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Strategies to Improve Team Cohesion Among Hybrid and Remote Teams to Improve Customer Satisfaction

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Leslie D. Collins

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2026

Abstract

Strategies to Improve Team Cohesion Among Hybrid and Remote Teams to Improve

Customer Satisfaction

by

Leslie D. Collins

MS, University of Phoenix, 2024

BS, University of Phoenix, 2023

Qualitative Pragmatic Inquiry Business Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

February 2026

Abstract

A lack of team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams can negatively affect customer satisfaction. Customer service leaders require effective strategies to improve team cohesion in increasingly flexible work environments; however, limited understanding exists regarding the strategies these leaders use to foster cohesion in hybrid and remote work settings. Grounded in the composite conceptual framework of theories of group development and customer focus, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore effective strategies that some leaders in the South Central region of the U.S. customer service organizations use to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with six customer service organizational leaders in the south-central United States. Using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, four themes were revealed: (a) communicating clearly and consistently, (b) promoting collaboration to enhance team member consistency, (c) fostering team cohesion through team building activities, and (d) cultivating a sense of belonging. A key recommendation for customer service leaders is to establish clear communication by defining channels for specific purposes, promoting open dialogue through active listening, and setting clear expectations for feedback and conflict resolution. This ensures that all voices are heard internally and that customers feel valued externally through consistent interactions. The implications for positive social change include the potential for increased job satisfaction, higher productivity and performance, and the promotion of inclusivity, diversity, and equity in the workforce, leading to a more reliable, efficient, and ethical marketplace.

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Dedication

I dedicate my research project to the memory of my late husband, Mario A. Collins, Sr. Though he is no longer physically by my side, his love and encouragement have been my guiding light. His belief in my potential fueled my perseverance, and his memory continues to inspire me every day. To my children, Peyton Walker, Nicholas Walker, Grayson Walker, and Joey Preddy, Jr., who remind me every day of the importance of learning and growing. Your unwavering belief in me made this journey possible, and I hope my work inspires you to chase your own audacious dreams.

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Section 1: Project Foundation

Background of the Problem

Customer satisfaction has a direct impact on customer loyalty, revenues, and profits. Content that achieves a high degree of customer satisfaction tends to foster increased customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth marketing. By delivering excellent service, an organization can build trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, thereby enhancing the overall customer experience and paving the way for long-term customer loyalty and success (Sharma & Singh, 2023). Customer satisfaction can reach its highest potential when teams are cohesive, as employees serve customers more effectively, leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. Team members who have strong relationships, respect, and communicate clearly with each other, collaborate effectively, and share a commitment from all members to work together towards a common shared goal (John & Gribko, 2025). However, among remote and hybrid teams, where physical presence is limited, team cohesion can be challenging due to communication barriers, physical isolation, and difficulties in building trust, which may lead to misunderstandings, decreased collaboration, and a sense of disconnection among team members (Hill & Villamor, 2023). In customer service, even a slight dip in cohesion can lead to inconsistent service, which is a leading cause of customer churn. Strategies to improve team cohesion are crucial for customer satisfaction because they foster better communication, increased efficiency, and higher employee morale, leading to consistent, high-quality service, faster problem resolution, and a stronger commitment to going the extra mile for customers, transforming a group into a unified, customer-focused unit.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem was that some leaders in U.S. customer service organizations lack effective strategies to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore effective strategies that some leaders in U.S. customer service organizations use to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction.

I used purposeful sampling. The target population for my research project consisted of leaders in U.S. customer service organizations, specifically those in the south-central region, who have successfully used effective strategies to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams, thereby improving customer service. The sample size consisted of six participants. Additional key participant eligibility criteria include being in their current role for at least 3 years. I recruited participants through professional networking and LinkedIn.

I employed a qualitative research methodology with a pragmatic inquiry design. I used qualitative research to understand complex human behavior of employees, leaders, and customers in the workplace because it prioritizes depth, context, and nuance over numerical, surface-level data. According to Sutton and Austin (2015), a qualitative research methodology enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of individuals, thereby gaining a broader understanding of the problem under study. A pragmatic inquiry research design may support the process of integrating beliefs and actions through inquiry (Morgan, 2014), moving closer to the idea

of truth when an idea aligns with reality (Dewey, 1920). Through a pragmatic inquiry design, I sought practical strategies that leaders can use in the real world. I collected data through semistructured interviews involving business-related low-risk topics, public documents, and related artifacts. I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. To enhance the reliability of my research project, I used member checking and ensured data saturation. I used stages of group development theory (see Tuckman, 1965) and customer focus theory (see Drucker, 1964) as a composite framework for my research project.

Project Research Question

What effective strategies do leaders in U.S. customer service organizations use to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

In research, an assumption is a concept or belief that is accepted as accurate without proof, serving as the underlying basis for the study (Corallo et al., 2024). Essentially, these foundational ideas are presumed to be correct, allowing the research to proceed (Corallo et al., 2024). Assumptions are crucial for research progress, but they must be acknowledged as they significantly affect the study's design, methodology, and the interpretation of its findings (Kovačević, 2023). In my research project, I made two assumptions. First, I assumed that all the participants I interviewed offered candid and precise descriptions of their effective strategies to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams, which would ultimately enhance customer satisfaction. My second

assumption was that the data I gathered would provide an accurate representation of current customer service industry practices, challenges, and strategies. I assumed I possessed the necessary skills and knowledge to collect and analyze data for my research project, and that I had a support system in place to guide me and ensure the quality of my work.

Limitations

Research limitations are the weaknesses or shortcomings in a study's design or execution that may impact its findings, conclusions, and generalizability (Haynes & Loblay, 2024). Limitations are not necessarily failures, but rather constraints that can arise from methodology, sample size, available resources, or unanticipated challenges. Acknowledging limitations is crucial for transparency and the proper interpretation of the results (Das, 2021). The research process benefits significantly from the open identification of study limitations, as this practice enhances transparency and allows for a critical evaluation of its credibility (Das, 2021). I was limited by the small sample size, which may have limited the ability to transfer the results to a different population. A small sample size may have also introduced a limited range of different viewpoints, experiences, or characteristics across various demographics. I would have had a larger sample size, but I was also limited by the timeframe in which I had to complete my research project and adhere to the pace of the Walden University curriculum. To complete the degree requirements, students must adhere to the accelerated pace required by the curriculum. Technical issues limited my ability to assist participants or myself if either of us encountered technical difficulties with Zoom. Lastly, I was limited by the

ability of other researchers to replicate my research project because interviews are inherently subjective and tied to a specific context; thus, other researchers may find it challenging to replicate my exact methods, which could have affected the reliability of my results.

Business Project Ethics

I was the primary research instrument. As the researcher in my project, my responsibilities during data collection were centered on establishing a transparent, impartial, and ethical methodology for acquiring information from leaders within the U.S. customer service sector. Nash (2025) stated the researcher's primary role involves actively engaging with participants to gather real-world data, primarily by leading the recruitment process and conducting semistructured interviews. These semistructured interviews allowed me to strike a balance between flexibility and structure, providing both a standardized core set of questions and the freedom to probe deeper into emergent themes. My direct involvement was crucial for collecting qualitative data that explored participants' experiences, beliefs, and feelings in-depth. My interview questions are located in Appendix A.

My role also involved ensuring ethical conduct with human subjects. According to the Office for Human Research Protections (1979) and *The Belmont Report*, researchers should ensure that their work promotes beneficence, justice, and respect for persons. I ensured beneficence to participants by minimizing potential risks to participants while maximizing the potential benefits of my research. I ensured justice by treating participants fairly and avoiding bias in my selection and treatment of them. I

ensured respect by recruiting nonvulnerable participants. Respect for persons, beneficence, and justice effectively align with the three core principles of *The Belmont Report*. By detailing careful considerations for minimizing risk and ensuring fair treatment, the approach demonstrates a strong commitment to the ethical protection of human subjects. Respect for persons, beneficence, and justice not only safeguard participants but also uphold the integrity and responsible conduct of the research (Office for Human Research Protections, 1979). I protected the privacy and confidentiality of participants by not collecting any identifiable information. Instead, I used pseudonyms for all participants (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.). I also ensured respect by providing informed consent and giving participants clear, understandable information about my research, its risks, benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants could withdraw simply by telling or emailing me. I did not provide any incentives for participants.

An institutional review board (IRB) at Walden University reviewed and approved my research involving human subjects to ensure their rights and welfare are protected. Bolland et al. (2021) stated that researchers should inform participants by implementing a comprehensive consent process that clearly explained the research goals, methods, and potential risks, allowing them to understand the study before deciding to participate, and the process included providing information and discussing the study's purpose, procedures, and risks to enable a voluntary and knowledgeable decision as highlighted in. Walden University's IRB required that my research include an informed consent document to ensure participants were aware of and agreed to the procedures, risks, and

benefits of my research. The Walden University IRB approval number for my research was 10-29-25-1247434. To safeguard privacy, I will securely store my data on a password-protected laptop for 5 years, then permanently delete it.

Evidence-Based Integrative Review

In the evidence-based integrative review, I address the business problem by synthesizing and analyzing diverse literature to provide a holistic understanding of how to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction, bridging research and real-world application. Through the Conceptual Framework, I identified the applications of my composite framework in prior research, providing the building blocks for its use in my research project. Through the Business Problem Scholarship Evidence, I compared different perspectives and clarified the relationship of the project to previous research and findings, thereby clarifying the business problem. Through the Business Topic Scholarship, I created new insights and practical guidance for customer service leaders. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore effective strategies that some leaders in U.S. customer service organizations use to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. The evidence-based literature review enabled me to enhance my understanding, inform evidence-based practice, and provide a strong foundation for developing practical, evidence-based recommendations for leaders in this sector.

Conceptual Framework: Stages of Group Development Theory

I used a composite framework for my research project. I utilized established frameworks, including Tuckman's (1965) stages of group development theory and Drucker's (1964) customer-focused theory, to capture multiple facets of a complex phenomenon (e.g., team cohesion and customer satisfaction) simultaneously, thereby addressing the different purposes of my research project.

Tuckman (1965) developed the stages of group development theory to describe the predictable phases that teams undergo to become more effective and productive, providing a framework for understanding and guiding group dynamics. Tuckman created the stages of group development theory to show how groups evolve from an initial gathering to a cohesive, high-functioning team by navigating inevitable stages. Tuckman introduced the original four stages of the theory: forming, storming, norming, and performing. In 1977, Tuckman collaborated with Jensen, adding the adjourning stage to the theory (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Organizations rely on effective teams, and while various models exist, Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) model remains frequently used for understanding group development.

Team members and leaders can use this framework to enhance their effectiveness. Leaders can use stages of group development theory by recognizing how to guide their teams through the five stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Muscato et al., 2023). Organizational leaders who understand team dynamics and their team's stage of development are more effective contributors and leaders. As team members, organizational leaders can help guide the group through its developmental

phases, dedicating the necessary time at each stage to foster greater synergy. When in a leadership role, leaders can apply specific strategies to support their team members and promote collaborative efforts (Muscato et al., 2023). Leaders can use the stages of group development theory to understand their team's evolution and adapt their leadership style accordingly. This involves providing clear direction during the forming stage, managing conflict during the storming stage, establishing routines and empowering team members during the norming stage, removing obstacles and focusing on development during the performing stage, and facilitating learning during the adjourning stage. By tailoring their approach, leaders can enhance collaboration, mitigate conflict, and boost team productivity.

The first stage of Tuckman's (1965) stages of group development theory is the forming stage. When a new team is formed, the initial phase involves members getting to know each other through introductions and social interactions, which may feel awkward at first but is crucial for establishing initial impressions and determining their level of commitment to the group, as they begin to understand their roles without yet having clearly defined responsibilities (Muscato et al., 2023). The focus of the forming stage is on orientation and getting acquainted. At this stage, leaders should assume a dominant position, provide clear direction, and establish a clear purpose.

The second stage of Tuckman's (1965) stages of group development theory is the storming stage. During the storming stage of group development, members, who know each other better, begin to experience conflict and disagreements. As individuals grow more comfortable, distinct personality differences become apparent, which can lead to

friction. Team members may test boundaries and question the group's structure, leadership, and responsibilities, which intensifies disagreements. This process can be stressful, causing discomfort for those involved. For most teams, conflict is a normal and productive part of their development, helping them learn how to resolve issues and generate diverse, shared ideas. Rather than avoiding it, leaders should normalize healthy conflict by distinguishing between positive and negative disagreements, providing constructive feedback, and facilitating effective group decisions. This process, particularly during the storming phase of team formation, allows members to strengthen their relationships and build trust. By embracing conflict constructively, leaders can improve collaboration and foster a stronger, more cohesive team (Muscato et al., 2023). In their positions, leaders should act as coaches and facilitators to resolve conflict.

The third stage of Tuckman's (1965) stages of group development theory is the norming stage. In the norming stage, team members move past their individual differences and appreciate each other's unique strengths, leading to greater comfort and commitment. During this phase, roles and procedures are established, enabling the group to find a sense of flow and operate with increased efficiency and cooperation. Conflict is still possible, but the team has developed the skills to resolve it effectively and constructively. This unity and competence lead to higher confidence and lower stress among members, though the group may temporarily revert to the storming phase when faced with new challenges. As a leader, consistently recognizing both group and individual contributions is crucial for sustaining team motivation and momentum. By acknowledging the collective's hard work while also specifically appreciating individual

efforts, leaders can foster a sense of value and purpose within their team. To maintain this positive atmosphere, frequent and continuous feedback is necessary, as it helps reinforce positive behaviors, addresses potential issues promptly, and guides the team toward continued growth and success (Muscato et al., 2023). In this stage, leaders should empower the team by transitioning to a more supportive role.

The fourth stage of Tuckman's (1965) stages of group development theory is the performing stage. In the performing stage, a team reaches its peak effectiveness and productivity, operating with high levels of trust, commitment, and motivation. The group is cohesive and organized, with members working comfortably together on their assigned tasks and collaboratively towards shared goals. Minor conflicts or differences of opinion are managed constructively and efficiently, rather than being a source of tension. At this point, the team is self-reliant and able to hold each other accountable, with leaders taking on a more hands-off, supportive role. In the performing stage, leadership adopts a *laissez-faire* style, primarily delegating tasks and monitoring progress from a distance rather than intervening directly. The leader's role involves observing the team's forward momentum and offering praise to individual members for both their successful task completion and their effective collaboration. This approach aims to foster a strong sense of synergy and autonomy among all team members (Muscato et al., 2023). In the fourth stage, leaders should support and develop the team and its individual members.

The fifth stage of Tuckman's (1965) stages of group development theory is the adjourning stage. The adjourning stage, added by Tuckman and Jensen (1977), occurs when a team's task is completed and it either disbands or transitions to new work. While

the adjourning stage may not always exist, it provides a valuable opportunity for the team to reflect on its accomplishments and consider areas for improvement. The adjourning stage is sometimes referred to as the mourning stage because team members may experience a sense of loss, particularly if they have developed strong relationships with one another (Tuckman, 1965). The adjourning phase is also crucial for setting up new teams for future projects. For this reason, team leaders should ensure that both individual and collective achievements are formally recognized and celebrated, providing closure and a sense of accomplishment. An effective leader of this stage supports the transition and acknowledges the lessons they learned.

Leaders can use the stages of group development theory to tailor their approach, which in turn builds team cohesion. Zirar et al. (2025) stated that the stages of group development theory are a crucial initial step toward building team cohesion. A positive experience during the forming stage can lead to the trust and collaboration required for stronger bonds and greater productivity in later stages. Muscato et al. (2023) confirmed that successful organizational leaders benefit from knowing how teams function and evolve. With this knowledge, leaders can help guide their team through each stage of development, fostering greater cooperation and synergy. In their roles, leaders can utilize specific techniques to support the team and enhance overall team cohesion by applying the stages of group development theory. Using the stages of group development theory enables leaders to predict team behavior, provide targeted support, and proactively address issues to promote team cohesion. A leader's actions in each phase can significantly influence the success of their team. In a remote or hybrid working

environment, group development stages occur online, presenting unique challenges compared to in-person interactions. For example, the initial forming stage can be hindered by the lack of casual, in-person socializing, such as meeting for coffee, while storming may manifest as silent friction in emails or chat messages rather than open discussion. In reality, team development is not a linear progression. Team development often cycles back and forth between the storming and norming stages, particularly when new members join or crises occur.

Conceptual Framework: Customer Focus Theory

Drucker (1964) developed the customer focus theory in business to increase profitability and success by prioritizing customer needs and satisfaction. Drucker's customer focus theory strategies prioritize needs and satisfaction by building stronger customer relationships, driving innovation, and improving products and services based on customer feedback. Prioritizing needs and satisfaction enables organizations to build customer loyalty and gain a competitive advantage by making decisions centered on delivering value to customers. Drucker argued that a business is defined by its customers and that profit is a result of delivering value, not the other way around. For Drucker, an entire organization should be oriented toward the customers' needs.

The key elements of Drucker's (1964) customer focus theory are that marketing encompasses the entire business, marketing renders selling superfluous, value is determined by the customer, creating and selling to non-customers involves a results-oriented and adaptable approach, decentralization and employee empowerment, and social responsibility. An organization that applies Drucker's customer focus theory views

the customer as the ultimate determinant of what a business is, shifting away from an internal, product-centric view. By gaining a deep understanding of customer needs through innovation and effective marketing, a business can create lasting value and build a sustainable competitive advantage (Rao, 2021). By prioritizing customer needs and tailoring products and services to their specific requirements, business leaders can ultimately improve long-term customer loyalty and gain a competitive edge in the market.

The first key element in Drucker's (1964) customer focus theory is understanding that marketing encompasses the entire business. Drucker's customer focus theory, which posits that marketing is not a separate function but rather a fundamental philosophy that must permeate every aspect of a company, asserts that marketing is the whole business viewed from the customer's perspective. Instead of viewing marketing as merely advertising or selling, Drucker argued that it is a central management responsibility that requires a comprehensive, organization-wide focus on understanding and serving the customer. From product innovation and development to finance, manufacturing, and customer service, all departments must prioritize the customer's needs, wants, and values as their primary consideration (Rao, 2021). A business's true purpose is to create and retain customers, and only the customer's willingness to pay transforms economic resources into wealth. A truly customer-centric organization recognizes that what the company thinks it is producing is irrelevant and that what matters is what the customer perceives as valuable, and contrasts sharply with a product-centric approach that pushes features and discounts without regard for the customer's perspective. In a Drucker-

inspired business, marketing is deeply ingrained in the culture, guiding strategic decisions and empowering all employees to contribute to a comprehensive, outside-in effort to create long-term customer value (Rao, 2021). This customer-centric approach is the foundation for creating long-term value.

The second key element in Drucker's (1964) customer focus theory is that marketing makes selling superfluous. Marketing aims to make selling superfluous, a foundational principle of customer-focused strategy that signifies a radical shift from a product-centered approach to one driven entirely by customer needs. Instead of a business creating a product and then using aggressive sales tactics to convince customers to buy it, Drucker argued that a company should first deeply understand and anticipate its customers' desires, pains, and aspirations. The exhaustive marketing process, which involves comprehensive research, innovation, and product development, should be so effective that it creates an offer that perfectly fits the customer. When a product or service aligns precisely with a customer's needs and provides clear, unambiguous value, the traditional hard sell becomes unnecessary. The product sells itself because the target customer recognizes its inherent value and sees it as the apparent solution to their problem. The marketing approach fosters a natural pull from the market, where customers proactively seek out the company's offerings, ultimately building long-term relationships and trust based on the value delivered, rather than through persuasive force. In the customer-centric model, marketing is not just a promotional tool. However, the core function of the business, which shapes every aspect, is to ensure that every aspect, from product design to customer service, enables the company to continuously create and

retain customers (Rao, 2021). In other words, a customer-centered organizational leader understands the customer so well that a product or service requires minimal promotion to sell.

The third element in Drucker's (1964) customer focus theory is that the customer determines value. In the customer focus theory, value is determined by the customer, meaning that a business must understand that the customer's own perception of what the product produces is secondary to what the customer believes is bought and considered worthwhile. The value is determined by the customer's perspective, which posits that a customer's willingness to pay is the primary factor that generates wealth for a business. To prosper, an organization must move beyond its own internal assumptions and engage in a systematic effort to understand the customer's perspective, focusing on the problem a product or service solves for the customer, and not just the product's features.

The fourth key element in Drucker's (1964) customer focus theory is creating and selling to non-customers. In the customer focus theory, creating and selling to non-customers means strategically innovating to meet the unmet needs of those who currently do not buy from the business. Instead of focusing solely on existing customers, Drucker challenged businesses to examine the markets they do not serve to discover new growth opportunities. By asking why non-customers do not buy from the organization, an organization can uncover new insights, challenge assumptions, and create new products, services, and value propositions that effectively create new customers. This approach, which involves selling to noncustomers, emphasizes that true innovation stems from exploring previously unexplored market segments, thereby fundamentally shifting the

organization's focus from its own products to the value it can provide to customers outside its current base (Rao, 2021). From a customer-focused standpoint, organizations can utilize deep insights, market research, and personalized communication to engage potential buyers who have never made a purchase before.

The fifth element in Drucker's (1964) customer focus theory is having a results-oriented and adaptable approach. Drucker's customer focus theory, a results-oriented and adaptable approach, means that an organization should define the measurable impact it wants to have on customers' lives and then continuously evolve to meet those goals. The focus of the organization is needed on internal processes or what the organization is selling. Success is determined by the customer's perception of value and their willingness to pay. The requirement is that organizations continually monitor customer needs, embrace continuous learning, and be prepared to adjust strategies in response to market changes and shifts in customer behavior. The results-oriented and adaptable approach creates a customer-centric organization that is both effective at achieving its objectives and resilient in the face of change (Rao, 2021). By prioritizing customers, organizations become more effective at achieving their objectives and more resilient to change.

The sixth element in the customer focus theory is decentralization and employee empowerment (Drucker, 1964). Decentralization and employee empowerment are crucial for creating and keeping customers. Decentralization involves delegating decision-making authority to the lowest possible level, particularly to frontline employees who are closest to the customer. Decentralization empowers employees by giving them the autonomy to resolve customer issues, respond quickly to market changes, and contribute

to innovation. The result is a more agile and responsive organization that delivers greater value to customers, as defined by the customer's perception, not the organization's. The decentralization and employee empowerment approach stands in stark contrast to traditional top-down, command-and-control management (Rao, 2021). By distributing decision-making authority closer to the customer, organizations can achieve greater agility, responsiveness, and innovation, ultimately leading to more positive customer experiences.

The final element in Drucker's (1964) customer focus theory is social responsibility. Drucker's customer-focused theory's key element of social responsibility is integrated with an organization's fundamental purpose, which is creating and retaining customers. Rather than being a separate, philanthropic activity, social responsibility is an integral aspect of a business's operations and its pursuit of long-term profitability. Drucker believed that society entrusts resources to businesses to serve customers, creating a virtuous circle. By understanding and meeting customer needs, offering fair pricing, providing quality goods, delivering excellent service, and maintaining ethical behavior, a company also fulfills its social obligations to the employees, suppliers, and the broader community (Rao, 2021). Organizations that are customer-centric should demonstrate a genuine commitment to social responsibility, building trust, and fostering long-term customer loyalty.

Organizations and leaders who use Drucker's (1964) customer focus theory as a framework may be better positioned to create and keep customers by generating long-term, socially responsible value through marketing and innovation. Madhani (2021)

stated that when an organization is customer-focused, it generates competitive advantages and improves its performance, generating value through marketing and innovation. A customer-centered approach may lead to improved performance by fostering brand loyalty, anticipating market trends, and driving innovation based on customer feedback and insights. Lakshman et al. (2023) confirmed that by implementing customer-focused leadership and customer-focused strategic leadership, organizations can become adaptive to competitive advantages, increase organizational performance, and achieve positive customer retention. A customer-focused theory ultimately aims to drive long-term business success by centering all decisions, strategies, and operations on understanding and meeting customer needs. This creates exceptional value for customers, which, in turn, generates sustainable loyalty, growth, and profitability for the company. A strategic mindset synthesizes a results-oriented focus with the ability to be highly adaptable, recognizing that marketing is the whole business and that these elements are intertwined for navigating dynamic environments and achieving sustainable success. In hybrid and remote environments, decentralization is not just a choice but a necessity. Empowering remote employees to make customer-centric decisions without waiting for headquarters' approval is a critical strategy for leaders. Modern customers often choose brands based on their social impact, which directly aligns with Drucker's idea of creating and retaining customers.

Business Problem Scholarship Evidence

Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to Encourage Psychological Safety

When in teams, inclusive leaders create an environment where every employee feels valued, heard, respected, and empowered to contribute their best work, improving team collaboration. Hincapie and Costa (2024) found that inclusive leadership is essential for enabling hybrid teams to reach their full potential, work together effectively, achieve their goals, and support the well-being of all team members. Orekoya (2024) confirmed that inclusive leadership has a positive and direct effect on team climate, where team members interact, engage, and share ideas. Leaders who value diverse perspectives, invite input, and appreciate unique contributions increase employee engagement, trust, willingness to share ideas, higher team performance, increased innovation, and reduced stress. Baysinger et al. (2025) found that the absence of team cohesion leads to a dysfunctional team environment, resulting in a negative impact on team performance and customer satisfaction. Inclusive leadership fosters a sense of belonging, camaraderie, and the valuing of diverse perspectives, so that team members are more likely to collaborate effectively, trust one another, and work towards common goals. Through the lens of the stages of group development theory, inclusive leaders can effectively guide their teams through the various stages of development, understanding and adapting to the dynamics of each stage, and ultimately working towards team cohesiveness.

Inclusive leadership practices foster a work environment where individuals feel secure and empowered to express themselves openly and freely. According to Woods et

al. (2024), much of inclusive leadership focuses on creating a psychological safety environment where individuals feel secure enough to express themselves openly in the workplace. Psychological safety plays a crucial role in the context of an inclusive leader, influencing learning, innovation, and performance. Kusumawardani et al. (2023) found that inclusive leaders enable employees to express their opinions and feelings, leading to increased feelings of psychological safety, and ultimately contribute to employees' well-being. An inclusive leader creates an environment that feels safe for individuals to express themselves without feeling overwhelmed, promotes psychological safety, and fosters a positive work culture. Through the lens of the stages of group development theory, inclusive leadership practices create a work environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves. Inclusive leaders foster an atmosphere of trust and respect, promoting employees' well-being and enhancing learning, innovation, and performance.

When team members feel psychologically safe, they trust each other. Team members feel comfortable being themselves around their colleagues, freely express their thoughts and ideas, and admit mistakes without worrying that their colleagues will judge them or get upset. Mitterer and Mitterer (2023) discovered that creating a safe and trusting work environment, characterized by strong leader-follower relationships and organizational trust, significantly boosts job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment by improving overall work environmental factors. Cultivating trust is a foundational strategy for organizations seeking to improve their internal culture and achieve sustainable success. Zavaglia (2023) confirmed that building

trust through leadership involvement with employees, considering psychological well-being, and evaluating leaders' aptitude, integrity, and benevolence are crucial for fostering a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Building psychological safety among a team is an ongoing process that enables leaders and employees to navigate each stage of development efficiently, fostering an environment where everyone can flourish.

Team Members Working in a Trusting Environment

When team members are flourishing in this environment, they trust each other, feel comfortable communicating openly, and work better together by sharing ideas, unity, mutual respect, and trust. According to Faherty and Clinton (2025), team members who trust each other communicate openly, create a sense of vulnerability, share creative ideas, and speak up to foster healthy dialogue among team members. This foundation reduces defensiveness, encourages productive conflict, and promotes collaboration, ultimately improving collective success. Scalia et al. (2022) verified that team performance in roles with higher interaction with an autonomous agent is more influenced by the agent's presence and the team's trust in the agent. Team members who trust each other to communicate openly establish a working relationship built on mutual respect, trust, unity, and the ability to share ideas. In the final stages of the team development theory, the performing stage, team members achieve cohesiveness, operate at a high level of efficiency, recognize each member's strengths, and maintain a strong commitment to shared goals. In this stage, psychological safety enables team members to focus on the work itself and take calculated risks, knowing they are supported.

Building Trust through Communication and Shared Goals

Transformational leadership can enhance team communication. Transformational leaders foster a sense of shared purpose among the team. Transformational leaders set the vision, and team members collaborate to bring it to life. Loyless (2023) discovered that by effectively adapting and focusing on communication skills in evolving leadership roles, transformational leadership is highly beneficial for navigating change, boosting retention, and fostering a collaborative culture. By adapting to evolving, often virtual, work environments, these leaders build trust, encourage innovation, and align teams with a shared vision. Rachman (2022) confirmed that transformational leadership and strong interpersonal communication have a positive influence on employee discipline and job satisfaction, which can be achieved by promoting trust and understanding. This, in turn, leads to employees adopting positive attitudes and norms, ultimately increasing their job satisfaction. Transformational leadership enhances communication, and when implemented, it helps improve team communication, allowing team members to work together and bring the vision to life.

Constructive Conflict

Effective conflict resolution improves team cohesion by developing empathy, trust, and open communication. According to McCarthy and Pearce (2025), workplace conflict is less of a factor when teams are well-functioning, and conflict resolution strategies are implemented in conjunction with team cohesion. This approach fosters a work environment where disagreements are addressed constructively, rather than allowing them to escalate. Meeuwissen et al. (2024) found that constructive conflicts and

valuing different perspectives, mainly when supported by organizational alignment, create environments that foster successful collaboration and positive team outcomes. When teams are cohesive, they engage in open dialogue and trust one another, which fosters a strong relationship. Through these strong relationships, team members can often prevent minor disagreements from escalating into major issues, fostering a positive workplace environment.

Leader Support in Conflict Resolution

Leaders can encourage conflict resolution and promote communication and collaboration. According to Cheng et al. (2022), in situations where conflict arises within a group, individuals can gain status and leadership roles by stepping in to resolve disputes, effectively demonstrating their ability to handle challenging situations and thereby earning respect from others. Leadership is not merely about giving orders, but often emerges organically from individuals who fulfill critical needs within a group, such as maintaining harmony and effectiveness. McCarthy and Pearce (2025) confirmed that leadership conflict management support has a positive influence on conflict resolution, team cohesion, and customer satisfaction. Leaders can encourage team development by using conflict as an opportunity to build empathy, promote open communication, and find solutions rather than blaming each other. Mediation may create a foundation for healthier, more open conflict management, leading to a cohesive environment that supports productivity and shared accountability.

Target Conflict–Resolution Technique

When team conflict arises, mediation can help resolve it by using a neutral facilitator to foster open communication and find mutually beneficial solutions, thereby strengthening team cohesion, enhancing collaboration, and fostering trust among team members. Rai et al. (2024) stated that team members work well together during times of conflict by using a conflict-resolution technique, such as transformative mediation, to help build trust and commitment between leaders and team members, and to eliminate distractions when conflict arises. Transformative mediation focuses on empowering the disputing parties to air grievances, gain insight into one another's perspectives, and come to their own solutions, which strengthens their working relationships. Zia et al. (2025) confirmed that using mediation conflict-resolution techniques helps build a supportive workplace, which in turn boosts both individual and team performance, ultimately leading to greater success for the entire organization during times of conflict. Therefore, by utilizing mediation-based conflict resolution, organizations can address team conflicts constructively, restoring trust and commitment, and ultimately fostering a supportive and high-performing workplace that drives overall organizational success. Thus, through a targeted conflict-resolution technique, team cohesion is established by building trust, commitment, and the ability to eliminate distractions, resulting in satisfactory team performance and a positive work environment during times of team conflict.

Individual Preparation for Team Success During Conflict

To proactively avoid such conflicts, leaders might consider incorporating casual games, such as team-building activities, to provide teams with realistic conflict scenarios

that help them develop new strategies for handling future conflicts in the workplace. Willox et al. (2023) found that using casual games helps individuals improve their performance in team-based settings by developing their team skills and familiarizing them with tools such as a team charter, communication plan, and conflict resolution plan. Fazeli et al. (2024) confirmed that individual preparedness is necessary in times of conflict, and individuals should be socially and mentally aware to develop positive team cohesion and exhibit positive communication skills. Casual games encourage communication, problem-solving, and creativity. When hosting casual games, leaders might consider having a debrief with team members to reflect on how to apply the skills they learned in a real-world work collaboration.

Using Problem Solving and Team Intervention to Increase Team Cohesion

Conflicts that arise can be opportunities for strengthening team bonds, fostering trust, and improving communication and team morale. However, oftentimes, a leader or mediator needs to get involved. Kratochwill et al. (2024) suggested that leaders should develop, implement, and evaluate intervention plans to determine whether working through such challenges together fosters greater camaraderie and trust. Eticha et al. (2024) verified that using intervention methods alongside problem-solving helps improve team cohesion because, with intervention methods, teams can establish trust, gain awareness, and have a positive attitude. Therefore, addressing conflicting times within a team requires a structured intervention that builds upon established research by creating a new, evaluable plan. Resolving issues together can foster an environment of open

dialogue, shared understanding, and collective effort, leading to mutual understanding, receptiveness to ideas, and a shared commitment to the agreed-upon solution.

Personal Factors Affecting Team Conflict

Individual and team members' personality traits are related to their individual and collective experiences, leading to an optimal state of immersion that boosts motivation, performance, and satisfaction. This state requires collaboration to solve problems, which in turn necessitates special skills, such as embracing diverse perspectives and communicating in a way that ensures everyone feels heard and valued. Buseyne et al. (2025) stated that an individual's personality traits influence their own and their team's ability to achieve a state of flow. This optimal experience boosts motivation and performance while fostering collaboration to solve problems. Cooke et al. (2021) confirmed that the difficulty of reliably measuring individual innovativeness through sequential problem-solving and demonstrated that differences in innovation among individuals can be attributed to heightened within-person variation in motivation, exaggerated between-person variation in accuracy, and the influence of past experiences. Such factors can lead to misunderstandings, tension, and a reduced ability to collaborate effectively. Leaders should understand and manage these individual personality traits to de-escalate disagreements, improve team cohesion, and facilitate progress toward team goals.

The Interconnected Cycle of Trust, Communication, and Knowledge Sharing

Trust, communication, and knowledge sharing are an interconnected loop that plays a vital role in building relationships and improving team cohesion. Dekate and

Mehta (2025) stated that although team cohesion does not serve as a mediating factor in the relationship between knowledge sharing and team adaptive performance, it does explain the link between communication and trust in team adaptive performance.

Abrantes et al. (2022) confirmed that Team cohesion contributes to the high performance of experienced teams, but only when trust in the coach is a specific combination of high competency-based and low emotionally-based trust. With trust as a foundation, team members in a cohesive team engage in clear, honest, and open communication, freely sharing their knowledge and expertise, thereby creating a powerful collective asset. Thus, some strategies that leaders use to increase their teams' performance and agility may include promoting open communication, building trust, and sharing knowledge.

Communication as a Mediator for Team Cohesion

Teams may use stories to share their vision, foster empathy, and create a sense of shared purpose among team members, which in turn increases team cohesion by fostering a sense of awareness and togetherness through the sharing of personal stories. Bedir et al. (2023) discovered that communication skills influence the established relationship between empathy, team cohesion, and competition success through sharing personal stories and building relationships and trust within the team. Ruan and Liu (2021) confirmed that team members feel comfortable sharing stories when trust is built in the relationships and are made to feel comfortable by the team leadership showing empathy, leading to successful team performance and cohesion. Practical communication training is an invaluable tool for cultivating empathy, which in turn fosters a resilient and high-performing team environment by encouraging the open exchange of personal experiences

and emotions. A sense of shared understanding and psychological safety is built among team members. This foundational trust, cultivated through empathetic leadership and transparent communication, is crucial for improving team cohesion and achieving competitive success.

Collaborative Learning

In collaborative learning environments, cohesive teams are more likely to engage and support one another, resulting in improved learning outcomes. Yoon et al. (2025) stated that to strengthen the unity of remote teams, leaders should give teams problem-solving tasks that require group effort and collaboration. These tasks create a necessity for interaction and reliance on teammates, reinforcing the value of collective effort over individual silos, especially in virtual environments where natural interaction is limited. Zamecnik et al. (2024) confirmed that the emphasis on collaborative learning cultivates a sense of shared accountability and responsibility, which in turn leads to greater engagement and motivation. This approach enhances critical thinking and commitment as learners rely on each other to reach common goals, making learning more dynamic and effective. This principle of shared goals, mutual reliance, and community building also directly underpins strong customer loyalty, creating engaged users who feel part of a brand's success.

Customer Satisfaction as a Bridge and a Moderator for Customer Loyalty

A strong brand image fosters customer satisfaction by bridging brand attributes with positive customer perceptions, and this positive perception, in turn, generates customer loyalty, which then further reinforces satisfaction and strengthens the

connection between the initial brand image and the customer. Tedjokusumo and Murhadi (2023) found that achieving higher levels of customer satisfaction is crucial to building customer loyalty, which in turn positively impacts customer behavior, such as driving repeat business and new customer acquisition. Fu et al. (2025) confirmed that high customer satisfaction is directly linked to increased customer loyalty, which in turn drives repeat business and supports sustainable growth. A strong brand image's initial promise of customer satisfaction thus becomes a continuously self-reinforcing cycle, generating lasting customer loyalty that drives business success. Through the lens of the customer focus theory, the customer's perspective is that a strong brand image creates a continuously reinforcing cycle of positive perception and loyalty because it signals that the organization prioritizes customer satisfaction, resulting in an experience that is both personally validating and consistently reliable.

Customer Trust and Its Role in Customer Satisfaction

Customer trust in an organization plays a significant role in customer satisfaction. Devantari et al. (2024) stated that positive customer satisfaction in an organization, driven by enjoyable service and product experiences, significantly increases consumer confidence, fosters trust, encourages repeat purchases, and enhances overall customer satisfaction. By consistently delivering or exceeding expectations, organizations build brand advocates, enhance their reputation, and create a resilient customer base. Syamsudin and Ratnapuri (2024) confirmed that delivering high-quality service, primarily through reliable alternative solutions, along with building trust, significantly improves customer satisfaction. Customer trust in an organization plays a significant role

in driving customer satisfaction, as enjoyable service and product experiences lead to positive customer satisfaction, consumer confidence, and repeat purchases. An organization cultivates customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty by centering business decisions and service delivery around the customer's needs and experiences. Positive service and product experiences lead to increased consumer confidence, thereby reinforcing the customer-centric loop of satisfaction and trust.

Brand Loyalty and Customer Satisfaction

Effective management of an organization's brand image, service quality, and customer satisfaction has a significantly more substantial and more positive impact on customer loyalty. Fitriani et al. (2025) stated that making simultaneous improvements to customer relationships, service quality, brand image, and customer satisfaction will lead to an increase in customer loyalty. Hamonangan and Puspita (2025) confirmed that customer satisfaction results from a loyal customer feeling that a brand has consistently met their expectations, which in turn builds their commitment to that organization. An organization's ability to foster strong brand perception and high-quality service leads to increased customer satisfaction and, in turn, a more dedicated customer base. By prioritizing customer needs through the strategic management of brand image, service quality, and satisfaction, organizational leaders can build and maintain long-term loyalty, ensuring their own success.

Understanding the Customer Satisfaction-Customer Loyalty Dynamic

Brand image, service quality, and customer satisfaction collectively have a significant and positive impact on customer loyalty. Fitriani et al. (2025) discovered that

customer loyalty is significantly and positively impacted by customer relationship marketing and service quality, and as these areas improve, customer loyalty also increases. Meylina et al. (2024) confirmed that higher customer satisfaction fosters loyalty, which is more profitable in the long term than continually acquiring new customers, and also leads to positive recommendations that benefit the company. While customer relationship marketing, service quality, and brand image can all influence customer loyalty, it is higher customer satisfaction that ultimately leads to long-term profitability and positive recommendations. To create customer loyalty, a customer-focused strategy can build upon satisfied customers by creating deeper connections.

Customer-Focused Culture Provides a Competitive Advantage

A customer-centric company culture places customers at the core of every business decision, fostering positive experiences that build customer loyalty, boost customer satisfaction, and drive revenue growth. Belhaj et al. (2025) stated that achieving high levels of customer satisfaction fosters loyalty, leading to greater profitability and a more sustainable competitive edge, even in a changing market. Loyal, satisfied customers are more likely to recommend brands and stay through changing market conditions.

Awad and Mahmoud (2024) confirmed that effective leadership strategies, such as attracting and retaining customers, are an advantage that comes from having a customer-centric company culture. By placing customer needs and experiences at the core of every decision and activity, organizations gain a unique, sustainable advantage that is difficult for competitors to replicate, leading to higher profitability and long-term growth.

Adopting a customer-focused approach leads to heightened customer satisfaction, which

in turn creates a competitive advantage by building customer loyalty, generating positive publicity, strengthening market reputation, and ultimately increasing long-term profitability and market share. Boteng et al. (2024) found that customer retention involves strategies aimed at enhancing customer satisfaction and increasing loyalty, which in turn benefits both the customer and the organization. By enhancing satisfaction, companies reduce churn and gain cost-effective, repeat business.

These efforts improve profitability and turn customers into brand advocates. Dwivedi et al. (2024) confirmed that organizations can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty by implementing techniques to address customer needs better, thereby establishing a link between improved customer relationships and customer retention. A customer-centered culture fosters long-term success by prioritizing customer satisfaction and gathering feedback. By providing exceptional service and consistently adapting to customer needs, a company can increase customer loyalty, encourage repeat business, and generate positive word-of-mouth marketing. When an organization adheres to the customer focus theory, it prioritizes a customer-centric business culture, which in turn drives customer satisfaction and leads to higher rates of customer retention. In a hybrid organization, the distance between leadership and frontline staff often creates a decentralization gap, where employees lack the apparent authority or shared culture to solve customer issues independently. Rao (2021) noted that Drucker's core idea is that marketing is not merely a department. However, viewed from the customer's perspective, the entire business emphasizes how every function contributes to defining and delivering customer value. In today's work environment, when remote customer

service agents feel culturally disconnected, their ability to embody Drucker's unified idea, that every part of the organization must focus on delivering customer value, making the whole company responsible for marketing and innovation, not just the marketing team, diminishes directly, impairing their capacity to provide the cohesive, organization-wide value Drucker envisioned consistently.

Business Topic Scholarship

Adaptive Leadership to Support Conflict Resolution

Team cohesion is strengthened by leader support during conflict resolution, as leaders can foster open communication, provide necessary resources, and promote a collaborative environment that focuses on common goals. Elgoibar et al. (2025) stated that conflict is a normal consequence of different needs, beliefs, values, opinions, or goals within an organization. Thus, in the reality of team cohesion, the potential for conflict is inevitable. However, a leader's approach to conflict resolution can either cause disputes to escalate and erode team cohesion or strengthen relationships and foster a more collaborative environment. There is no single approach to conflict management that can be universally applied to all situations; leaders should be flexible in adapting their approach to the specific contexts they face, which may involve various conflict management strategies, such as negotiation, mediation, or open communication (Badriyah et al., 2024). In conflict resolution, effective leaders should be flexible and adaptable, selecting the most suitable approach based on factors such as the origin of the conflict, the individuals involved, and the desired outcome. Regardless of their approach, leaders who actively support collaborative conflict resolution turn an unavoidable source

of tension into an opportunity for growth, strengthening the team's ability to work together more productively.

Adaptive leadership effectively supports conflict resolution and improves team cohesion. Mohi Ud Din et al. (2025) stated that the effectiveness of leadership support relies on a leader's ability to use active listening, empathy, and clear communication to mediate disputes and build trust. These skills are essential for creating a positive environment where employees feel valued, understood, and empowered, ultimately leading to improved collaboration, engagement, and performance. Urbano and Vázquez (2025) confirmed that by actively guiding discussions, identifying root causes, and ensuring a fair and constructive resolution, leaders can foster a positive and collaborative work environment. By focusing on open communication, understanding all perspectives, and working toward mutually beneficial solutions, leaders can manage conflict constructively and foster trust. By mastering mediation and communication skills, leaders can build a workplace culture that not only resolves conflicts effectively but also builds the skills and trust necessary for constructive disagreement and strong teamwork.

Using Games and Team Building Activities

Games and team collaboration encourage communication, problem-solving, and creativity by creating a fun, low-stakes environment where team members can practice essential skills and build stronger relationships. Aronson et al. (2025) stated that a team's sense of togetherness and its members' contributions were manifested within the structure of games and collaboration, such as an escape room. The escape room's structure and challenges reliably and meaningfully elicit the intended behaviors and feelings of team

cohesion and performance. Nasief et al. (2022) confirmed that team members experience notable social well-being, including high team cohesion and a positive ability to adjust socially when games and collaboration are implemented. By cultivating team cohesion and a positive social environment through collaborative games, customer service organizations can directly improve staff well-being and the overall quality of customer interactions. It is beneficial for an organizational leader to implement collaborative games to foster team cohesion, promote employee well-being, boost morale, and help teams develop innovative solutions to real-world challenges.

Conflicts as Opportunities for Growth and Stronger Relationships

Debriefs, forgiveness, and a growth mindset turn conflict into opportunities by fostering learning, healing, development, and stronger relationships between team members and leaders. Britton et al. (2024) stated that taking just a short time to think constructively about relationship conflicts can make people feel more confident and less stressed about the conflicts, because even simple reflection without a strict plan can be helpful. In the workplace, leaders might consider reflective debriefs, where, after a conflict, the team could assess what worked well and what could have been handled better, turning the experience into a learning moment for continuous growth. Shagirbasha et al. (2025) confirmed that employees who are naturally forgiving and are focused on growth and stronger relationships are more proactive and helpful at work, even when conflicts arise with team members. Having a forgiving mindset enables team members and leadership to perceive conflict as less threatening, allowing them to act proactively rather than getting bogged down by negative feelings. Forgiveness can mitigate the

negative impact that coworker conflicts have on their willingness to help others.

Organizational leaders who adopt a mindset of forgiveness and focus on growth can effectively transform conflicts into opportunities that lead to stronger, more cohesive teams. Managers should lead by being forgiving to foster a culture of psychological safety, accountability, and innovation, allowing them to hold employees accountable in a manner that fosters growth rather than resentment, encouraging mistakes to become valuable learning opportunities. This approach fosters trust, enhances team cohesion and retention, and promotes a more positive and collaborative work environment.

Customer service organizations that leverage conflicts as opportunities for growth and strengthening relationships between team members and leaders tend to exhibit positive team cohesion, especially in remote and hybrid work settings, which can be prone to misunderstandings due to the absence of face-to-face cues such as body language and tone. Zelenko et al. (2023) stated that for leaders and team members to be more effective, they should master the skills of conflict resolution, enhance the team's ability to produce high-quality work, and make informed judgments about collaborative approaches. These skills are interconnected and contribute to a productive and harmonious work environment where everyone can contribute their best efforts towards achieving shared goals. Gxhaweni and Plaatjies (2023) confirmed that a collaborative, win-win strategy for resolving conflicts between different teams involves integrating the input of leaders and team members. By adopting this integrated approach, teams move away from a mentality of blaming each other and towards collective ownership. The focus shifts from historical analysis of errors to forward-looking, shared solutions, which

naturally build trust and psychological safety among team members. This fosters environments where everyone feels comfortable contributing to a resolution without fear of retribution.

Managing Different Personality Traits

Managing different personalities fosters team cohesion by leveraging diverse strengths, improving communication, and minimizing conflict. Khan et al. (2025) stated that to improve team cohesion, managers and team leaders can enhance safety, productivity, and morale by focusing on managing different personality traits, such as conscientiousness and agreeableness. This approach fosters a more inclusive, predictable, and supportive work environment. Murmu and Neelam (2022) confirmed that managing different personality traits can influence virtual team trust and collaboration. Effective management requires fostering open communication and understanding to bridge these differences, ensuring that individual personalities are leveraged positively for team success. Emotional intelligence mediates this relationship and can be developed to improve team cohesion (Murmu & Neelam, 2022). High emotional intelligence enables empathy, calm conflict handling, and stronger social bonds, turning challenges into growth opportunities for a united team.

Highly emotionally intelligent leaders demonstrate empathy, vulnerability, and care, creating psychological safety, open communication, and better engagement. Flavián et al. (2022) discovered that employees' trust in leaders and their subsequent commitment to the team are shaped by a combination of individual personality traits and the team's operational success. Employee trust and team commitment are influenced by a

combination of personality traits and the team's ability to achieve its goals. Mai et al. (2022) confirmed that the inherent qualities of leaders play a key role in shaping an organization's ability to innovate, not only through immediate effects but also indirectly by boosting team cohesion, promoting positive customer interactions, and facilitating continuous organizational learning. Effectively managing diverse personality traits within a customer service setting, combined with strong leadership, is crucial for fostering a trustworthy environment that not only enhances internal team morale and cohesion but also directly contributes to positive customer interactions and sustained organizational success and innovation.

Promoting Open Communication, Building Trust, and Sharing Knowledge

Promoting open communication, building trust, and sharing knowledge are fundamental to fostering positive team cohesion, which in turn promotes transparency and mutual respect, thereby enhancing collaboration and strengthening unity through the free exchange of ideas and honest feedback. Imam and Zaheer (2021) stated that leadership improves teams by fostering knowledge sharing and cohesion, which in turn boosts project success through increased collaboration, motivation, and empowerment. Leadership is a catalyst for organizations, achieved when leaders foster team cohesion and knowledge sharing, which in turn leads to better collaboration, motivation, and empowerment, ultimately improving project outcomes. Atrian et al. (2022) confirmed a strong, positive link between extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, and employees' knowledge sharing within their teams, which fosters positive team cohesion. Extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and

openness have a positive impact on employees' knowledge sharing, resulting in increased team cohesion (Atrian et al., 2022). The implementation of strategies that cultivate transparency, mutual respect, and sharing knowledge, such as those centered on personality traits like extraversion and conscientiousness, is vital for building strong, unified, and successful teams (Silvia et al., 2024). When integrated with an understanding of individual personality traits, these approaches can lead to more effective collaboration and successful outcomes. Iqbal et al. (2025) stated that fostering an environment where team members can openly share ideas and feedback without fear enables teams to build trust and feel more connected to each other and the company's goals. Creating psychological safety transforms teams by unlocking their full potential through a foundation of trust and fearless contribution.

The core strategies of promoting open communication, building trust, and sharing knowledge directly support the goal of identifying effective leadership strategies to improve team cohesion and promote enhanced customer satisfaction among hybrid and remote teams. Wei et al. (2022) stated that value and social proximity have a positive impact on knowledge sharing and team cohesion, which in turn positively affect project team resilience. Value and social proximity contribute to team members sharing information, aligning their goals, and trusting one another, creating a cohesive unit that can more effectively adapt to challenges. Dewi and Hasmin (2025) confirmed that to boost innovation and overall performance, organizations should focus on cultivating leaders who inspire and motivate employees toward a shared vision, creating an environment where employees feel safe to take risks, voice concerns, and admit mistakes

without fear of retribution, and implementing systems and cultures that facilitate effective knowledge sharing among employees. Organizational leaders can enhance innovation and performance by cultivating inspirational leaders, fostering a psychologically safe environment for risk-taking and open communication, and implementing systems that facilitate effective knowledge sharing among employees.

Prioritizing Customer Trust and Brand Image

Prioritizing customer trust and brand image is fundamentally linked to promoting positive customer satisfaction, as these efforts build a foundation of reliability and perceived value, leading to enhanced loyalty and long-term positive relationships. Sitompul and Andarini (2025) stated that enhancing customer loyalty involves solidifying the brand's perception and ensuring that the product experience consistently meets or exceeds customer expectations after use. Customer loyalty is a dual strategy that involves both strengthening the brand's image and consistently delivering exceptional post-use product experiences. Sahlani and Ruswanti (2024) confirmed that what makes consumers trust a brand is that trusting a brand provides useful advice for creating successful marketing and brand management plans. Trust is earned through consistent, positive experiences and actions that demonstrate to customers that organizations value them, making it a core pillar of sustainable marketing success.

Organizations that focus on customer trust and brand image are fundamentally linked to promoting positive customer satisfaction, as these efforts build a foundation of reliability and perceived value, which in turn relates to strategies that leadership in customer service organizations can implement to improve team cohesion and ultimately

enhance customer satisfaction. Hafid et al. (2025) stated that a strong brand reputation is essential for organizations, as brand image increases consumer trust and helps differentiate the organization from competitors, thereby aiding in customer attraction and retention. A positive brand image enhances consumer trust, provides a clear competitive differentiation, and effectively drives both customer attraction and retention. Sahlani and Ruswanti (2024) confirmed that brand image is a crucial factor that shapes customer satisfaction, which in turn drives customer loyalty. A strong brand image and positive online recommendations lead to higher customer satisfaction. Septiano et al. (2025) noted that satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal to a brand, which in turn fosters customer trust, forming a crucial framework that leadership can leverage when implementing strategies aimed at enhancing team cohesion and ultimately improving overall customer satisfaction within the organization. Satisfied customers are more than repeat buyers; they become advocates, creating a virtuous cycle where external success (customer loyalty) fuels internal alignment (team cohesion) and vice versa, strengthening the entire organization.

Summary

In Section 1, I provided background information on the problem, stated the business problem focus, and outlined the project's purpose. I also included the research question for my project, along with the assumptions and limitations. I specified my ethical responsibilities. I also included an evidence-based integrative review, in which I synthesized and analyzed both conceptual frameworks, business problem scholarship evidence, and business topic scholarship.

Section 2: Primary and Secondary Industry Data Analysis

Nature of the Project

I employed a qualitative research methodology, which proved effective for identifying and exploring effective strategies to enhance team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams. Orea-Giner et al. (2025) stated that a qualitative approach provides a deep understanding by exploring what participants feel, think, and experience, going beyond surface-level data to uncover rich details and personal viewpoints through a combination of methods. A qualitative methodology enabled me to understand the essence of improving team and customer satisfaction from the participants' perspective. The insights I generated through my in-depth qualitative exploration laid a critical foundation for the main findings of my research project on the effective strategies that some leaders in U.S. customer service organizations use to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. Han et al. (2024) highlighted how a qualitative research approach enabled an in-depth look at real-world examples within the customer service industry. Qualitative methods allow researchers to uncover reasons behind customer actions, revealing rich narratives, emotions, motivations, and contextual details like specific service failures or successes that numerical data may miss, leading to better empathy and targeted improvements.

Method and Design

I used a pragmatic design for my research project. I employed a pragmatic inquiry design in my research project because my focus on uncovering practical, actionable results aligns with the goal of identifying and exploring effective strategies to improve

team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. The pragmatic design provided a thorough insight into the effective strategies that customer service leaders use to improve team cohesion in hybrid and remote settings, to improve customer satisfaction. A pragmatic design was directly applicable to real-world organizational challenges in hybrid and remote contexts.

Reliability

To ensure that my research process was sound and that my findings were credible and useful, I took steps to ensure reliability. Xue and Lyu (2025) stated that reliability is essential in research because it guarantees that measurements and findings are consistent and repeatable, confirming the trustworthiness and accuracy of the data to support valid conclusions. To ensure reliability, I employed member checking, achieved data saturation, and cross-referenced my findings through triangulation. Kullman and Chudyk (2025) stated that member checking, a validation technique often used in qualitative research, is the process where researchers share their preliminary findings, interpretations, or transcripts with the original participants to verify accuracy and credibility. Member checking ensured that my data accurately reflects the participants' experiences and perspectives, while also giving participants a voice in how I interpret our interviews. I employed member checking by sending the participants an email with my interpretation of our interviews, to verify accuracy, credibility, and ensure that I understood what the participants had tried to convey.

To further ensure reliability, I sought data saturation, meaning I collected a sufficient amount to confidently identify themes. Lim (2025) stated that data saturation is

the point in qualitative research at which no new information or themes emerge from further data collection, indicating that sufficient data have been gathered to effectively answer the research question. Lim further stated that data saturation is crucial because it helps researchers determine when to stop gathering data, ensuring a thorough analysis while preventing unnecessary work and resource expenditure. I knew I had reached data saturation when no new information or themes emerged from the data collection, and I felt confident that I had gathered a sufficient amount of data effectively.

Lastly, I triangulated my data. Kavar et al. (2024) stated that data triangulation is when researchers gather and cross-verify data from multiple sources, publicly available documents. By using multiple sources, I was able to draw more credible, valid, and reliable conclusions through cross-verifying my findings, identifying biases, and providing a comprehensive understanding of complex subjects, thereby strengthening the evidence by seeing if different angles converge on the same truth. Data triangulation acted as a safeguard against misleading results I obtained from semistructured interviews alone, allowing me to collect deeper, more nuanced insights. I maintained strong standards of rigor and consistency throughout my research project, incorporating these practices.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

For my research project, I selected a sample of six leaders from the customer service industry in the south-central region of the United States. The participant eligibility requirement included: (a) being a mid-level or higher leader with titles such as president, vice-president, project manager, manager, and supervisor; (b) in their current

role for at least 3 years in the customer service industry in the south-central region of the United States; and (c) having experience successfully using effective strategies to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. I purposefully selected these individuals because they possessed specific characteristics relevant to my project's research question. Stratton (2024) identified that purposeful sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique in which researchers deliberately select participants or cases based on their knowledge or expertise regarding the phenomenon being studied, and purposeful sampling is important because purposeful sampling allows for the in-depth exploration of specific groups or situations, thereby developing rich insights and enhancing the understanding of the research topic. To gather a wide range of perspectives, participants represented multiple sectors of the customer service industry, including health and telecommunications. The wide range of perspectives offered a multifaceted view of customer service leaders' effective strategies to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. To gain access to the participants, I employed direct instant messages on Teams, sent personal emails, and made a call for participants on LinkedIn. My LinkedIn call for participants did not receive any responses; however, my personal, direct outreach yielded interest. When recruiting participants, I included details about my research project's objectives, ensured confidentiality, and explained the benefits of involvement to attract leaders with specific expertise relevant to my research project.

I focused on generating rich, in-depth data, and my research employed a sample size of six, which facilitated a manageable data collection process consistent with the

qualitative methodology's goals. I explored key themes until I reached data saturation, ensuring comprehensive coverage of my topic. I ceased data collection when no new themes or insights emerged from the interviews, indicating that I reached data saturation. I continued to oversee the process through repeated cycles of gathering and reviewing data, ensuring the research remained relevant and comprehensive.

Data Collection Activities

To collect my data, I conducted semistructured interviews with participants. Patel and Quan-Haase (2023) noted that researchers employ semistructured interviews to collect rich, detailed qualitative data by combining predetermined open-ended questions with the flexibility to probe interesting participant responses, thereby allowing for a deep exploration of experiences, perspectives, and complex topics. I used an interview protocol (Appendix B) to ensure consistency, minimize potential bias, and enhance data quality. The interview protocol provided me with a structured guide for asking questions, ensuring I covered all key areas. The interview protocol helped me stay on track, maintain a professional flow, and gather relevant, comparable information from every participant.

I recruited participants beforehand by reaching out to potential participants via Teams, emails, and LinkedIn. After recruiting six participants, I created a calendar invite for each interview. I sent a Microsoft Outlook calendar invitation for our Zoom interview, set in 30-minute windows, to each participant individually, according to the date and time agreed upon by the participants. When I met virtually with each participant on Zoom, I introduced myself and followed the participant interview protocol outlined in

Appendix B. I initially started with some small talk to build rapport with the participant, then I pivoted to the interview itself, where I used my interview protocol to ensure consistency. When applicable, I asked follow-up questions for participants to provide specific examples and obtain more detailed information. I used Zoom for all participant interviews. I audio-recorded and used the built-in live transcription on Zoom for all interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Following the interviews, I conducted member checking.

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

To find themes in my dataset, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis technique. I used Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis because it is systematic and offers me clear steps to uncover rich insights. Hole (2024) stated that researchers use thematic analysis to systematically identify, analyze, and report recurring themes in qualitative data, thereby uncovering deeper meanings, gaining a deeper understanding of experiences, and gaining insights that address their research questions. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis provides a flexible, in-depth way to organize complex data, revealing both commonalities and nuanced understandings of subjective phenomena. I followed Braun and Clarke's six-step method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting pattern themes in my qualitative data. First, I familiarized myself with the data. Second, I generated initial codes for the following interesting features. Then, I searched for potential themes. Then, I reviewed and refined those themes against my data. Next, I defined and renamed the final themes. Ultimately, I compiled a comprehensive report that presented my findings, supported by evidence and interpretation.

After analyzing the data, I focused on the key themes and correlated them with the existing literature and my conceptual framework. I incorporated new studies to ensure my research was current, robust, and positioned within the most recent scholarly context. By comparing my themes to those found by other researchers, I could see where my findings aligned with, differed from, or added nuance to existing research. Connecting the themes to my conceptual framework allowed me to better interpret my themes while providing context and depth,

Summary

In Section 2, I justified my use of a qualitative methodology with a pragmatic inquiry design. I also included an explanation of how I improved the reliability of my research. I specified my population, sampling, and participants. I also included data collection activities, organization, and my analysis techniques.

Section 3: Data and Professional Practice

Project Results

The purpose of my qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore effective strategies that some leaders in U.S. customer service organizations use to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. The research question was: What effective strategies do leaders in U.S. customer service organizations use to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction? To answer this research question, I analyzed the data from my semistructured interviews. From this analysis, I derived the following themes. In this section, I present these themes: (a) communicating clearly and consistently, (b) promoting collaboration to enhance team member consistency, (c) fostering team cohesion through team building activities, and (d) cultivating a sense of belonging.

Theme 1: Communicating Clearly and Consistently

One effective strategy that leaders use is communicating clearly and consistently. In hybrid and remote environments, clear and consistent communication serves as the foundation for high-performing teams, fostering trust, reducing conflict, and boosting productivity by ensuring everyone shares a common purpose and understanding. It directly drives employee engagement, prevents role ambiguity, and yields superior, consistent customer experiences that foster loyalty. A primary challenge in hybrid and remote settings is the loss of nonverbal cues, which, in physical offices, naturally facilitate social bonding, spontaneous problem solving, and the rapid dissemination of

information. Without deliberate intervention, lack of non-verbal cues can lead to remote employees feeling isolated, a two-tier information system where in-office staff have an advantage, and a general fragmentation of team culture. The resultant misunderstandings and misalignment in goals directly impact productivity, as team members may duplicate efforts or become frustrated by vague managerial communication, ultimately hindering the seamless teamwork required to deliver consistent, high-quality customer service.

While technology offers connection, it often strips away vital nonverbal cues.

Thus, intentional, clear, and consistent communication is paramount for building trust, cohesion, and ultimately, great customer experiences. Several participants outlined several strategies for fostering clear and consistent communication to improve team cohesion in hybrid and remote settings. All participants also mentioned that they hold brief, regular check-in meetings to keep progress visible and address any challenges that may arise. Participant 1 shared that they use shared communication platforms, such as Drive or working documents, employing standard templates for workflow processes so that everyone is on the same page. Participant 1 also mentioned the value of actively soliciting team member feedback on processes and tools to demonstrate that their input is valued. Participant 1 also emphasized that they align their workflows to ensure that both the hybrid and remote team members stay connected and can deliver consistent, positive expectations to their customers. By implementing these strategies, teams can maintain strong connections and deliver consistent, positive experiences for their customers, regardless of work arrangement.

Participant 2 emphasized the value of leveraging specific software, such as Google Meet, Slack, or Slides, for daily communication. Participant 2 uses specific software to establish clear, agreed-upon methods and tools for disseminating information to their team. When managing a team of managers who oversee colleagues, consistent messaging across all subteams is crucial. Without body language, words must carry the full load, requiring precision. Participant 2 also stated that different communication among groups leads to varied results, reactions, and customer satisfaction levels. Participant 2 stated that managers should be held accountable not just for what they communicate, but also for how they communicate it. Participant 2 acknowledged that the remote environment presents challenges because nuances like emojis, exclamation marks, or all caps can change the interpretation of a message, making it vital that expectations are explicitly clear. Thus, Participant 2 further advised that effective communication and collaboration are essential for a unified group. Participant 2 shared that a lack of communication within the team, particularly concerning interactions and messaging with customers, leads to inconsistent service and potentially results in no customer satisfaction at all. Participant 2 emphasized that every team member must be aware of the overarching goal and the correct, consistent messaging that needs to be communicated throughout the organization. Establishing clear expectations for communication channels, tone, and messaging consistency ensures alignment and clarity across all departments, levels, and work environments.

Other participants also mentioned that intentional, concise communication ensures team members understand their roles and how they contribute to the team and

organization. Participant 5 emphasized the importance of being highly intentional and concise in communication to effectively foster team cohesion in hybrid and remote settings. Participant 5 stated that every message should be impactful and straight to the point, arguing against overwhelming the team with excessive information. Participant 5's response focused on quality over quantity, making the most of limited communication opportunities. Participant 1 stated that clear communication, ensuring everyone understands expectations and responsibilities, helps reduce misunderstandings. Participant 1 also stated that to communicate clearly and consistently, one must focus on realigning workflows to help teams stay connected and provide a positive experience for team members, and ensure everyone is on the same page, which is essential for effective collaboration and a positive member experience.

To enhance the credibility of my research, I triangulated this theme by gathering and cross-verifying information from a variety of sources, including public documents. My triangulated approach minimized the risk of bias and misleading results inherent in relying solely on interviews, allowing for a more thorough and nuanced understanding of complex subjects. I cross-verified the findings, enabling me to draw more reliable and valid conclusions, and ensuring that I maintained rigorous and consistent standards throughout the research process. As one example, my findings are consistent with those of O'Bryan et al. (2024), who stated that the link between objective communication patterns observed in virtual team meetings and qualitative assessments of individual team member effectiveness is essential for team cohesion, and that communication is a core component of successful teamwork. In virtual environments, more frequent and active

verbal communication directly correlates to higher perceived individual and team performance. Voltage Control (2024) reached a similar conclusion to mine, confirming that open communication from leaders helps build trust and reduce uncertainty, foundational elements for effective teamwork and a positive customer experience. By sharing honest information—both good and bad—leaders reduce anxiety and speculation, creating a stable environment for effective teamwork and a better customer experience. The application of triangulation in my research project not only strengthened the credibility and rigor of my research but also highlighted the critical role of robust, multifaceted communication strategies in fostering effective teamwork and reliable outcomes.

In literature, researchers frequently emphasize that maintaining clear and consistent communication is essential for enhancing team cohesion in both hybrid and remote work environments. Yu et al. (2022) stated that communicating openly has a positive influence on team cohesion, fostering a culture where staff feel comfortable sharing thoughts and ideas openly, and enhancing unity within teams. Open communication fosters trust among team members, promotes psychological safety, aligns individual efforts with the team's objectives, and encourages diverse perspectives, ultimately contributing to improved decision making and innovation. Bedir et al. (2023) also confirmed that strong communication skills serve as a bridge, demonstrating how empathy fosters better team cohesion. Strong communication, infused with empathy, builds bridges by actively listening and validating others, thereby creating trust, reducing conflict, and fostering open dialogue. This approach directly boosts team cohesion,

collaboration, morale, and overall performance by making members feel understood and valued.

The participants' findings on the importance of clear and consistent communication align directly with Tuckman's (1965) group development theory. When uncovering effective strategies to improve team cohesion and increase customer satisfaction, clear, consistent communication is especially important for navigating the norming and performing stages in a distributed work context. The norming phase of Tuckman's group development theory represents the process of confirming. In the norming phase, leaders should reinforce shared understanding, establish routines, and foster open sharing of progress and roadblocks. This clear and consistent communication will foster cohesion, trust, and a collective identity, increasing team cohesion. In the performing stage, leaders should also maintain structured and efficient communication, such as clear agendas and regular check-ins, while encouraging creative input and feedback to support high performance, enhance customer relationships, increase loyalty, and achieve sustained growth.

Clear, consistent communication ensures that team members understand and follow established norms, allowing leaders to enforce them effectively. This, in turn, reduces confusion and enhances trust, accountability, and productivity within a cohesive and effective team environment. Participant 1's mention of using standard templates for workflow processes and shared communication platforms acts as a direct modern equivalent to establishing group norms, providing the structure needed for hybrid or remote teams to operate cohesively. Participant 2 reinforces the confirming process by

stressing the need for explicit expectations regarding communication nuances, demonstrating how groups must consciously engineer the rules of engagement that might form implicitly in an office setting. Explicit rules ensure everyone understands preferred communication channels, response times, and standards for professional interaction. This reduces ambiguity, the frustration that comes from differing implicit assumptions, and the challenge of varied interpretations in remote communication, thereby reducing the potential for storming and relapse. A performing team operates strategically toward common goals with high interdependence. Consistent messaging is a prerequisite for achieving high performance in complex, multilayered teams of managers. Inconsistency across subteams, as noted by Participant 2, undermines the unified structure required for the performing stage, resulting in varied outcomes and customer satisfaction levels (Rachman, 2022). These variations result in a lack of shared vision and inconsistent processes, directly contributing to disparities in results and customer satisfaction levels across the team. When leaders communicate clearly and consistently, they mitigate these issues and foster cohesion. By establishing common goals and standardized operational procedures, teams are better equipped to overcome internal friction and focus on high performance, resulting in streamlined processes, efficient problem solving, and consistent quality. This, in turn, directly leads to smoother and more reliable customer experiences.

Drucker's (1964) customer focus theory emphasizes that the customer is the foundation of a business and the key to its existence, advocating that the entire organization must focus on meeting customer needs and ensuring their satisfaction. The participants' insights are consistent with Drucker's principles, particularly in terms of

how internal processes directly impact external customer outcomes. Customer focus theory (Drucker, 1964) integrates clear, consistent communication and team cohesion by making the customer's needs the central, shared goal, breaking down internal silos, and fostering trust, so teams collaborate effectively to deliver unified, exceptional experiences, driven from leadership down and measured by outcomes for both the customer and the organization. Cohesive teams, aligned by this vision, communicate openly and work together, reducing conflict and improving performance, which directly enhances customer satisfaction. Drucker's customer focus theory is supported by the findings. The research illustrates how internal miscommunication can lead to inconsistent service and unhappy customers, underscoring the importance of strong internal operations in fostering external customer relationships (Muscato et al., 2023). Internal miscommunication often results in inconsistent service and dissatisfied customers, confirming the critical link between internal operations and external customer experience. Strong internal operations, characterized by customer focus, clear and consistent communication, and team cohesion, are essential for building positive external customer relationships.

A lack of communication within the team, particularly concerning interactions and messaging with customers, leads to inconsistent service and highlights the negative consequences of failing to achieve the systematic alignment described by Drucker (1964). When teams are not cohesive and deliver conflicting messages, the customer experience becomes fragmented and unreliable, directly contradicting Drucker's vision of an organization unified around serving the customer's needs effectively. Drucker

emphasized that an organization's primary purpose is to create and retain customers, and they advocated for a systemic, unified approach where all parts of the organization work in concert to meet customer needs effectively. Decades later, Loyless (2023) still argued that customer focus must be systematic across the organization. Participant 2 emphasized the importance of holding managers accountable for the external customer experience. Holding managers accountable is crucial because they drive culture, set standards, and empower employees, directly impacting satisfaction, loyalty, and business performance.

Employees are also responsible for actions (focus) that lead to the outcome (satisfaction). Şardağı et al. (2025) stated that clear and consistent communication enables managers to set clear expectations for action, build trust, align actions with goals, and empower teams to deliver better service, ultimately impacting customer satisfaction and loyalty. Salin and Koponen (2024) confirmed that when managers translate organizational goals into daily tasks and provide regular, honest feedback, employees understand their role in the customer experience, resulting in more consistent, high-quality service and improved business outcomes. Drucker's customer focus theory dictates that employees must prioritize understanding and meeting customer needs for success. In practice, this means that leaders should set clear customer-centric goals. Theme 1 highlights a clear mandate that managing communication effectively is not a secondary soft skill, but a primary operational necessity for successful modern business practices.

Theme 2: Promoting Collaboration To Enhance Team Member Consistency

Another effective strategy that participant leaders use is promoting collaboration to enhance team member consistency. This strategy, which many participants employed to cultivate consistent performance across their teams, involves ensuring everyone operates from a shared understanding and approach. Many participants noted that fostering an environment where knowledge sharing and joint problem solving are the norm enables team members to align their work processes and decision-making. Participants stated that a collaborative environment minimizes the risk of team members developing divergent, unaligned methods, particularly when different individuals or subgroups are involved. By encouraging open communication and shared ownership of projects, participants noted that leaders help bridge gaps in understanding, ensuring that every team member has access to the collective expertise. Many participants noted that the result is a more unified and reliable output, as individual efforts are systematically integrated and cross-verified, creating a cohesive, high-quality product that reflects a consistent team standard.

Several participants outlined several strategies for promoting collaboration to enhance team member consistency to improve team cohesion in hybrid and remote settings. Participant 1 shared that promoting a clear, collaborative culture ensures everyone is aligned with providing consistent, positive experiences for members. Participant 1 stated that using real-time templates is particularly effective in enhancing service delivery and increasing customer satisfaction. Participant 2 stated that effective leadership strategies require a strong emphasis on communication, collaboration,

and accountability. Participant 2 also stated that when teams are not aligned on communication protocols, especially regarding customer interactions, poor alignment can result in inconsistent service and lower customer satisfaction. A collaborative work environment is, therefore, essential that every team member understands the common goals and the established communication standards. Participant 4 shared that they established a routine of regular check-ins and team meetings to foster a culture of collaboration and open feedback. To enhance team unity and ensure every meeting is productive, Participant 4 sets clear goals and expectations, ensuring their team remains focused on achieving their intended outcomes. Participant 4 said one of their key priorities is to increase collaboration and communication across the team actively.

In general, participants shared that when their employees are equipped with the right tools, training, and a clear understanding of company goals, they deliver more authentic, proactive, and empathetic service. Participant 1 shared that promoting a clear, collaborative culture ensures everyone is aligned with providing consistent, positive experiences for customers. Using real-time templates is particularly effective in enhancing delivery service and increasing customer satisfaction. Participant 2 stated that effective leadership strategies require a strong emphasis on communication, collaboration, and accountability. Participant 2 also stated that when teams are not aligned on communication protocols, especially regarding customer interactions, poor alignment can result in inconsistent service and lower customer satisfaction. Participant 4 shared that they establish a routine of regular check-ins and team meetings to foster a culture of collaboration and open feedback. To enhance team unity and ensure every

meeting is productive, Participant 4 sets clear goals and expectations, ensuring they remain focused on achieving their intended outcomes.

When I triangulated the data from this finding, I found similar results that promoting collaboration enhances team member consistency, directly boosting team cohesion and customer satisfaction by fostering aligned, efficient, and reliable service delivery. Buła et al. (2024) indicated that by encouraging frequent communication, collaboration, and prioritizing inclusion, organizations can foster successful collaboration and ensure the well-being and productivity of all employees in a hybrid work environment. By prioritizing these strategies, leaders can foster a cohesive work culture that thrives regardless of employees' locations. Radacina et al. (2025) confirmed that team collaboration, group emotions, and interactions evolve in remote settings through the collaboration required for team cohesion. Remote team collaboration, emotions, and interactions evolve as they transition from organic, in-person cues to intentional, tech-enabled, and asynchronous communication, which is crucial for building trust, cohesion, and consistent performance. Promoting consistency requires clear, documented expectations, regular virtual social interaction, and structured collaboration tools to manage shared goals effectively.

In literature, researchers often highlight that promoting collaboration to enhance team member consistency is essential for improving team cohesion in both hybrid and remote work environments. Zirar et al. (2025) discovered that collaboration plays a critical role in achieving team cohesion and organizational success in hybrid and remote work settings through consistent processes. Promoting this consistency

involves establishing shared team charters, standardized workflows, and intentional team-building to foster trust and, ultimately, higher performance. Buseyne et al. (2025) stated that an emphasis on fostering a clear, collaborative culture, using real-time templates, and employing effective leadership strategies that involve strong communication and accountability directly aligns with established management theories and studies on virtual team effectiveness. These strategies establish the structure and culture required for virtual teams to overcome the challenges of distance and time, resulting in improved effectiveness and consistent performance. My participants' insights extend the literature by offering practical, ground-level strategies for navigating the complexities of remote and hybrid communication protocols and service delivery.

The data further corroborates findings in the existing academic literature on the benefits of structured communication and operational alignment in counteracting the challenges inherent in non-co-located teams. Participant 4's approach of implementing regular check-ins and setting clear goals aligns with studies that advocate for structured interactions to build trust and ensure alignment when organic, in-person interactions are less frequent. Hincapie and Costa (2024) stated that inclusive leadership is vital for hybrid and remote teams to reach their potential, collaborate effectively, achieve goals, and support member well-being. Orekoya (2024) confirmed that leaders who communicate directly and positively have a positive impact on the team environment, encouraging members to interact, engage, and share ideas freely. While the existing literature broadly covers these concepts, the findings specifically reinforce that poor alignment on customer interaction protocols in hybrid settings can lead to tangible

adverse outcomes, such as inconsistent service and lower customer satisfaction. This highlights the practical importance of these strategies in modern work environments.

The participants' findings on promoting collaboration to enhance team member consistency align with Tuckman's (1965) group development theory. The participants' findings on promoting collaboration to enhance team member consistency align directly with the core tenets of Tuckman's group development theory, particularly the stages of norming and performing. Tuckman's theory outlines stages through which groups move: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. The strategies described by participants primarily relate to the norming phase, where teams establish communication protocols, define roles, and develop cohesion. Increased, consistent collaboration helps members resolve discrepancies between expectations and reality, fostering acceptance. Participant 1's focus on promoting a "clear, collaborative culture" and using "real-time templates" addresses the need for the team to agree on shared norms and processes, which is the defining characteristic of the norming stage. This alignment on expectations and methods helps transition the group out of the storming phase, characterized by potential conflict over procedures, such as the poor alignment in communication protocols mentioned by Participant 2, and into a functional, norming environment the team is consistent and has a clear understanding of goals.

Thus, promoting collaboration and enhancing team member consistency is essential for fostering a cohesive work environment that drives project success and operational efficiency across an organization's initiatives. The collaborative environment and established communication standards Participant 2 advocates for are vital for

achieving the unity and mutual understanding that characterize the successful performing stage, where the team functions as a highly effective unit with minimal friction. A mature and consistent team shares leadership, communicates openly, and collaborates to solve. Participant 4's proposed routine of regular check-ins, team meetings with clear goals, and an active push for collaboration and communication directly implements the practices required to solidify these norms. These actions help the team bypass prolonged storming and quickly establish the necessary cohesion and consistency to operate effectively, ensuring the team remains focused on achieving outcomes and successfully reaches the high-performance performing stage of group development.

The participants' findings on promoting collaboration to enhance team member consistency align directly with Drucker's (1964) customer focus theory, which emphasizes the critical need for internal alignment to consistently meet external customer expectations. Drucker's customer focus theory posits that the primary purpose of a business is to create and retain customers, a goal achieved only when every function within the organization operates with a unified, customer-centric approach. Participant 1 reflects this by fostering a clear, collaborative culture that ensures everyone provides consistent, positive experiences. A collaborative, customer-centric culture requires aligning organizational structure to facilitate, communicate, and deliver consistent, positive experiences through shared accountability, feedback, and empowered, supported employees. The use of real-time templates further enhances service delivery consistency, directly increasing customer satisfaction. Furthermore, Participant 2's emphasis on strong communication and aligned protocols for customer interactions directly addresses a key

tenet of Drucker's theory: inconsistent service, stemming from poor internal alignment, inevitably leads to lower customer satisfaction. A collaborative environment, therefore, serves as the operational mechanism to ensure every team member understands common goals and established communication standards, thereby actualizing Drucker's vision of an organization focused outward on the customer.

Theme 3: Fostering Team Cohesion through Team Building Activities

Teambuilding activities foster cohesion by building trust, enhancing communication, and strengthening interpersonal relationships, which in turn lead to a more collaborative and productive environment. Participants emphasized that by focusing on shared purpose, consistent interaction, and mutual understanding through structured team-building exercises, leaders can transform distributed groups into cohesive units, enabling better information sharing and ultimately leading to project success. Participant 4 stated that a proactive team-building approach ensures that team members develop strong bonds and trust, essential for tackling challenges and fostering a positive, collaborative culture in today's flexible work environments.

In general, participants shared that when they include team-building activities and strategies, team-building helps build a strong sense of connection and value. Even when physically separated, building a strong sense of connection and value relies on deliberate efforts: undertaking meaningful tasks, establishing specific responsibilities, celebrating collective achievements, and resolving disagreements fairly to ensure inclusivity. Participant 4 places a significant emphasis on team building through social interactions and the development of personal relationships. Participant 4 stated they initiated a "social

month" program, where managers took their teams out for a two-hour, work-free lunch each month. These events were strategically located in different areas to be convenient for all team members, encouraging them to connect on a personal level and build rapport and trust. Participant 4 includes initiatives that support team building and foster a positive team culture, including recognition and rewards, collaborative goal setting, and continuous improvement through feedback loops, and follows up directly with teams in the field to assess the effectiveness of these cultural changes, driving trust and ensuring the strategies are working in practice. Participant 4 emphasized that they experienced a 34% increase in customer service satisfaction over an 11-month period, a significant improvement attributed to intentional team-building efforts. Participant 6 believes team-building activities are crucial for fostering connection, particularly in a remote environment. Participant 6 said that simple activities, such as playing bingo or asking personal questions like employees' favorite Christmas movies, can help bridge the gap between team members. Participant 6 observes that other teams struggle due to a lack of involvement, which they say is especially challenging when working remotely and feeling isolated. Having meaningful connections with colleagues, or even someone met during training, helps to foster a positive work environment where employees feel valued, understood, and motivated to achieve shared goals.

According to numerous participant leaders, team-building activities are an effective tool for boosting cohesion in distant and hybrid teams by fostering trust, creating shared experiences, and promoting open communication to bridge virtual gaps. Aligned with my findings, Nasief et al. (2022) stated that implementing team-building

activities within customer service teams improves staff well-being and the quality of customer interactions by cultivating team cohesion and a positive social environment, confirming research findings that team members experience notable social well-being when these activities are implemented. These interventions enhance communication, trust, and empathy, thereby reducing burnout and boosting morale, which in turn leads to improved customer experiences.

Such initiatives are vital for building a supportive and effective high-performing team. I also triangulated my data using a study by Aronson et al. (2025). In their study, Aronson et al. demonstrated that team unity and individual effort are evident in team-building activities. The inherent structure and challenges of team-building activities are effective in consistently and significantly revealing team cohesion and performance dynamics. The convergence of these findings suggests that implementing team-building activities is a robust and essential strategy for cultivating team cohesion, fostering connections, improving performance dynamics, and enhancing overall well-being in hybrid and remote teams.

The findings from Participants 4 and 6 highlighted the existing literature on the importance of social interaction in the workplace, particularly regarding social cohesion and rapport building, and their direct impact on both team culture and organizational performance. The emphasis on strategically planned social interactions, as described by Participant 4's social month program, aligns with Nasief et al. (2022), who highlighted the need for intentional, non-work-related interactions to foster trust and psychological safety among team members. Participant 4 reported a 34% increase in customer service

satisfaction, which serves as compelling evidence that these soft-skill-focused initiatives translate into tangible business results, extending the literature by providing a clear, measurable outcome directly tied to specific team-building activities.

Participant 6's observations regarding the crucial role of "simple activities," such as virtual bingo, in remote environments strongly support contemporary literature on mitigating isolation and building connections in a distributed workforce. The observation that a lack of involvement leads to teams "struggling" due to isolation disconfirms the notion that purely task-oriented interactions suffice for effective collaboration, especially remotely. Participants' 4 and 6 collectively extend the literature by underscoring the necessity of a sustained, intentional focus on relational development as a foundational element for team success, moving beyond anecdotal evidence to include specific program examples and quantifiable improvements in performance metrics.

Tuckman's (1965) group development theory posits that teams progress through five stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. The findings from Participants 4 and 6 offer practical applications, primarily facilitating the transition from the 'storming' phase into 'norming' and ultimately 'performing'. Participant 4's emphasis on Teambuilding activities fosters cohesion by building trust, enhancing communication, and strengthening interpersonal relationships, which in turn lead to a more collaborative and productive environment. Meanwhile, Participant 6's social month initiative helps teams move past potential conflicts and personal differences inherent in the storming phase by building interpersonal rapport and trust. These social interactions and opportunities for personal connection, as exemplified by Participant 6's use of simple

games, are crucial for fostering cohesion and psychological safety, which are hallmarks of the norming stage.

By implementing initiatives such as collaborative goal setting, recognition programs, and continuous feedback loops, Participant 4 helps solidify the team's identity and purpose, a characteristic of the norming phase. These practices mitigate potential dysfunction and isolation, as noted by Participant 6 regarding struggling teams, and instead channel the group's energy towards effective execution. The resulting 34% increase in customer service satisfaction serves as a quantifiable indicator that the team reached the performing stage, where optimal functionality, trust, and goal achievement are realized. Thus, the deliberate strategies employed by both participants act as catalysts, accelerating teams through the initial developmental stages to achieve high performance.

Drucker's (1964) customer focus theory, particularly the emphasis on the customer as the foundation of the business, offers a powerful lens for interpreting the findings from Participants 4 and 6. Drucker argued that the primary purpose of any organization is to create and retain customers, and all internal activities should ultimately serve this external focus. Participant 4's approach directly aligns with this, demonstrating that prioritizing internal team health and communication yields by prioritizing significant external results. The implementation of inclusive, rotating meetings and a "social month" program fostered a positive team culture, building rapport and trust among employees. This improved internal cohesion not only made the team happier, but it was also a strategic initiative that yielded a quantifiable 34% increase in customer service satisfaction over an 11-month period. The participants' findings validate Drucker's

implied assertion that well-managed internal relationships and effective communication are essential prerequisites for delivering superior value and service to customers. The participants' data suggest that a customer-centric outcome is the direct result of intentional, employee-focused strategies that ensure every team member is engaged and able to contribute to the organization's purpose.

The findings from Participant 6 further support this application of Drucker's (1964) framework in the modern context of remote work. Drucker's emphasis on organizational purpose suggests that every action, even simple social interactions like virtual bingo or asking personal questions, is a means to an end. In a remote environment where isolation can hinder involvement and collaboration, these activities serve to bridge gaps between team members and prevent the disconnectedness that leads to underperformance. By ensuring that all team members feel connected and involved, Participant 6 advocates for a work environment where a cohesive team can collaborate more effectively on the core purpose of the business: serving the customer. The observation that other teams struggled due to a lack of involvement highlights the importance of these simple yet meaningful connections. Ultimately, the strategies proposed by Participants 4 and 6 demonstrate that fostering robust internal relationships and a strong team culture are essential, foundational elements that directly translate into enhanced customer service, thereby fully embodying Drucker's fundamental principle.

Theme 4: Cultivating a Sense of Belonging

Another effective strategy that participant leaders use to promote team cohesion is cultivating a sense of belonging, ensuring everyone feels integral to the group. Many

participants emphasized that an inclusive environment is one where every individual feels that their contributions are valued and necessary for the group's overall success, regardless of their role or location. Many participants ensured that by making each person feel integral, participant leaders help build trust and a supportive culture where team members can express ideas and concerns without fear of judgment, thereby naturally strengthening the bonds that hold the team together.

To promote a sense of belonging, participant leaders focused on several practical approaches. Participants' leaders 2, 4, and 6 stated that they promoted open and transparent communication, actively listened to all team members, and fairly recognized both individual and collective achievements. Participants' leaders, 2, 4, and 6, encouraged mutual support and facilitating activities that allow members to get to know each other better are also essential steps. Participants' leaders 2, 4, and 6 prioritized an inclusive atmosphere where everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute and grow. Participants' leaders 2, 4, and 6 ensure a motivated, engaged, and unified team capable of achieving shared objectives and adapting to challenges effectively.

Participants' leaders 2, 4, and 6 outlined many effective strategies for promoting team togetherness and strengthening cohesion. Participant 2 emphasized a strong relationship between active communication and high team performance. Participant 2 stated that when employees actively participate in communication channels, their productivity and customer satisfaction metrics improve because involvement fosters a sense of togetherness and belonging. Participant 2 stated that it is a collective feeling of togetherness that motivates team members to actively contribute to their team.

Participant 2 suggested that the more involved team members feel, the prouder the team becomes of their team's metrics and the more likely they are to produce positive results and exceptional customer service. Participant 4 shared that togetherness goes beyond simply working on the same tasks; it involves emotional bonds, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to common goals. Participant 4 also shared that an environment of high cohesion and togetherness fosters open communication, enhances collaboration, and ultimately leads to higher motivation, productivity, and success for the team. Participant 6 emphasized that in a remote work environment, genuine togetherness and connectivity among team members are crucial for morale and continued motivation. Participant 6 noted that some remote teams struggle when team members are not actively engaged with one another, which can lead to feelings of isolation. Participant 6 stated that the necessity of these personal bonds is highlighted as essential for emotional support and a sense of belonging, particularly when individuals are working alone.

When I triangulated the data from this finding, I found similar results indicating that team member togetherness leads to a boost in team cohesion and customer satisfaction. My participant findings aligned with Bedir et al. (2023), who stated that fostering togetherness through sharing personal stories and building trust and strong relationships significantly enhances communication skills, which in turn influences the established connection between empathy, team cohesion, and the team's ability to achieve competitive success. Developing empathy and trust through personal connection strengthens communication skills and team dynamics. Ruan and Liu (2021) also confirmed that when team leaders demonstrate empathy and build trust, team members

feel a strong sense of psychological safety and togetherness, allowing them to share stories comfortably, which in turn boosts team cohesion and customer satisfaction. A connection exists between empathetic leadership, team dynamics, and positive organizational outcomes. My participant findings consistently demonstrate that fostering a culture of togetherness, built on trust and empathy, is a crucial strategic imperative for leaders aiming to enhance both internal team dynamics and external customer satisfaction, pointing towards the need for practical frameworks to implement these strategies effectively.

My participant findings contribute to the existing literature regarding the critical role of team cohesion and communication in fostering positive outcomes such as enhanced performance, productivity, and job satisfaction. Participant 2's emphasis on a direct relationship between active communication and improved metrics such as productivity and customer satisfaction aligns with established research on team effectiveness and the importance of clear communication channels in achieving goals. Participant 4's perspective, which broadens the concept of togetherness to include emotional bonds and mutual respect, further solidifies the multidimensional nature of team cohesion, often discussed in the literature beyond mere task completion.

Participant 6's insights relate to the existing literature by applying established principles to the modern context of remote work environments. The literature often addresses cohesion in traditional settings, but Participant 6 highlights a specific, timely application. The necessity of intentional personal bonds for morale and motivation when individuals are physically isolated. Participant 6's emphasis on combating isolation

through active engagement provides practical implications for managing virtual teams, suggesting that the mechanisms of cohesion remain the same but require different, more deliberate strategies in a remote setting to ensure continued success and emotional support.

The findings from the participants align directly with several stages of Tuckman's (1965) group development theory, particularly the foundational elements that facilitate progression through the forming, storming, and norming stages toward the ideal of performing. The emphasis on fostering togetherness, emotional bonds, and open communication directly addresses the initial need for orientation and connection in the Forming stage, where team members are getting to know each other and establishing ground rules. Participant 2's assertion that involvement fosters a sense of togetherness and belonging is crucial for successfully navigating the potential conflicts of the storming stage. Team cohesion, as noted by Participant 4, fosters an environment of mutual respect that enables disagreements to be handled constructively, preventing the team from becoming stuck in conflict and facilitating movement into the norming stage, where consensus and group cohesion naturally strengthen.

My participants' effective strategies provide practical methods for achieving the characteristics of the performing stage, when the team operates efficiently with high trust and shared leadership. In the performing stage, leaders support belonging by recognizing individual and team achievements and providing opportunities for deeper connection. The collective feeling of belonging and shared commitment to common goals, as highlighted by Participants 2 and 4, is the bedrock of a highly functional team. When the

team is unified, works interdependently, and is focused on achieving its objectives, resulting in high performance, productivity, and exceptional customer service, as my participants described. Participant 6's focus on maintaining these bonds even in a remote environment underscores the ongoing need to support the social and emotional elements of a team to sustain performance and prevent regression to earlier, less cohesive stages of development.

My participant findings regarding cultivating a sense of belonging align with Drucker's (1964) customer focus theory, which posits that the primary purpose of a business is to create and retain customers. My participants' emphasis on togetherness as a driver of motivation, productivity, and exceptional customer service directly links internal team dynamics to external customer outcomes. Specifically, my participant found that a collective sense of belonging, fostered through active communication and emotional bonds, translates into improved customer satisfaction metrics. The resulting pride and motivation of a cohesive team directly support Drucker's assertion that an organization's internal workings must ultimately serve the customer, illustrating that fostering a sense of belonging is an essential component of a successful, customer-centric business strategy.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

One effective strategy that some leaders in U.S. customer service organizations use to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction is communicating clearly and consistently. Ferguson et al. (2024) stated that in a hybrid or remote work setting, the practice of clear and consistent communication is

vital for ensuring teams remain connected and collaborative, which in turn directly drives high customer satisfaction. My research findings suggest that when misunderstandings arise from vague communication, employee and team productivity suffer. A primary recommendation for leaders is to implement structured, explicit communication protocols. Leaders can design specific tools (e.g., Slack for quick updates, email for formal documentation, video conferencing for meetings) that help employees know where to look for information. Sperry et al. (2025) confirmed that a clear and consistent communication approach moves beyond simply using technology and requires a strategic investment in transparency to foster an inclusive information system. This strategy transforms communication from a one-way information push into a dynamic, inclusive system that fosters understanding and collaboration.

Implementing collaborative tools and practices helps standardize procedures and expectations across a team or organization, promoting collaboration to enhance consistency among team members. Moster et al. (2021) emphasized that leaders can implement specific collaborative tools and practices, such as cross-training programs, peer reviews, and shared platforms for documentation, which serve to standardize procedures and expectations. These strategies enhance clarity and consistency, ensuring everyone operates from the same playbook.

Team building in hybrid and remote settings is essential for bridging physical distances, fostering trust, and promoting communication that reduces employee isolation. Improved cohesion boosts collaboration, reduces errors, and raises engagement. Implementing structured team-building activities is crucial for enhancing contemporary

business practices, particularly in the context of increasingly flexible and distributed work environments. My findings suggest that implementing team-building activities fosters cohesion by strengthening interpersonal relationships, enhancing communication, and building trust, which subsequently leads to more collaborative and productive teams. By prioritizing shared understanding and consistent interaction through teambuilding activities, leaders build unified, resilient teams through clear communication, psychological safety, and a common purpose, leading to effective information sharing and sustained project success. Franken et al. (2022) suggested that by prioritizing shared understanding and consistent interaction, leaders can ensure their teams evolve into unified, resilient units capable of effective information sharing and sustained project success. Beyond daily tasks, leaders should implement structured team-building activities, such as collaborative workshops and informal social interactions, to help build rapport, strengthen relationships, and enhance team cohesion. Ultimately, more connected, motivated teams communicate better, leading to faster problem-solving and higher-quality, more consistent customer experiences.

Finally, cultivating a sense of belonging is an effective strategy to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. My findings suggest that when organizational leaders prioritize environments where every employee feels integral and valued, and when they foster a culture of trust and support, this directly improves communication and collaboration, as noted by Baczyńska et al. (2024). Inclusive environments where employees can voice ideas without fear of judgment significantly boost engagement and productivity (Urrila et al., 2025). An inclusive

environment fosters a culture of trust and transparency, enabling better problem-solving and a more resilient workforce. Key strategies include active and empathetic listening, regular non-work social interactions (such as virtual coffee chats and games), and inclusive communication that ensures remote members feel equally valued and informed.

Implications for Social Change

Improving team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams sparks positive social change across multiple levels by fostering more inclusive, flexible, and human-centric work environments. Dewi and Hasmin (2025) stated that team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams sparks positive social change across multiple levels. Wolf et al. (2025) emphasized that for employees, team cohesion provides a positive social change by combating social isolation and burnout, fostering a vital sense of belonging, well-being, and professional growth. Chamberlain et al. (2021) also noted that for leaders, team cohesion fosters positive social change, enabling the development of new, empathetic leadership skills focused on inclusion, transparency, and trust, thereby enhancing their management capabilities. By working closely, teams learn to value diverse perspectives, communicate openly, and build trust, skills that are directly transferable to effective, inclusive leadership. This dynamic not only improves internal team performance but also helps cultivate leaders better equipped to navigate and promote positive change in a broader societal context. Lestyoningrum et al. (2023) confirmed that for organizations, cohesive teams exhibit improved collaboration, innovation, and productivity, leading to better problem-solving, reduced operational waste, and the ability to tap into a more diverse and globally accessible talent pool, which promotes greater equity and inclusion

which contributes to society by creating more effective, inclusive, and resilient models for work that can adapt to changing global dynamics and redefine the traditional workplace, potentially leading to broader societal transformations in work-life balance and accessibility to opportunities. The positive outcomes of team cohesion and its effect on social change at the individual, leadership, and organizational levels converge to redefine the traditional workplace, creating more effective, inclusive, and resilient models for work that can adapt to changing global dynamics and potentially lead to broader societal transformations in work-life balance and accessibility to opportunities

Improving customer satisfaction serves as a catalyst for positive social change across all stakeholders, creating a virtuous cycle of well-being and responsibility. Xu et al. (2023) stated that for employees and leaders, a focus on customer satisfaction often translates to a more meaningful work environment, as ethical practices that foster trust and loyalty become paramount, in turn boosting employee morale and retention. When an organization acts with integrity, it builds strong trust and loyalty with its customer base, which in turn significantly boosts employee morale and retention. This cycle demonstrates that a commitment to ethical conduct is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic business advantage that benefits both employees and customers. Santosa (2023) confirmed that organizations benefit by building a reputation for integrity and long-term viability, moving beyond short-term profit motives to sustainable success that includes a commitment to community and environmental responsibility, which in turn benefits the wider society, as businesses operate as ethical corporate citizens, driving market shifts towards better standards and more human-centric business

models. Corporate responsibility drives progress on social and environmental issues, contributing to a healthier planet and stronger communities. Revda (2025) noted that customers are empowered by interactions with responsive and responsible organizations, feeling valued and gaining access to products and services that genuinely improve their lives, which reinforces their positive connection to the brand and community. By providing personalized interactions, proactive engagement, and high-value, meaningful solutions, organizations create a sense of belonging, transforming buyers into engaged community members. This value-driven approach ensures customers feel valued, heard, and deeply connected to the brand. Thus, improving customer satisfaction is a powerful driver of positive social change, benefiting many stakeholders and initiating a virtuous cycle of well-being and responsibility.

Recommendations for Future Study

Future researchers can expand on my findings by studying various work environments, geographical locations, and leadership levels. For instance, while I studied hybrid and remote teams, future researchers could conduct a similar study among traditional, in-office teams. Additionally, as I used South Central for my geographical location, future researchers could conduct similar research in the Western and Eastern regions of the U.S. Lastly, while my research participants included being a mid-level or higher leader with titles such as president, vice-president, project manager, manager, and supervisor, future researchers could target participants in mid-level roles.

Future researchers could also address some of the limitations I had in my research project. For instance, I used a small sample size, which may not have captured the full,

complex range of experiences or perspectives, especially since the participants were all from the same geographical region. Future researchers should consider a larger sample size from a larger or different geographical location, which may help capture a wider range of viewpoints, experiences, and characteristics across various demographics. I was also limited by the timeframe in which I had to complete my research project and adhere to the pace of the Walden University curriculum. Future researchers who do not have time constraints may utilize longitudinal designs to extend their studies over longer periods, capturing developments and trends.

Furthermore, all of my participants were in the customer service industry. While considered a standalone industry itself, customer service is also a crucial function *within* virtually every other industry (retail, finance, tech, healthcare) that relies on helping customers, involving vast employment and significant economic activity through support, experience, and relationship management. I recommend that future researchers study a single business industry to examine the phenomenon in depth, perhaps even employing methodologies such as case studies. This approach may provide nuanced insights into specific organizational behaviors and market interactions that might be lost in a broader, cross-industry analysis.

Lastly, as my research method was qualitative, future researchers may consider using a quantitative research method. Kavar et al. (2024) stated that quantitative research utilizes numbers and statistics to objectively test theories, identify patterns, and measure relationships in large populations, thereby answering questions such as how many, how much, or how often, through methods like surveys and experiments. Building on my

research, quantitative researchers could measure team cohesion levels using structured surveys before and after implementing specific interventions, such as team-building activities. Data analysis, such as paired t-tests or regression analysis, could determine if changes in team cohesion are statistically significant. Researchers could also use regression analysis to determine if higher team cohesion significantly predicts improved customer outcomes.

Conclusion

In Section 1, I identified that some leaders in U.S. customer service organizations lack effective strategies to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore effective strategies that some leaders in U.S. customer service organizations use to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. My research question was: What effective strategies do leaders in U.S. customer service organizations use to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction? I also included the assumptions and limitations, as well as ethical practices that I adhered to throughout my research process. I provided an evidence-based integrative review, including a synthesis and analysis of my conceptual frameworks, business problem scholarship evidence, and business topic scholarship.

In Section 2, I justified my use of a qualitative methodology and pragmatic inquiry design. I explained how I ensured reliability through member checking, data saturation, and data triangulation. I noted that I used a purposeful sampling approach,

specifically recruiting six participants from the south-central region of the U.S. who were a) in a mid-level or higher leader with titles such as president, vice-president, project manager, manager, and supervisor; b) in their current role for at least 3 years in the customer service industry in the south-central region of the United States; c) have experience successfully using effective strategies to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. I conducted semistructured interviews among these participants until I reached data saturation, then analyzed the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis.

In Section 3, I revealed that I uncovered four themes: a) communicating clearly and consistently, b) promoting collaboration to enhance team member consistency, c) fostering team cohesion through team building activities, and d) cultivating a sense of belonging, all of which contribute to the professional business and management field. Improving team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams sparks positive social change across multiple levels by fostering more inclusive, flexible, and human-centric work environments. Improving customer satisfaction serves as a catalyst for positive social change across all stakeholders, creating a virtuous cycle of well-being and responsibility. Future researchers can expand on my findings by studying different work environments, geographical locations, and leadership levels, or by addressing the limitations of my research. For any researcher or practitioner, enhancing team cohesion while enhancing customer satisfaction is highly beneficial, creating a virtuous cycle that boosts productivity, reduces employee turnover, and increases revenue. To build a strong, cohesive, and productive team, leaders can focus on foundational elements, such as clear

communication, collaboration, and a sense of belonging, as well as activities like team building, to create trust, align goals, and foster a supportive culture that yields better results and customer satisfaction.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your role in creating effective strategies to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction?
2. What specific strategies have you implemented that you believe were effective in improving team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction?
3. What challenges do you face when implementing these strategies?
4. What do you do to mitigate the impact of these challenges?
5. How did you evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies you implemented?
6. What additional information regarding effective strategies used to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction would you like to share?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Action	Script
<p>Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee.</p>	<p>"Hello, thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study. I appreciate the criticality you attach to the expected findings, and I hope to add to the literature that develops strategies to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction. I have been working on a degree for a Doctor of Business Administration for the past few years. In this study, I am exploring the strategies that customer service leaders use to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction."</p> <p>"A few weeks ago, you agreed to sign an informed consent form. Do you have any questions for me or any matter that requires my attention? This interview is confidential, and your identity and that of your organization shall remain anonymous and represented by codes."</p> <p>"I will collect data using semistructured interview questions. The idea is to allow you to explain any strategies, events, and memories that answer the interview questions. During your narration, I may prompt you for further explanation and details."</p> <p>"I will need to record your responses so that I do not miss anything."</p> <p>"Note that you may rescind your decision to participate in the research anytime."</p>
<p>Ask Interview Questions to get in-depth responses. Listen for nonverbal cues. Paraphrase as needed.</p>	<p>1. "How would you describe your role in creating effective strategies to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction?"</p>

Action	Script
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. What specific strategies have you implemented that you believe were effective in improving team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction?" 3. "What challenges do you face when implementing these strategies?" 4. "What do you do to mitigate the impact of these challenges?" 5. "How did you evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies you implemented?" 6. "What additional information regarding effective strategies used to improve team cohesion among hybrid and remote teams to improve customer satisfaction would you like to share?"
<p>Schedule transcript review either by phone or email.</p>	<p>"In a few days, I will need your assistance in authenticating my understanding of your responses to the interview questions as part of the research process. You may adjust the script or add to your initial responses if needed. I will send the transcript by email, and we can discuss it by phone if you agree."</p>
<p>Introduce a member checking review and set the stage.</p>	<p>"Thank you for agreeing to meet me today to finalize what I heard from you during the interview and the meaning I have provided for each response."</p>
<p>Wrap up the interview by thanking participants.</p>	<p>"Your contribution to this doctoral research has been most impressive, and I thank you very much for helping me to achieve the doctoral degree. I hope you will find the research findings beneficial to your organization and professional development."</p>