2016

Labor Relations at a Major Airline: Exploring Employee Performance Strategies

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Abstract

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by

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MBA, Andrew Jackson University, 2005

BS, Embry Riddle Aeronautical University, 2000

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

Globally, the aviation industry supports 58.1 million jobs in related industries and U.S. airlines alone generated 11.8 million jobs. Airline performance, productivity, and profitability depend on employees. The purpose of this single case study was to explore the strategies that U.S. airline leaders use to improve employee performance. The study was grounded with the Harvard model of human resource management. A stratified purposeful sample of 14 managers and 10 frontline staff from a Florida airline participated in semistructured individual interviews and a focus group, respectively. The data from these interviews were analyzed using Moustakas's modified van Kaam method. The themes that emerged from analysis included: an emphasis on the individual interaction and verbal affirmations between managers and frontline staff, additional career development opportunities for employees, not only for performing in their role but improving performance and level of commitment to the organization. Furthermore, managers and employees arrived at the same conclusion about organization culture and commitment—individuals have to feel they are contributing to the overall mission and feel valued in doing so. For the latter to occur, leaders need to engage employees in continuous dialogue and be completely transparent, and employees need to be open to feedback and share their motivations and goals. Social change implications include improved management and labor relationships within the U.S. airline industry, which ultimately benefits the flying public through greater stability and better service.

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Dedication

I dedicate my doctoral work to my family and many friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving parents, Georg and Rosemarie Popp whose words of encouragement and push for tenacity ring in my ears. Their example to work with dedication and to aim and pursue high goals gave me the energy to continue even as things did not go as smoothly as I hoped. My sister Julia who never doubted my success in this endeavor and is very special to me. I also dedicate this doctoral study to my many friends and colleagues who have supported me throughout the process. I will always appreciate all they have done, especially Brian North, Angela Corridan, and Michael Carbone who were instrumental in securing needed approvals to collect data. I dedicate this work and give special thanks to my mentor Richard Rolland for the encouragement and fantastic leadership example he has set, which has and will continue to guide my professional development. Lastly, I want to thank my school teacher Winfried Feldes who saw my potential years before others or I recognized it.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my committee members who were more than generous with their expertise and precious time. A special thanks to Dr. Jamie Patterson, my committee chair for her countless hours of reflecting, reading, encouraging, and, most of all, patience throughout the entire process. I can say with certainty that Dr. Patterson's commitment to my success is the reason I have the great fortune to celebrate today. Therefore, from the bottom of my heart, thank you, Dr. Patterson. I also would like to thank Dr. Banks for agreeing to serve on my committee.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

U.S. airlines recorded net losses of $67 billion from 1979 to 2009 (Borenstein, 2011). As a whole, industry losses from 2001 to 2012 exceeded all airline profits since deregulation of the industry in 1978 with more than 50 passenger and cargo airlines filing for bankruptcy during that time (Helleloid, Nam, Schultz, & Vitton, 2015; U.S. Department of Transportation, 2012). Al-Refaie (2015) and Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) connected fiscal results with the company culture as financial results can affect the mood of employees within the industry. Al-Refaie (2015) concluded that psychosocial work factors have both direct and indirect effects on an organization's productivity. Furthermore, with ever-increasing labor costs (Borenstein & Rose, 2013; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013) and declining profit margins (Swelbar & Belobaba, 2010), the decline in affective commitment to the organization could exacerbate the airline industry's financial situation. Existing literature on organizational psychology and change provides research concerning job satisfaction (Ariss, 2012; Denning, 2013), job involvement (Ariss, 2012; Denning, 2013), job performance (Ariss, 2012), and affective commitment (Culpepper, 2011; Festing, 2012). This literature indicates that researchers remain committed to finding tangible building blocks to foster positive management and labor relationships.

Background of the Problem

Long-term sustainability is essential for the U.S. airline industry, which contributes to the worldwide economic impact of aviation and related industries (Air Transport Action Group, 2014). Related industries include aerospace products, airports,

hospitality services/hotels, tourism, rental-car services, security, and retail. The aviation industry supports 58.1 million jobs in related industries and contributes $2.4 trillion to the global economy (Air Transport Action Group, 2014). A focus on low-cost fares or high-traffic profit margins can combat losses, but adapting work systems to cultivate a workforce with high affective commitment is the best solution (Festing, 2012; Kehoe & Wright, 2013). Aligning individual employee goals with organizational objectives prevents system collapse during large-scale change, while incentives increase affective commitment (Wattanacharoensil & Yoopetch, 2012). Affective commitment is essential for competitive advantage after deregulation as strong affective commitment supports strategic implementation and change, translating into organizational success (Bal, Kooij, & Jong, 2013; Ciliberto & Schenone, 2012; Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, Baillien, Vanbelle, Vanhercke, & De Witte, 2014; Wattanacharoensil & Yoopetch, 2012). Therefore, ongoing proactive nurturing of affective commitment in the workplace should help airlines succeed. No study within the U.S. airline industry exists to advance the understanding whether the effort by management to foster affective commitment would improve employee performance. Hence, some U.S. airline leaders do not have effective strategies in place to manage affective commitment of the employee and subsequently their performance.

Affective commitment describes the emotional investment of an individual to an organization and correlates with employee performance and work effort (Culpepper, 2011), and as such, has gained the interest of researchers and practitioners in harnessing its potential for organizational success (Ciliberto & Schenone, 2012). Affective

commitment correlates with several positive outcomes related to organizational success such as greater job satisfaction, increased job involvement, and better occupational commitment as well as lower levels of employee absenteeism and decreased turnover rates (Boon & Kalshoven, 2014; Kuvaas, Dysvik, & Buch, 2014; Meyer et al., 2012; Stazyk, Pandey, & Wright, 2011).

As such, affective commitment correlates with job involvement and job satisfaction. Of particular interest are the specific dynamics that make up positive affective commitment and the attendant outcomes, and the specific negative attributes of affective commitment that manifest in negative organizational outcomes (Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011). Disengaged employees contribute to an unenthusiastic work environment, which in turn constrains employee affective commitment (Meyer et al., 2012; Shuck et al., 2011). Affective commitment is essential for competitive advantage after deregulation as strong affective commitment supports strategic implementation and change, translating into organizational success (Bal, Kooij, & Jong, 2013; Ciliberto & Schenone, 2012; Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, Baillien, Vanbelle, Vanhercke, & De Witte, 2014; Wattanacharoensil & Yoopetch, 2012). Therefore, ongoing proactive nurturing of affective commitment in the workplace should help airlines succeed.

In my review of the literature, I found no studies examining the relationship between managers' efforts to foster affective commitment and employee performance in the airline industry. Hence, I believe that airline leaders may lack effective strategies for managing employees' affective commitment and performance.

Using a case study design, I investigated the perceptions and experiences of employees at this airline in an effort to understand the effects and effectiveness of this human resource management (HRM) choice to foster affective commitment amongst employees and subsequently improve the job performance of the individual.

Problem Statement

Globally, the aviation industry supports 58.1 million jobs in related industries and contributes $2.4 trillion to the world economy (Air Transport Action Group, 2014). U.S. airlines alone generated 11.8 million jobs and $459.4 billion in earnings (Federal Aviation Administration, 2015). Airline performance, productivity, and profitability depend on employees (Ganguly, 2015). The general business problem is that airline employee performance may negatively impact profitability. The specific business problem is that some U.S. airline leaders lack strategies needed to improve employee performance.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that U.S. airline leaders use to improve employee performance. Data were collected from leaders of a major airline at an airport operation facility in Florida. Improved or enhanced support of airline employees contributes to profitability, which has far-reaching implications on aerospace products, airports, hospitality services/hotels, tourism, rental-car services, security, and retail (Air Transportation Action Group, 2014; Peoples, 2014). The findings could contribute to positive social change through improved management and labor relationship within the U.S. airline industry, which ultimately benefits the

flying public through greater stability and better service.

Nature of the Study

My aim in this investigation was to explore and discover the shared meanings and affective motivations of real people in a real workplace as it relates to affective commitment and individual job performance. Use of a qualitative method afforded advantages when it came to understanding the inner workings of organizational culture, as this kind of interpretive meaning may not be forthcoming from a statistical study (Sloan & Swenson, 2012). Quantitative research is relevant for statistical analysis and is based on numerical measurements (Sloan & Swenson, 2012). As such, quantitative research would not have been useful for meeting the objectives of this study. By favoring an interpretive approach, the aim was to explore and discover the shared meanings and affective motivations of real people in a real workplace as it relates to affective commitment and individual job performance. The best way to explore employee performance was to utilize semistructured, open-ended interviews as recommended by Meyer et al. (2012). Among existing qualitative research methodologies, there are information gathering strategies and tactics to address business problems and related research questions, including narrative, ethnographic, phenomenological, and case study design (Merriam, 2014; Sloan & Swenson, 2012). The narrative design, which relates to the concept of one individual's long-term experience, was not relevant to the type of short-term organizational research that was necessary for this study (Carlson & Herdman, 2012; Pereira, 2012). Ethnographic study was inappropriate because the target population in this research did not belong to a culturally homogenous group (Merriam, 2014).

Phenomenology was not an appropriate method because the goal was not to understand a specific phenomenon (Sloan & Swenson, 2012).

A qualitative single case study design was the ideal structure for this study because I sought to explore what the leaders have done with employee performance strategies within a single U.S. airline. The context of the study was to discover which HRM and management practices and strategies managers or leaders should use to foster employee commitment and improve performance.

Research Question

The central research question that guided this study was: What strategies do U.S. airline leaders use to improve employee performance?

Interview Questions

I posed the following open-ended questions to managers and supervisors whom I interviewed individually:

1. What strategies do you use to improve employee performance?

2. What strategies do you use to build performance culture?

3. What are your experiences regarding affective commitment?

I posed the following open-ended questions to front-line employees whom I interviewed in a focus group setting:

1. What do you think sets this airline apart from its competitors?

2. Which of your day-to-day activities and actions do you feel contribute to the success of the airline? How?

3. What are the decisions that affect your interaction with customers? How did this affect your interaction with customers?

4. What recognitions do you think are necessary to achieve the organization's success?

5. What does organization culture mean to you?

6. Why is organization culture important?

7. If given the opportunity, what would you do to improve on the organization's culture?

Conceptual Framework

The study was grounded by the HRM Harvard model (Beer, Boselie, & Brewster, 2015). Rosen and Hochwarter (2014) stated that HRM enhances employee relations through analysis of individual and collective organizational behavior. The *founding fathers* of the HRM Harvard Model concept were Beer et al. (2015). Beer et al. (2015) focused on assessing the appropriateness or effectiveness of human resource policies and practices for an organization. For this reason, Beer et al. (2015) devised the Harvard model of HRM. This model is also supported by Ariss (2012) who observed a shift from a control-based model to a humanistic model. Within the HRM humanistic (Harvard model) approach, human resources are valuable assets toward gaining a competitive workplace advantage (Delery & Gupta, 2016), which places the focus on the motivation of employees (Kaufman, 2015). Employee participation is vital to the realization of organizational objectives and increases performance and efficiency (Piening, Baluch, & Ridder, 2014; Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014); but critics argue that employee participation

does not alone improve organizational performance (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012; Mishel, 2012). However, two key Harvard model factors include valuing the employee stakeholder and the win-win objective on employee satisfaction (Jiang et al., 2012; Mishel, 2012; Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014). Through this case study, I investigated the Harvard model's role in affective commitment and improved job performance amongst employees at a single U.S. airline.

Operational Definitions

Affective commitment: A subtype of organizational commitment, this distinct term represents the psychological commitment of an individual to an organization. Culpepper (2011) determined several ways to bring about improved employee commitment toward their organizations, and illustrated organizational commitment impact on work variables such as turnover, behavior, and job performance (Conway & Briner, 2012; Kaufman, 2015).

Collective bargaining agreement (CBA). A CBA is a contract defining the outcome of negotiations between union representatives and employers with respect to the terms and conditions of employment such as (a) wages, (b) work hours, (c) work conditions, (d) grievance procedures, and (e) the rights and responsibilities of the respective trade union(s) (Kochan, 2012).

Employee Absenteeism. Employee absenteeism occurs when job dissatisfaction leads employees to withdraw temporarily from the job (Townsend, Wilkinson, & Burgess, 2014). In particular, for the airline industry, absenteeism can be substantially damaging to carriers by affecting labor input for prescheduled operation plans (Choi, Lee,

& Olson, 2015). Absenteeism is also a much-studied variable in the social science of organizational psychology.

Flight Crew and Ground Crew. For the purpose of this study, flight crew defines employees in the airline's flight operation such as Cockpit Crews (Pilots) and Inflight Crews (Flight Attendants). Similarly, ground crew members are employees in support of the airline's ground operation such as Check-in, Gate Agent, Baggage Service and Handling, Aircraft Maintenance, and Aircraft Servicing.

Legacy Carrier. Legacy carrier is the classification of an airline having established travel routes prior to the enactment of the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978 (Ovtchinnikov, 2013). American Airlines, for example, was a legacy carrier from the beginning, whereas JetBlue was a new start-up carrier that showed up to take advantage of changing market forces (Ovtchinnikov, 2013; Roy, 2013).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Merriam (2014) defined research assumptions as factors potentially influencing the findings of the study, which are beyond the researcher's control. For this study, the assumptions included (a) no language or other barriers between interviewer and interviewee causes misunderstanding, and (b) the participants were open, honest, and did not feel coerced in any way to participate.

Reflexivity, an objective of neutral and unbiased research, was supported by the identification and transparency of the study's assumptions (Gioria, Corlye, & Hamilton, 2013; Merriam, 2014). Disclosing the assumptions of the study may add value to findings

of the research. Identifying and qualifying the assumptions related to the value of the

research is important should challenges or questions arise later (Marshall, Cardon,

Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013).

Limitations

Limitations refer to issues that may affect the study's internal validity or the

extent to which the results will be credible and trustworthy (Merriam, 2014). A possible

weakness of the study is that the participants may not have felt comfortable enough to

fully disclose their thoughts and feelings. Pairing limitations with other research

techniques provides an opportunity to achieve different goals (Aguinis & Edwards,

2014). Utilizing a narrowly defined group is a limitation when compared with a study

including a larger, diverse group, but the limitation creates an opportunity for further,

comparative analysis as changes occur later (Aguinis & Edwards, 2014).

The identified limitation of a narrowly defined group offers another opportunity

by limiting the transferability of the research (Bryman, 2012). Data and research

collected from a narrowly defined group of participants will provide more accurate,

focused data about the individuals reducing the transferability of the overall data

collected (Bryman, 2012). The lack of transferability as a limitation is an opportunity to

expand the research from the baseline data set to larger, more general data sets with

future research. Future research may help to provide data related to aspects of long term

sustainability.

Delimitations

Researchers establish delimitations to set the boundaries of the studies (Merriam, 2014). One delimiter is that only current employees from one company within the airline industry participated. A further delimiter is the inclusion of only managers, as well as the Ground and Flight Crews they oversee, as participants. Excluded are other support personnel not directly employed by the airline; such as fuel staff, operations staff, and deicers. Marshall et al. (2013) suggested using delimited boundary amongst participant groups that share common characteristics or experiences. As such, I isolated the participants to only managers and frontline staff they oversee may add value to the findings through the delimited boundary set by focusing on the unique experience of the specific group. Use of a small-scale study offers the opportunity to draw a wider inference about the data as long as the delimited boundaries are followed (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). Using the small-scale delimited boundary of a focused group with a set of managers and frontline staff, I was able to focus on several individuals' personal experiences and perspectives.

<p align="center">**Significance of the Study**</p>

Contribution to Business Practice

Potential benefits to business practices as a result of this research include discovering new strategies that can improve overall affective commitment and job performance of the individual within the studied airline. Enhancing policies and procedures related to personnel management should foster success, trigger profitability, and lead to greater efficiency throughout daily operations. Although the airline industry

served as the setting for this study, contributions from research findings may apply to other industries when HR and industry variables share similarities.

Implications for Social Change

Findings and recommendations from this study may serve as a basis for social change if they impact other airlines or go beyond the airline industry. Enhanced employee involvement and affective commitment, which would result in satisfied employees, may improve organizational performance and outcomes (Jiang et al., 2012).

One of the organizational outcomes of an airline is the level of customer service, as such the flying public may benefit from a much better traveling experience. Application of this study may lead to employees and managers who increasingly operate in a team-built framework resulting in less stress and faster solutions. This is supported by other studies on the impact of labor relations and the individual affective commitment on the overall organizations performance (Jiang et al., 2012; Supanti, Butcher, & Fredline, 2015).

The benefits may also translate into decreased stress and pressure, which may lead to improved family support. Sustaining the emotional wellbeing of employees and their families may lead to more productivity and overall job satisfaction for the employee (Chintrakarn & Chen, 2011; Khan & Khan, 2011). Subsequently, ongoing proactive nurturing of affective commitment in the workplace boosts an organization's competitive advantage (Ciliberto & Schenone, 2012).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The literature review provides a thorough understanding of how HRM practices can elicit employee commitment. Furthermore, it can demonstrate how these factors combined can influence overall organizational performance. The keywords used in the literature search were as follows: *affective commitment, airline industry, airline labor relationship, capitalism, competitive advantage, cost reduction, deregulation, Harvard model, human resource management, international labor movement, labor cost, labor laws, labor management, labor policies, labor relations, labor unions, organizational behavior theory,* and *social market.*

These keywords produced more than 300 articles for review. Due to the sizable number of sources, I focused on peer reviewed articles that were published in 2011 and afterwards and that were directly related to my study. Use of older sources serve solely for the historical and contextual background information needed to understand HRM practices within the U.S. airline industry.

Of the total number of articles that I found, 108 related to the Harvard model of HRM practices and the Harvard model's influence on organizational performance or to the changes in HRM practices due to the emergence of a global competitive market. Of the 161 references that I cited in this study, 88% were peer-reviewed articles that had been published in scholarly journals within the past 5 years.

The resulting literature highlighted the following three categories related to HRM practices: (a) employee commitment, (b) organizational performance, and (c) the current status of employee commitment and labor relations within the airline industry. The

literature review begins with the general history of HRM to provide readers with background knowledge. This history is followed by an assessment of HRM's historic use within the airline industry. Followed by a discussion on the evolution of the HRM Harvard model. Furthermore, the literature review includes a summary of current research on the airline industry, an evaluation of the research findings as they pertain to this project.

General History of HRM

The industrial revolution changed the manner in which workers earned wages and, eventually, the factory became the core of the process of production. As such, a new business organization order emerged, characterized by manufacturing, managerial capitalism, and craftsmen as large-scale assemblers (Andries & Czarnitzki, 2014; Marler, 2012). The onset of managerial capitalism led to the growth in business enterprise management. However, this organizational growth did not correlate to improvement of personnel relations or HRM (Andries & Czarnitzki, 2014). Machine processes and technological improvements became the focus, not workers. Industry growth during the 19th century's final decades gave rise to the economic turmoil that led to labor-management conflict and a dramatic increase in union membership (Andries & Czarnitzki, 2014).

Labor unions' bargaining efforts sparked managerial resistance at the beginning of the 20th century (Lange, Geppert, Saka-Helmhout, & Becker-Ritterspach, 2015; Morris, 2012). However, World War I provided conditions that required an expansion of personnel administration and increased worker efficiency (Morris, 2012). These

conditions allowed HRM to evolve beyond mere hiring and firing and included activities

such as welfare work and job standardization (Safdar, 2012). Thus, the *golden age* of

industrial relations emerged from 1945 and continued through the 1970s. The primary

focus revolved around employment relationships, the same concept which had given rise

to HRM originally from stable economic growth within the United States after World

War II (Andries & Czarnitzki, 2014).

The transformation of HRM began during the 1950s and continued until the

present day (Morris, 2012). The impetus for change in HRM strategies and practices

included international and domestic competition growth, technological advancements,

globalization, and deregulation (Hassel, 2014; Starkie, 2012). HRM also became the

vehicle by which organizations dealt with those changes (Mura, 2012; Safdar, 2012;

Welch & Welch, 2012; Yeung, 2011).

Historical Assessment of HRM within the U.S. Airline Industry

Assessing HRM prior to airline industry deregulation in 1978 and up to modern

day highlights the industry's complex labor-management relations (Marler, 2012). The

Railway Labor Act (RLA) and the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) became the

primary legislation for collective bargaining. These two laws significantly influenced the

HRM strategies and practices of the airline industry (Marler, 2012; Moskowitz & Griffin,

2013).

Rose (2012) evaluated the 40-year history of airline regulation, focusing on airline

managements' abilities to adapt economically as well as operationally to deregulation,

and concluded that labor-management relations suffered post-deregulation due to

principal stakeholders' failures to respond and evolve. The regulation era came about during the Great Depression, when regulation created the economic environment needed to encourage private and public investments into the nation's air navigation system. Airline industry development required regulatory controls (Ovtchinnikov, 2013; Rose, 2012; Roy, 2013). Airlines flourished within the regulated economic environment producing sizable returns for stockholders and providing high-paying jobs for its employees (Rose, 2012).

At the same time, these economic regulations also stifled competition between airlines, resulting in high costs and inefficiency (Rose, 2012). Rising costs and declining efficiency catalyzed new management theories, which promoted deregulation (Ovtchinnikov, 2013; Rose, 2012). As a result, the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978 introduced the airline commercial enterprise to market-driven competition (Ovtchinnikov, 2013).

Since 1978, the airline industry struggled financially for many reasons, such as regulated price guarantee retractions (Rose, 2012). There were 200 bankruptcy filings by airlines since 1990 (Winston, 2013). Consequently, airline bankruptcies negatively affected employee pay and benefits, all of which led to decreasing job security in the industry (Ovtchinnikov, 2013; Swelbar & Belobaba, 2010). As financial underperformance reduced wages, labor turmoil became a larger issue (Rose, 2012).

Shareholders increased their pressure on management in an effort to reverse airlines' financial underperformances (Borenstein & Rose, 2013; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014; Shuck et al., 2011). Consequently, labor costs did not escape the

industry's financial woes, which resulted in decreased employee commitment as well as increased employee resentment and turmoil (Borenstein & Rose, 2013). Townsend, Wilkinson, and Burgess (2014) investigated labor turmoil's effects on airline industry financial performance and employees' service quality. Townsend et al. (2010) analyzed U.S. domestic airlines' monthly financial data from 1987 to 2010, studying various forms of labor turmoil in the areas of employee representation, collective bargaining, and business strategy. Research detailed monthly operations performance as well as passenger service and examined the contribution of labor turmoil to the quality of airline service. Townsend et al. (2014) concluded that employee disengagement has a longer-lasting and greater effect on the quality of service than any other form of workplace conflict.

In a study of employee attitudes, Panaccio, Vandenberghe, and Ayed (2014) examined how employee attitudes toward benefits and pay satisfaction predicted turnover. Panaccio et al. (2014) surveyed employees and entrepreneurs to collect data regarding their incomes and their attitudes toward benefits and pay satisfaction. Moreover, Panaccio et al. (2014) tracked employee and entrepreneur turnover over a period of 4 years, assessing temporal variations in the relationships conducted each year. The findings revealed that attitudes toward benefits predicted both employee and entrepreneur turnover; revealing satisfaction with pay was significant only for employees (Panaccio et al., 2011). Based on Townsend et al. (2014) and Panaccio et al.'s (2014) findings, employee dissatisfaction contributes to poor service and high turnover rates. Generating employee affective commitment would appear to be difficult under such a

scenario.

Unions were at the center of these shifts throughout the transition into deregulation, and remained in support of workers given the continuing challenges facing labor morale (Rau, 2012). From the 1980s to the 2000s, some airlines modified union agreements through negotiations (Swelbar & Belobaba, 2010). Prior to deregulation, union members received government-defined profit margin shares (Geraint, 2010; Rau, 2012). Following deregulation, the industry adopted a more cooperative labor relation style, which resulted in lower labor force pay, lower-cost operations, and low cost airlines (Brueckner, Lee, & Singer, 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; West & Dellana, 2016; Zanin & Lillo, 2013). The new policies placed pressure on workers. For example, unjustified cuts in employee wages contributed to decreased job satisfaction (Gross, 2012; Osterman, 2011). As a result, these new policies led to workplace inefficiency and a reduction in service standards (Malik, Danish, & Munir, 2012; Sageer, Rafat, & Agarwal, 2012).

From deregulation (1978) to 2009, the U.S. airline industry lost more than $60 billion (Borenstein, 2011), despite a rise in passenger numbers (Narangajavana, Garrigos-Simon, García, & Forgas-Coll, 2014). To reverse the trend, some airlines pursued a market dominance strategy to compete against new entrants (Daft & Albers, 2012). Market dominance strategy resulted in the network compatibility theory, which attempted to eliminate itinerary correspondence between direct competitors. Draft and Albers (2012) maintained that dominant airline networks used pricing policies to set high interconnection fees, decreasing consumer welfare, and making the system unsustainable.

As airlines became unprofitable, they liquidated, merged with other carriers, and/or restructured their internal costs (Dai, Liu, & Serfes, 2014; Festing, 2012; Vaze & Barnhart, 2012). The transition led to the merger of former competitors, which gave way to consolidation in the industry (Festing, 2012).

Festing (2012) concluded that the first round of airline post-deregulation mergers successfully resulted in market and price-revenue control. Peoples (2014) opined that these mergers' long-term benefits derived from improvements in operational efficiencies and positive response by the finance markets, rather than market concentration or pricing-power consolidation.

However, the airline industry's consolidation has critics who question the overall consumer and national economic benefit (Festing, 2012; Peoples, 2014). Festing (2012) and Peoples (2014) found a reduction in destination choices and service frequency coupled with increased ticket prices. In addition to consumer suffering, shareholders encountered greater risk associated with mergers. For example, the merger of two major U.S. airlines in 2005 did not deliver the expected benefits to shareholders or stakeholders (Pereir & dos Reis, 2011).

Peoples (2014) identified causal factors of mergers that fail to deliver economic benefits ineffectively merging the corporate cultures, and deteriorating labor-management relations. While mergers and consolidation have addressed some of the operational cost challenges such as scaled economies and supply-side management, HRM practices within the industry have not obstructed the affective commitment and congruence of employees for organizational goals (Ovtchinnikov, 2013; Roy, 2013).

With limited economic benefits and a blurred corporate culture, mergers countered HRM initiatives devoted to building employee affective commitment (Ovtchinnikov, 2013; Roy, 2013).

Developing Affective Commitment

Today, some HR personnel possess a renewed call to develop affective commitment (Chintrakarn & Chen, 2011; Khan & Khan, 2011). Because of the historic volatility of the airline industry, researchers (Delery & Gupta, 2016; Marler, 2012; Turner & D'Art, 2012) have suggested that best practices in HRM can lead to achieving a competitive advantage. One of the ways HRM practices can achieve competitive advantage is by eliciting affective commitment (Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014; Zhang, Bartram, McNeil, & Dowling, 2015). An organization's success may depend on contextual factors such as the organization's structure and culture, the quality of leadership, and even the position of the HR function (Turner & D'Art, 2012). Without these base factors verifying employee competency and creating a strong company culture, the development of affective commitment exists only in theory (Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014; Zhang et al., 2015). Organizational support was also seen as one of the ways to develop affective commitment (Marique, Stinglhamber, Desmette, Caesens, & Zanet, 2012).

Scott (2010) found that the implementation of HRM practices for employee involvement contributes to improved organizational performance by giving employees a voice in the design of the workplace and the development of policies in the workplace. Additionally, this approach avoids costly disputes and reduces exit behaviors such as

voluntary termination, absenteeism, malingering, and quiet sabotage (Turner & D'Art, 2012).

Some researchers concluded that the best HRM practices are those that contribute to (a) the achievement of organizational objectives (Scott, 2010; Turner & D'Art, 2012) and (b) the gains in competitive advantage through positive labor relations and improved employee commitment (Barros, Liang, & Peypoch, 2013; Scott, 2010; Turner & D'Art, 2012). The Harvard model encapsulates HRM practices that foster high involvement, high commitment, and high performance, as well as providing a foundation for a win-win relationship between managers and workers as a means to improve labor relations. Subsequently, affective commitment improves organizational performance (Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse, 2015; Wood, Van Veldhoven, Croon, & de Menezes, 2012).

Affective commitment is of particular relevance to the airline industry due to its service-intensive nature and its high ratio of labor cost to the total cost (Barros et al., 2013). Scott (2010) as well as Wattanacharoensil and Yoopetch (2012) suggested that positive labor relations increase service quality and subsequently resulted in customer loyalty, which in turn leads to improved financial performance. Understanding and developing commitment among the employees was a prime consideration for the founders of two low-cost airlines in the United States (Ciliberto & Schenone, 2012; Nason, 2012).

Lu, Wang, Jung, and Lu (2012) found that addressing substantive, traditional HR issues, such as financial compensation and benefits, may not be sufficient to improve organizational performance (Chintrakarn & Chen, 2011). In a study of union

representation and shared governance, relational factors such as conflict and workplace culture were more powerful determinants of performance than the structural factors of unionization (Barros et al., 2013; Rau, 2012). Barros et al. (2013) concluded that continuous improvement in service quality and financial performance requires fundamental improvements in the quality of HRM to nurture employee commitment. Scott (2010) supported this contention and further suggested that well-developed HRM practices are essential to achieving competitive advantages in the marketplace. Assertions like these position HRM initiatives at the core of successful internal workplace strategies and external marketplace strategies.

Despite competitive advantages generated through favorable HRM practices such as the Harvard model, various economic strategies will give way to downturns in the market (Geraint, 2010). In coordinated market economies such as Germany and Sweden, managers collaborate with their employees (Geraint, 2010). Compared to United States, United Kingdom, and Australian airlines, labor cost cuts in a market downturn would not occur without substantive collaboration between managers and employees (Geraint, 2010). Germany and Sweden's coordinated-market approach encourages a collaborative relationship between managers and workers (Lange et al., 2015).

In some implementations of employee relations, the type of capitalism influences the labor strategy choice by employers (Festing, 2012; Geraint, 2010; Lange et al., 2015). Geraint (2010) evaluated two liberal-market economies, the United States and United Kingdom, in terms of their choice of employment-relations strategies and their subsequent success. The airlines within both economies adopted a range of strategies.

Those airlines that chose labor relations closely aligned with the coordinated market economy and performed better than those that implemented a strategy closely aligned to a liberal economy (Geraint, 2010). Geraint's findings emphasized the value of the central characteristic found in a coordinated-market approach: collaborative approaches appeared to engender positive affective employee commitment.

Effect of HRM Strategies on Employee Behavior and Commitment

Literature exists discussing the impact of HRM strategies on employee behavior and commitment. According to Lu et al. (2012) and Scott (2010), affective employee commitment level influences the operational performance of the organizations (Swelbar & Belobaba, 2010). Bechter, Brandl, and Meardi (2012) found that, regardless of the industry, the choice of HRM strategy and the resulting employee commitment and satisfaction impacted the success and performance of the organization. In studies on organizational performance, Ciliberto and Schenone (2012) identified workplace culture and HRM practices as being more critical determinants for worker satisfaction and productivity than structural factors such as wages. From the 1980s to 2012, the highest expense within the airline industry was labor cost, which accounted for up to 55% of all operational expenses (Vaze & Barnhart, 2012). The labor cost figure serves to emphasize the importance of motivating and invigorating employees. Opposing these figures, there is minimal research concerning the role compensation plays in shaping employee affective commitment (Scott, 2010).

Sarina and Wright (2015) categorized the airline industry into two different HRM strategies based on coordinated-market economies and liberal-market economies.

Furthermore, Sarina and Lansbury (2013) highlighted strategies each airline implemented toward cost reduction and the subsequent effects on HRM practices. One strategy focused on controlling the behavior of employees while aggressively pursuing the organization's goals, a HRM strategy aligned with the Michigan model. Another HRM strategy pursued accommodation or collaboration with employees to achieve affective commitment as entailed in the Harvard model (Festing, 2012; Sarina & Lansbury, 2013; Sarina & Wright, 2015).

Few studies document the organizational impact of the Harvard model conclusively (Chintrakarn & Chen, 2011; Khan & Khan, 2011). However, researchers used the model as an analysis framework to identify best HRM practices to improve organizational performance (Mitchell, Obeidat, & Bray, 2013). For instance, Kaufman (2015) used the Harvard model of HRM as an analytical framework to examine the effects of HRM outcomes among different types of Australian public sector employees. Feng, Wang, and Prajogo (2014) used the Harvard model as a guide to examine the relationship of human resource management and employee empowerment, service reward, service training, employee satisfaction, customer service and customer satisfaction. Kaufman (2015) and Feng et al. (2014) concluded that effective HRM practices could lead to improved employee job-satisfaction and affective commitment, which in turn may result in a competitive advantage for the organization. Peters, Tevichapong, Haslam, and Postmes (2015) found that when employees are not empowered, they do not use or experience their working conditions as job resources that might include home-based teleworking and trust relationships that are characterized by

supporting leadership, collegial support, and collegial commitment.

The service industry, particularly the financing sector, attempted to improve service delivery by integrating the Harvard model in its HRM practices. Abdulkadir and Adedoyin (2011) examined the effect of the model among 15 insurance firms in Nigeria. The analysis revealed that, among the variables examined, organizational climate influences the adoption of strategic HRM practices. Abdulkadir and Adedoyin (2011) suggested simultaneous improvements in organizational structure, policies, and the HR policies to adopt strategic HRM practices.

Examining Harvard model effects at UK National Health Services, Hyde, Sparrow, Boaden, and Harris (2013) found that employee commitment remained the key solution for enhancing the organization's performance. Affective employee commitment is critical to positive employee relations and company success. Hausmann, Mueller, Hattrup, and Spiess (2013) case studies suggested labor relations' importance to organizational performance. Despite affective commitment's known benefits, unrest and strife dominate the labor-management relationship within the airline industry (Ciliberto & Schenone, 2012; Li, Granados, & Netessine, 2014; Loi, Lai, & Lam, 2012).

To increase organizational performance, Harvard model HRM practices can be used to align the organization's goals with employees' needs (Hill, Seo, Kang, & Taylor, 2012; Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014; Zhang et al., 2015). To conclude this literature review, I will discuss first four major Harvard model components: stakeholder interests, situational factors, HRM policy, the long-term consequences for stakeholders, and the current state of employee satisfaction and labor relations within the airline industry.

Conceptual Framework: Harvard Model of HRM

The Harvard model encapsulates the humanistic view of HRM in contrast to the utilitarian view (Thompson, 2011). This means the Harvard model regards human resources as valued assets to achieve competitive advantage through commitment, adaptability, and high quality (Shaw, Park, & Kim, 2013). The Harvard model works as a humanistic strategy map to guide managers in their relations with employees (Beer et al., 2015).

The Harvard model of HRM describes such practices as (a) valuing employees as assets and core partners, (b) creating and communicating a culture of partnership between the employer and employees, as well as among employees, and (c) communicating the organizational mission, values, goals, and strategy statement through explicit, open communication. The outcomes are high employee commitment to the organization and high individual performance leading to cost-effective products and services (Beer et al., 2015). Subsequently, employees with a strong degree of commitment to the organization's goal are more likely to be productive and efficient in their activities (Al-Refaie, 2015). According to Delery and Gupta (2016), the Harvard model of HRM enhances the organization's global competitiveness. Jorgensen and Becker (2015) found that a collaborative form of HRM practice within European firms reflected a positive and statistically significant association with organizational performance.

To achieve increased organizational performance, the Harvard model's six basic components must align the organization's goals with employees' needs (Beer et al., 2015). The Harvard model's six basic components are as follows: (a) stakeholders

interest, (b) situational factors, (c) HRM policy, (d) long-term consequences for stakeholders, (e) employee commitment, and (f) a feedback loop.

Stakeholder interests that recognize the trade-offs, either explicitly or implicitly, between the interests of employees and employers. A humanistic approach is vital to facilitate organizational change in response to changing market conditions by actively endorsing and proactively engaging with all organizational stakeholders (Delery & Gupta, 2016). This requires the development of change-management skills, which include the capability to think strategically, engage employees, facilitate change, and exceed expectations (Delery & Gupta, 2016). Instituting this basic component of the Harvard model requires managers to be proactive and create new initiatives to assist organizations and their employees to cope with change (Kaufman, 2015). Organization administrators who effectively manage change by continuously adapting their bureaucracies, strategies, systems, products, and cultures in response to the changing business climate are masters of renewal (Mitchell et al., 2013). Kaufman (2015) noted the HRM function has become multifaceted as the pace of change has quickened, requiring a transition toward more value-added roles such as the role of a change agent. Therefore, employers must facilitate organizational change and implement the necessary HRM practices to ensure success.

Situational factors that influence the management choice of human-resource strategy. Thompson (2011) noted a transformation in HRM during the 1990s. As the Harvard model gained acceptance in the business community, functions changed from the traditional role of human resources planning towards a strategic and holistic HRM

approach. These researchers proposed that a shift had occurred away from preoccupation with industrial relations, to a broader concern with the strategic effects of the HRM role. Consequently, research on HRM has shifted accordingly to encompass the entire HRM system, with a focus on the individual employee's development and its influence on organizational performance (Welch & Welch, 2012).

HRM policy choices focus on management decisions and human resources' action resulting in an integrated humanistic approach to HRM practice that results in satisfied and committed employees demonstrating above-average individual and team performance (Welch & Welch, 2012). Welch and Welch (2012) found a positive relationship between employee empowerment and organizational performance. Wood, Van Veldhoven, Croon, and de Menezes (2012) reported a strong and positive relationship between worker perceptions of managerial responsiveness and managerial perceptions of productivity. Consequently, a responsive orientation of management toward employees is predictive of high performance. In addition, Ariss (2012) found that the Harvard model on HRM's applications such as staffing, training and promotion, involvement of employees, incentives, and safety and health positively correlate with organization performance. Welch and Welch (2012) established that workforce planning, teamwork, training and development, compensation and incentives, performance appraisal, and employee security are indispensable HRM dimensions affecting productivity, product quality, and business performance.

At the individual level, the long-term consequences are the psychological rewards employees receive for their effort, which may include promotions and higher

compensations. Consequently, a high degree of organizational commitment and high performance by the individual leads to cost-effective products and services benefitting all stakeholders (Delery & Gupta, 2016). Additionally, employees with a strong degree of commitment to the organization's goals are more productive in their daily activities (Choi et al., 2015; Loi et al., 2012).

Affective Commitment Development

The changing business environment makes the adoption of HRM practices to elicit affective commitment imperative to achieving a competitive advantage (Choi et al., 2015). Hence, HR personnel play a pivotal role in ensuring that organizations have a continuous supply of qualified and trained employees. However, it is not only expertise in selection, recruitment, and training that is critical in this process; an organization's success also depends on contextual factors such as the structure and organization's culture, the quality of leadership, and even the position of the HR function itself (Beer et al., 2015).

Jorgensen and Becker (2015) found that the implementation of HRM practices with employee involvement contributes to improved organizational performance by giving employees a voice in the design of the workplace and the development of policies in the workplace. In additional this approach also avoids costly disputes and reducing exit behavior such as voluntary termination, absenteeism, malingering, and quiet sabotage (Kochan, 2012).

Some researchers defined best HRM practices as those that contribute to (a) the achievement of organizational objectives (Beer et al., 2015) and (b) gain competitive

advantage through positive labor relations and improved employee commitment (Kaufman, 2015). Hence, the Harvard model encapsulates HRM practices that fosters high involvement, high commitment, and high performance, and provides the foundation for a win-win relationship between managers and workers as a means to improve labor relations. Subsequently, affective commitment improves organizational performance (Loi et al., 2012).

Researchers have found that addressing substantive issues, such as financial compensation and benefits, may not be sufficient to improve organizational performance (Choi et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2012). Affective commitment development is of particular relevance in the airline industry due to its service-intensive nature and high ratio of labor cost to the total cost (Choi et al., 2015). Researchers suggested that improved labor relations increases service quality and subsequently result in customer loyalty, which in turn leads to improved financial performance (Kaufman, 2015). This finding is not unique to the airline industry or the U.S. market.

Leadership and Performance Culture

Leaders have an impact on the performance culture in the workplace (Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014; Zhang et al., 2015). Leaders, together with the HR department, develop and implement policies that ensure the productivity and efficiency in the workplace (Ciliberto & Schenone, 2012). Moreover, leaders also cultivate an atmosphere where employees are committed to the company (Carmeli, Tishler, & Edmondson, 2012).

Carmeli et al. (2012) noted that CEOs can improve the quality of strategic decisions their top management teams make by shaping a relational context of trust and

facilitating learning from failures. CEOs should be able to cultivate an atmosphere of trust in the team. Moreover, CEOs should process the mistakes of their team in order to facilitate learning rather than just scolding their teams (Supanti et al., 2015). Chen and Chen (2013) supported the findings of Carmeli et al.'s (2012) study about the importance of knowing how groups and organizations learn from failures, and how leader behavior influences these learning processes.

Leaders should also work together with the HR department in order to cultivate a performance culture. Meyer et al. (2012) explored the relationships between HR strength, leadership, organizational climate, and performance. Based on 323 questionnaires from a company in the industrial sector, results showed a positive relationship between HR strength, leadership, organizational climate, and performance. Jorgensen and Becker (2015) stated that leadership style should be coordinated with the firm's HR strategies so that the firm and its members could benefit from it. Furthermore, it could lead to improved performance through effective and fulfilled psychological contracts with workers.

Stakeholder Interests

Stakeholders' interests account for trade-offs, either explicitly or implicitly, between the interests of employees and employers. A humanistic approach facilitates organizational agility in response to changing market conditions by actively endorsing and proactively engaging with all organizational stakeholders (Jorgensen & Becker, 2015; Porter & Latham, 2013). Engaging all stakeholders requires change-management skills, which include the capability to make calculated decisions, develop employee

relations, empower others to adapt, and perform beyond the job's expected norms (Jorgensen & Becker, 2015; Porter & Latham, 2013). Porter and Latham (2013) concluded organizational leaders can balance their policies to suit the interests of all parties by adapting to changing market conditions through the act of focusing on stakeholder interests.

Instituting the basic component using the Harvard model requires managers to be proactive and create new initiatives to assist organizations and their employees to cope with change (Jorgensen & Becker, 2015; Loi et al., 2012; Porter & Latham, 2013). Organization administrators manage market developments by consistently altering strategies, systems, products, and cultures due to the changing business climate as masters of renewal (Jorgensen & Becker, 2015).

Scott (2010) noted the HRM function has become multifaceted as the pace of change has quickened, requiring a transition toward more value-added roles. Therefore, employers must facilitate organizational change and implement the necessary HRM practices to ensure success (Choi et al., 2015; Loi et al., 2012).

Situational Factors

Situational factors influence the management choice of human-resource strategy. Dello Russo, Vecchione, and Borgogni (2013) noted a transformation in HRM during the 1990s. As the Harvard model gained acceptance in the business community, functions changed from the traditional role of human resources planning towards a strategic and holistic HRM approach. Dello Russo et al. (2013) proposed that a shift occurred away from a preoccupation with industrial relations, to a broader concern with the strategic

effects of the HRM role. Consequently, HRM research has shifted to encompass the entire HRM system, with a focus on the individual employee's development and its influence on organizational performance (Ehrhardt, Miller, Freeman, & Hom, 2011; Jorgensen & Becker, 2015; Porter & Latham, 2013).

HRM Policy Choices

HRM policy choices focus on management decisions and HR actions resulting in an integrated humanistic approach to HRM practice. Policy changes like these result in satisfied and committed employees who demonstrate above-average individual and team performance (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). Kehoe and Wright (2013) found a positive relationship between employee empowerment and organizational performance. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Maynes, and Spoelma (2014) reported beneficial interactions resulting from managers responding to employee needs, and manager attitudes improved upon increased productivity. Consequently, a responsive orientation of management toward employees is a predictor of high performance.

Ehrhardt, Miller, Freeman, and Hom (2011) found that the Harvard model on HRM's applications such as staffing, training and promotion, involvement of employees, incentives, and safety and health positively correlated with organization performance. Vermeeren, Kuipers, and Steijn (2014) established that workforce planning, teamwork, training and development, compensation and incentives, performance appraisal, and employee security are indispensable HRM dimensions affecting productivity, product quality, and business performance.

Long-Term Consequences for Stakeholders

Stakeholders stand to benefit from HRM practices that promote affective commitment and employee rewards. Edmans (2012) asserted the importance of examining the long-term consequences for stakeholders in terms of wealth creation and sustained profitability (Edmans, 2012; Hill et al., 2012; Kim & Brymer, 2011). At the individual level, the long-term consequences are the psychological rewards employees receive for their effort, which may include promotions and higher compensations. Consequently, a high degree of organizational commitment and high performance by the individual leads to cost-effective products and services benefitting all stakeholders (Conway & Briner, 2012; Hill et al., 2012; Kwoka, Hearle, & Alepin, 2016). Additionally, employees with a strong degree of commitment to the organization's goals are more productive in their daily activities, which will contribute to long-term stakeholder success (Kaufman, 2015).

Affective Commitment and Employee Benefits

Some literature linking the relationship between affective commitment and employee benefits advocates that both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards contribute to employee engagement (Jiang et al., 2012; Supanti, Butcher, & Fredline, 2015). Employees who are assigned to projects that result in failure may develop lower levels of affective commitment (Teimouri, Izadpanah, Akbariani, Jenab, Khoury, & Moslehpour, 2015). The reality is that some organizations experience project failure, and the organizational culture paradigm may have an impact on how employees feel about subpar performance results (Teimouri et al., 2015).

Organizations that promote the idea of learning from failures and give their employees ample support are likely to have employees not adversely affected by temporary setbacks (Teimouri et al., 2015). Managers need to not only provide their employees with support in order to instill affective commitment, but recognize that employees will need time to process the negative feelings they experience from failure (Teimouri et al., 2015). While some employees who have more strongly developed coping mechanisms will recover quicker than others, managers can reiterate the idea that failure does happen and is even expected as the organization continues to grow (Teimouri et al., 2015).

A study on how life satisfaction drives affective commitment to an organization found that next to job satisfaction and job role, life satisfaction, and cultural positivity had a positive effect on an employee's affective commitment (Hausmann, Mueller, Hattrup, & Spiess, 2012). Even though an organization and its leaders may not influence and control all aspects of an employee's level of satisfaction with his or her life, work-life balance may play a role. Defining what employees need is a subjective exercise but organizational leaders can structure and manage workloads to convey that work-life balance principles are a priority (Hausmann et al., 2012). In a globalized economy, cultural differences in how employees regard the work environment and how they view work-life balance satisfaction have become more visible (Hausmann et al., 2012). Data gathered from multiple countries reveal that a positive life satisfaction effects affective commitment (Hausmann et al., 2012).

Organizations that champion a cooperative cultural environment are more likely to exhibit employees with high levels of affective commitment (Bogaert, Boone, & van Witteloostuijn, 2012). Cooperative organizational environments consist of cohesive values and group norms, as well as employees who have concern for the well-being and performance of the collective group (Bogaert et al., 2012). Those who value individual performance and the self tend to be less cooperative and exhibit lower levels of affective commitment to the organization (Bogaert et al., 2012). Subjectivity can have an effect on whether the employee perceives the organization as cooperative or non-cooperative (Bogaert et al., 2012).

The quality of an employee's work life has an effect on his or her commitment to the organization (Zhang, Fan, & Zhu, 2014). A quality work life is defined as an employee's experience in terms of job satisfaction, the rate of employee turnover, intention to separate from the organization, personality, and stress levels (Zhang et al., 2014). Relationships between employees and their immediate supervisors are moderated by the extent employees can tell their contributions are valuable and related to positive work life qualities. Employees whose work lives are valuable and meaningful likely feel confident about accessing opportunities to develop new skills; and are likely to anticipate receiving appreciation for their accomplishments (Zhang et al., 2014). Feeling appreciated increases affective commitment levels among employees and reduces their likelihood of searching for employment outside their current organizations (Zhang et al., 2014). Salary relates to a high-quality of work life (Zhang et al., 2014).

Some industries face higher than average turnover rates such as the information technology (IT) industry, which has an average turnover rate of 20% (Yücel, 2012). Affective commitment is linked to job satisfaction. If employees become dissatisfied, they are likely to seek employment elsewhere. Relationship equity between employees and their managers, good benefits, and fair treatment all effect job satisfaction (Yücel, 2012).

In the IT industry, there is often a mix of younger and older employees. Different employees gain job satisfaction by having various sets of needs met. Younger employees have a tendency to want higher salaries and opportunities for advancement (Yücel, 2012). Older employees want to feel as though they belong, develop strong social ties within the organization, and have a good degree of stability (Kooij, Guest, Clinton, Knight, Janson, & Dikker, 2013; Yücel, 2012).

Gender may affect how benefits and job features influence employee satisfaction levels and affective commitment. Females tend to focus on leisure factors, while males seem to focus on money factors (Cunningham, Tang, Frauman, Ivy, & Perry, 2012). Higher levels of affective commitment correlates with reduce turnover, lower absentees, and increase job performance. As employees develop tenure in the public sector, their job satisfaction scores tend to rise (Cunningham et al., 2012). Among public sector employees, increases in job satisfaction correlates with the extent employees feel a sense of accomplishment and job responsibility (Cunningham et al., 2012). The dynamic relationship between job satisfaction and sense of responsibility intensifies when

employees own accumulated pension benefits, and a higher wage based on tenure (Cunningham et al., 2012).

Organizational change can negatively affect job satisfaction. Some employees may express their dissatisfaction through sabotage, vocal expressions, grievances, and withdrawal (McKay, Kuntz, & Naswall, 2013). Open communication between management and subordinates about impending organizational changes reduces negative feelings among employees (McKay et al., 2013). It is best to involve employees in the change process and communicate how changes have positive effects on them personally (McKay et al., 2013). These realizations increase the likelihood employees will maintain affective commitment to their organizations (McKay et al., 2013).

Employee Satisfaction and Labor Relations in the Airline Industry

The literature on employee satisfaction and labor relations in the airline industry exhibits some differences in opinion and supporting evidence. One of the largest U.S. airplane manufacturers, experienced friction over pay and benefit negotiations with its largest employee union in 2013. The union was opposed to the company's proposal to steer workers away from the company's pension plan and toward a 401(k) (Denning, 2013). Even though the company offered extra signing bonuses, additional dental benefits, and kept its pay scale competitive, the change in retirement plan structures became the major obstacle in achieving a compromise on new employee contract terms (Denning, 2013). Denning's (2013) case study illustrated how financial benefits, both short and long-term, have a direct impact on employee engagement, commitment, and satisfaction.

Regional airlines are experiencing a shortage of pilots due to high training costs and low salaries (Schreckengast & Drury, 2015). Flight training can cost up to $100,000 (Higgins, Lovelace, Bjerke, Lounsberry, Lutte, Friedenzohn, & Craig, 2013) and entry-level salaries for regional airlines pilots are between $17,000 and $22,000 annually (McGee, 2015). Starting salaries at regional airlines do not incentivize pilots enough for them to seek out employment with regional carriers or maintain employment with them (Schreckengast & Drury, 2015). Compounding the problem are new Federal regulations increasing the number of flying hours required for entry-level pilots; a wide wage gap between regional and national carrier pilot salaries and the mandatory retirement age of 65 (Schreckengast & Drury, 2015).

A regional carrier in Canada challenges this trend. The carrier's employees are known as owners and are not unionized and own stock in the company, and there is less of a gap between the financial compensation of senior management and front-line employees (Murray, 2013). Murray (2013) observed that the company does not just provide employees with financial perks and benefits, but also promotes an atmosphere of fun, celebration, and social affiliation resulting in profitability, employee satisfaction and high levels of affective commitment.

An organization promotes affective commitment by making sure that prospective employees fit its organizational culture and seeks employees who are willing to try new things, have fun and work in a collaborative environment (Taylor, 2015). Any company, and those in the service industry in particular, benefit from employees who are committed

to their job function and have the desire to engage with customers to ensure the best experience possible (Taylor, 2015).

Employee engagement levels tend to rise alongside customer satisfaction levels (Taylor, 2015). A U.K. based major airline emphasizes its employees' skills and high engagement levels in its advertising campaigns. Part of the company's strategy is to highlight the employees' knowledge and skills, and appeal to the customer's need for a personal touch (Peters et al., 2015). Satisfied employees tend to want to make sure that the customer is satisfied (Peters et al., 2015). Taylor (2015) concluded that employees with high levels of affective commitment equate personal performance with company performance as they link customer satisfaction with the company's success.

A way that the airline industry increases employee satisfaction and group cohesiveness is through group travel benefits (Wattanacharoensil & Yoopetch, 2012). Employees of airlines often receive travel benefits as part of the incentive and compensation package (Schreckengast & Drury, 2015). Being able to experience the airline from this perspective allows the employee to experience the airline from the customer's point of view (Murray, 2013). These types of experiences develop empathy and motivate an employee to want to create a positive customer experience when they are working (Peters et al., 2015).

Conclusions from the Literature Review

The literature review of qualitative and quantitative research across industries and geographical locations revealed a strong relationship between employee affective commitment and organizational success. The effects of HRM strategies and practices on

organizational performance are notable among customer-service industries with high

labor costs, e.g., the airline industry (Keltner, Finegold, & Team, 2012; Müller-Jentsch,

2012; Wirtz & Heracleous, 2012). The employee disengagement and labor turmoil within

the U.S. airline industry is the product of more than 70 years of political and economic

change (Helleloid et al., 2015). The changes included (a) deregulation of the industry in

1978, (b) the introduction of low-cost competition, (c) industry consolidation and

mergers, and (d) a weakening of the U.S. economy (Smith & Cox, 2008).

      Researchers posited that the implementation of HRM practices to engage

employees, results in job satisfaction and leads to organization success (Shaw et al.,

2013). Kehoe and Wright (2013) focused on enhancing the organization's success via

employee commitment. Their research identified two essential aspects of HRM. First,

HRM is a technique to enhance employee and labor relations, and second, it is a means of

analyzing individual and collective behavior within the organization for the satisfaction

of labor needs and wants (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). Ariss (2012) observed a shift in

thinking from a control-based model to a compliance-based HRM model.

      According to Kaufman (2015), in today's business world, organizations adopt

either a utilitarian or a humanistic approach to HRM. The utilitarian approach of HRM,

also known as the Michigan model, considers human resources as a common output of

production for achieving the strategic objectives of the firm. It disregards and rejects the

concept of HRM that considers human resources as a source capable of transforming

lifeless production-related factors into profit and wealth. Critiques of this model point to

job dissatisfaction that results in high employee turnover rates, which then makes the

organization inefficient in the long-run, while also increasing the transaction costs and inevitable loss of job-specific skills (Ariss, 2012; Kehoe & Wright, 2013).

On the other hand, the humanistic approach of HRM views human resources as valuable assets and necessary in order to gain a competitive advantage through adaptability, high quality, and commitment. The Harvard model emphasizes the human aspects of HRM. It is concerned with leading people via motivation and communication rather than through simply managing employees. Furthermore, the model involves employees in the realization and determination of the organization's strategic objectives. Advocates of the Harvard model claim that the humanistic approach increases organizational performance in the long-term through improved efficiency (Kaufman, 2015; Keegan, Huemann, & Turner, 2012; Keltner et al., 2012). Critics argue that this approach does not improve organizational performance by any measurable degree (Kochan, 2012; Morris, 2012).

The Harvard model encapsulates HRM practices to enhance the level of commitment among the employees to produce high-quality products and services that fulfill the needs of the employees and allow the organization to achieve its goals (Kaufman, 2015; Keegan et al., 2012). Applying these emerging themes to airline HRM practices may allow company executives to identify and deploy the policies and processes that are conducive to the growth of affective employee commitment.

Transition

In Section 1, I identified specific airline industry challenges as airline leaders struggle to remain viable and financially sound while profit margins continue to narrow.

Researchers and practitioners have debated which of the external factors such as (a) deregulation, (b) cost of fuel, (c) low-cost competition, and (d) market elasticity in the competitive environment; have had the greatest effect on the financial performance of the airline industry (Ciliberto & Schenone, 2012; Vaze & Barnhart, 2012). Some researchers agree that employee commitment plays a role in managing operational success and gaining a competitive advantage (Choi et al., 2015).

The purpose of this case study was to explore which HRM policies and practices effectively elicit affective employee commitment and subsequently improve the on the job performance of the individual. Section 2 contains a comprehensive discussion of the methods and strategies involved in the case study design and the processes for the design's implementation. Data collection through semistructured interviews with managers and a focus group of employees allowed the exploration into the work-related experiences and the subjective meaning of those experiences as they impacted affective commitment.

In Section 3, I present the findings of the case study on the strategies used by leaders of one U.S. airline to improve employee performance and better understand what affective commitment means to airline management and employees. A stratified purposeful sample of 14 managers and supervisors and 10 frontline staff participated in semistructured individual and focus group interviews. Managers participated in one-on-one interviews with the goal to identify successful HRM strategies. Focus group interviews of ground and flight crews focused on understanding the effectiveness of these strategies.

Section 2: The Project

The purpose of this section is to provide a complete and clear description of my

study method and design. Hussein (2015) noted that research is a scientific inquiry aimed

at learning new ideas and testing facts. The objective of this study was to explore and

identify effective management strategies and employee perceptions of affective

commitment and subsequently improve the on the job performance of the individual.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that

U.S. airline leaders use to improve employee performance. Data were collected from

leaders of a major airline at an airport operation facility in Florida. Improved or enhanced

support of airline employees contributes to profitability, which has far-reaching

implications on aerospace products, airports, hospitality services/hotels, tourism, rental-

car services, security, and retail (Air Transportation Action Group, 2014; Peoples, 2014).

The findings could contribute to positive social change through improved management

and labor relationship within the U.S. airline industry, which ultimately benefits the

flying public through greater stability and better service.

Role of the Researcher

In conducting this case study, I was the primary data collector and performed all

tasks associated with data analysis. After obtaining the letter of consent (LOC), the

director of human resources was emailed requesting participation. Each email contained

my contact information, my study purpose, and an explaination of how employees'

anonymity and confidentiality would be protected. All participants signed an informed

consent form before the interviews, and my procedures followed the Belmont Report

parameters for the protection of human subjects of behavioral research (The Belmont

Report, 1979). These include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice through the

application of informed consent, assessment of risks and benefits, and selection of

subjects.

As Manager of Flight Training Services at the selected company, I had a

professional, non-supervisory, working relationship established with many respondents.

The strategies of reflexive judgment and the ability to continuously self-monitor help

reduce threats related to potential biases, and how to minimize their effects (Kyte, Ives,

Draper, Keeley, & Calvert, 2013).

Participants

The initial interview plan had a minimum stratified purposeful sample of 20

respondents from the airline industry, divided into subgroups of 10 managers and

supervisors and 10 frontline staff participants. This minimum sample size achieved

saturation with a satisfactory breadth of viewpoints, even though the mean sample size

among similar studies is 31 (Clarke & Brown, 2013). I interviewed four additional

managers after the initial 10 interviews, which is consistent with using stratified

purposeful sampling. To gain access to participants, permission was obtained from the

necessary legal channels at the selected airline (see Appendix A) prior to contacting the

individual participants. Upon receipt of permission to conduct the study, I sent email

invitations to all potential participants who were in the subgroups of managers or

frontline staff. The expectation was that the evaluation of the airline's culture and

promotion of affective commitment would have encouraged employees to respond positively to an invitation to participate in the research.

To encourage participation as well as to establish a working relationship with employees, I also contacted the company's HR director and asked if the department leaders would be willing to make front-line management and employees aware of the study. After establishing initial contact with the prospective participants, I made accommodations to minimize the schedule impact for individual interviews. In addition, I provided contact details to allow participants the opportunity to reach me for concerns or questions regarding the study. To ensure qualified participants received ethical protection, informed consent forms (see Appendix B) outlining the purpose, parameters, and rights of the study participants were included in the invitation. Finally, an acknowledgment concerning the confidentiality of the participants' responses and personal information anonymity was included.

As described in the Population and Sampling section, the study comprised a stratified, purposeful sampling of airline employees. Furthermore, stratification of the small sample for qualitative purposes produced thematic results (Clarke & Brown, 2013; Merriam, 2014). For data retention, a safety-deposit-box contains all hardcopy forms (signed approval letters, supporting documentation, etc.) while virtual data (voice recording, Nvivo analysis, etc.) has been retained on a researcher-access-only password protected computer. All content will remain accessible only by me for 5 years after completion of the study after which I will destroy the contents to protect the privacy of the participants.

Research Method and Design

The purpose of this qualitative case study was directed at understanding the strategies that U.S. airline leaders use to improve employee performance.

Research Method

Lewis (2015) and Merriam (2014) described the case study approach as the methodology maintains deep connections to core values and intentions and is particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. Potential biases and prejudgments included the possible assertion on the part of managers that employee affective commitment methodologies already sufficiently serve airline employee needs, in the hope of positioning themselves ahead of managerial colleagues. Employees may have experienced reluctance to share their views on the effectiveness of the company's HRM practices based on concerns that the queries may impact their job security if they expressed a critical viewpoint.

Applebaum (2012) and Lewis (2015) suggested using an open-ended, semistructured interview technique. The semistructured interview method contributed to a comprehension of the work environment that impartially documented participant attitudes (Hays & Wood, 2011). The mixed methods approach was not chosen because there is no need for synthesizing quantitative data with qualitative data, and philosophical assumptions have been set aside in the interest of participant viewpoints.

I chose the qualitative method because qualitative inquiry affords advantages when it comes to understanding the inner workings of organizational culture. Sloan and Swenson (2012) suggested, this kind of interpretive meaning may not be forthcoming

from a statistical study. Quantitative research is more relevant for statistical analysis and mostly based on numerical measurements. As such, quantitative research would not have been useful for meeting the objectives of this study. As Merriam (2014) and Sloan and Sewneson (2012) suggested, I aimed to investigate and discover the shared meanings and affective motivations of real people in a real workplace. The best way to find out what improving employee performance means to management and employees was to utilize semistructured, open-ended interviews.

Research Design

Among existing qualitative research methodologies, numerous information-gathering strategies and tactics exist to address business problems and related research questions. The narrative design, which relates to the concept of one individual's long-term experience, is not relevant to the type of short-term organizational research that was necessary for this study. A case study design is an empirical inquiry that can be used to explore a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context (Carlson & Herdman, 2012; Pereira, 2012). Case study design pertains to particular cases, which is the point of this study. Phenomenological designs are deep-level inquiries into the perceptions of social status and expected behaviors within the organization as the intersubjective reality of the workplace (Carlson & Herdman, 2012; Stenfors-Hayes, Hult, & Dahlgren, 2013). An ethnographic design allows the researcher to become a participant-observer in the culture of the workplace. He or she comes to see the job through the eyes of the employees, which in this case is not practical because the population for this study does not belong to an ethnically homogenous group (Carlson &

Herdman, 2012).

Upon review of each option, a case study research design was best suited to explore what the leaders have done in implementing strategy to improve employee performance. A case study design enables the investigation of individuals, a small group of participants, or a group as a whole (Pereira, 2012). Researchers use case studies to explore the intersection of all influential factors to provide a complete understanding of the situation (Carlson & Herdman, 2012). This type of comprehensive understanding is arrived at through a process known as thick description, which involves an in-depth description of the entity being evaluated, the circumstances under which it is used, the characteristics of the people involved in it, and the nature of the community in which it is located (Pereira, 2012).

The use of semistructured interviews allowed participants to express and share their experiences using their words (Merriam, 2014). Managers participated in one-on-one interviews with the goal of understanding successful HRM strategies. A focus group for ground and flight crews took place with the goal of understanding the effects of these strategies. Participants were encouraged in both venues to express and share their experiences using the prepared interview protocols as a guide.

Ensuring an adequate number of participants is a process contingent upon a comprehensive review of possible viewpoints, often described as *data saturation* (Giorgi, 2012; Paillett, 2012; Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). Data saturation influences the sample size, and smaller studies focusing on a specific case within a single industry may require fewer participants (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). I allowed the patterned reality to

emerge through the course of the interviews. Hence, openness to whatever may transpire was essential throughout the research (Giorgi, 2012; Paillett, 2012; Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). The closer the data identifies the everyday experience in the workplace from the point of view of the participants, the better and the more meaningful the research will be.

Population and Sampling

The participants in the study consisted of a stratified purposeful sample of managers/leaders who have discovered strategies to improve employee performance. The eligibility criterion for participants was that they are a manager/leader with an active work status, have worked within the organization for at least 1 year, and were willing to participate in the research study. In addition to the one-on-one interviews with managers, there was a focus group of employees that included the frontline staff.

Given the study's design, the stratification sampling technique best fit the purpose of the research for three reasons. First, according to Lewis (2015), stratified sampling technique is appropriate for qualitative studies because it ensures the appropriate representation of the target population given the small sample size of participants. Second, stratification achieves a higher accuracy rate when the participants within each stratum are similar, and the participants between the strata exhibit differing characteristics of interest with respect to the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2014; Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). In this study, comparison of management perceptions to employee perceptions with respect to the airline's HRM practices aligns with the aims of stratification sampling and its qualitative nature as specific characteristics of interest were compared for purposes of methodological triangulation. Furthermore, administering

stratified sampling is convenient given the larger employee population of this airline. Third, stratified purposeful sampling ensures better population coverage compared to random sampling (Lewis, 2015), which was a key consideration for this study.

The interview venue was a quiet and climate-controlled environment to ensure the comfort necessary for qualitative, case study research. Once a participant agreed to the interview and provided his or her informed consent, an interview at the participant's convenience was scheduled. The interview setting varied depending on each participant's represented site, either headquarters or the support center, both of which are located in Florida. However, as suggested by Thompson (2011), each participant was encouraged to choose a setting to ensure that the environment was one in which the participant felt comfortable to share experiences, express views, and maintain confidentiality.

Ethical Research

Throughout the course of this study, I complied with protocol and procedures from the University Human Subjects Committee. No data gathering took place until receiving permission from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the airline's management (IRB approval #03-09-16-0189059). After receiving IRB approval, I sent emails to managers/supervisors and front line staff requesting their participation in the study. All individuals who accepted the invitation to participate then provided written consent. In the consent process, the participant read, signed, and returned the informed consent form (see Appendix B) to me at the time of the interview. At this point, the participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that all information, data, and statements would remain anonymous. Participants were assigned

pseudonyms, as such managers and supervisors are identified as by the capital letters MS while front line staff is identified by the letter F followed by sequential numbers for each individual participant. Additionally, to ensure no economic coercion or undue compulsion to participate was present, participants did not receive any form of compensation for study participation (Bluhm, Harman, Lee, & Mitchell, 2011; Hussein, 2015).

Prior to the interview and completion of the informed consent form, participants were informed in writing as to the purpose of the study and the process by which data would be collected, which was through a face-to-face interview with me, serving as the researcher. I did not expect that the participants would experience any negative consequences from sharing their insights and experiences. I conducted interviews in a respectful manner; as affective commitment describes how people candidly feel about their employment setting. I kept in mind the vulnerability that participants may have experienced in sharing sensitive information that could have potentially jeopardized their position within the company. Participation was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw from the study in writing or verbally at any time during the process and without adverse repercussions. Because data from the study included rich and sensitive feedback, study data will be contained in a secure environment for a period of no fewer than 5 years and then destroyed or archived.

Data Collection Instruments

A research instrument is reliable when it provides a consistent measure over time and across situations or subjects (Joshi, 2013; Petty et al., 2012). There are six types of

data collected in case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and artifacts (Pereira, 2012). Because this was a qualitative case study, the primary research instrument was me, serving as the researcher. I utilized a semistructured interview technique that contained the interview questions. Semistructured interviews also ensure that the line of questioning and protocol across all participants begins with the same opening phrases (Petty et al., 2012). The interviews started with a general question and allowed the participant to tell his or her story or experience. The questions were open-ended to allow participants to express and freely share their viewpoints (Petty et al., 2012). The subsequent questions depended on the initial response and followed the interview protocol guide in order to cover all research questions areas.

This process involved the implementation of the interview protocol as suggested by Corely (2011). To this end I used a recorder, took notes, and later expanded on those notes to extract relevant data. I was prepared to rephrase questions as necessary, maintained a broad understanding of research objectives, recognized when the respondent had answered a particular question to advance the process, and asked questions without referring back to the guide each time. This level of preparation ensured the implementation of data collection with minimal interviewer bias. Furthermore, interviewing 24 participants consisting of managers, ground crew, and flight crew ensured subjectivity and provided a wide range of perspectives for exploration in this study.

Because the participants answered the questions in the semistructured interview,

no formal process beyond the completion of the informed consent form was necessary

(see Appendix B). I adapted the format of the semistructured interview question template

to participant responses, thus leaving the potential for open sharing as desired by the

participant to explore specific facets of the airline's HRM practices. The interview's

effectiveness depended on the willingness of the participant to share his or her insights,

and the building of professional rapport remained essential. The informed consent

process involved the presentation of information to the prospective research participants,

the allocation of time giving adequate opportunity for the subject to ask questions and

have them answered, and the completion of documentation of the decision to participate

(Lewis, 2015). Furthermore, the process of obtaining informed consent provided an

opportunity for me to bond with the interviewees. By showing them respect and being

grateful for their time, and by assuring them of confidentiality of their responses, I was

able to cultivate an optimal environment for the interviews.

Upon completion of each interview, I imported all interview responses into

NVivo, and raw data from the interviews were made available based on the thematic

model stemming from the NVivo software. This ensured the minimization of bias or

negative-case sampling where results disconfirm expectations (Joshi, 2013).

Additionally, reflexive judgment and negative-case sampling helped reduce any bias

(Everest, 2014; Hays & Wood, 2011). To enhance the reliability and validity of the data

collection technique, all interview transcripts were made available to the participants for

transcript-review and member checking to ensure that the flow of interview questions and

information is smooth.

Data Collection Technique

Semistructured Interview Techniques

I used semistructured interview techniques with managers/leaders of the airlines. I

requested each participant's permission to record the interview prior to commencement,

and asked each participant to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix B). The audio

recording ensured accurate transcription and facilitated analysis of each participant's

response. Semistructured interviews enabled me to capture the perceptions and

experiences of participants while simultaneously providing an opportunity for the open

sharing of new ideas. Appendix C references the list of interview questions.

Disadvantages of the interview technique included garbled or difficult to understand

speech that may have been difficult to transcribe, and any inhibitions participants may

have felt toward me, as the researcher, while being recorded. It is possible that these

inhibitions could have affected the outcome of the interview (Bluhm et al., 2011;

Erickson, 2012; Everest, 2014; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Focus Groups

I also conducted a focus group with employees. Only ground crew and flight crew

were invited to the focus groups. The focus group took place in Florida and followed a

prepared semistructured interview protocol (See Appendix D).

Member Checking

A transcript of the original responses was maintained and focused summaries

were created that included the questions, the summarized answers, and my interpretation. I then went back to each leader/manager and read the interpretation out loud and asked whether I missed anything. In an interview, researchers can sometimes only get surface-level information. With transcript review and member checking, participants are able to know the researcher better, so trust will develop and open the lines of communication for any additioanl information. The majority of participants, however, had no additional information to add and the participants who did only made slight adjustments to ensure clarity.

Data Organization Technique

To organize the interview data, I developed and maintained a research log to facilitate the identification of common themes and variance among the themes emerging from the interviews, such as any variance in perspectives between management and front-line employees. Research logs helped organize the large amounts of data associated with open-ended interview questions. Additionally, NVivo provides query tools that enable researchers to uncover subtle trends in data, such as searching for an exact word or words that are similar in meaning (Bluhm et al., 2011; Hanson, Balmer, & Giardino, 2011; Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). Furthermore, through the data analysis and highlighting of key points, NVivo's *nodes* feature works like a virtual filing box allowing the researcher to see all information on a theme summarized together (Bluhm et al., 2011; Hanson et al., 2011). The nodes tool helped in organizing emerging understandings with each new interview.

Data Analysis

Responses to open-ended interview questions provided insight to the respondents' experiences and perceptions regarding how the airline's HRM strategies and practices impact employee performance and affective commitment. Appropriate transferability regarding effective strategies to foster employee affective commitment require that analysis of interview data proceed based on the actual words and phrases of the respondents, avoiding the potential selective attention and resulting bias of the interviewer (Maguire, Stoddart, Flowers, McPhelim, & Kearney, 2014). Aggregate analysis of individual respondents elucidated topics and themes that informed appropriate transferability (Terrell, 2012).

Per Applebaum (2012) I used data analysis techniques that encompass each of the three levels of analysis prescribed in Applebaum's methodology: detailed, selective, and holistic. Reduction using brackets and precise measurement units provide line-by-line analysis of every sentence of every interview (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; LeVasseur, 2013). Summarizing individual interviews and grouping units together to define trends are techniques that allow the emergence of selective themes from the full breadth of respondent statements (Applebaum, 2012; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Making a composite summary and extracting general and unique themes from the composite provide a holistic view of the full body of data (Hays & Wood, 2011; Mock et al., 2012). Therefore, I implemented Applebaum's suggested steps for data analysis so any transferability produced regarding labor relations in the airline industry would come from interviewees (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

The data analysis software program NVivo was used as I followed each of the steps suggested by Applebaum. NVivo data analysis software converts text to code, sorts data, links content (relationship identification), and creates models (Bernauer, Lichtman, Jacobs, & Robinson, 2013). Initially, converting text to code facilitated detailed analysis by providing a practical means of data organization (LeVasseur, 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Codes were established for the program by identifying a complete, all-inclusive list of topics and themes generated by respondents. The initial data analysis is neither selective nor holistic because all topics and themes, regardless of whether or not they appear frequently in interviewee responses, are coded (Merriam, 2014). Data coding for the identification of individual participants relied on an alphanumeric process to differentiate managers and supervisors from front line staff (Riese, Carlsen, & Glenton, 2014). For example, MS1 represents the first Manager-Supervisor participant while FG2 represents the second Front-line employee participant in the focus group.

In addition to facilitating the continuous organization of incoming data, NVivo aided steps involved with selective data analysis (Merriam, 2014). Querying interview data through the NVivo data analysis software enabled detection of recurring themes, and illuminated correlations with new and existing literature (Bernauer et al., 2013). Queries aided in defining parameters for grouping units together to define trends, and further assisted with holistic analysis by extracting general and unique themes (Hays & Wood, 2011). Thus, the NVivo software organized and consolidated the totality of interview data to provide an appropriate foundation for individual interview summaries and the subsequent composite summary (Bernauer et al., 2013). This composite summary

addressed the open-ended interview questions by exploring the participants' perceptions about the company they work for.

Data triangulation occurred through semistructured one-on-one interviews with managers, focus group discussions with employees, and member-checking efforts. Moreover, I have stored all research data in a locked container, where it will remain for a minimum of 5 years. The data will be available to any researcher who wishes to confirm the results of this study, subject to the study's previously described limitations. Thus, should it become feasible and desirable to do so, this study could further satisfy the Moustakas's modified van Kaam analytic methodology of intersubjective agreement by making data available among researchers.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are important for maintaining the quality of the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations (Giorgi, 2012; Hussein, 2015). Validity refers to the criterion that the study design identifies the cause and effect relationship beyond a simple correlation (Giorgi, 2012). Validity in qualitative research refers to the research rigor that ensures the reasonability and appropriateness of study conclusions (Hussein, 2015). Hussein (2015) suggested three criteria for testing the validity of qualitative research, including credibility, transferability, and confirmability. To ensure credibility, researchers describe the phenomena of interest through the participants' eyes. Transferability refers to how the research results apply to other similar organizational entities, and if the results assist other organizations struggling with a similar challenge. Confirmability refers to how results align with accepted previous results, particularly

when a researcher applies a similar case study protocol (Giorgi, 2012; Palinkas et al., 2013).

The criterion of reliability is the assumption of replicability: observations of the same event will produce the same result for each occurrence (Palinkas et al., 2013). This assumption is problematic even for quantitative research because the same event cannot occur twice (Morse, 2015). In qualitative research, including this study, reliability and validity are problematic categories to safeguard because of the subjective nature of the data (Morse, 2015; Tammaro, Valenti, Rossi, & Pescapé, 2012).

Hussein (2015) proposed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as alternative, but analogous categories for assessing research design in qualitative research. Credibility is analogous to internal validity, referencing the perspective of research participants on the believability of the results (Sreejesh, Mohapatra, & Anusree, 2014). Transferability, analogous to external validity, requires responsibility on the part of the researcher who wishes to generalize the result to another context, whether the researcher authored the original study or conducts research external to that study (Reynolds et al., 2011). Dependability refers to the degree with which the original investigator could reproduce results, given the first study's limitations and the mutable characteristics of the research environment (Wiles, Crow, & Pain, 2011). Finally, confirmability addresses the degree to which other researchers would confirm the study's result, recognizing the original researcher's unique perspective on the qualitative data generated (Wiles et al., 2011).

Ensuring an adequate number of participants is a process contingent upon a comprehensive review of possible viewpoints, often described as data saturation. Data saturation influences the sample size, and smaller studies focusing on a specific case within a single industry may require fewer participants than the mean sample size of 31 and other studies that span multiple disciplines (Petty et al., 2012). I allowed the patterned reality to emerge through the course of the interviews. Hence, openness to whatever may transpire was essential throughout the research (Giorgi, 2012; Paillett, 2012; Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). I recruited a minimum stratified purposeful sample of 24 respondents from the airline industry and categorized into divided subgroups of 14 managers and supervisors and 10 frontline staff participants. This minimum sample size achieved saturation with a satisfactory breadth of viewpoints, even though the mean sample size among similar studies is 31 (Clarke & Brown, 2013).

This research design incorporated procedures to address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as the criteria for analysis of qualitative data (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Comprehensive recordings of all interviews ensured the transcription's accuracy. The transcript recordings were an essential component in addressing all four categories of data analysis evaluation.

Reliability

I ensured rigorous data collection and analysis methods to mitigate threats to the study's reliability. For example, steps were taken to evaluate the study design before implementing the research methods. As recommended by Tsang (2014), I submitted this design for evaluation to determine the clarity of the questions and their applicability to

eliciting responses on the targeted issues. Presenting the study design and interview questions to experts in academic research prior to conducting the actual interviews provides an opportunity to revise the question, or interview design if necessary, and contributes to the reliability of the study (Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Petty et al., 2012).

Additionally, all interviews were recorded to avoid the potential for bias if the interviewer tried to remember the conversations before recording the answers because taped conversations will provide more reliable evidence than quickly written field notes (Tsang, 2014). Also, the questions were asked in a natural tone of voice, and if there was any misunderstanding of the question by the interviewee the question was repeated until the interviewee understood the question. As a result, all of the interviewees were given the opportunity to explain their individual beliefs without interruption by the interviewer. These interruptions could have been in the form of comments or gestures, and were avoided to reduce possible bias in the interviewee's response to the interview questions (Lewis, 2015).

I also recognized and prepared for other potential threats to reliability during the collection of data for this research study. These threats included the halo effect or the potential bias toward leniency and overly favorable outcomes based on the perception of positive personality characteristics (Lewis, 2015; Paillett, 2012). I annotated observations alongside interviewee responses to questions to note any individual interviewee personal issues that could lead to distorted responses from participants. Another potential threat to the study's reliability was the central-tendency response, whereby participants understate the impact of a scenario due to an unwillingness to elaborate or provide a perceived

extreme response (Joshi, 2013). I was prepared in that if I perceived that the central-tendency issue may have been occurring, I was ready to document the significant nature of the event described by a participant. Lastly, I interviewed only employees with whom I have only limited professional contact to mitigate the threat of going native, which is a concern for this study because of my employment with the firm whose employees I interviewed.

Bryman (2012) found that qualitative research based on rigorous analysis of interview data demonstrated confirmability when research designs enact proactive steps to counter threats to the study's reliability (Harzing, Reiche, & Pudelko, 2013; Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Luyt, 2012). Informal, interactive interviews distinguish case study research studies (Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Petty et al., 2012). The interview process is time-consuming and expensive, but is popular in qualitative research due to the ability to obtain meaningful personal information and feedback from participants (Petty et al., 2012).

Validity

To assure credibility, Bluhm et al. (2011) suggested using standard interview questions, recording researcher observations, and member-checking. Member checking is a system in which the interviewee's responses are recorded in the form of transcripts. Then the transcripts are analyzed, interpreted, and synthesized into concise summaries (Bluhm et al., 2011). Member-checking affords participants the opportunity to check the accuracy of the data and comment on the study prior to its completion (Morse, 2015). To implement a member-checking process, I contacted participants after the interviews to

review their transcribed interviews for accuracy (see Appendix E). Transcript review allowed participants to confirm or deny the authenticity of their statements (see Appendix F). While the review could not guarantee the correct interpretation of the response data, it did assist in verifying the accuracy of participants' responses to interview questions. Thus, member-checking identified emerging themes founded on participant perspectives.

In advance of the interviews, I briefed interviewees on the study's purpose. I instructed the interviewees to avoid discussing their interview with potential study participants in order to maintain unbiased responses. Participants agreed not to discuss their interview with other participants.

Overly broad interpretations about the transferability of research findings are mitigated in the delimitations section. The limited number of case studies on HRM practices in the American airline industry may not provide sufficient context for HRM practices deployed by domestic airlines other than the one in this study (Ovtchinnikov, 2013). Further, the interviewees came from only one city located in the United States and transferability beyond this geographic location are outside the scope of this inquiry. Also, while it is possible that the results of this study may be appropriately extrapolated to the HRM practices of other airlines, different industries may experience diverse effects from HRM practices that could diverge from those presented in this research study.

This study design produced data and analysis that inform appropriate transferability concerning employee affective commitment and HRM practices in the airline industry. Toward this goal, I interviewed 24 participants, at one geographical

location, which mitigated questions of idiosyncratic subjectivity by gathering a wide perspective range.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 of the proposal contains the details of the methodology and design for conducting the current research on the employee perception of affective commitment at the airline selected. Section 2 contains the purpose statement of the study, a description of the role of the researcher during the data gathering procedure, details of the participants in the research, the research method, research design, data gathering procedure, and data analysis techniques. Section 3 will contain the study's findings and how the findings apply to professional practice. Section 3 will also contain the study's implications for social change related to the findings, recommendations for actions based on the research, and recommendations for further study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the strategies that U.S. airline leaders use to improve employee performance and better understand what affective commitment means to airline management and employees. A stratified purposeful sample of 14 managers and supervisors and 10 frontline staff participated in semistructured individual and focus group interviews. Managers participated in one-on-one interviews with the goal of understanding their successful HRM strategies. Focus group interviews of frontline ground and flight crews had the goal of understanding the effects of these strategies.

During individual and focus group interviews, participants discussed several aspects and strategies managers and supervisors employed to improve employee performance and the organization culture, to answer the one overarching research question that guided this study: What strategies do U.S. airline leaders use to improve employee performance? Participating flight and ground crew members expressed an overall feeling of pride toward the customers and their fellow coworkers. Many shared that having the ability to be their own individual, with their decision-making and as part of a team, contributed to their organization culture, one of which they felt set the airline apart from others. However, these participants acknowledged that improved leadership actions could improve the organization's culture; most flight and ground crew member participants expressed verbal recognition, affirmations, and additional opportunities as a way to motivate and encourage an even greater culture of performance.

During individual interviews, leaders described effective strategies most used for improving employee performance and building a culture of performance. Many leaders referenced the airline organization itself as a culture in which employees like to work and perform. Leaders shared that although they believe much of an employee's motivation and commitment comes from within the individual, coaching of employees can improve their performance and develop greater commitment. Most managers and supervisors expressed the importance of individual coaching toward improving employees' motivation and dedication, within their role and as a part of the company as a whole. Leaders explained that individuals want to feel valued in their role; by taking efforts to learn about individual employees and what motivates the person, leaders are able to improve individual performance and levels of affective commitment.

Presentation of the Findings

To better understand what affective commitment means to airline management and employees and efforts made to improve employee performance, one central research question guided the study: What strategies do U.S. airline leaders use to improve employee performance? Themes related to leader strategies and affective commitment were generated from individual and focus group interviews of managers, supervisors, ground and flight crews within a single U.S. airline. Tables 1 and 2 show the themes and subthemes generated from individual and focus groups interview responses, each grouped into pre-emergent categories.

Table 1

Themes from Individual Interviews with Managers and Supervisors

Category	Theme
Effectively improving employee performance	Individual and team coaching
	Rewards and recognition
	Clear understandings
Motivating Employees	Individual interaction
	Engaged in their role and in the company
	Leading by example
Strategies that build a culture of performance	Create a motivating environment
	Clear job expectations
	Consistent goal-setting
	Create opportunities
Strategies to improve employee performance	
	Individual and specific coaching
	Being direct
	Timeliness and consistency of feedback
Experiences of affective commitment	People want to have a positive impact on others.
	Affective commitment comes from within the individual.
	Affective commitment can also be learned.
	Knowing the individuals on one's team can contribute to their affective commitment to the organization.

Themes from Individual Interviews

From individual interviews with managers and supervisors, themes and categories emerged. Categories included effectively improving employee performance, motivating employees, strategies that build a culture of performance, strategies to improve employee performance, and experiences of affective commitment. In the following subsection, I provide an overview of the feedback from interviews with managers and supervisors.

Effectively Improving Employee Performance

Managers and supervisors shared approaches they perceived, and used, to effectively improve employee performance. Themes of individual and team coaching, rewards and recognition, and clear understandings emerged from individual interviews.

Individual and team coaching. Eight manager and supervisor participants shared that coaching employees effectively improved employees' performance. Many shared that coaching delivery, whether individually or within a team setting, depends on the manner and type of motivation that an employee or team prefers. This finding is supported by the findings of Keegan et al. (2012) in regard to managers' use of HRM practices to optimize employees' performance. MS1 and MS4 both supported this theme. MS1 shared, "you have to figure out what's going to work and what's going to motivate your team members." MS4 further explained

I think coaching is a great way to really address performance and to improve performance; tailor your feedback based on crew members. I really think it is important to dial that back down to the individual and be very specific …. to make the crewmember and the team successful.

MS10 described a similar perspective and referred to how individualistic coaching can be:

Whether you're giving … feedback or if you're recognizing or just simple communicate, I have found that it's very important to not take a one size fits all approach. …. I feel it's incumbent upon the leader …. to adapt to the crewmember and not the other way.

Two other participants emphasized the importance of providing individualized coaching in to improve employee performance. The observation of these two participants is in alignment with the finding of Loi et al. (2012) in regard to the importance of interpersonal relationship to foster affective commitment. MS13 stated one has to take "a step back to really understand what it is that is causing that lapse of motivation and then together creating a path to help bring that crew member or leader back on track." MS14 stated that pairing an employee with a more skilled worker can help the lesser-performing employee, stating, "it's pretty simple that we just team the weak with the stronger, and give them time to adapt into a new craft."

Whether individually or within a team setting, some managers and supervisors perceived coaching to also mean being consistent with feedback and direction. MS2 explained the importance of addressing the performance of the team as well as of the individuals:

> Those on the team know what their mission is [with] enough touch points … with the entire team and with the individual to make sure that we're tracking towards what it is that they're supposed to be doing and …. meeting their goals.

MS11 described a similar approach, emphasizing the ultimate goal of improved performance:

> Consistent coaching has been helpful in trying to manage through challenges in a recent performance situation. I think feedback is important, and sharing it more consistently and more frequently is very helpful in managing that issue. In addition, I think being very detailed in the feedback …. and offering examples

helps correct the behavior. I think, being able to provide … detail and provide

those examples, with perhaps action planning when necessary, or when you feel is

appropriate, giving them smaller goals to overcome those behaviors or those

issues, is very helpful.

MS6 also felt details and examples effectively helped employees improve their

performance:

I've learned this early in my career...when you provide coaching or you provide

feedback, people want examples. Because …., people want to get better.

Sometimes they don't necessarily know the expectation. They don't necessarily

know where the goal post is. Obviously that has to be clear …. so when you

provide feedback; if it's too general .... they don't know what to do with it.

Rewards and recognition. Five managers and supervisors described the

effectiveness of rewards and recognition on employee performance. All five believed

reward and recognition in some form was extremely important for employees to continue

performing according to expectations. Kaufman (2015) opined that an appropriate

rewards and recognition system has a greater impact on the long-term performance of an

employee than monetary increases alone. MS3 described the ease of recognizing some,

and the challenge of recognizing others, in large part to the organization's reward system:

For high performing crew members, …. we have the "Blue Bucks" programs

which is really a wonderful incentive for them. For those that are neither the top

performers nor our concerns, we … really struggled. They want to be

acknowledged for doing a good job, for being consistent, for always being there,

for being in the core group that we can count on. When you're thinking about

rewarding someone maybe it isn't that top of the line crew member that you need

to acknowledge, maybe its middle of the row.

MS7 shared the need to recognize employees not only for that individual but also as

motivation or a role model for others to achieve as well:

It's important to recognize and acknowledge that person and …. it is positive peer

pressure. You want others to see what happens when they perform really well. I

definitely want to reward or recognize that person and make it clear to the team

that, here's the person that performed well. …. And maybe there's someone who is

not performing well. Here's a potential role model, here's a potential mentor for

them.

MS9 and MS12 both considered how employees may want to be recognized. As MS9

pointed out, "something that is for the individual? Some people like something different

than others?" MS12 further shared, "we found that [Lift rewards] are motivating for our

crew members, but there are a lot of them that respond better when you go and sit down

…. and say, hey thank you for doing this today." MS13 explained how leaders need to be

cognizant in recognizing everyone, at whatever performance level:

So I think it's incumbent on us, as leaders, to make sure we are focusing …. and

recognizing the right moments and celebrating success when things go well.

When our teams execute with precision and when they perform their job even if

it's just I've done my job well today, …. it's easy to forget …. when things are

going right and working the way they are suppose[d] to.

Clear understandings. Two leaders shared that making sure employees had a clear understanding of their role, responsibilities and expectations of them would effectively improve employees' performance. Boom and Kalshoven (2014) suggested that role clarity reduces tension and increased productivity. MS8 shared that by "boiling it down to some …. basic steps, …. I try to demonstrate values that they might understand to help with the team's goals." MS5 further explained the importance of a clear conversation with employees about expectations and their purpose:

> It's really important that I have that dialogue with them and help them understand the purpose of why they are here. My role is to help them to be successful. So getting that particular individual involved in a project outside of [the department] is a motivator for that person … So one person is motivated by the potential opportunity of the new job. Another person understands that the successful execution of a particular initiative is going to put them in a position for a bonus or promotion.

Motivating Employees

During individual interviews, participating managers and supervisors discussed how they approached motivating their employees. Themes that emerged from interview responses include individual interaction, engaged in their role and in the company, and being direct. Bal et al. (2013) identified the individual interaction and company engagement as the accommodative HRM, which enhances employee engagement and commitment. All participating leaders believed that motivating employees depends on the individual and, therefore, individualization is important in order to reach the employee as

the leader intends. MS12 and MS13 confirmed this theme, MS12 stating, "it comes down to what the individual finds motivation in." MS13 added, "I haven't found one method meets all needs. What is most effective is doing it quickly and in the moment."

Individual interaction. Five managers and supervisors shared that from their experiences, individual interaction effectively motivated their employees. Individual interaction meant anything from providing feedback, making someone feel appreciated, or simply having a conversation (Al-Refaie, 2015). Most important of motivating employees through individual interaction was the individualization within leaders' approach. MS6 shared, "many people like positive feedback and like to be encouraged. Some people take negative feedback more challenging. I think part of it depends on how motivated they are internally." MS11 takes the concept of individual interaction further by stating that motivation begins by developing relationships with employees:

> If you are able to establish rapport with your team, and you are able to focus on a culture of communication and connectedness, you'll foster the behaviors that you're … targeting. I think that if you can build a commitment to them, if you effectively communicate with them, if you are committed to keeping them connected, you will build rapport to a level where they will perform for you. I think spending time with crew members, …. you start to know what makes your team tic, and what they really appreciate.

MS1 and MS2 both shared they consider motivating employees from how they themselves are motivated best. MS1 explained, "I take it from how I like to be rewarded and it's mostly verbal." MS2 agreed, sharing:

I would …. rather have a face-to-face interaction where someone was able to recount exactly what happened and showed how my inputs made the process better versus get some notification or a twenty-five dollar gift card. But different people take different motivation. To motivate the individual, you have to know what motivates the individual, getting to know the individual and catering the motivation to what meets the individual's needs and what makes them motivated. I think the most important thing is that, you find a way for someone to feel appreciated for what they do.

MS14 expanded on motivating by simply showing an appreciation of the employee:

I've always believed that a simple pat on the back is worth more than any monetary value …. I've seen that a lot in my career where, [money] just doesn't, have the same effect as me walking up and say, … you did a great job. When you sit down, and you write somebody a note, that's personal, that's how we do it in our shop, simple.

Engaged in their role and in the company. Four leaders believed that creating a feeling of engagement to one's role and in the company within employees greatly motivates them to perform. Task proficiency was also identified by Boon and Kalshoven (2014) as a means to engage employees and foster affective commitment. MS3 explained engagement as a very important motivator, stating: "they need to be part of it, they need to be part of identifying problems, they need to be part of the solutions, they need to be part of where is this company heading, they need to be engaged." MS7 and MS8

described the ability to help employees understand not only their role but their role in the

company can increase an employee's motivation. MS7 explained:

A big part of it is when they understand a lot of the why, what we're trying to do

and how well they're going to work and how they're going to learn something

bigger. I found that when people have a deeper understanding to how they

contribute towards the success of something, they …. get motivated.

MS8 further described:

Making sure that they feel a commitment to the team goal, so it's not necessarily

that they're helping themselves, but they're participating in the goal of the team.

The other piece that I think gets people motivated is ownership over their work.

MS5 also believed in motivating the team as a whole:

Engaging your group and helping them understand this is our overarching

business objective, this is the reason behind it; they got to understand why them,

their role and how they fit into this particular initiative and then secondly a

motivator is ensuring there's a clear line.

Leading by example. Carmeli et al. (2012) noted that CEOs can improve the

quality of strategic decisions their top management teams make by shaping a relational

context of trust and facilitating learning from failures. CEOs should be able to cultivate

an atmosphere of trust in the team. Moreover, CEOs should process the mistakes of their

team in order to facilitate learning rather than just scolding their teams (Supanti et al.,

2015). Chen and Chen (2013) supported the findings of Carmeli et al.'s (2012) study

about the importance of knowing how groups and organizations learn from failures, and

how leader behavior influences these learning processes. Three leaders shared that as a leader, motivation should come from their actions; leading by example shows employees that managers and supervisors are passionate and motivated about their role and the company. MS4 supported this theme, stating:

> I think motivation has to start from the top so as a leader as a manager I think it is really important to …. making sure you have the passion …. ; as a caring leader you are able and willing to do what you ask your crew members to do, and having an expectation; showing them by doing really helps them to get that passion and to gain that passion that you have for project.

MS10 felt similarly, stating leading by example has been "the most effective method" to motivate employees. MS10 further shared, "I never ask them to do something that I would not jump in and help them do as well." MS9 explained that the work ethic of leadership can impact employees, therefore it should be demonstrated: "We do encourage [personal work ethic] and when we have opportunity for coaching we'll say, take ownership of your trainees. …. it is something we demonstrate, train, and implement."

Strategies that Build a Culture of Performance

Managers and supervisors discussed strategies used to effectively build a culture of performance. Meyer et al. (2012) explored the relationships between HR strength, leadership, organizational climate, and performance. Based on 323 questionnaires from a company in the industrial sector, results showed a positive relationship between HR strength, leadership, organizational climate, and performance. Jorgensen and Becker (2015) stated that leadership style should be coordinated with the firm's HR strategies so

that the firm and its members could benefit from it. Furthermore, it could lead to improved performance through effective and fulfilled psychological contracts with workers. Most common among participating leaders were the themes of create a motivating environment, clear job expectations, and consistent goal setting.

Create a motivating environment. Half of the managers and supervisors interviewed shared that creating a motivating environment was a strategy they relied on to build a culture of performance. MS1 shared that the "company does a great job of directing us to have a performance-based culture," which when it trickles down to the employees, creates an environment where employees motivate each other:

I want to make sure that everything I do falls in line of safety, integrity, fun, passion, and caring. Those are my drivers for how I behave here and how I produce here at [the airline]. I would ask others how could they help … others while challenging themselves and get over those difficulties so everybody could see that nobody is perfect. In fact, I encourage them to coach each other, and that really does work.

MS3 described seeing that same effect among employees:

Because of the passion and whatever it is they are sharing, it really comes across and then others are engaged. That responsibility of these are my customers, by saying it's for me to address this customer's needs in the best possible way the whole responsibility of this is our job and if we all do it and learn it and do it to the best of our ability then we'll succeed.

MS13 detailed the personal experience approaching the daily tasks with passion toward

employees and to the organization, demonstrating dedication not only to building a

culture of performance but also to each employee on the team:

> On a weekly basis, I meet with my team and we all talk about everything we have
>
> on our plates so we can recognize what's happening with all of us and how many
>
> things we have going. And that's [also] a form of recognition, we are all
>
> contributing, we're all performing. Together as a team we are working on our
>
> short term and our long term strategy. I also really believe in the sum value so we
>
> do off site activities, I just started a book club we are reading a leadership book
>
> and then we'll have a book club at my house and talk about the leadership book
>
> and we'll have wine and cheese. It is giving your leaders the tools, the resources,
>
> the knowledge and the skills to drive forward to end results without having to
>
> dictate it to your team.

Leaders expanded on how the overall culture of the airline organization

contributed to leaders' ability to create a motivating environment for their employees.

MS6 explained, "we have taken an approach where we want everybody to be great at

everything and I think part of that is our culture...one that says everybody matters and

everybody can be successful at whatever they want to do." MS9 described how

departments and levels of management demonstrate a culture within themselves:

> The culture within the [department]...you're looking at a well-paid job with ….
>
> time flexibility. …. If you start looking at management...there's a culture of a high

degree of dedication. Presence is big with the leadership...to have that...to

demonstrate that level of commitment your team will feel support and motivated.

MS7 shared leader presence does in fact have an effect in establishing that environment

for performance, "Recogniz[ing] and striv[ing] for a high performance...[employees] get

things done but they get them right and efficiently...they meet the stakeholder needs and

they look for more work." MS5 believed it was within the role of a good and effective

leader "to create an environment where they feel motivated they feel safe; they feel

empowered they feel they achieve [their] goal."

      Clear job expectations. Four leaders shared that providing employees with clear

job expectations helped them to build a culture of performance. MS4 believed

communication of clear job expectations and goals was part of "great performance

management," explaining:

> Making sure that you're clear with those expectations upfront and giving them
>
> attainable goals to meet, really motivates them more. They know the expectations
>
> they can all work towards that goal and feel proud about it at the end of the year.
>
> When they have a clear understanding well I didn't meet this goal because of
>
> XYZ or I met this goal because I did this.

MS1 and MS2 shared part of employees' job expectations involved meeting expectations

of the leader and the end goal, all of which needed to be clear as well. MS1 stated,

> You figure out what the responsibilities are for the job and if the person is able to
>
> meet all of those responsibilities, then they are meeting my expectations as their

crew leader… basically coming in line with the performance that I want them to

have.

MS2 further explained that "making sure people know what their job is [and] what their

impact is to the particular team that they're working on" so they "see [the] value in what

they do based upon their own personal motivation for doing that." MS10 agreed,

describing how employees need to understand their role, and therefore value, in meeting

the end goal of the company but most importantly, their specific performance goals:

You have to know what, not necessarily the desire and the outcome is but what is

your goal of what you're doing. Their one piece could be extremely critical to a

very big goal. I think the more you share with them and the more transparent you

are with that, be more engaged they're going to be in what they're doing.

Consistent goal-setting. Two leaders emphasized the need for consistent goal

setting as a strategy for building a culture of performance. Both leaders explained the

importance of goals and not just during a review, but throughout the year. MS8 explained

that "people [need to] know where they stand" and one way to do so is by "identifying

what people find valuable, the most valuable" and build on goals from that point. MS14

had a similar belief, expanding on the idea of building on what employees most value in

their role, sharing, "it's simply just molding them, I think there needs to be some sort of

device of measure, or to set goals throughout the year, otherwise I think we stay stagnant,

and we get comfortable.

Strategies that Improve Employee Performance

During manager and supervisor interviews, leaders shared strategies they used and believed were most effective toward improving employee performance. Some literature linking the relationship between affective commitment and employee benefits advocates that both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards contribute to employee engagement (Jiang et al., 2012; Supanti, Butcher, & Fredline, 2015). Organizations that promote the idea of learning from failures and give their employees ample support are likely to have employees not adversely affected by temporary setbacks (Teimouri et al., 2015). Managers need to not only provide their employees with support in order to instill affective commitment, but recognize that employees will need time to process the negative feelings they experience from failure (Teimouri et al., 2015). While some employees who have more strongly developed coping mechanisms will recover quicker than others, managers can reiterate the idea that failure does happen and is even expected as the organization continues to grow (Teimouri et al., 2015). Common among participating leaders were the themes of create opportunities, individual and team coaching, being direct, and timeliness and consistency of feedback.

Create opportunities. A few leaders shared that by creating additional or new opportunities for employees, improved employee performance will occur. Three managers and supervisors believed that some employees just want their skill set to be acknowledged, whether in their current role or within an additional or different one. MS1 shared an example of such an employee:

> There was a previous scheduler that personality-wise fit the role perfectly. But he applied for another position, he got the position and he's doing phenomenal. I mean he's a supervisor in a different department and you can just tell that he's very satisfied with what he's doing. He wasn't unhappy in the other position but he wasn't performing a hundred percent or a hundred and ten percent. Now, he is.

MS2 supported MS1's employees move, explaining, "there are plenty of opportunities [in] this organization for someone that wants to make an input to find a way to do that."

MS3 described acknowledging employees' skill sets, individually as well as within the group, in order to improve overall employee performance:

> We've started what we call lunch and learns, it's …. once every other month. We have a supervisor take something that they feel they are very strong at, and then we have lunch, everybody brings food or snacks and we sit together for 2 hours and they teach us or share with us what they're strong at and what impact it has and how they go about it. It could be a tool, it could be a soft skill, it could be a variety of things so it's allowing us to capture someone's strength and allowing it to be shared with the rest of the supervisor team.

Individual and specific coaching. Half of participating managers and supervisors point to coaching, that is specific to the individual and their role, as a strategy toward improving employee performance. Leaders emphasize the personal interaction, communication, and approach used with employees, noting the importance of how individuals interpret the coaching provided. MS4 described this theme:

I think coaching has to be a mix of active coaching and reinforcement coaching …. there has to be the opportunities where you present something that crew members doing well or something they do good. I think that balance of reinforcement and active coaching is key. The thing is also on the delivery so making sure you're aware of who is around when you coach I'm not coaching in front of others making sure you are sincere with your coaching. Also making sure you are aware of what that crew member has just gone through they may need some time to distress …. taking those factors into consideration will help make coaching successful.

MS12 shared this same belief explaining, "A lot of it is tailoring that feedback to how the individual responds. I think if you're a new crew leader walking into the position, you have to ask your team, how do you guys respond to feedback." MS5 expanded on the importance of a leader's approach to employees during the coaching process, emphasizing the ability to create an environment where employees feel comfortable to "have that dialogue about any issues that they might be experiencing." And further explained a leader's role in the tailored coaching as:

I help them understand the expectation of their current position and job to be successful in. In a case when a crewmember underperforms I am …. extremely firm in setting deliverables and deadlines. These goals and deliverable may be aggressive but they are most certainly doable. Sitting down with them and making sure they understand it and letting them know what the outcome is if they don't achieve or meet these goals.

MS6 used coaching similarly, believing the "leader behavior is so important," especially in the role of a coach. "It has an impact on everybody else on the team. More times than not, it's [just] having that conversation and talking about why the behavior doesn't meet what the expectation is.

MS10 and MS13 described the different kinds of performers and their approaches to improving employee performance between both types of employees. Among the high performers, M10 and M13 continue to find ways to keep these employees engaged, typically by building on their responsibilities and roles. MS10 explained engagement motivates high and low performers to perform better, sharing:

> I think if you're not engaged in what you're doing, you can't possibly be great at it. You might be okay at it, you may be good at it with a lot of work but if you're fully engaged in something, you're going to give it your all, be excellent at.

MS13 shared that "high performing crew members [are] the most exciting ones because that's a career path conversation." When discussing low performers, MS13 explained there are different types, one being "easy low performer to coach, it's the person who's doing the things that are easy to identify, easy to track." MS13 describes a current example of coaching a low performer:

> I think regardless of the approach, total honestly and transparency is essential. So you have to be clear in what failure was, for lack of a better term, or what the area of opportunity is and then set goals together on how you, as a team – meaning the crewmember and you, the leader, are going to improve and enhance whatever is

lacking and then make sure you're holding each other accountable to having routine follow-ups and celebrate success as you go through.

Observation was also discussed as a strategy that, when included in the coaching process, can improve employee performance than just by coaching alone. MS9 stated that from observations, employees are "giv[en] tools to do the job better." MS4 further explained:

I will observe them in the class room sitting or observe them running the meetings or whatever it is in gather very specific tangible examples that I can review with them and providing examples. To make sure I'm very specific with my feedback of what they have done incorrectly or what they have done correctly. That helps them to improve their performance; being very specific and coaching them through those instances is very important.

Being direct. Two leaders shared their most effective strategy to improving employee performance was directness. Both found that by being transparent and clear, employees' improved their job performance. MS14 shared that simply "put[ting] it right up on the table that we're not here to walk you out the door, we're here to try to help you get to the next level" motivates employees to perform better. MS7 agreed with this belief, sharing:

I find that a lot of it comes from trust. Being open and being credible. It's being open, being direct, building that back and forth and asking a lot of questions to see if the other person really understands the impact of what happened.

Timeliness and consistency of feedback. Three leaders shared that timeliness and consistency of feedback can have a big impact on employees' performance. From their experience, both MS8 and MS11 felt that consistency of reinforcement, whether feedback or repetition, was critical to many employees that need additional motivation or challenges to perform as expected. MS8 explained this theme, sharing:

> What I've found for high performers is you … got to keep reinforcing the good job that they're doing and how much you appreciate it and how much those around them appreciate it. I can tell them frankly that they're not performing well, but it's difficult area for me. I have to be frank with them in their performance and say, you know, you're not up to the standards. These are the areas that I see you need to improve. If we don't see improvements, there [are] repercussions.

MS8 also shared that the help of "job aids or assistance is probably the best way to do it." MS11 agreed with consistency in dialogue between leaders and employees, as well as the timeliness of the dialogue:

> Giving a performance review, twice a year, it doesn't really help develop your team if you're not working on things along the way. It's great to analyze what they've done, and it's great to understand whether or not they had exceeded the goals for the year. But it's how they get there, and that's what makes this [the airline]. If you don't offer feedback more frequently, then they may not know what you're able to observe. So make sure …. that it's something that will, a, have an impact, b, is measurable, and c, is actually something that motivates them.

MS12 described how timeliness of feedback, whether "you're trying to compliment or reinforce good behavior," is critical for employees to recognize the effect or impact of their performance. "If you don't do it within 24 to 48 hours, it almost feels, to the person receiving it, that it's old news. With negative feedback or constructive feedback, I found that the timeliness is important there as well."

Experiences of Affective Commitment

When asked to share their experiences with affective commitment. Managers and supervisors discussed the psychological commitment of their employees to the airline organization, several common themes emerged, including wanting to have a positive impact on others, affective commitment comes from the individual, affective commitment is a learned behavior and knowing individuals on one's team can contribute to that commitment. Researchers have found that addressing substantive issues, such as financial compensation and benefits, may not be sufficient to improve organizational performance (Choi et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2012). Affective commitment development is of particular relevance in the airline industry due to its service-intensive nature and high ratio of labor cost to the total cost (Choi et al., 2015). Researchers suggested that improved labor relations increases service quality and subsequently result in customer loyalty, which in turn leads to improved financial performance (Kaufman, 2015).

People want to have a positive impact on others. Three leaders shared their experience of affective commitment, demonstrated by employees who want to make a difference to others. MS7 supported this theme, stating, "a lot of people take pride in

knowing about their ability to influence … new crewmembers." MS2 recognized affective commitment among pilots and leadership:

> They feel as though that they're making an impact to the organization and they're doing it because they want to make an impact to the organization, and they're bettering themselves and the group at the same time by doing that. I think there are quite a few people …. in flight operations that are doing their job because they want to make a positive change for [the airline], their fellow crewmember, the industry, and the flying public.

MS10 pointed to the brand, the airline itself, in creating affective commitment within employees, at all levels. The airline prides itself on commitment to customers, as MS10 explained, and because of that affective commitment "comes natural when you're working for a brand that you're proud of. Our commitment is to be empathetic to be fair and consistent and ensuring that fair and consistency is applied across the organization through people."

Affective commitment comes from within the individual. Four managers and supervisors believed that the individual employee, at any level, plays a big part in their level of affective commitment to the organization. MS5 "truly believe[s] there is a lot of this variance" among employees and level of commitment and "whether or not that person really believes in what they are doing and they're bringing value." MS5 has experienced the level of affective commitment among employees who "want to please their group leader they want to show those around them that they are solid strong contributors that they are reliable that they can be used as resource" and those who

possess a different level of commitment, those that "need to understand have they connected to this whole thing called work, they got to understand that they have a place and that they are valued and that there is a reason for them being here." MS6 had also seen "numerous examples where people really are dedicated and want to go that extra mile" however believing "a lot of that is because of what they bring to the table, not necessarily what we are doing for them." MS11 confirmed this statement by explaining there is only so much one can do to motivate and encourage commitment among employees:

> You can have the nature to be committed, but it can never be tapped if nurture is not motivating it, is not making someone feel like they want to perform on this team, or they want to be committed to making something happen. I can give you a recent example of a crew member that went above and beyond, to develop something for the team, when they are part time work, minimal hours, but consistently trying to go above and beyond, to bring forward ideas and then also actually materializing, not just throw them out there. That to me is [a]ffective commitment. If they didn't feel pleased with what they were doing, or the team they're working with, or motivated by their leadership, would they do it, probably not.

MS12 also agreed, explaining each employee brings with him or her "a certain amount of motivation that may have been instilled through their upbringing, or their motivation may be some goal that they're trying to attain." However, MS12 believed there was more to affective commitment than within the individual. "You can turn somebody's performance

around by guiding them in the right way, but you have to tailor that guidance to a way that an individual responds." MS12 explained further:

I think it's a little bit of both, probably maybe 60-40, 60% of a person's motivation is nature, it come instilled within them, and 40% is influenced by nurture or external factors to unlock that person's motivation. I've never worked for an organization where you see so many people committed to an organization like I've seen here. I think whatever we've done, we've been able to instill, …. in our people to why crewmembers love this company and want to see [the airline] succeed.

Affective commitment can also be learned. Two leaders felt affective commitment is a learned behavior, coached by leaders and learned by employees. MS3 and MS4 both believed that employees who may not be committed to the organization can benefit from additional coaching. MS4 shared a personal experience:

Making sure that [they] understood the background behind everything before we even started to do what it was they needed to do. Make sure that they have that passion, if they weren't a great fit for it then maybe, we need to pick somebody else in making sure that they all aligned with the needed passion for this, to make sure that they are committed to the end. And I think when you do understand the why, you'll agree with the why; you can really commit yourself and your actions. So I think doing so, explain and make the team understand the why, is key. Set those expectations right up front, and the individual and most importantly the team will commit.

MS3 also felt these conversations were critical to have with employees, giving both leaders and employees the opportunity to discuss the commitment level and if anything can help improve it if necessary:

> If they become aware and if they'd have someone to be able to chat with them and to talk to them and be honest and say you are missing the culture piece. Let me tell you what that means and really give them opportunities to engage and do that, it's been learnt. I have crew leaders today who have learnt it and been able to adapt.

Knowing the individuals on one's team can contribute to their affective commitment to the organization. Three leaders believed that getting to know each employee, their skills, their motivation as well as what de-motivates them, contributes to the affective commitment each has toward the organization. MS13 experienced this amongst direct reports but also shared "it is my gut instinct...knowing my team, knowing how they work, and knowing what the end goal is in mind? And then following my instinct based on those things on what's the best way to get us there." MS8 and MS14 both believed the airline organization created an environment where leaders easily get to know their employees, in turn creating affective commitment among those employees. MS8 shared the observation:

> It's a good culture in that I think that everybody seems to be trying to do the right thing for the company, most are not just out for themselves. It's a very team oriented company. The biggest part is the people that you bring in and your team that you surround yourself with.

MS14 felt similarly, describing the overall work environment to contribute to affective commitment, believing:

> [The airline] is that company that you always wanted to work for. They felt like that they cared about you as an individual. You aren't just that number. It makes it a lot more comfortable when we come to work in a place that we really like to come to work for.

Themes from Focus Group Interview

From a focus group interview with flight and ground crew members, categories were determined of which themes were grouped into; categories include setting the airline apart from others; activities or actions that contribute to airline's success; effects of decisions on customer interaction; meaning of organization culture; importance of organization culture; necessary recognitions toward organization's success; and improving the organization's culture (see Table 2).

Feng, Wang, and Prajogo (2014) used the Harvard model as a guide to examine the relationship of human resource management and employee empowerment, service reward, service training, employee satisfaction, customer service and customer satisfaction. Kaufman (2015) and Feng et al. (2014) concluded that effective HRM practices could lead to improved employee job-satisfaction and affective commitment, which in turn may result in a competitive advantage for the organization. Peters et al. (2015) found that when employees are not empowered, they do not use or experience their working conditions as job resources that might include home-based teleworking and

trust relationships that are characteristic for supporting leadership, collegial support, and collegial commitment.

Table 2

Themes from Focus Group Interviews with Flight and Ground Crew

Category	Theme	Subtheme
Setting the airline apart from others	Individuality The product	
Activities or actions that contribute to airline's success	Just doing my job Interacting with customers	
Effects of decisions on customer interaction	Taken care of	
Meaning of organization culture	Camaraderie with other employees Respect from leadership Customer satisfaction	
Importance of organization culture	Commitment to the company	
Necessary recognitions toward organization's success	Tangible recognition Intangible recognition	Affirmations Opportunities
Improving the organization's culture	Improved leadership actions	

Setting the Airline Apart from Others

During focus group interviews, ground and flight crews shared their perspective of factors that set their airline apart from other airlines. Themes of individuality and the product emerged from employee responses.

Individuality. Many frontline staff shared that the organization created an environment that treats employees as the individual they are, in any role with the airline, respected and trusted to deliver airline service in a manner they believed met desired

goals of the organization. Participants shared that leadership gave flight and ground crew members "leeway" in their roles, "as long as you deliver what you're supposed to [and] interact with people." No one is simply "just a drone in the system." This flexibility allows employees to "be who you are as a person," accepted as that person among all other employees. Flight and ground crew members perceive the organizational environment to embrace individuality among employees, from which there is ease in creating relationships with other employees as well as with customers.

The product. Flight and ground crew members perceived that the airline set itself apart from other airlines. Most participants shared there is a "distinct difference" between the airline and its competitors, such as "customer loyalty," "the comfortable atmosphere," and being of a more "modern type of company" where the "next cool thing" to provide to customers is always on employees' mind. One participant shared that the original leaders of the airline had a vision they were committed to providing, in turn creating the airline it is today, "there were people that were very involved in other airlines and that small group ha[d] a vision and it was a different vision. And I think they truly were committed and believed in it."

Activities and Actions that Contribute to Success of Airline

During focus group interviews, when asked which of their daily activities and actions they believed contribute to the success of the airline. Themes of just doing my job and interacting with customers emerged from the responses.

Just doing my job. Participants shared that deciding just to perform their role and job responsibilities contribute to the success of the airline. Flight and ground crew

members shared that by performing their job, even just "coming in to work" elevates any "burden on that person" if they had acted any differently. Similarly, the interactions this group of participants engage in daily within their job, be it with the customers or other employees to resolve any issues or problems, create a successful organizational environment. Participants perceived that by just making "an impact to the way [others] see things" allows for organizational success to occur at the moment or in the near future; "even if it may not be the perfect idea, can we build something off of this?"

Interacting with customers. Much of frontline staff roles involve interacting with the customer. These interactions occur on a daily basis and of which participants shared, has them checking in with themselves "did I make someone's day better? Did I connect with someone? Did I help them? Do they find me a helpful person and also did the product that I delivered have an impact?" Flight and crew members felt that one of the most important actions within their job is "how a person is treated." Many of the positons in the organization involve customer interaction so "presenting yourself in a manner in which a person feels welcome and would want to come back" demonstrating success for the organization. As one participant shared, "a happy internal environment leads to a happy interaction with our external customer. It also leads to a happy interaction with an internal customer."

Effects of Decisions on Customer Interaction

During focus group interviews, flight and crew members were asked to describe decisions they each make that effect customer interaction and how so. Participants shared

that they approached each customer decision with the goal to provide the customer a positive experience with the airline.

Taken care of. Flight and ground crew members shared that the most important decision they make on a daily basis is to take care of the customer. One participant shared: "We want to make sure that the customers are taken cared of before there are any kind of complaints for whatever there may be. Their wellbeing is above beyond more important than charging any fee."

Because of participants' positions, customer interaction occurs daily; at the end of the day each considers "who have they impacted?" Within those decisions, a participant shared a specific example; resolving any issues within "a timely manner" rather than just from the technical [side], meant a positive impact on someone, and therefore meets the definition of a "good day." Flight and crew members consider their decisions that affect customers, as opportunities. As one participant explained, each employee "ha[s] that choice every single day that absolutely affects our customers out there and our work out there."

Meaning of Organization Culture

Several themes emerged from focus group interviews regarding the meaning of organization culture. Themes include camaraderie with other employees, respect from leadership, and customer satisfaction.

Camaraderie with other employees. Participants shared that the relationships built and maintained among themselves and with leadership define organization culture. The relationship of the people they work with contribute to the airline's culture. Some

flight and ground crew members shared that a culture within groups is obvious based on the interactions that take place. One participant shared:

> When you fly with the crew, you take care of them. We make sure that they are fed, and they are taken care off during the time they are on the airplane, so they're happy and pass it on to the customer.

Another participant described the honest and openness within their team:

> That place where we are really transparent with one another. I don't sense that politics in the office- we kind of air our dirty laundry amongst ourselves, so we don't …. feed into the external nonsense and that's kept us in a really happy place, in a good place.

> The working relationships formed within and between teams enable flight and ground crew members to provide and accept "feedback," developing "an appreciation" for each other "that goes a long way." One participant described first experiencing this feeling:

> I remember sitting in orientation, my orientation [leadership] was up there speaking and said, …. , no one crew member is any better than any other crew member, no matter what your job. If you're cleaning a lab on an airplane or if you're the CEO of the company we're all treated equal and we all go by our first name okay, and we're all accessible. And that stuck with me.

Flight and ground crew member participants believed that the people each work with are what make up the airline's organization culture. Participants felt that "because of the way you treat them and you recognize them and you take good care of that," people are happy

to work with and for each other, creating a positive environment; in their mind their specific environment defines organization culture.

Respect from leadership. Flight and ground crew members shared that receiving respect from leadership was also a demonstration of organizational culture. One participant described this respect as "an upside down pyramid" and of which involves at least listening to what employees have to say. Another participant described one employee "who not only has earned the respect of his colleagues, …. but the people who worked for him because they know he started throwing bags on the ramp." Participants generally felt that although participants felt executive leadership, and respect received, was "not perfect, it's also what keeps you here."

Customer satisfaction. To flight and ground crew members, organization culture also meant a satisfied customer. To these frontline staff, the customers are most important, and from who[m] they do not "feel underappreciated by." One participant described organization culture as:

> What you leave for other people to enjoy. Culture can be anything from just saying hello or coming to orientation. …. Culture is something that you leave for other people. It's not just for you. You leave yourself there for somebody else at hand.

The positive feeling this group of employees gains from satisfied customers greatly contributes to their organization culture.

Importance of Organization Culture

In discussing the importance of organization culture, ground and flight crew members shared one common perspective: commitment to the company. Participants shared that culture of the organization, and the brand itself, create employees' commitment to the airline.

Commitment to the company. Flight and ground crew member participants described how their organization culture leads to employee commitment. Participants explained they are "proud to be part of the brand" and will certainly "go the extra mile." Many of the focus group participants shared they helped to build the brand of the airline, and are "proud to come into work and go a little more beyond" their role and responsibilities to "expand the brand to other customers." The pride of participants, and therefore their commitment to the airline, is an example of the importance of organization culture. Two participants described the "strong culture," one participant explaining,

> When you create a culture that is extremely strong, you create that sense of ownership on the employee side or crew member. That sense of I got to make sure I do my job right because I don't want this company to go under or I want to make sure that the external customers sees it exactly like we do.

Another participant shared that the "return to the company is low employee turnover;" it is believed that employees are committed to the organization for an extended period of time. There is a general sense of pride from flight and ground crew members as they described their commitment to the company as an example of organization culture.

Necessary Recognitions toward Organization's Success

During focus group interviews, flight and ground crew members shared several different perspectives in what they believe were necessary and appropriate recognitions that would contribute toward the airline organization's success. Themes that emerged include tangible recognition and intangible recognition. Two subthemes emerged under the theme of intangible recognition: opportunities. Participants explained a recognition platform, "Lift", the airline uses to recognize employees' for their achievements, and of which monetary value could be associated with the recognition and can be seen throughout the entire organization. Although a form of recognition, tangible and intangible, most participants preferred recognition in other ways. One participant shared it was not "necessary to have somebody who doesn't even know me in New York see my name on some Lift reward."

Intangible recognition. Flight and ground crew members shared that intangible rewards or recognition provided them with the greatest satisfaction, contributing to their efforts in making the airline a success. To participating employees, intangible recognitions came in the form of affirmations and additional opportunities.

Affirmations. Participants explained that recognition from their peers, direct report, or leadership "goes a long way;" a personal "thank you goes a long way" for these employees. Flight and ground crew members appreciated the simple gestures of verbal positive feedback, even a thank you sent via email or handwritten. One participant shared that to them, "the times that [recognition is] most impactful to me is if someone repeat[s] something what was said about me." Within departments as well as outside of one's

team, participants gained satisfaction from hearing others recognize their achievements or "a job well done." One participant explained,

> For me the most meaning, is if someone outside my department said something to me. Even while passing, something like 'hey! You did a really great job on that' like you noticed that. To me that means a lot.

Another participant agreed, sharing a particular experience, stating "people outside of who you work with everyday know that you're doing a good job and recognize that was rewarding." The positive feedback and appreciation provided by others provided flight and ground crew members with the satisfaction they needed to continue their efforts in making the organization a success.

Opportunities. For some flight and ground crew members, the additional responsibilities or assignment of a challenging project was recognition that drove their success. A few participants explained how this form of recognition really meant something to them; that their leader saw their skills. One participant shared, "I think being counted on for another project, is equivalent to words of affirmation because it basically says you did well in this here." Another participant felt similarly, describing "if I'm given a little more than what I have before then for me it's like, okay, then I'm being counted on for something in addition to what I already had." Such opportunities were rewarding experiences, not negative challenges, for these flight and ground crew members, and of which contributed to their efforts in making the airline a success.

Tangible rewards. Some participants shared that tangible rewards are necessary for recognizing employees and therefore will contribute to the organization's success.

The majority of the participants identified money as the ideal tangible reward. However, of those flight and ground crew members who would like tangible recognitions, most preferred that the reward be "personalized" and "attached to" the specific job performed to receive recognition. One participant explained the reward should be "something of value, even if it's a t-shirt, something to attach to, hey great job as well I got this for you." One participant described presenting an employee with a personalized reward; "to this day they're showing off that keychain," demonstrating their excitement to the tangible item attached to the recognition of a job well done. Although, most flight and ground crew members find other intangible ways of recognition to be more rewarding, a few participating employees gain satisfaction for their achievements through monetary or physical, personalized items.

Improving the Organization's Culture

Flight and ground crews shared a common perspective on how to improve the organization's culture. All participants felt that improved leadership actions would improve the airline's culture.

Improved leadership actions. Although flight and ground crews described organization culture as camaraderie with others, customer satisfaction, and respect from leadership, all perceived their leadership to lack in their actions. One participant shared that leadership "still portrays this as a special culture it's not modeled." Participants felt that they "hear verbiage" from leadership, but the organization isn't "living it." A specific example was provided by a participant, sharing that although leadership encourages feedback from employees, "they don't listen, they don't take our advice." Flight and

ground crew member participants shared the general belief that leadership should act upon their words, rather than just say the words.

Findings Related to the Existing Literature

The purpose of the current study was to explore strategies employed by leaders of a U.S. airline to improve employee performance and better understand affective commitment among employees within the organization. Findings from the study show that human resource management is critical to the success of the organization. Researchers posited that the implementation of HRM practices to engage employees, results in job satisfaction and leads to organization success (Shaw et al., 2013). Based on the findings, leadership practices, and employee perspectives of leader actions influences the culture of the organization.

Leaders recognized that employees are critical to the success of the organization. Employee performance effects the organization's performance and therefore, learning what motivates each employee, how to engage them in their role or provide additional opportunities to do so, and recognizing their achievements as well as needs to perform their job better, are actions leaders constantly need to be aware of and demonstrate. As shared by both leaders and frontline staff, HRM practices can enhance the level of commitment among the employees to produce high-quality services that fulfill the needs of the employees and allow the organization to achieve its goals (Kaufman, 2015; Keegan et al., 2012). The findings presented in Section 3 provide insight into strategies that fall within the Harvard HRM model that company executives can use toward developing

policies and processes that are conducive to the growth of affective employee commitment.

Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework

Guided by the HRM humanistic approach, also known as the Harvard model of HRM (Beer et al., 2015), I explored the strategies employed by U.S. airline leaders to improve employee performance and perceive affective commitment within their organization. The HRM humanistic model positions human resources as valuable assets for a competitive workplace advantage, and focuses on the motivation and communication of its employees (Delery & Gupta, 2016; Kaufman, 2015). Based on interview responses from both individual leaders and a focus group of flight and ground crew members, this U.S. airline organization demonstrates such a model. Leaders explained the need for continued communication with employees, whether individually or within a team setting, in order to build and maintain a culture of performance. Additionally, communication was critical for all employees, leaders as well as frontline staff, in performing their role; employee interaction, either leader-employee or employee-customer, was a critical element of the organization as a whole. Leaders' main focus is to teach, coach, motivate, and engage their employees. Flight and ground crew members focus is on customer interaction and working with their team in order to provide high quality service to customers. Flight and ground crew members emphasized customer interaction as a specific incentive of their position, and therefore a motivator to perform as expected or better. As described by the HRM model, participating employees of this airline organization emphasize employee participation as vital to the realization of

organizational objectives and increases performance and efficiency, which is supported by similar research in this field (Piening et al., 2014; Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014).

Two key Harvard model factors include valuing the employee stakeholder and the win-win objective on employee satisfaction (Jiang et al., 2012; Mishel, 2012; Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014). Managers and supervisors recognized that employees needed to feel valued in their role and as a part of the company, and described efforts of doing so. Leaders described that providing such affirmations or encouragement to employees was sometimes needed more so with low performing employees, however recognizing each employee's role and performance was necessary toward building and maintaining a desired culture of performance. Flight and ground crew members agreed with this feeling of value, expressing their desire for more verbal recognition from leadership. Individual interaction, whether recognition or coaching, between and within leadership and frontline staff, was referenced by both groups of participating employees as necessary for desired performance to occur. Flight and ground crew members described camaraderie with fellow employees and respect from leadership as elements of the organization they believed contributed to their individual success, in turn the success of the airline. Managers and supervisors shared their experiences of providing consistent feedback, needed coaching, and additional opportunities, to employees in order to create and maintain a "win-win" feeling within employees, and therefore their team and the organization. Study findings show that valuing the employee stakeholder and encouraging them is a win-win objective on employee satisfaction (Jiang et al., 2012; Mishel, 2012; Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014). From interviews with participating managers,

supervisors and flight and ground crew members, I explored and presented an example of Harvard model's role in affective commitment among its employees (Delery & Gupta, 2016; Kaufman, 2015).

Findings Related to the Existing Literature on Effective Business Practice

Existing literature on effective business practices shows that leaders are highly influential in employee performance and the performance culture of the organization (Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014; Zhang et al., 2015). Moreover, leaders also cultivate an atmosphere where employees are committed to the company (Carmeli et al., 2012). Findings from this study support leader influence on employees and their performance. Flight and ground crew members shared that leader actions do impact their performance, acknowledging specifically that verbal recognition, such as affirmations, and being given more opportunities, can motivate employees to improve their performance. However, contrary to existing literature, frontline staff in this study explained that much of their commitment to their job, and therefore the organization, is based on the customers they serve and fellow employees they work with. Flight and ground crew members expressed great pride in their roles, largely due to customer interaction and the camaraderie that exists within their teams. Although frontline staff point to areas other than leadership as their motivation and commitment to their job, leadership greatly influences the organization's culture. However, flight and ground crew members also shared that by improving leader actions, employee performance and affective commitment can further improve.

The HRM humanistic approach facilitates organizational agility in response to

changing market conditions by actively endorsing and proactively engaging with all organizational stakeholders (Jorgensen & Becker, 2015; Porter & Latham, 2013). Both leader and frontline staff participants in the present study shared that interaction between leaders and employees was imperative to an organization's success. Although, no discussion on changes in market conditions occurred during interviews, participants did point to the competitive advantage their airline has over other airlines; the brand of the airline, or product, was a common theme among flight and ground crew members as setting the airline apart from others. Frontline staff and leaders both shared that keeping the airline ahead through improved or increased services, or figuring out "what the next big thing is" they can do, is a demonstration of engaged stakeholders at all levels. This finding supports the research of Jorgensen and Becker (2015) and Porter and Latham (2013), that leadership as well as ground crew members proactively engage themselves within their role and for the organization. Engaging all stakeholders requires change-management skills, which include the capability to make calculated decisions, develop employee relations, empower others to adapt, and perform beyond the job's expected norms (Jorgensen & Becker, 2015; Porter & Latham, 2013). Portler and Latham (2013) concluded organizational leaders can balance their policies to suit the interests of all parties by adapting to changing market conditions through the act of focusing on stakeholder interests.

Instituting the Harvard model requires managers to be proactive and create new initiatives to assist organizations and their employees to cope with change (Loi et al., 2012; Jorgensen & Becker, 2015; Porter & Latham, 2013). Leaders referenced consistent

goal-setting among employees; not necessarily to cope with change in the market but to cope with low performing employees or those that seek additional or new opportunities. This finding supports existing research (Jorgensen & Becker, 2015; Loi et al., 2012; Porter & Latham, 2013) on proactive actions required of leaders toward the organization's success. Both leaders and frontline staff explained that additional opportunities and interaction with leaders can enhance the performance and culture of the organization. Flight and ground crew members expressed their desire for affirmations and a feeling of value to the organization; such recognitions that at the time of the study were obvious among fellow employees but could be improved upon from leaders. Leaders acknowledge the timeliness of feedback, recognition, as well as change in responsibilities in order to provide that feeling of value and engagement within the organization. The two perspectives imply that leader actions within this particular airline may not be recognized by their employees as they intend.

Existing literature on HRM research has shifted to encompass the entire HRM system, with a focus on the individual employee's development and its influence on organizational performance (Ehrhardt et al., 2011; Jorgensen & Becker, 2015; Porter & Latham, 2013). Findings from this study further extend current research on that focus within the HRM system on individual employee's development and its influence on organizational performance. Leaders and frontline staff in the study both acknowledged coaching, or individual interaction, between leaders and employees as a means of developing employees' skills and commitment, in turn improving employee performance. Leaders specifically recognized that taking time to learn about their employees –

interests, what motivates and what de-motivates – as well as highlighting their strengths was deemed as influential to employee performance. Further developing employees, whether through coaching or providing additional opportunities, was noted by both groups of participants as desired—flight and ground crew members wanted that time with leaders—and of which can contribute to overall organizational performance.

Applications to Professional Practice

As a result of this research, several applications to professional practice are presented. Study findings from leadership and frontline staff uncover strategies they employ to improve overall affective commitment within the studied airline. Leadership described effective strategies toward improving employee performance and building a culture of performance; coaching and continued, consistent feedback was identified by leaders as effective approaches toward employees of all performance levels. Findings from leadership can apply to leaders of similar airline organizations as well as other companies where customer service is the overarching goal of the organization. Flight and ground crew members shared leadership approaches they believed to encourage and motivate their performance, specifically recognition and the customers themselves. From findings of frontline staff, leadership within the airline can enhance their actions and efforts to further foster success of employees, therefore leading to greater commitment and productivity throughout daily operations. Results of interviews from both groups of airline employees provide insight into how airline leaders can improve their procedures related to personnel management to further the affective commitment of employees. Although the airline industry serves as the setting for this study, contributions from

research findings may apply to other industries when HR and industry variables share similarities.

Implications for Social Change

Results of this study point to many implications for social change. From leader and frontline staff interviews, social change can occur as managers of U.S. airlines now have a better understanding of affective commitment among employees. Leaders within the airline industry may be more willing to channel scarce financial resources into HRM practices, such as improved verbal recognition of employees, to further their competitive advantage as a means to improve the industry financial performance. Enhanced employee involvement and affective commitment, which would result in satisfied employees, may improve the airline customers' experiences. Application of study findings may lead to employees and managers who increasingly operate in a team-built framework resulting in less stress and faster solutions, which aligns with the findings of other research in this field (Jiang et al., 2012; Mishel, 2012; Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014).

The benefits may also translate into decreased stress and pressure, which may lead to improved family support. Sustaining the emotional wellbeing of employees and their families may lead to improved productivity and overall job satisfaction for the employee (Chintrakarn & Chen, 2011; Khan & Khan, 2011). Subsequently, ongoing proactive nurturing of affective commitment in the workplace boosts an organization's competitive advantage (Ciliberto & Schenone, 2012). Findings and recommendations from this study may serve as a basis for social change within similar airlines and extend

beyond the airline industry to other organizations that focus on customer service as an overarching organizational goal.

Recommendations for Action

From the findings, I gained insight into the motivation of flight and ground crew members toward their performance and commitment to the airline. Leaders can consider frontline feedback, such as desired verbal recognition and improved leadership actions, to enhance leadership approaches toward improving employee performance. Additionally, motivation of frontline staff to perform is partially influenced by the individual's desire to make the customers' experience of using the airline's services a positive one. Leaders can benefit from knowledge presented here to continue and improve their efforts in providing a motivating environment for their employees and in turn maintain a culture of performance within the airline organization.

Insight on strategies used by leaders to encourage and motivate employees to improve performance and commitment emerged, Flight and ground crew members can consider results from leader interviews to understand leader actions and efforts demonstrated within the organization. Leaders emphasized the importance of coaching and individual interaction with employees in order to engage them not only in their role but also as a valuable member of the organization. Frontline staff can be encouraged that leaders recognize their needs are important in order for not only the organization to be successful, but also for employees to succeed.

Results from this study are important for airline leaders and leaders of similar organizations that emphasize customer service. Customer satisfaction was not only an

overarching goal of this specific airline, but also of frontline employees. Other airlines that focus heavily on that same outcome can employ strategies shared and provide necessary recognitions to continue and improve employee efforts toward maintaining quality customer service. Additionally, airline training programs and flight schools can use study findings to emphasize the use of human resource strategies toward job performance and commitment. Airline leadership trainings, workshops, and conferences can also benefit from study findings in improving leadership actions toward their employees. Additionally, study findings can be shared with the airline industry as a whole, through yearly association meetings or conferences to encourage human resource strategies as an effective means of improving the culture and performance of airline organizations.

Recommendations for Further Research

Additional research on strategies employed by organization leaders to improve employee performance and better understand affective commitment among employees can extend study findings and contribute to existing research on human resource management. A possible weakness of the study is that the participants may not have felt comfortable enough to fully disclose their thoughts and feelings. Conducting the study in a more comfortable setting, or developing a rapport with participants prior to and during interviews may engage participants to disclose more of their thoughts and feelings about leadership and/or the culture of the airline organization. Similarly, a larger sample of the same populations within the organization may add to the present study findings.

Additionally, the utilization of a narrowly defined group limits study findings; conducting a similar study that includes a larger, diverse group creates an opportunity for further, comparative analysis as the airline industry or related industries change and evolve (Aguinis & Edwards, 2014). Although flight and ground crew members may be the most "frontline" staff for the organization, and managers and supervisors may be the most appropriate leaders to include in the present study, additional employees in other leadership, mid-level, or frontline roles could provide further insight into understanding affective commitment and human resource management that occurs within the specific airline organization. Future research utilizing a larger, more diverse group can expand the current research from the baseline data set to larger, more general data sets, allowing for greater transferability of study findings.

Lastly, conducting further research may help to provide data related to aspects of long term sustainability. Participants described efforts taken and preferred to enhance performance and commitment of employees; such results provide initial insight toward long-term sustainability of employees as well as the organization. Additional research on factors that contribute to long-term employee commitment can add to the present study findings on affective commitment within airline and similar organizations.

Reflections

I was pleasantly surprised how open and candid the participants were to share their personal experiences. The focus group interview was challenging in terms of scheduling and actual conducting the interviews due to the group size. Although the data were insightful, I do believe a one-on-one interview format would have provided richer

data. Therefore, it is my recommendation to encourage future researchers to adapt a one-on-one interview methodology for Manager/Supervisors as well as Front-line employees to more effectively contrast perceptions and difference between these two groups.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the strategies that U.S. airline leaders use to improve employee performance. From focus group interviews of flight and ground crew members and individual interviews with managers and supervisors, several strategies were shared that could be used toward the continued success of the organization. Flight and ground crew members did not share so much the strategies but the elements of the organization that make their organization successful. Participating flight and ground crew members shared that the product itself, that is, the airline, sets their airline apart from others. These frontline staff perceived their customer service, interaction with customers, and the services the airline offers contribute to the airline's success. Customer satisfaction was the overarching goal of the organization and one that, to flight and ground crew members, defines the culture of the airline organization and contributes to their commitment to the organization.

In further discussing organization culture, participating frontline staff pointed to camaraderie with other employees and respect from leadership as additional defining elements of organization culture. Many expressed that the relationships developed among colleagues and the ability to be themselves created a working environment all enjoyed being a part of. Individuality was emphasized not only when discussing their peers, but also in describing leadership; leaders created an environment where frontline staff could

take ownership of their role in everyday decision-making, motivating employees and enhancing their commitment to the airline. Additionally, recognition from leadership, mostly through affirmations and additional opportunities, further motivated employee performance, in turn improving the organization's success. Flight and ground crew members did express, however, that improved leadership actions could improve the culture of the organization. Leader actions, or rather following words with actions, was pointed to as desired by a few of the participating frontline staff. Overall, the flexibility and freedom provided by leadership, camaraderie with fellow employees, and interaction with customers created an organization culture flight and ground crew members were committed to and took pride in being a part of.

Leadership strategies toward employee performance and the organization culture were expanded on by airline managers and supervisors. These leaders described the use of individual and team coaching, providing clear understandings of job roles and responsibilities, and rewards and recognition, effectively improved employee performance. Managers and supervisors expressed that employees needed that individual interaction with leaders and feel engaged in their role to be motivated and further improve their performance. Leaders believed that individually coaching employees and providing feedback consistently and in a timely fashion led to improved employee performance and therefore the performance of the organization.

In discussing the culture of the organization, leaders explained that creating a motivating environment was critical. Many employees were described as being internally motivated, with few identified as low performers; for those that were, leaders shared that

providing examples, clear job expectations, and consistent goal-setting, helped improve their performance. Managers and supervisors believed that by motivating and engaging employees to their role and the organization as a whole, they were creating an environment in which employees would want to perform well and demonstrate affective commitment to the organization.

Leaders shared their experiences of affective commitment among their employees. Many shared that employees want to have a positive impact on others and therefore are committed to doing so. This level of commitment was described as mostly coming from within individuals, either through one's upbringing or just a personal work ethic of commitment. However, a few leaders have witnessed that affective commitment can also be learned by employees. Through nurturing, leaders can engage employees to their role, developing affective commitment that motivates them to improve their performance and want to be successful, not only for themselves but for the organization. For leaders to provide that nurture to employees, they recognize much of that involves knowing each individual on one's team. Managers and supervisor described experiences of making effort to learn employees' interests, their motivations, even just a say *hello* or *thank you*, that contribute to their affective commitment to the organization. Overall, leaders recognize that simple and consistent leader-employee interaction influences employee performance and affective commitment.

Results of this study point to some distinct, yet guiding principles towards improving employee performance and developing affective commitment within a U.S. airline organization. Leaders and frontline staff both emphasize individual interaction is

needed towards success—success of the individual in their role and the success of the

organization. Flight and ground crew members specifically acknowledge individual

interaction, mostly through recognition, from leaders as a necessary means of both

improving their performance and contributing further towards a culture of performance.

Managers and supervisors also pointed to individual interaction, in terms of individual

coaching, consistent goal-setting, and engagement, towards improving employee

performance as well as enhancing affective commitment among employees. Leaders also

agreed with frontline staff that recognition is important for employees to continue

performing as expected; verbal affirmations and additional opportunities were both

referenced by both participant groups as motivators for employees, not only for

performing in their role but in improving employees' level of commitment to the

organization Overall, both groups of employees at this particular airline present the same

conclusions about organization culture and commitment—individuals have to feel they

are contributing to the organization and feel valued in doing so. For that to occur, leaders

need to make efforts to engage employees in continuous dialogue, be completely

transparent, and employees need to be open to feedback and share their motivations and

goals.

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Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation from Community Research Partner

████████████████

Vice President, Associate General Counsel

████████████████

Dear Mr. Popp,

It is ██████ understanding that you are and have been engaged in a course of study at Walden University in Florida in which you are studying and researching among other things , effective employee commitment in human resources management in your pursuit of a Business Administration degree. As part of a large project and academic exercise required for this course of study, you desire to conduct interviews of certain ██████ crewmembers at both our ████ ██████████████████████████████████████ support centers durign the time period of March to June 2016.

We understand that in connection with this course of study, you will also be undertaking a Walden University student researcher role that is separate and distinct from your Manager of Flight Training Services position within the ██████ organization. In thisstudent researcher role, you desire to arequest and conduct interviews with certain ██████ crewmembers and ██████ Managers for the purpose of conducting a qualitative case study with the understanding that the results will contribute to the requirements for obtaining your degree. as a. It is ██████ understanding that you will first obtain the full consent of the individual crewmembers involved as well as that of their supervisors prior to conducting these interviews. Participation by any crewmembers and Managers will be completely voluntary, at their own discretion, and unpaid. In obtaining crewmembers' consent, you will disclose that the interviews are not employment related nor in any way endorsed by ██████ The identity of any and all crewmembers or Managers interviewed will be kept strictly confidential and not revealed to any other individuals in or outside of ██████. The material presented in the study will de-identify ██████ and all individuals from ██████ whose perspective or observations are included in the study and presenting materials. You also agree not to include or share any confidential, commercially sensitive or proprietary ██████ information in your study and any sharing or publication of this study beyond the presentation to the appropriate teaching/instruction staff of Walden University will require explicit approval from the ██████ Legal and People Departments. You have also agreed not to utilize the results of this study and any information gained from the study in any manner other that the approved class project necessary for you to obtain your degree.

We understand that you will facilitate an open environment that allows participants the opportunity to reach you for concerns or questions regarding the study and cooperate or decline anonymously as they choose in order to minimize conflicts of interest and other potential ethical problems██████ reserves the right to withdraw from the study and request that you terminate the study at any time.

All the data collected in conjunction with this study will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff.

Sincerely,

███████████

Vice President, Associate General Counsel

████████████████████
██████████████

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verifies any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).

Appendix B: Informed Consent Forms

Individual Interviews

You are invited to take part in a research study on the strategies used by U.S. airline companies to improve employee performance. The researcher is inviting managers of an airline operation facility in Florida to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Christian Popp, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may also know the researcher as a Manager of Flight Training Services, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore the strategies used by U.S. airline companies to improve employee performance. To achieve this purpose, I will be recruiting employees who meet the following criteria:

- Currently employed as a manager/leader
- Must have been employed in the organization for at least a year

Procedures:

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

- Participate in an individual interview, which will be audio-recorded. This interview will last for a maximum of 30 minutes.

- Review the transcript of your interview, which will require 30 minutes of your time

Here are some sample questions:

1. What methods have been most effective in motivating your employees?
2. What methods have been most effective in improving employee performance?
3. What strategies do you use to improve employee performance?
4. What strategies do you use to build performance culture?
5. What are your experiences regarding affective commitment?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at ▮▮▮▮▮▮ will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. Deciding to stop participating in the study will not affect your standing in the company or your relationships with your superiors.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress at being asked to talk about your job. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

There are no direct benefits to you, but the information you share can help airline companies improve employee performance and productivity.

Payment:

You will not receive anything for participating in this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. However, if during the course of this study, information regarding illegal activity or any activity or behavior that goes against company policies is revealed, I am obliged by the organization's code of conduct to report this to the proper authorities.

Also, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by using passwords on all electronic files. All paper files will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the data. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via ▉▉▉▉▉▉ or through ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call ▉▉▉▉▉▉. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is ▉▉▉▉▉. Walden University's approval number for this study is **03-09-16-0189059** and it expires on **March 8, 2017.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to the email with the words "I consent", I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Focus Groups

You are invited to take part in a research study on the strategies used by U.S. airline companies to improve employee performance. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Christian Popp, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may also know the researcher as a ████████████████████████████ but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore the strategies used by U.S. airline companies to improve employee performance. To achieve this purpose, I will be recruiting employees who meet the following criteria:

- Currently employed as a ground crew member or a flight crew member
- Must have been employed in the organization for at least a year

Procedures:

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

- Participate in a focus group discussion, which will be audio-recorded. This focus group discussion will last for a maximum of 90 minutes.

- Review the transcript of your interview, which will require 15 minutes of your time

- Maintain the confidentiality of the focus group, including the identity of your co-participants and the statements made during the focus group discussion

Here are some sample questions:

1. What do you think sets this airline apart from its competitors?
2. Which of your day-to-day activities and actions do you feel contribute to the success of the airline? How?
3. What are the decisions that affect your interaction with customers? How did this affect your interaction with customers?
4. What are the decisions that affect your quality of life? How did this affect your quality of life?
5. What recognitions do you think are necessary to achieve the organization's success?
6. What does organization culture mean to you?
7. Why is organization culture important?
8. If given the opportunity, what would you do to improve on the organization's culture?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at ▮▮▮▮▮ will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. Deciding to stop participating in the study will not affect your standing in the company or your relationships with your superiors.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress at being asked to talk about your job. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

There are no direct benefits to you, but the information you share can help airline companies improve employee performance and productivity.

Payment:

You will not receive anything for participating in this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. However, if during the course of this study, information regarding illegal activity or any activity or behavior that goes against company policies is revealed, I am obliged by the organization's code of conduct to report this to the proper authorities.

Also, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by using passwords on all electronic files. All paper files will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the data. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or through ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Walden University's approval number for this study is **03-09-16-0189059** and it expires on **March 8, 2017.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to the email with the words "I consent", I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Appendix C: Individual Invitation Email

Good day!

As part of the requirements for my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting a research study to explore the strategies used by U.S. airline companies to improve employee performance. As such, I am inviting managers/leaders to participate in individual interviews that will be audio recorded. More details on the study and the nature of the participation required are provided on the letter of informed consent attached to this letter of invitation.

The Title of the study is "Labor Relations at a Major Airline: Exploring Affective Commitment"

Affective commitment describes the emotional investment of an individual to an organization and correlates with employee performance and work effort (Culpepper, 2011), and as such, has gained the interest of researchers and practitioners in harnessing its potential for organizational success (Ciliberto & Schenone, 2012). Affective commitment correlates with several positive outcomes related to organizational success such as greater job satisfaction, increased job involvement, and better occupational commitment as well as lower levels of employee absenteeism and decreased turnover rates (Boon & Kalshoven, 2014; Kuvaas, Dysvik, & Buch, 2014; Stazyk, Pandey, & Wright, 2011).
The purpose of this proposed qualitative case study is to explore the strategies that U.S. airline leaders use to improve employee performance. Although some organizations recognize that improves or enhances to employees' affective commitment increases employee performance, the strategic approach underlying these patterns are still unclear (Bal, Kooij, & Jong, 2013; Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, Baillien, Vanbelle, Vanhercke, & De Witte, 2014

In order to find patterns underlying the strategy to improve affective commitments I would like to interview ▮▮▮▮ 10 ▮▮▮▮▮ Managers (one-on-one Interviews) and 10 Frontline Crewmembers in a Focus Group setting.

I would like to stress that participation in the study is strictly voluntary and I would greatly appreciate your time. I hope you consider participating in the study. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Christian J.G. Popp
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix D: Focus Group Invitation Email

Good day!

As part of the requirements for my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting a research study to explore the strategies used by U.S. airline companies to improve employee performance. As such, I am inviting ground crew members and flight crew members to participate in a focus group discussion that will be audio recorded. More details on the study and the nature of the participation required are provided on the letter of informed consent attached to this letter of invitation.

The Title of the study is "Labor Relations at a Major Airline: Exploring Affective Commitment"

Affective commitment describes the emotional investment of an individual to an organization and correlates with employee performance and work effort (Culpepper, 2011), and as such, has gained the interest of researchers and practitioners in harnessing its potential for organizational success (Ciliberto & Schenone, 2012). Affective commitment correlates with several positive outcomes related to organizational success such as greater job satisfaction, increased job involvement, and better occupational commitment as well as lower levels of employee absenteeism and decreased turnover rates (Boon & Kalshoven, 2014; Kuvaas, Dysvik, & Buch, 2014; Stazyk, Pandey, & Wright, 2011).
The purpose of this proposed qualitative case study is to explore the strategies that U.S. airline leaders use to improve employee performance. Although some organizations recognize that improves or enhances to employees' affective commitment increases employee performance, the strategic approach underlying these patterns are still unclear (Bal, Kooij, & Jong, 2013; Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, Baillien, Vanbelle, Vanhercke, & De Witte, 2014).

In order to find patterns underlying the strategy to improve affective commitments I would like to interview up to 10 Frontline Crewmembers in small Focus Group settings.

Here are some sample questions I will ask Crewmembers who participated in the Focus Group.
1. What do you think sets this airline apart from its competitors?
2. Which of your day-to-day activities and actions do you feel contribute to the success of the airline? How?
3. What are the decisions that affect your interaction with customers? How did this affect your interaction with customers?
4. What are the decisions that affect your quality of life? How did this affect your quality of life?
5. What recognitions do you think are necessary to achieve the organization's success?

6. What does organization culture mean to you?
7. Why is organization culture important?
8. If given the opportunity, what would you do to improve on the organization's culture?

I would like to stress that participation in the study is strictly voluntary and I would greatly appreciate your time. I hope you consider participating in the study. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Christian J.G. Popp
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix E: Example of a Transcribed Interview

File Name   : MS1
Length   : 14.43

Researcher: What method have you used in the past, or currently use to motivate your employees?

MS1: Well, I think, economically, the best way is positive reinforcement by verbal affirmations. For example telling your employees, *Great work*, or sending them emails letting them know that you acknowledge their good work/performance. So that's one way. Here at such company that we're working for. We have a program called Lift which allows you to give recognition to your direct reports or other crewmembers you have the opportunity to work with. Also, the Lift program allows others to see the recognition rewards you have issued and can even add comments of their own, which I find very motivating for the recipient of the reward. And you can also tie monetary rewards to it.

Researcher: Okay, so if you would summarize it, what do you use currently to motivate people to perform? You mentioned the lift program, which is something…

MS1: …Yes, but mostly, I take it from how I like to be rewarded and it's mostly verbal.

Researcher: … So this is how you want to deal with someone who performs well to affirm them and build them up. What about performance improvement, for those that are not quite meeting your standard. What are you going to do to improve or bring people up to a standard? Do you have any kind of methods that you use?

MS1: Yes, and what I've seen that works effectively is a lot of coaching and meetings. Sometimes you have to engage people, and you have to be very present and help them progress in their role. Because some people need that positive reinforcement every day, maybe on a weekly basis, you have to meet with them, see where they are with their projects, their tasks, see where you can help them. You really have to open up that, you know, that communication with them to see what can help them, because they can be underperforming but you don't know why. Is it something at home? Is it maybe the environment? Why they not connecting with their team members? So you really do have to open up that communication.

Researcher: Two words stuck out, coaching and present. Would you please elaborate?

MS1: So a few years back, I had a team of two at that time, and one of them was an overachiever and the other one was an underperformer. And they were drastically different, these two employees. And even the way they approached work was very different. So one was process-oriented, as long as I told her exactly what I wanted, when I wanted it and how I wanted it, she went on her own and got everything done. The other

one, even though I did the same, I told him what I needed, when I needed it, how to do it, he needed more of a holding hand approach. So I would have to check in with him on a daily basis. Sometimes even more times within the day. I had to do it in the morning, I'd check in with him, then after lunch to see where he was, then I would help him get organized for the following day. So those were two examples of completely different people. One, I just had to meet with her once, and she'd run with the project. The other one, I had to be present, I had to be there and let him know, "I'm sitting here. If you need something, ask. You know, here to support you." But then I also had to constantly be checking in with him.

Researcher: So would you say that as a leader, you have a standard of performance that you expect people to live up to, but then you were the one that needs to be adaptive to the you crewmember…

MS1: Absolutely, You cannot live in a box as a crew leader. You have to adapt to your team. You know, sometimes you have the ability to pick your own team and you pick people that are very cohesive with the way you work, but sometimes you are given a team that doesn't really match up to your way of working or your expectations, so you have to adapt and you have to figure out what's going to work and what's going to motivate your team members.

Researcher: In your own words or in your opinion, how would you describe performance? What is it?

MS1: So it's difficult to quantify because it depends on what the job is, you know. Some jobs require certain data to be provided. Let's say, like if it was a position that was in records, you would figure out that the performance is based on how they're doing all of these items that have to be done in a system. So you could easily gage, have they finished all of the record items? Have they done all of the approvals? There's a way to do it, but when you're talking about somebody that maybe works, in the reception, that's interacting with people, now its performance based on engagement with other crew members. You have to ask yourself, are they satisfying the needs of the customer? So it's really hard because this type of job requires different ways of evaluating that performance. For me, you look at the job, you figure out what the responsibilities are for the job and if the person is able to meet all of those responsibilities, then they are meeting my expectations as their crew leader… basically coming in line with the performance that I want them to have. If they go above that, that I hear that they're taking the time to go above all of those responsibilities that are required of them, then they're going to be somebody that exceeds in that performance.

Researcher: Have you ever heard the term 'performance culture?' There is a lot of talk about culture in general but, what strategy have you used to build a performance culture within your team?

MS1: And it's interesting because here at ▮▮▮▮, we have our values which drive our culture. Everything should be tied to our values. So, in that sense, I think the company does a great job of directing us to have a performance-based culture. I want to make sure that everything I do falls in line of safety, integrity, fun, passion, and caring. Those are my drivers for how I behave here and how I produce here at ▮▮▮▮ But when you have a team and you're talking about performance culture, I think back to my biggest team which was eight crewmembers, I always wanted to make sure that everybody felt like a complete team, and that the performance of one person was not a sole factor, --how do I say it--I didn't want to define my team as having top performers and having low performers. I wanted them to all see it like being on a boat, we're all rowing and we have to row in the same direction or we're not going to be successful. So I really challenged my team to learn each other's job so everybody was cross-trained, and then we would have meetings where we would talk about what were the difficulties that we were having, and then I would ask others how could they help this other person, challenge themselves and get over those difficulties so everybody could see that nobody was perfect, everybody had a lot of work, everybody had things that they could improve on. But they, themselves, would coach each other, and that really did work.

Researcher: That worked well.

MS1: Yeah, it did.

Researcher: Okay, so you're looking for cohesiveness to create that culture and that is by understanding each other's strength and weaknesses and assisting in the form of team spirit, right?

MS1: Team spirit. Now, if you don't have a big team and it's just you and one direct report, you want to establish that as well. You don't want it to be just, you're the crew leader and you don't listen to the person that works for you. They have to see you as a team player, someone that is there to support them in their role, in their job.

Researcher: Besides the formal concept of forming a team and team spirit, such as meetings, and individual conversations, do you find there are other venues that are helpful to go and create team spirit? That do you use as a strategy to build cohesiveness.

MS1: Well, you know, I mean, if you're talking about, maybe, like, group outings? Is that what you're thinking?

Researcher: Yeah, maybe something like that.
MS1: Yeah, that actually works well, but what I noticed--and I actually read an article that a coworker shared with me the other day, which was very interesting. So it talks about how some people--they work well within groups, and some people don't, and it's the same thing when you have people coming together at work where… I'll give you an example: our JBU leadership meeting. That is mandatory, but not everybody likes that

type of setting. So when I had a big team, I mandated certain meetings, the ones that I would have them talk about what they're doing, what projects, how can they help each other. But I didn't want to force that outside of work, because that's their personal time. So one of the girls came up with a weekly potluck, and so they would all bring food on Wednesdays and they would take turns and bring food in for the rest of the team. They came up with that, we would carve out that time, and we would do that and that was all -- no work was talked about during that lunch, during the potluck. They came up with that concept on their own. I never told them, "Hey, let's go out to a basketball game," or something, 'cause that's their personal time. I didn't want to drive work into their personal lives.

Researcher: Now, that sounds good. Now, one of the last questions I'll ask you is, like, have you ever heard about affective commitment?' And if not, then let me quickly explain...

MS1: …I haven't so please explain it. I know you did before we started the work…

Researcher: …Yeah, affective commitment is the idea of anybody. The work we do, we're having affection for it, we're identifying ourselves with what we currently do, and so the idea is, what experience do you have regarding affective commitment or promoting affective commitment amongst your team members?

MS1: Well, I think about our current team, and I think about a particular person that's on our team that isn't really performing to the highest level, at least if you are to compare them with the other team members. And I think they are committed to the company so they have an effective commitment--they're committed to ▮▮▮▮ they don't want to leave ▮▮▮▮ but they are not committed to the job. I find myself asking, "How can this person improve?" And it's just very simple. They don't fit the job requirement. So when we hired this person, we might have hired based on personality, but we didn't think of the whole picture which is, "Do they fit well into this job." And so I think, when you're talking about being committed to a job, if you're hiring people, you're going to get people that actually want to do the job. And when you're doing the hiring, you want to make sure that they understand fully what the job is, and if they really fit well with that job. What I see a lot of times here at ▮▮▮▮ is people just want to get their foot in the door because they want the travel privileges and they hear great things about ▮▮▮▮ So they go into positions that they really don't want to do or don't have the skill set for. And now they're stagnant, and their crew leader has this one crew member who they like, maybe personality-wise, but they're not a shining star. Or can't perform at the level they need to.
Researcher: So going back to the earlier question on performance improvement, would it be fair to say that, in your opinion--just reading back to the… correct me if I'm wrong. If you have someone that struggles performance-wise, also you identified the problem use coaching and being present; there is a possibility that some people will never reach that higher level of performance. Because they're not a right job fit… Doesn't make them a

bad person, it's just that the tasking does not fit their personality, skill set, whatever it may be.

MS1: Yes. We have a great example of that in our team. There was a previous scheduler that personality-wise fit the role perfectly. But he applied for another position, he got the position and he's doing phenomenal. I mean he's a supervisor in a different department and you can just tell that he's very satisfied with what he's doing. He wasn't unhappy in the other position but he wasn't performing a hundred percent or a hundred and ten percent. Now, he is.

Researcher: Alright. I think that answers most of those questions. Thank you so much for your time.

MS1: You are so welcome.

Researcher: Thank you.

[Audio Ends]

Appendix F: Participant Transcription Verification

Participant		Verification Comment
MS1	Supervisor	I sound like an idiot! But I do think the general feelings are included
MS2	Director	Yes, it looks fine
MS3	Manager	You did an effective job capturing our interview.
MS4	Manager	That was fun and interesting. Good job on the transcription looks good
MS5	Director	Geez, I rambled on. I have no changes to the transcript; I believe it captures the interview.
MS6	Director	Yes, I am good with it
MS7	Manager	I made some minor changes, but I do believe that it represented our conversation.
MS8	Manager	The transcript reflects my views of administration we discussed.
MS9	Manager	I enjoyed our time. Great reflection, you have done a nice job transcribing my thoughts.
MS10	Manager	I made some minor corrections because I did not state them correctly. Nice job.
MS11	Manager	I talked a lot, nice job in transcribing my random thoughts
MS12	Manager	Looks like what we talked about
MS13	Director	No comments from my end
MS14	Manager	You have captured my thoughts regarding your questions

Participant		Verification Comment
FG1	Ground	Thanks for making me a part of it. I am good
FG2	Ground	I hope this helps. Feel free to use it as you see fit
FG3	Flight	This was fun thanks
FG4	Ground	I am good with the Transcript
FG5	Ground	I made a small change so my answer is more meaningful
FG6	Ground	Nice job. No comments
FG7	Flight	Good to go as is
FG8	Flight	No comments. Thanks
FG9	Ground	Looks like what we discussed
FG10	Ground	Thanks no corrections needed