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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

THE EFFECTS OF COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES ON EMPLOYEE  
SATISFACTION LEVELS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Thomas Martin

June, 2021

Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

Successful organizations understand how employee satisfaction levels affect the bottom line. Establishing the best practices for managing employee satisfaction is paramount so human resource directors can share information. This literature review will help educate human resource practitioners and researchers to understand better the history, the existing research, and the benefits of properly managing employee satisfaction levels. When employees become dissatisfied, it can lead to a lack of trust, poor communication, and retention problems. Obtaining information on managing employee satisfaction levels can be difficult for aspiring human resource leaders. Through this phenomenological research study, human resource executives will share their knowledge and experience by answering 11 interview questions that seek to answer four research questions that revolve around defining, measuring, and tracking levels of employee satisfaction. Next, the discussions will move toward overcoming challenges of managing employee satisfaction, then migrate toward the challenges that are faced when trying to increase employee satisfaction. Finally, the questioning will end with a list of practices that human resource directors should avoid when managing satisfaction levels. These questions will be asked and answered through a semi-structured interview process where human resource executives will share their knowledge and experience with what has worked in the past. Maintaining acceptable employee satisfaction levels is essential to keeping organizations running smoothly. Human resource directors can increase employee satisfaction in many forms, and those suggestions will be reviewed and analyzed in this research study.

*Keywords:* employee satisfaction, collaboration, employee engagement, communication, employee survey, expectations, retention, participation, phenomenology, trust, transactional

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Background/Historical Context**

Companies need engaged, satisfied employees to bring their best for companies to thrive in the business world. When a company has high employee satisfaction levels, the commitment to the organization, managers, and peers increases so goals can be attained efficiently. Mayo (2000) contends that people form a critical component of the organization and human capital is the ultimate driver of future success. Every organization wants its employees to come to work because they want to, not because they need a paycheck. There are many techniques and strategies to create a satisfied and engaged workforce. This study will examine the best practices to manage employee satisfaction levels and achieve organizational goals through the workforce.

Allowing employee participation to make management decisions is a growing trend that helps develop a highly energetic, involved, and productive workforce (Sanaghan & Gabriel, 2011). Collaborative management and leadership refer to the participation of the workforce in the decision-making process. Developing a collaborative leadership style in an organization is a method that is used to create an involved culture to guide leaders. Moreover, participative management utilizes the democratic principles of inclusion. The democratic system of leadership necessitates managers to listen to their subordinates and consider opposing views while trying to gain support for one outcome. There are many styles of traditional management practices that offer a range of different approaches. The old methods of control, intimidation, and fear have become outdated in today's society. The participative management style is gaining importance in modern industries.

One of the most significant factors that adds to the accomplishment of a business is whether the staff can function and perform well utilizing collaboration (Katz et al., 2013). With

increasing competition, it has become essential to bring creativity to the workplace. Additional partnerships can help support healthy relationships within the workforce, and counterbalance increased competition. According to Katz et al. (2013), collaboration refers to a situation where two or more employees or groups simultaneously work toward achieving a common goal. Teamwork allows employees to be more effective at their jobs. Collaboration will enable employees to make more responsible choices and also raises motivation levels.

Another benefit of participative business management is that it promotes self-evaluation and permits employees to better consider, express, and understand their own proficiencies (Lee & Bozeman, 2016). Problem-solving approaches are applicable in the workplace when employees work toward the same goal. When team members are collaborating, they acquire new knowledge from one another. The organization acts as the framework that encourages a mindset through which growth can be accomplished by learning new knowledge from coworkers.

While considering the significance of engaging the workforce in decision-making, it is crucial to understand the mixture of processes that groups will apply over time (Katz et al., 2013). Once the team sets a strategic goal, they can begin to progress towards accomplishing the operational objectives. Project teams are created for a definite period to achieve a specific purpose. The main benefit of collaborative teamwork is that it allows businesses to achieve solutions that will not be possible for an individual employee to accomplish. Collaborative teams can deliver results by making better use of the available resources, and they take better decisions and devise useful ideas. Socially, teamwork can improve employees' work satisfaction levels.

Participative management is gaining recognition as a change model in the workplace. Decision-makers use the information pertaining to collaboration to enhance the work culture's performance by implementing knowledge-based management initiatives. Some other benefits of

participative management include greater creativity and better organizational culture.

Collaborative workforce participation strengthens morale at all levels in a business. The corporations that utilize the traditional top-down approach have been losing credibility for decades (Emihovich & Battaglia, 2000).

Implementing collaborative leadership practices is a joint venture to which managers and workers contribute by making decisions for their success (Rubin et al., 1999). When the effects of collaboration on the workforce are studied, organizational management theorists offer evidence that collaborative management practices can improve labor relations. The type of partnership provided by this practice can help businesses make better long-term decisions. If cooperative organizations are professionally designed, they can satisfy both the institutional needs and the individual employee needs with the establishment of long-lasting employee-organization relationships. As team members' collaborative skills increase, their capacity to grow beyond their comfort zone increases, and the business acumen rises as well.

Despite the vast existing literature on increasing employee satisfaction, not much is understood about how this practice is achieved (Rubin, 2009). Another gap in the current literature is the lack of widely accepted factors that can determine a collaborative organization's successful vision. Researchers have identified some components of a cooperative system that correlate to organizational improvement (Emihovich & Battaglia, 2000). Yet, there is an absence of a conceptual understanding of such group dynamics that can improve work culture and productivity. The development of a model to increase employee satisfaction levels will provide valuable knowledge that can help enforce organizational reforms and promote their application.

Business managers may assert that they want to improve their employees' satisfaction, but their activities or the measures they undertake seldom reflect their statements (Kim, 2011).



Company engagement involves developing the workforce and business culture in order to bring about a change in their environment. It is up to the business leaders to create programs that can invite and encourage workforce participation and develop a policy that reflects the desire to build a collaborative business model. Some businesses still use the tactic of sending out questionnaires to the workforce as their primary engagement practice. Many new innovative and digital platforms allow corporations to understand their engagement attempts more closely (Simon & Ferreira, 2018).

While considering business decision participation, it is significant to understand how a workforce relates to the work process or business change. Corporate leaders must acquire feedback from their employees and then follow through with the transition plan. The word “engagement” has become a catchphrase and is often used as an expression by business managers but is never put into action (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). Workers are typically enthralled to participate in engagement practices, as they want to become more involved and make a difference. Therefore, this study focuses on the best practices that can be deployed by company leaders to engage the workforce and increase satisfaction levels. These practices relate to the mechanical components as well as the social interactions of all the stakeholders (Hanekop & Wittke, 2013).

According to Linna et al. (2010), a workforce's production rate can be defined as the capacity at which a business or a system successfully uses its resources. They further noted that the top collaborative performers' performance levels in a competitive organizational setting tend to increase as well as decline. This oscillation results in a circular productivity style among the good, poor and competitive environments that do not use collaboration or offer any alternatives that promote growth. The top contributors also face such complications and tend not to advance

due to their bad business relationships. In a corporate setting, collaborative leadership styles can develop those employees who have growth potential. The value generated through collaboration can be enhanced with the use of social media platforms, both internally and externally (Ferreira et al., 2012).

Djellal et al. (2013) also noted that productivity increased the levels of collaboration. The decreased productivity caused by enhanced connections is acceptable since long-term relations increase through experience and growth. Hanaysha and Tahir (2016) reported that employees who do not feel united at work exhibit low job satisfaction levels through withdrawal and absenteeism. Moreover, these employees also display decreased employee production, high turnover rates, and reduced workforce morale (Markovits et al., 2010). Employees' work delays and sluggishness also lead to reduced productivity and, consequently, cause corporate losses.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Collaborative management can be defined as the process through which employees and their managers collectively and equally make decisions. This definition is valid since individuals primarily act on their perception of reality when ambiguity is associated with a change. A conceptual model can be used to specify the variables related to collaborative studies. One aspect of employee satisfaction is by utilizing employee input to make better decisions and increase employee buy-in. The model used by Rubin (2009) is one accepted style to increase employee satisfaction and is comprised of three main elements:

- The five stages that outline the development of collaborative organizations.
- The dependent variables that measure the success of collaborative management through employee satisfaction.

- Eleven independent variables were proposed as predictive of employee success measures (Rubin, 2009).

Collaborative leadership utilizes the independent and creative thinkers of an organization in order to take advantage of their untapped knowledge.

It is vital to encourage employee participation during the implementation of change initiatives. Their participation can help create a unified vision of the change rather than causing actions that deter change (Smith-Crowe et al., 2003). Effective employee satisfaction levels can be hard to achieve when leadership is unstable or absent. Many obstacles may hinder undertakings and collaborative efforts as leaders shift their focus from employee participation to survival (Ivery, 2010). Each organization has diverse and complex needs, and collaborative partnerships can build social relationships to implement change in the workplace.

Collaboration requires mutual respect and communication among the employees. For its success, frequent meetings and sharing of ideas are essential to ensure that communication does not break down. Team members need to perceive each other as collaborators, not as competitors. The most influential factors that impede the increase of collaboration are vague goals, lack of decision-making skills, and employment of inconsistent rules and processes. According to Wiese (2011), such ambiguities generate distrust and resistance. Each step of the decision-making process in an organization must be clear and concise. Maintaining fairness and transparency of rules and decisions will keep employees content and help achieve tangible goals.

According to Bodilly et al. (2011), lack of collaboration in the workforce harms organizations in two primary areas, information development, and growth. When a business does not monitor employee satisfaction levels, it misses out on its advantages and, as a result, profitability suffers. As organizations grow, the consequences of low collaboration levels lead to

decreased productivity and can become exponentially more expensive. As organizations become more complex, mistakes become more expensive. The opportunity cost of not monitoring employee satisfaction levels can have surprising implications and, in some cases, lead to the organization's demise.

When the productivity and quality gains of collaborative organizations are examined, it is found that these companies outgrew their competition. The inability to collaborate can also result in the development of poor workforce culture. When collaboration is considered a natural process for employees, organizations become better equipped to increase their productivity, quality, and profitability (Bakken, 2018). A capable team's ability to accomplish organizational goals depends on the suitable conditions of a place that allows each member to contribute. An efficient team needs its members to work as a cohesive unit. Groups are progressively more capable of keeping up with the ever-expanding corporate scope and strategy.

Employee engagement through collaborative efforts continues to remain alarmingly low in American companies, according to Moen et al. (2012). Corporate leaders of such organizations make decisions in a vacuum without eliciting employee participation, potentially reducing profitability. Due to this problem, business leaders need to put more effort into encouraging workforce engagement in three critical areas: strategic planning, building interest communities, and implementation of best practices for expanding collaborative work culture. Effective measures that increase employee satisfaction levels can be hard to achieve because many obstacles hinder the undertaking. More knowledge is needed regarding engagement practices with these key opportunity objectives and how they could be leveraged to maximize performance levels.

Typically, internal collaboration is seen as an efficient organizational strategy. However, some managers believe that collaboration is additional costs and create project slowdowns. The projected return on investment of a collaborative project is not always increasing cash flow or cost savings. There could be missed opportunity costs that increased collaboration could generate that can't be seen on the balance sheet. Collaboration costs are additional costs that are present in many organizational groups. Specifically, collaborative managers can positively bring about a change that can ultimately increase the overall effectiveness of the work culture and ultimately increase employee satisfaction (Zdenek & Walsh, 2017).

Many challenges need to be overcome to achieve cross-departmental collaborations during project deployments. One of those challenges that can be considered is the power dynamics within organizations. McDonald et al. (2012) describe three themes related to power dynamics in an emerging organization, protection of autonomy, dynamics between government and private business, and reduced dependency on others to maintain power. During the development of employee satisfaction strategies, trust themes related to role perceptions can commonly emerge. The study demonstrates the competencies and importance of excellent communication in order to develop trust over time.

Business leaders can overcome geographic boundaries with new leadership methods that incorporate advanced technologies (Simpson, 2005). Social media platforms and technologies are expected to change the future workplace environments, in turn, causing a change in the culture and collaborative environments (McDonald et al., 2015). Technology can reach a much broader group of individuals by using applications on cell phones, social media platforms, and email notifications to encourage worker engagement. If the business community better understands the best practices and processes that can facilitate workforce engagement, other

corporate leaders would be able to replicate these innovative ideas to better respond to employee needs and increase organizational effectiveness (Wandera et al., 2016).

### **Purpose Statement**

Workforce engagement and employee satisfaction levels are considered essential for developing a healthy organizational culture and better decision-making skills for achieving business objectives. Human Resource Managers need a universal best practice guide so that companies can better serve the workforce and increase employee satisfaction levels (Mayo, 2000). The purpose of this study is to explore current practices utilized in government businesses to evaluate and maintain employee satisfaction levels. Secondly, to determine the best practices that business leaders can incorporate within their agencies to help manage workforce satisfaction levels.

The effects of collaboration on employee satisfaction levels can be seen through various traditional human resource management practices that offer an assortment of different approaches to maintain organizational satisfaction levels. The participative management style is gaining importance in modern corporations and, more importantly, giving employees a voice that can positively affect the change process (Pardo-del-Val et al., 2012). Collaborative management plays a critical role in limiting resistance to change. The other benefits of participative management include greater creativity and enhanced decision-making skills. Participative leadership and management refer to the practice of encouraging the involvement of employees throughout the decision-making process. The connections among the workgroups in an organization develop through improved business culture and employee behaviors that reflect commitment and collaboration.

Employee job satisfaction measures a worker's level of contentment with their job, along with whether the employee likes the individual aspects of their position or not (Locke & Latham, 2002). Job satisfaction can be measured by a cognitive-behavioral or affective component. Even when businesses encourage collaboration processes and employ the current collaboration methods within the corporation, there is a lack of appropriate studies and research that explore the interests of collaborative learning. Moreover, there is a lack of coherence in the understanding of the teamwork and behaviors that constitute collaboration. Examining how collaborative management strategies can improve employee satisfaction levels and boost corporate morale can create more cohesive organizations.

When a project implements sustained engagement and collaboration, the organizational mission is furthered (Locke & Latham, 2002). When collaborative practices are incorporated into the work culture, employees are successful, and job satisfaction levels are highest. The primary aspect of this area is that corporate culture can affect organizational success and profitability. Companies rely on the performance of their employees for the progress of the organization. Many business leaders are unaware of the ways to deploy collaborative techniques. Therefore, this study will evaluate the development of a collaborative culture through the lenses of human resource executives, which is important to create and maintain a communal setting.

This study will also examine the primary approaches that could be implemented to further develop a collaborative workforce (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). It will also investigate employee insights on corporate culture and their job satisfaction levels. The study approach will use a qualitative method, and the data will be collected through personal interviews. The interviews will comprise semi-structured conversations to allow the free flow of ideas during the

process. The collaborative models' unique design can be utilized to measure the level of awareness the employees possess when it comes to current collaborative approaches.

The investigative findings will be used to prepare a calculated set of recommendations that will help expand corporate collaboration as it relates to employee satisfaction (Runeson & Olsson, 2020). The findings will help human resource executives to ultimately enhance current corporate leadership practices. The results can also be used to make recommendations regarding any type of business applications related to the study's conclusions. One of the objectives of this study is to determine the corporate engagement opportunities that are being utilized during the strategic planning process. It is essential to procure workforce input during the planning phases to ensure that the employees' voices are heard and considered while designing organizational strategies. It is crucial to create a shared corporate vision that can serve as a guide to plan the future effectively.

Another objective is to determine how the communities' practice can be fostered to assist with exchanging knowledge. Communities of practice are self-created networks of individuals who share knowledge and practice areas of interest (Wenger, 2002). Companies are increasingly looking for more straightforward ways to participate and develop a voice by utilizing tacit knowledge (Busch, 2008). This knowledge could be used and shared with the workforce through practice communities. The third objective is to evaluate the corporate industry's current collaboration methods and determine whether something could be done to expand the corporate culture. The study will include the contributions of 15 participants, including human resource managers from various public organizations.



## Research Questions

With all the available data regarding employee satisfaction levels, there are still some unanswered questions about how these practices can be considered and incorporated by business leaders. Hypotheses regarding the ways to provide better answers to some of the problems have been developed. The first hypothesis assumes that collaboration will have a positive effect on job satisfaction levels. The next hypothesis forecasts that there is a relationship between employee satisfaction levels and organizational outcomes. Another hypothesis predicts that the challenges human resource executives face during the deployment of employee satisfaction measures can be overcome. The last hypothesis suggests that employee satisfaction initiatives can be implemented successfully at the organizational level.

This dissertation follows a case study research design. Its goal is to determine what strategies human resource executives can utilize to increase employee trust, engagement, and satisfaction. Therefore, the following research questions (RQ) are addressed in this study:

- RQ1 – How do human resource executives define, measure, and track desirable levels of job satisfaction?
- RQ2 – What challenges do human resource executives face in implementing these strategies?
- RQ3 – What challenges do human resource executives encounter when trying to increase employee satisfaction levels?
- RQ4 – What advice would human resource executives give aspiring human resource executives for increasing job satisfaction levels?

Employee satisfaction is a broad-based topic that includes many sub-categories, such as communication, time management, listening, and organizational structure. Choosing the appropriate research questions is essential for maximizing the proper utilization of time and resources. These research questions intend to formulate a plan that will serve as a roadmap. An organization can utilize this research to develop a transition plan and transform a traditional company into a collaborative organization.

### **Significance of the Study**

According to Prager et al. (2012), workforce collaboration is crucial for a resilient and robust work culture. The measurement of the level of employee satisfaction is vital since it reflects many aspects of the literature. These aspects are:

- Employee empowerment
- Workforce productivity
- Employee turnover levels

Employee empowerment allows leaders to demonstrate that they value their subordinates and build trustful relationships. Such relationships help assure employees that their leaders will make correct organizational decisions. It also helps people feel like they are a more significant part of an organization. When employees are at liberty to choose their own destiny, organizational goals become more important to them (Hanaysha & Tahir, 2016). Researchers have also noted that employee job satisfaction levels vary to the extent that feelings or cognitions about their position in the organization can be measured.

Workforce production is significant, as it generates profits and creates a company image (De Silva et al., 2018). Conventional measures of production consider the outputs within a specific period. Although collaboration can slow productivity in the initial stages, a united vision

is created, which includes both employees' and managers' perceptions, and eventually, the production levels rise. The collaborative component focuses on the team's aspects, and productivity levels are better indicated at a group level through workforce satisfaction (Hanaysha & Tahir, 2016).

Evaluation of employee productivity is an essential component of management (Pellegrini et al., 2010). Low employee productivity levels lead to poor organizational outcomes, which can be improved by implementing collaborative practices to enhance employee performance. The most experienced workforce can excel further by utilizing communities of interest in transferring knowledge by keeping collaboration at the core. Longevity at a position can correlate to employee production levels. As employees gain work experience, they can increase their knowledge, which, in turn, can be transferred to new employees, raising overall productivity levels and raise overall organizational satisfaction levels.

Low employee performance can have several adverse effects on the workplace. The most significant impact is workforce morale being negatively affected (Smith-Crowe et al., 2003). Other factors that affect employee morale include employee resilience, employee training, and collaboration within an organization. Evaluating and managing satisfaction levels include identifying workers from different backgrounds who can extensively evaluate workgroups on an organizational level. The study findings will be utilized to offer suggestions that can develop collaboration and increase workers' job satisfaction levels.

It is essential to consider what is at stake and how it will impact the organization for undertaking business engagement programs. An overlooked aspect is understanding what practices for engagement worked best in the past and where program improvements can be implemented to increase future engagement practices. This study's objectives focus on

examining the best ways to improve employee satisfaction practices in businesses that serve their workforce. After conducting a comprehensive analysis of the leadership practices, Walker and Daniels (2019) define collaborative learning as a framework intended to persuade relationships between the leaders and the followers. They expect the changes will reflect their common purpose. Leadership is not about what the leader does; instead, it is about what leaders and collaborators do to influence others.

The study will also focus on reviewing the literature and acquiring information that indicates that corporations are making efforts to engage with their workforce during the change process (Atkinson et al., 2017). Collaborating at the stage of creating a vision is essential for increasing workforce cohesion and developing buy-in for the plans. Another objective of the study is determining how collaboration can be best taught in the workplace. The final purpose constitutes figuring out the most effective way to transform a traditional business into a collaborative organization. As technology advances, government leaders need to keep up with the progress and deliver an engaging experience. These questions lay the groundwork for determining the best practices for successful corporate workforce engagement and satisfaction.

The development of employee collaboration skills is advantageous for the business and the employee (Graca & Camarinha-Matos, 2019). When work is accomplished in collaboration with others, it allows all involved in interacting and sharing ideas to attain a deeper understanding of how each of them performs their jobs. Collaborative partnerships can generate higher levels of productivity when communication and trust are established. Practicing partnership can help employees understand how to address problems, decide the best course of action, and pitch solutions. These partnerships can develop into long-lasting relationships that extend beyond group boundaries.

Collaborating with different workgroups, resources, and talent can help pool resources and make projects and organizations more successful, according to Aggarwal and Srivastava (2019). A collaborative workforce draws strength from the community spirit that exists within the organization. High levels of collaboration can change the work culture and help employees feel like they are part of a family. A collaborative environment promotes an atmosphere that nurtures different levels of allegiance and friendship. Close-knit relationships can motivate employees to be more involved in the business. In this environment, employees are willing to be more cooperative, hardworking, and supportive of each other.

Employee engagement practices enable people to collaborate with one another more productively and efficiently, both inside and outside an organization (Di Domenico et al., 2015). The core components of a high-level collaborative organization include the following:

- A common purpose or goal
- High levels of trust
- Ability to leverage heritage relationships
- Open and effective communication
- Clear assignment of roles in the beginning
- Ability to increase the diversity of ideas

Increasing the number of meetings is not required to effectively collaborate in an organization when collaboration is integrated into the culture and daily work environment. Teamwork increases as well as satisfaction levels when employee cooperation is increased to create group efficiency. As a result, better ideas are developed, and productivity increases.

Individual goals and tasks are necessary for everyone and must be kept at the center (Karpatne et al., 2017). It can be challenging to break down the walls separating departments and discover complementary skills in other people and workgroups. The benefits of teamwork include better efficiency and mutual support. Groups comprising two or more employees can generate better ideas and create synergy, thereby increasing productivity. Many organizations rely on team management and have telecommunication protocols in place that further increase employee satisfaction levels.

According to Devedzic et al. (2018), soft skills are essential at every position, from entry-level to the chief executive officer. Soft skills include communication, leadership, ethics, and collaboration. Conversely, hard skills are skills that are acquired on the job. Collaboration skills develop between individuals and teams while interacting, engaging, and working toward a common goal. Several skillsets fall under the collaboration umbrella, including group brainstorming, communication, and building emotional intelligence, contributing to increased employee satisfaction levels.

Collaborative strategy constitutes the connection between business strategy and partner strategy. This concept is considered as a new way of increasing business. Companies collaborate with partners, customers, and vendors to build a strategic relationship that has powerful effects. The concept is based on finding aspects of commonality and complementary skills among teams such that everyone involved in the project can efficiently achieve the common goal.

Accomplishing collaboration and teamwork can be challenging in the modern workplace (McDonald et al., 2015). A way to achieve this is by providing workgroups with collaborative media through which ideas, workplace news, and information can be shared. Managing teams and assigning tasks can be difficult when the company is rapidly expanding and becoming more

complex. Collaboration plays an essential role in helping workers develop high-level thinking skills. It is also useful for employees to understand that other people do not always have ideas that are similar to their own. As employees practice collaboration, they learn that it is quite rare to have the same opinions and beliefs as others.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

This study will provide a better understanding of employee satisfaction levels and the effectiveness of trained and knowledgeable employees in a modern workforce. Inspired and dedicated employees tend to align their interests with those of the organization. It can be assumed that their actions and outlook will be reflected in their initiative to develop a collaborative work ethic, which will lead to the establishment of satisfying relationships with the employer. It is believed that this research study will help bring a change and pave a path for executives who intend to integrate collaboration into their workplace better. It gives future collaborative organizations the ability to review the study findings and employ them for formulating training improvements so that collaboration can be integrated into the organization. These enhancements can direct the creation of a more precise definition of organizational goals and values.

Brown et al. (2011) found that employee satisfaction levels and active involvement contribute to positive outcomes connected to employee commitment, affirmative work attitude, and employee buy-in. An additional assumption is that the study subjects will ethically share knowledge with each other without any restrictions. Some parts of the meetings will include questions about employee participation at every level and the availability of training programs that allow progress. It can also be assumed that the additional conditions of the interview samples are suitable, and the participants have had similar collaborative experiences that are

suitable for discussion. It is also assumed that the study participants have an interest in the research work and do not have any ulterior motives.

Furthermore, the study assumes that there is a reasonable amount of response rate for the final findings. It concludes that the number of interviewees is appropriate for drawing a reliable conclusion. On the other hand, it is also assumed that a few of the recruited respondents will not provide truthful information. This reluctance could occur due to many reasons, including fear of retaliation from the management, individual bias, and others. The importance of making correct choices while selecting the participants is imperative for collecting useful data.

Despite the many reasons that might lead researchers to think that corporate collaboration will enhance productivity, the relationship between them is not apparent (Lee & Bozeman, 2016). The mere fact that policymakers believe collaboration increases productivity does not make it accurate. Transactional costs are unavoidable while working with groups and teams. Moreover, not all collaborative relationships are perfect, and many collaborators have had bad experiences. Each group member provides an equal amount of input, but the results do not always meet expectations.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In the context of business engagement, several limitations are to be considered. First, many of the participants included in past research studies in the literature were not randomly selected. According to McDonald et al. (2015), the selection process may have been somewhat biased, with the inclusion of individuals interested in managing employee satisfaction levels. After reviewing these studies, it is noted that the data or long-term results presented in these works validate the ongoing benefits of promoting workforce engagement. A different limitation to be considered is the long-term effects of collaborative engagement programs on the business



community. Once the projects have been planned, there are no benchmarks to compare the workforce's success levels. Employee engagements need to be compared to agencies without employee engagement and satisfaction plans. This engagement experience could also lead to positive outcomes when employees increasingly feel that they are making a difference.

Additional undetermined elements or factors can affect participant responses, including the schools the participant studied in, their educational backgrounds, and others (McDonald et al., 2012). The participants' employment history can also influence their responses, as some managers may have extensive collaborative training. Moreover, it is unknown whether the number of participants is adequate for gaining credible answers to the research questions of this study. With a limited number of 15 interviews, a data saturation point may not be reached.

### **Definition of Terms**

Some of the terms used in this study are related to corporate workforce engagement, and therefore, will be appropriately defined in this section. In business, collaborative practice is defined as the process where workers from every level are brought together to envision and create their future. In this process, they solve existing problems and share knowledge with one another. In each chapter of the paper, many terms have been described. A complete list of all those terms and definitions is presented in this section in alphabetical order for easy reference.

- *Cross-boundary collaboration*: Involves several layers of a complex system, including social, cultural, political, economic, and environmental factors (Romano et al., 2017).
- *Change agent*: A person or group that works on implementing change initiatives (Sparks, 2003).

- *Collaborative management*: A type of leadership that helps build relationships across organizational boundaries by making new connections (Koontz & Thomas, 2006).
- *Collaborative partners*: Two or more people or groups that work together to achieve a particular goal (Ivery, 2010).
- *Decision-making accountability*: A process used to make decisions while maintaining the organization's mission values and ethics (Kim, 2011).
- *Engagement principles*: Promote a shared understanding of the ideologies within a business community (McMahon & Portelli, 2004).
- *Gap analysis*: A system that compares how a company works now with how it would like to work in the future (Byham et al., 2002).
- *Human capital*: Employees, along with all their knowledge, skills, and experience that make them valuable to a company (Marginson, 2019).
- *Interdependency*: The dynamics that make two or more people or groups dependent on one another (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).
- *Mediator*: A person who attempts to make the people involved in a disagreement resolve their differences (Lee et al., 2020).
- *Participative management*: Involving workers from every level of the organization in the decision-making process (Kim, 2011).
- *Stakeholders*: Persons who are directly affected by an issue (Hanekop & Wittke, 2013).

## Summary

An overview of Chapter 1 introduces the problem pertaining to the challenges of maintaining employee satisfaction levels. Human resource directors will be interviewed and

answer four questions to increase and sustain workforce satisfaction levels. Chapter 2 provides a review of the existing literature to present relevant data from other research studies, scholarly articles, and books. It also describes the nature of such research work and offers ideas regarding how it relates to this study. The literature review will divulge any gaps present in the analysis and direct how additional research can fill such gaps. Chapter 3 outlines the data collection methods used in this study and proposes recommendations for future research work. Although information regarding employee satisfaction levels in the workforce is readily available, peer-reviewed articles were less obtainable.

As the research expands, the best practices for its implementation will be documented and serve as a guide for future business leaders. The study will show that employee engagement and satisfaction are not about accomplishing intricate work in silos but more about developing inquisitive workers who can engage in collaborative practices to achieve the common goal. Group work and accountability help develop employees and create a collaborative workforce culture. Finally, five essential elements identified by Hancock (2004) will be used as indicators of an engaged, satisfied organization, which are the following:

- Individual accountability
- Positive interdependence
- High level of social skills
- Group processing ability
- A corporate culture that promotes face-to-face interaction

The study findings will show that employees learn and grow more deeply when they work in an organizational setting that is satisfied and can apply tacit knowledge to real-world problems.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review aims to look at shared management strategies and how they can be taught to a workforce to increase employee satisfaction levels. The research will further seek to define a satisfied workforce and provide a focal point for the literature review. The training overview will compare the differences between management and leadership practices and how they blend and incorporate it into a collaborative workforce. Many ideas surround collaboration, what it means, and how it is applied in business.

When building trust within the workforce, leadership can be both art and science. It takes time, trust, and strategy to succeed with organizational change, as Marshall (1999) noted. One approach will be to research organizational studies using a collaborative approach or model to increase organizational satisfaction levels successfully. The investigation will reveal the best practices for training and deploying a working collaborative business model. Ratzesberger et al. (2017) has determined why some have failed and what training or implementation could have been done differently to help avoid failure in the future.

### **Building Collaborative Partnerships**

Building leadership titans through collaborative partnerships is the preface to fundamental global change as a component of developing global leaders (Tsai et al., 2007). Tackling complex organizational problems requires understanding the workforce's skill and building a working model to maximize team performance. Learning how to influence and teach others is at the nucleus of leadership. This ability to manage leads to a shared understanding of goals and appreciation for priorities and purpose. As pointed out by Wagner and French (2010), motivating power and collaborative development is a way to saturate jobs with meaning.

Cultivating inspirational energy should be the mission of collaborative partnership leaders. One of the most effective leadership traits is the ability to use stories or narratives to bring communities together as noted by Vangen and Huxham (2003). Descriptions are used to build around communication practices that value experiential leadership, which, in turn, create the venture of visioning for the future. These linked stories, metaphors, and images attract the community by providing a relatable leader that inspires trust further to enhance collaborative relationships. Denning (2006) states that storytelling can lift organizations out of a downward trajectory, bring people together, ignite innovative ideas, and build a coalition of forward thinkers.

A relational lens looks for how the process of leadership emerges in social communities and organizations. Local leaders are crucial to building collaborative teams and developing a vision to move communities forward. Accomplishing this requires the proficiency to transcend borders and mobilize citizens for global change. According to Yu (2020), collaborative leadership practices need awareness to manage apprehensions for public participation demands through collaborative means creatively. Researchers have found direct effects of collaborative leadership on change initiatives in organizations. The study supports the perception that collaborative leadership can increase organizational capacity and lead to better outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

### **Participative Leadership in Government**

Vogel and Masal (2014) performed several community leadership studies that described how collaborative systems are developed, and they tested four public administration approaches. The first is a functionalist approach that includes data collection on performance measures for community satisfaction. The leadership performance measures are compared against

demographic characteristics such as educational level, political party affiliation, and ethnic diversity. Another element of collaborative leaders is the ability to develop tolerance in diverse situations. Olfert and Partridge (2011) found the community's level of ethnic diversity allows workers to invest in cultural occupations that are not ordinarily available.

Next is the behavioral approach, which can also be referred to as transformational community leadership. Transformational leadership is a wide variety of theories that examine the challenges of community leadership practices. Through these studies, it was found that transformational leadership was positively related to employee satisfaction. This approach revolves around the core values of community service leadership:

- The common good of the workforce
- Organizational trust
- Protection of fair practice

Thus transformational leadership approach relies on collaboration to bring the community together (Vogel & Masal, 2014).

The biographical approach to leadership is connected to ethical issues of community leadership. Current research places importance on the community element of public management; this is defined as a collective commitment to community service's core values (Denhardt & Campbell, 2006; Getha-Taylor et al., 2015). The reformist approach can be assembled into two forms. The first is collaborative community leadership, which is concerned with removing hierarchies and building cross-cultural networks and teams (Feldman & Khademian, 2007). This model seeks first to develop collaboration and then provide unity and diversity. The second subfield is community reform leadership. This research inquires to assess

the level of change and innovation in the community. Often this relates to leaders valuing the symbolic costs of outcomes rather than tangible results (Sanger, 2008).

According to Bryson et al. (2015), recent research verifies that the institutional environment is especially valuable for community problem-solving partnerships. Sandfort and Moulton (2020) mentioned how public arenas directly affect joint function and outcomes. Many of these cross-cultural programs require grant funding to obtain available funds (Bryson et al., 2015). Political environments can also have a substantial effect on international collaborations. A pivotal reason for forming cross-cultural collaborative partnerships is to harness the collective knowledge of the government, nonprofits, private businesses, and other community leaders. The beneficial result is the ability to spread the objectives' risk and provide better decision-making ability (Kettl, 2002). The culmination of partners with diverse expertise in relationships, technology, and financial backing can increase the probability of success (Demirag et al., 2012). Bryson et al. (2015) found that cross-cultural collaborations have emerged because community leaders could not independently accomplish their objectives (Provan & Kenis, 2007).

According to Mabey (2013), four other skills essential for an active community include the following:

- Developing an emotional connection to community service
- Making sense of political realities
- Managing relations with global leaders
- Contemplating leadership practices and assumptions

The findings reported were processed using coding and themes relative to essential collaborative skills. Quality control measures are focused on situated meaning. Cross-checking and self-monitoring were performed after the interviews and email exchanges with the subjects. The

findings were then organized based on essential skills. Many of the conversations used narrative stories as their role, influencing followers worldwide, which tended to increase satisfaction levels.

The findings indicate that storytelling represents a modern appeal to community leaders (Van Wart, 2013). The analysis and theorizing offer a relative understanding of narrative practices. Narratives and stories are utilized in a wide roll of ageless everyday social encounters. Accounts provide an abundant source of ideal tools for leaders to pursue relationships, change realities, and influence their followers. An organization's behavior and structure develop from the interaction between the collaborative agents that create the corporate culture (Boal & Schultz, 2007).

### **Developing Social Relationships**

Social entrepreneurs have the proficiency and competence to address modern-day social dilemmas. According to Portales (2019), a social entrepreneur uses a collaborative business practice to solve social or environmental problems. Social purpose business ventures exist to produce public good; however, the benefits created can derive profits. Social entrepreneurs become experts on the issues they fight and then use entrepreneurship skills to develop sustainable plans.

Social entrepreneurs can fight social dilemmas facing local, regional, national, or global government agencies. According to Hervieux and Voltan (2016), social entrepreneurship fundamentally discovers original solutions to complex social problems. Hervieux and Voltan (2016) further describe social entrepreneurship as social movements with united efforts to effect change. Social change can be accomplished by changing the status quo or responding to recent reforms that have proven detrimental. It is performed by forming new organizations that work



collaboratively with individuals to achieve a more significant impact than could be accomplished independently (Grant & Crutchfield, 2008).

Martin and Osberg (2015) describe three components to illustrate social entrepreneurship's representation of social movement:

- An unjust population demographic that needs to shift but does not have the financial or political resources to accomplish change.
- Collaboration through social entrepreneurship can be utilized to mobilize activities and produce support for the cause or goals.
- It also re-affirms the role of social entrepreneurship that works together and develops solutions to social problems.

Martin and Osberg (2015) recommended that future research include developing a collaborative framing process that would be used at each social level to increase satisfaction. Additionally, social entrepreneurs' interactions and the supporting organizational networks should be disentangled (Hervieux & Voltan, 2016). Entrepreneurship is progressively considered as containing cultural and social norms that have a great extent of enterprising activity. Established or traditional entrepreneurship is linked to originality and the discovery of new business practices, but these practices have been separated from ethical behavior (Haugh & Talwar, 2014).

The advent of social entrepreneurship focuses on exploring pioneering ideas that supportively fulfill collaborative social needs (Pandey et al., 2020). The association between social entrepreneurship and social change is the primary focus of Haugh and Talwar's (2014) study. With the advancement of social changes in society, little is known about the individual self's impacts and the correlation to satisfaction levels. Investigating social enterprise

involvement will help disclose the social influences on individuals and the community (Haugh & Talwar, 2014). A social entrepreneur's concept is substantiated through diverse collaborative practices and conclusions associated with innovative efforts. It is a processual approach that extends beyond profits to include an action that brings about cultural, institutional, and social change.

### **Balancing Inequality with Collaboration**

Another aspect of social entrepreneurship is the transfer of power to remove unjust inequalities that disturb the status quo. In life, the rules and standards that govern the allocation of resources give individual players authority over others in determining the exchange of resources and how resources develop into choices. These choices have the ability to persuade and influence satisfaction levels. Haugh and Talwar (2014) recommend two suggestions for further research. First, collect more analyses to determine how cultural attitudes affect the exchange of power as social entrepreneurs. Second, examine the impact of social entrepreneurship on assessing the impact of the achievements and then develop collaborative models that advance societal satisfaction levels.

Social entrepreneurship has become increasingly popular because of the serious social problems that need to be addressed worldwide while developing societal resources without focusing on profits (Zahra et al., 2008). Traditional entrepreneurship is a significant wealth source, providing economic diversity, innovative growth, and social renovation. Traditional entrepreneurship also empowers people to explore prospects worldwide that can then be focused on movements to advance social conditions to enhance satisfaction levels within communities (Corbett & Montgomery, 2017). Social entrepreneurship incorporates activities that seek to improve social wealth by creating new business opportunities through collaborative methods.

The economic globalization of foreign countries has increased investor action for addressing social problems (Coulibaly et al., 2018). Many of the world's problems are due to well-known disparities in income and availability of opportunities. Multinational corporations have played a role in the distribution of opportunities and wealth for decades. These global businesses also can increase satisfaction levels within communities and consider it a corporate and social responsibility.

A significant influence separating social entrepreneurship from traditional ventures is the presence of social opportunities that could be abused by entrepreneurs. Profitable social opportunities are scarce, which explains why there is limited research on social entrepreneurship and how it relates to community satisfaction levels. Social ventures are quickly becoming the precursors of social transformation, improving life conditions through collaborations with all population segments (Corbett & Montgomery, 2017). The world economy is rapidly globalizing, and this has created space for worldwide corporations to take responsibility and address social injustice. With increased awareness, social opportunities can be better described and learned, setting the stage for additional collaborative needs with government, nonprofits, and for-profit corporations (Zahra et al., 2008).

### **Employee Development**

Collaborative learning can be used to develop learning approaches involving joint efforts between the workforce and organizational leaders (Schuman, 2006). It consists of working with groups identifying different perspectives, developing solutions, or creating innovative ideas. Collaboration is a joint effort to build mutual benefits (Seralidou & Douligeris, 2015). Other scholars may differ in the definition based on interaction levels and different definitive levels.

Hypothetical tools to analyze relations within organizations could be debated. Many researchers have agreed that when two or more people converge on a solution, the outcome is usually better.

Studies have shown that collaboration is a convergence of shared ideas that have the potential to increase employee satisfaction levels. Analysis has been used to determine how to make the merging of ideas happen (Schuman, 2006). The results indicate that collaboration and satisfaction gradually change and revolves around five fundamental factors:

- The understanding of the situation through a structural lens
- The comparison of metaphors
- The interactive display
- The repair and confirmation of concepts
- The application of valid ideas for convergence

Group understanding of complex situations is attained through collaborative teamwork (Prager et al., 2012). Collaboration helps develop team interactions that facilitate the learning of team members through a continual explanation of viewpoints.

Communication helps build and improve worker comprehension and the retention of different concepts. After an agreement is achieved through verbal exchange, situational meaning can be negotiated, and therefore, the final understanding is shared. Exploring collaboration and the workforce's training needs will help to understand better and develop participative activities. Kim's (2011) findings suggest that training in participative management and encouraging supervisory communication can increase job satisfaction and lead to better organizational performance. Organizational leaders need to commit to changing the culture from a traditional hierarchal structure to a more modern, participative management and empowerment model (Kim, 2011).

Achieving this organizational shift requires a new framework and better training for cognitive thinking and change. There are critical assumptions in adult education that describe how adults are motivated to learn as they experience (Biech & Silberman 2015). According to Locke and Latham (2002), organizational learning is accomplished through collaborative learning, which can change organizational satisfaction. There are distinct differences between personal and corporate education. Individual learning is a result of intrinsic self-motivation.

Collaborative learning is an umbrella term for many educational approaches that involve joint knowledgeable effort. Collaborative teaching involves people working together to solve a problem or create a task (Gil-Garcia et al., 2019). The knowledge gained through private learning transfers to the group level, then up to the institutional level. This process develops from the combined knowledge acquisition of the workforce and operations and travels through the organization until the collective knowledge becomes part of the culture (Schuman, 2006).

Building holistic knowledge about the work's process and routine is essential but creating flexible options to generate learning is critical for long-term sustainability. Four conditions are needed for active learning at the organizational level. The first condition is the managers' commitment to creating an environment where organizational learning is supported and can occur organically. Second, a dynamic system must be in place so that every aspect of education must contribute to an acceptable outcome. The third condition of active organizational learning is knowledge development based on individual knowledge transferred to the organization. Last, the organization needs to look beyond adaptive learning and define the organization's learning level that is necessary for success and increased satisfaction (Basten & Haamann, 2018).

Past management practices have accentuated the importance of coordinating human relations to increase productivity and expand human capital. The researchers focused on

workforce motivation and its impact on job satisfaction to gain an edge in the business community. Participatory management involves sharing power between management and workers. This ensures that everybody takes part in searching for solutions, rather than all the burden on one manager. Building a conceptual model to establish training needs can provide a road map for an organization to move between collaborative strategies depending on the circumstances (Nared & Bole, 2020).

Collaborative training gradually leads learners to new meanings through conceptual change. Participative learning designers can create iterative cycles of interactions that bring together a new understanding of beliefs (Stoll et al., 2006). However, critics of collaborative management claim that the research is not consistent. Iqbal et al. (2018) found that the idea of participation brings a feeling of empowerment through employee involvement. These authors operated on the underlying assumption that sharing decision-making power with employees increases worker satisfaction and enhances organizational performance.

Asking managers to give up their decision-making power can be a challenge. In Kim's (2011) study, 14 anticipated performance measures were developed to measure the use of participative management styles. No training in collaboration or participative management was offered during the strategic organizational planning process. The effectiveness of their supervisor's communication was used to measure job satisfaction as the dependent variable. The performance measures were documented on a Likert scale from *Strongly agree* to *Strongly disagree*. The results indicated that managers who used participatory management styles and supported training corresponded positively with job satisfaction and the strategic planning process (Kim, 2011).

## **Developing Organizational Leaders**

With an increasing need for more decisive leadership, human resources managers are formulating leadership development programs. Developing collaborative leaders for the future requires attention to workforce trends along with creative curriculum plans. Public agency managers require unique collective management talent (Wheelan et al., 2020). Working in a political climate with the public and staff requires vital skills that include the following:

- Collaboration
- Creative thinking
- Cross-organization and cross-culture team building

The research consists of overviews of local government needs and communication models to allow for an increase in organizational satisfaction (Ingraham & Getha-Taylor, 2004).

Training staff for collaborative leadership plays a crucial role in two factors that drive employee satisfaction (Wheelan et al., 2020). The first is the development of collaborative teams by utilizing employee skill sets. The second is the creation of a sustainable pool of influential leaders for the future. Instructional design and development are processes where learners develop the skills, knowledge, and self-competence to succeed (Biech & Silberman, 2015).

According to Byham et al. (2002), building "Acceleration Pools" (p. 27) of leadership talent gives the appropriate training and models of behavior to be successful. The first step in training development is establishing past practice assumptions and contrasting them with current business practices and needs in a training system. Traditional beliefs are described with the stability of the organizational structure and business strategy. New assumptions for an accelerated pool system of training include frequent changes. These changes can consist of new competitors, new distribution channels, and new business partners. People have more

opportunities to move both vertically and horizontally. Collaborative training is integrated with each new assignment and provides skills and knowledge that can be used on the job as they are learned (Byham et al., 2002).

The acceleration pool approach understands the employees' needs and desires, considering their work situation and lifestyle. It also decreases the amount of paperwork and bureaucracy associated with an individual development plan. Reduced time on formalities allows more time for collaborative activities within the organization (Byham et al., 2002). Acceleration centers can also accurately assess people's development and satisfaction needs. They can force employees into situations that senior managers and executives typically face.

Professional assessors can observe and look for the use of collaborative skills as they work through complex problems. When multiple methodologies and evaluators are used, a holistic picture of the individual is created. Simulated issues that mirror the challenges of an organizational leader can be designed (Lowell & Ashby, 2018). The individual's collaboration techniques can be evaluated through a gap-analysis to diagnose individual development needs. A customizable training plan can be developed into an actionable behavior modification map. According to Byham et al. (2002), the most common characteristic of introducing collaboration into the organization development plan is accomplished with integration into the company culture. At the beginning of each project or task, the collaborative framework needs to be reinforced with verbal and action-based examples.

### **Employee Knowledge Transfer**

With advances in management practices, developing communities of interest is useful in assisting workers with organizational knowledge transfer. Research provides managers and business leaders with information to look at resistance to learning and the required model to help



overcome the complicated change process (Wang et al., 2019). Change agents now have a tool to improve relations and change outcomes utilizing collaborative management and knowledge sharing within their organization (Kim, 2011). One item to be concerned about is that the data suggests that the combined team members are taught tools and information that could endanger organizational change. It is essential to manage the news because it could lead to increased resistance to change in the company (Wang et al., 2019).

When diverse teams are convened to collaborate, it takes experience and training to succeed (Boyer et al., 2019). Recent research about team behavior has revealed some noteworthy paradoxes. Groups that are specially educated, diversified, large, or virtual are sometimes needed to solve complex problems. Those same qualities make it difficult to accomplish goals without intense collaborative training. It takes advanced training and trust to develop an environment where knowledge and objectives can be shared collaboratively. Through a study by Gratton and Erickson (2007), 55 large teams demonstrating high levels of collaborative behavior were identified; eight practices correlated with the team's success and satisfaction levels.

Leadership also requires a person or group's presence and actions that instigate a discussion of collaborative activities. Leaders that can initiate change appreciate challenges and recognize the pressure and presence of three forces:

- The interdependency of team players
- The uncertainty of future conditions
- The consequence of no action (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015)

The most challenging object to overcome when assembling participants to pursue interest groups is the initial motivational force. Once interest is established, a community of practice (COP) can develop and generate the ability to exchange knowledge and expand its concept.

Initiating leaders must have a dense social and professional network to attract stakeholders to the table. These leaders can deliver legitimate authority and strategic vision to create a climate of inclusion and cooperation to frame central issues (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

An essential attribute identified as a success factor is the collaborative philosophy from the organization's top executives. When executives invest in joint training and relationship building, it creates a gift culture (Boyer et al., 2019). Many organizations had a unique collaborative practice that was memorable and difficult to replicate in other business environments. Modeling of collaborative behavior daily by senior executives played a significant role in determining how collaborative teams worked together and the level of workplace satisfaction (Gratton & Erickson, 2007).

The next meaningful way to teach collaboration is daily coaching. When integrated into everyday activities, mentoring is more likely to increase collaborative behavior in the organization. Regular coaching creates a culture of gifting that, over time, replaces the usual transactional environment (Hohensee & Lewis, 2019). Two training concepts that improve team performance center around collaborative behavior and support for building communities. A company's human resources department's significant staff development investments can substantially improve collaborative practices (Gratton & Erickson, 2007).

A significant source of collaboration centers around the culture and habits of the company. Gratton and Erickson (2007) showed that the following skills are crucial for increased collaboration development:

- Conflict resolution
- Program management

- Purposeful conversations
- Appreciation of others

PricewaterhouseCoopers was shown to have one of the most robust, productive collaborative cultures. With 150,000 workers in 150 countries, the most effective training included teamwork, networking, emotional intelligence, having difficult conversations, social responsibilities, and communicating the firm's obligations. Other corporate programs included teaching employees relationship skills (Gratton & Erickson, 2007). The coursework consisted of strategies for building collaborative partnerships with customers. The most innovative and productively satisfied teams are led by ambidextrous task and relationship leaders.

Some of the participative management dilemmas are known as the paradigm of pattern paternalism, according to Lee et al. (2020). Leaders impose decision-making on employees who may not agree or know a better way to accomplish the activity. It takes active leadership training to counterbalance the desire to give orders. Some managers may not want to give up their power. In their eyes, they work hard to earn the decision-making position and are not comfortable giving their employees that power.

### **Collaboration in Public Agencies**

Collaboration takes training, and some public agencies do not have the luxury to afford their staff time to practice cooperation properly. Other businesses have a gap between the level of knowledge and experience to make quality, sound business decisions. Internal politics between teams can also create problems in the participation process (Lee et al., 2020).

A report from the United States General Accounting Office (GAO, 2003) set out to evaluate culture through a collaborative partnership by assessing five federal government agencies. The critical elements under review included the following:

- Data Quality
- Dedication to Self-Assessment
- Analytic Expertise
- Collaborative Partnerships

The five agencies demonstrated a desire for collaboration through regular evaluations of culture. These evaluations included programs, goals, and their ability to leverage partners and resources through collaborative efforts. Some of the collaborative partners developed naturally through shared interests and social networking with their stakeholders. During the evaluation process, a need for increased training and involvement was identified. Collaboration training for the organizations was accomplished through informal COPs (GAO, 2003).

The Coast Guard demonstrated a collaborative partnership at forums offered with port security committees that included state, federal, and local governments. Several of these collaborative partnerships were developed to obtain data and expertise for further evaluation. The collective community used educational programs to create and form connections that solicited involvement from other agencies and the public. Knowledge objectives as they relate to acquired skills will need to be accounted for with other forums. It was also established that additional evaluation methods and integration with other federal programs were required. (GAO, 2003).

Cross-boundary collaboration evolves within complex systems that consist of several layered, interrelated conditions that can develop within a COP. These conditions include social, cultural, political, economic, and environmental (Hsiao et al., 2012). Once the collaboration training is complete, and the process has started, both expectations and unrelated events can open new possibilities or bring unexpected changes. Without the education and understanding of the

context, participants may assume that there are no conditions and proceed to develop their purpose and goals. The power between the collaborators is usually not distributed evenly in these cases.

The patterns to influence can create public perceptions that shape individual opinions of the collaborative process. The application of these principles by leaders in government agencies has shown they must operate across organizations and hierarchies to effectively manage an organization (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003). The inclusion of government agencies connecting with neighboring or overlapping organizations to create joint partnerships is becoming a required skill. These partnerships are accomplished through the following:

- Contractual relationships
- Committees and coalitions
- Networks and alliances

Managers jointly develop strategies to effectively serve the community's common good while increasing the community satisfaction level (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003).

For most of the 20th century, managers used the hierarchal structural form to manage agencies, according to Agranoff and McGuire (2003). In the 21st century, the workforce's interdependence has created an environment where departmental and organizational boundaries have become conceptual guidelines. Working within this new framework requires collaborative leadership skills that complement and replace bureaucratic agencies. Public managers operate in a complex inter-organizational environment. Recent decades have highlighted the need for interdependence between government agencies and nonprofits at the local level (Deverell et al., 2019).

In many cities, work is contracted out to private sector companies to provide essential services to the community. Some cities choose to work with collaborative methods, but others avoid it. Many government agencies have learned to collaborate to achieve common political goals. Collaboration does not automatically happen; it must be managed and maintained through the organizational culture, according to Gil-Garcia et al. (2020). Government agencies must make a continuous effort to practice and educate staff with collaborative training (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003).

With shrinking resources and growing problems, both department and agency interdependence are required for achieving goals. When public agencies, service providers, community groups, or private organizations cannot succeed in reaching out to the public's needs, reaching out to other agencies for additional resources becomes necessary. Leadership skills that can develop cross-collaboration between agencies are essential to many public organizations (Gil-Garcia et al., 2020). Collaboration can cultivate opportunities and develop many kinds of leadership skills while achieving goals. Initiating direction is the final and crucial driver to build collaborative group resources and deliver increased satisfaction levels.

### **Expansion of Social Learning**

Vygotsky (1896–1934) founded a social learning theory that forms the basis for collaboration. The idea of collaborative learning is similar to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Excellent social skills are necessary to learn and participate in collaborative techniques. Social interaction is established through socialization and social behavior, which leads to consciousness and enhanced cognition. Vygotsky focused on sociocultural content and connections between people (Hargreaves & Elhawary, 2020). Internalization of speech and

writing are learned from the social environment. This concept can be expanded like an employee learning a new culture, group norms, and collaboration in the work environment.

All organization members are expected to think strategically and take ownership and responsibility for business decisions. Although supervisors and managers need to provide leadership support to guide and educate employees remains, a training program will strengthen their skills and give employees the base of knowledge necessary to contribute actively (Jaramillo & Richardson, 2016). Collaborative management is where managers share the influence on the decision-making process with the employee base. The level of participation can vary between organizations, and methods are not always consistent. The essential components of the process, according to Hanekop and Wittke (2013), include the following:

- Identification of the problem
- Intelligence phase
- Choice of the decision
- Implementation
- Revisions

Another benefit of the collaborative management style is the ability to facilitate change. The main effects of collaborative management are reducing resistance to change and increasing the effectiveness and commitment to decision-making (Lewis, 2016). In a recent study, the United States GAO (2003) measured five items to evaluate organizational politics during the participative process. All knowledge is learned through structures generated from the political experience. The study found that collaborative engagement between organizations improves performance, satisfaction, and increases progress towards agency goals.

According to Ingraham and Getha-Taylor (2004), there is no best way to train collaborative leadership. Practical training needs to be implemented to change company culture and expand employee knowledge. Recent trends in collaboration training include distance learning that demonstrates how distant collaboration can be accomplished through technology. Offsite training programs can be leveraged to reduce anxiety and distraction caused by the workplace. Another form of training could be rotational work assignments, which can also increase employee satisfaction levels.

By training the workforce, human resource administrators can grow leadership instead of buying leaders from the outside. Growing leadership in an organization requires developing skills and experiences within organizational employees (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019). Developing leaders is most effectively done over time; as skills and responsibilities increase, it eventually leads to leadership development through on-the-job training. Many traditional leadership styles, such as charismatic, heroic, and solitary, are being replaced with more team-oriented styles and viewpoints (Ingraham & Getha-Taylor, 2004).

According to Austin (2000), new leadership demands include the need for a flexible image of leadership. The model is changing beyond single-minded leaders that used to be aggressive and controlling. A new vision of leadership as being supportive and encouraging is developing. Declining resources require leaders to have the ability to build bridges and gain cooperation during troubled times. According to Gentina (2019), Generation Z will need training that looks and feels completely different from previous generations. Creating a satisfied workforce is growing increasingly difficult, with changes in generational needs and cultural differences.



Singh (2014) cited that 93% of Gen Z students said they visited YouTube at least once per week. Generation Z contributes to shared knowledge through websites. They agree that technology will help them reach future goals. Training the workforce to adapt and collaborate will be essential to navigating through future circumstances. What you know will determine how you apply what you are learning (Biech & Silberman, 2015). The push towards technology will be the most significant generational shift the workforce has ever seen (Gentina, 2019). Leaders will need to strategize as they try to develop platforms that converge cooperative principles and values across multiple learning platforms (Singh, 2014).

### **Increasing Employee Satisfaction**

Increasing employee satisfaction works in various combinations with uncertainty, incentives, interdependence, and initiating leadership. One or more of these forces is necessary for a coordinated governance process to begin (Amsler, 2016). The initial act of socialization with others comes in response to the incomplete information surrounding a problem or issue that cannot be resolved by working alone. The interdependence and uncertainty of a situation are not always enough, according to Emerson and Nabatchi (2015). Employee satisfaction levels can continue to increase without additional pressure, and this helps to avoid losses in the political drivers that initiate employee satisfaction measures. Forces can change to reemerge, recede, diminish over time, or reply to the evolving conditions. A multitude of strategies may present themselves at some level during the process and evolve to reinforce each other and bring key collaborators together.

### **Participatory Management Versus Collaboration**

Lee et al. (2020) used empirical research as the primary methodology to test relationships between participation in decision-making and organizational change. The statistical analysis was

accomplished through a correlation analysis to gain insight into the variable links. The organization's workforce is expected to think systematically and take ownership and responsibility for organizational decisions. Accomplishing this requires training programs with topics such as mental models so that experiences can be stored and retrieved (Biech & Silberman, 2015). The findings show that supervisors and managers still need to provide leadership and support to guide and educate employees in a participative or collaborative fashion (Lee et al., 2020). The necessary components of joint decision making, according to Tao et al. (2018), include the following:

- Identification of the problem
- Intelligence phase
- Choice in the decision
- Implementation increases performance

Pardo-del-Val et al. (2012) found that productivity is more significant for organizations with pioneering collaborative cultures. Training the staff helps remove the boundaries that prohibit joint activities. The study further rationalizes that innovative organizational culture conflicts with participative decision-making.

Lee et al. (2020) also found that participative management increases organization satisfaction levels and performance with better commitments through empowerment. Empowering employees is good, but they need to be educated and trained in participatory practices before making decisions. Their study (2020) recommends that a mediator be used to describe the new demands on leadership, progressing beyond single-minded leaders that use dynamic and controlling technologies rather than supplying support and encouragement.

Participative management can limit managers' involvement with the workforce in decision-making, problem-solving, and information processing (Ewens & van der Voet, 2019). Participative leadership promotes a sense of "we" feeling, as stated by Nadeem (2012) among the employees, and enables employees to own the group's decisions. Participative management encourages the involvement of all stakeholders within the organization. Collaboration also includes the development of strategic plans, analysis of problems, and the implementation of solutions.

Other forms of participatory management include increasing employee responsibility and job enrichment programs and forming self-managed teams or quality work-life committees (Wulf, 2020). This participation also demands that managers take employee decisions seriously and act on them. The most active form of participative management is direct to employee-owned companies. Moors (2012) idealized participative leaders consulting with subordinates on proposing actions that encouraged them to participate. The participative environment with a high level of interaction could be damaging for some without proper training (Kim, 2011). Employees could feel pressured and take on additional stress from added challenges, increased accountability, and extra responsibilities.

### **Benefits of Participative Management**

Involvement in the decision-making process improves the understanding of workplace issues and supports a reduction in assumptions. Researchers have studied the process of collaboration and observed many positive outcomes (Robinson & Fuller, 2017). Training programs' primary benefits include clarity of critical issues and interests, better decision-making, increased satisfaction, and advanced knowledge integration. It also provides enhanced conflict

management, increased trust, respect between groups or individuals, and improved perception of the collaborative process (Bryson et al., 2015).

There are two processes for conceptualizing beneficial collaborative measures, according to Kark et al. (2015). The first approach portrays collaboration as a straight line of events with cognitive steps or stages that occur with training and development. These steps include defining the problem, setting the direction, and implementing. The second approach depicts collaboration as a circle of progress that requires iterative interactions between members (Ansell & Gash, 2007). By distinguishing between first engagement, shared motivations, and a need for action, the social setting can better describe the communications, personal relations, and the functional components of a collaborative system.

Schuman (2006) reported that organizations could be strengthened through collaboration by maximizing innovation and engaging the workforce. Collaborative practices can help workers succeed in a dynamic business. Many managers still view collaborative teams as those used for specific assignments rather than a need developed due to organizational culture. The concept of organizational learning can be considered as action with the team members collectively performing a project. Genuine collaboration is more than an activity because it is a process of behaviors that can be learned and enhanced (Rincones-Gómez & Rodríguez-Campos, 2012).

Collaborative organizations help employees comprehend that their contribution fits into the company's strategic plan and strategy. As a result, employee satisfaction increases, and workers show increased productivity because they work for the growth and believe in the organization rather than merely showing up for a paycheck (Raines, 2019). At the fundamental level of an employee is a need to belong, and collaborative practices can foster a sense of belonging (Schuman, 2006). Organizational silos can develop if cross-functional activities and

innovative ideas are not pursued. Where collaboration is encouraged, employee buy-in will increase, and better decisions will be formulated (Rincones-Gómez & Rodríguez-Campos, 2012).

### **Increasing Employee Buy-In**

Nadeem's (2012) findings on school management reflect a widespread belief that participative leadership creates an environment for managers to get work done. The study further reveals that school principals are less likely to utilize a participative style and are susceptible to deploying an authoritarian leadership style. Nadeem (2012) concludes that there is a lack of leadership in public schools than their private counterparts. On the private school side, leaders tend to develop and encourage an inclusive environment with employees. Therefore, there must be a united effort to increase participation by:

- Providing training and education to administrators in participative leadership styles
- Ensuring community involvement with management councils
- Expanding workshops and training that preach the benefits of participative leadership

### **Community of Practice and Job Satisfaction**

Wenger and Snyder (2000) defined a COP where groups of people share their knowledge and experiences in a creative way to develop new ideas and best practices. COPs can reinvent the workplace if managers can learn to foster environments that allow and nurture the formation of these organizational ideas. According to Wenger and Snyder (2006), some components working against COP's are as follows:

- These are new concepts that innovative companies must learn to harness.
- COPs are not easy to build and maintain. They typically happen organically and are spontaneous with resistance to management and supervision.

Studies have been performed to produce empirical data that finds that there are positive effects on knowledge networks. Conversely, Bourouni et al. (2014) experienced a team impact that was reported as unfavorable and did not impact business performance. Information is useful for decision-makers to enhance cultural performance by implementing knowledge management initiatives.

According to Wenger (2002), although COPs are organically formed, they can be encouraged through manager support and resources. Members within the COP share the expertise and passion for a subject and seek to share these with the community and make it grow. Some possible group norms should include trial runs to give employees experience, get feedback to all group members, and develop the group vision (Retna & Tee Ng, 2011). Porter and Kramer (2006) have proposed a new interpretation of the relationship of mutual dependence that exists between corporations and employees. Micheline and Fiorentino (2012), claim that this new shared value principle revolves around a hybrid social business model.

The intent of coming together through a COP is to share experiences and standardize practices, materials, and project requirements (Wenger, 2002). Developing shared knowledge is a way to avoid problems and increase efficiencies. COPs initially start as an informal group of workers who share stories at the workplace or conferences (Agrifoglio, 2015). What begins as an informal sharing of knowledge can grow and develop into a routine of practice in a common field between members. COPs are not intended to stifle innovation and creativity but rather create a base understanding of ideas and knowledge.

Much of the knowledge exchanged in a COP cannot be learned in books or similar sources. Typically, the knowledge exchange takes place through other people. The transfer happens because of the passion and dedication to the practice (Agrifoglio, 2015). Knowledge,

social relations, and activities become tightly bound together. In COPs, members learn by practicing the craft or field of expertise (Retna & Tee Ng, 2011). The constant repetition leads to further exchange of ideas and improved practice.

### **Engaging the Workforce and Employee Job Satisfaction**

One dynamic that has become a challenge in organizations is employee turnover and recruitment. During offboarding meetings held by human resources, one common theme surrounding an employee's desire to leave is a lack of independence and job autonomy (Jansen, 2008). This grave oversight also puts pressure on the employees to work out of their comfort zones and forego development opportunities. According to Madison and Eva (2019), low morale and employee burnout can also create performance problems within an organization. More than ever, there is a need to develop new collaborative practices and a change model that centers around a collaborative practice framework.

Strategic alignment of corporate leaders can help define and develop short- and long-term goals with business priorities. These strategies can help create a success profile that could be used as a blueprint for evaluating internal candidates' skill sets. Leaders of collaborative work practices could also develop benchmarks that are indicators of potential (Chevalier & Buckles, 2008). Utilizing a collaborative framework allows the group to gain unfiltered knowledge and multidimensional views of the candidates. Collaborative corporate practices could perpetuate a pool of talent ready to compete against outside candidates (Noe, 2019).

Becoming familiar with each potential member of the group should be done across several generations with regular exposure. Managers can begin to assess the workforce's potential for future possibilities (Hersen, 2005). With company support, collaborative practices could allow cross-training to happen organically and be self-directed. The new actions could be

developed as a long-term business model and strategy. Corbett and Montgomery (2017) state the growing and maintaining a collaborative culture requires commitment from the company to invest in these activities. With this investment, the company can ensure that the workforce has the skills and experience they need to keep them active and continually grow their rank-and-file leadership.

Social interaction is an essential component of the learning process and cognitive abilities (Vygotskij, 1979). Situated learning is described as learning through social events rather than psychological dynamics. Wenger (2002) also describes situated learning as peripheral participation, which can be the context for new members becoming integrated into a COP. Collaborative teams negotiate how people become involved in decision dynamics when members work on multiple teams; they bring a different lens to each community and influence the workflow through increased shared knowledge (Wenger, 2002). Integrating new employees into communities with long-term goals will improve and prolong employee engagement within the organization.

### **Expected Outcome**

Some collaborative organizations meet regularly to discuss the workplace and other connections to maintain open communication styles. These casual gatherings allow for a free exchange of knowledge and develop synergistic ways to solve problems. These potential changes can bring innovation and standardization to new members of the group and a better understanding of the field, and reduced training costs. Bowen and Reeves (2011) claim that developing a sense of community is a psychological variable reflecting how members feel attached to an organization.



Creating active collaborative groups in an organization is the key to success. To be an effective leader, one must develop groups that ensure commitment to the goals, provide correct and thorough information, provide leadership and persuasion, review, analyze, and challenge all possible options, and resolve contentions efficiently (McCauley & McCall, 2014).

Accomplishing effective leadership requires more than a basic comprehension of group dynamics; an in-depth understanding of group dynamics, theory, and working practice is essential (Johnson & Johnson, 2013).

In Brown et al.'s (2011) study, the assessed indicators about community well-being revolved around the following:

- The supportiveness of the community
- The sense of community
- Whether they wanted to stay in the community

Their study sought to understand military associations better as they relate to practice communities. For this to occur, the community needs to be more than a network of connections or a club of friends. They must have a common interest or passion where their time is committed. Being part of this community implies an obligation to the community (Brown et al., 2011). The group members value their collective competence and learn from each other to perfect the trade. People from the outside do not often see or recognize their expertise.

Community members enjoy engaging in activities that help them share information with each other. These relationships enable informal learning and develop collaborative rapport amongst them. All community members must interact and collaborate to learn together, although this does not mean they practice collaboration as a daily routine. Simple meetups that allow the members to exchange information can create an informal collaborative team. Members of the

community have a passionate interest in an outcome and work together to achieve the goal; they share stories, experiences, ideas, tools, and knowledge about achieving the goal (Vande Brake, 2010). It takes time to develop and sustain this interaction, and during this interaction, stories and cases strengthen the bond between the community members.

One essential element for a collaborative leader is procedural learning; this involves having conceptual knowledge of the skill when it should be implemented and then consistently using this expertise to adjust for the errors encountered along the way. Theoretical learning requires basic textbook knowledge of the skill, which should be comprehended before practice (Raines, 2019). Additionally, an understanding of when the expertise is appropriate and accurately timing its use is critical. Perhaps most important is the skill's continual practice, which will enable the leader to obtain feedback and adjust the group as necessary (Detweiler-Bedell & Detweiler-Bedell, 2012).

### **Developing Effective Groups**

Another leadership competency is the ability to create a capable group. Some of the guidelines for forming and managing active groups include the following:

- a) Form clear goals and expectations
- b) Establish practical communication standards within the group
- c) Check that participation is delegated evenly across the group members
- d) Ensure that the group has the expertise and authority to perform the work
- e) Match the level of effort to the expected outcome
- f) Employ a contentious viewpoint to challenge the group's thinking
- g) Face conflicts and manage competing interests (Johnson & Johnson, 2013)

One way to learn these skills is to use experiential learning. A capable group is achieved when each member's contributions are less than those of the group's sum (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). Group combination can occur when the members are balanced, have excellent communication, are empowered, and are happy to be together. When they know that the group's success depends on them working in tandem, it creates a synergistic effect. According to Dyer and Dyer (2019), continuing the practice and going one step further to create a high-performance work team requires all the foundations of a capable group plus the addition of a deeper level of commitment to both the group and one another.

Increased engagement in practice will help new employees develop workflow into a pattern; this new formation can develop skills to enhance the new employee and integrate them into the group. The simple act of taking breaks together, repetitively with the same employees, can grow into a community (Bourouni et al., 2014). The continued repetition and discussion can create new situations, change experiences, and bring different meanings or interpretations to a job or adventure. With the exchange of language, the meaning can evolve and improve social relations and presentations over time. Wenger (2002) points out that accomplishing understanding requires sustained attention and modification to produce sense. Negotiating is also necessary for new community members to resolve converging ideas representing different features and viewpoints.

### **Increasing Job Satisfaction**

Considerable research has been conducted on organizational commitment, coaching, and worker development. However, there is little research on the relationship between employee engagement and job satisfaction (Buckley et al., 2020). One alternative to building a department-based training program is to create a community-wide collaboration team that oversees one-on-

one job shadowing. Organizations that could utilize different workgroups to build communities of interest could also benefit from developing a COP outside the work setting. Stacey (2009) indicated that creating a COP within every department of the organization, can generate a pipeline of new talent that is ready and prepared for the future can be developed.

With support from the company, there could be tailgate meetings or company-provided lunch to help build and foster the community and increase engagement. Better morale could lead to faster development and longer tenure for the workers (Weakliem & Frenkel, 2006). Wenger and Snyder (2000) indicated that if employees are appropriately nurtured, a COP will respond to an added incentive by offering resources such as a meeting room or funding for provisions. The group will have a higher satisfaction level, which could spark increased acceptance of new members.

### **Models of Collaboration**

Two collaborative management models intersect the activity level and the extent to which the activity is strategically aligned with a collaborative culture. Many different types of collaborative management can be crossed and varied to hypothesize how the collaborative model could be perceived. The dominant style of collaboration can be measured for each agency and Agranoff and McGuire (2003) indicated that jurisdiction-based management is an alternative model of collaboration. An important implication in the model is that the managers become policymakers through proposed strategies and adjustments. Axelrod (1997) states that their organization's boundaries become rigid and defined by their agency, and then managers act as independent representatives.

It is from their positions that collaborative contacts and negotiations develop across governments and organizations. Managing across governmental boundaries needs to be a core

activity of public managers (Cheung, 1996). A clear vision of the empirical landscape is necessary to develop collaborative management in the public sector. The variation of collaborative activities across governments can be explained through the strategic orientation of each agency (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003). When government organizations adopt a strategic policy that incorporates the planning process, collaborative measures are used to evaluate their programs and employ a basic administrative structure. That administrative structure is focused on development goals and high collaboration levels.

The organization's management approach can also be viewed through the actors within the agency where collaboration occurs. In addition to managing across organizational boundaries, building collaborative linkages is essential to increase the number and type of opportunities for collaborative settings. The basic building blocks of any network are the contacts and interactions at the local government level (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003).

### **Horizontal and Vertical Linkages**

The collaborative linkages made by organizations are extensive, but the involvement level varies by each agency. Agranoff and McGuire (2003) indicated that vertical intergovernmental relationships involve frequent contacts that can be found in a central agency. The pursuit of adjustment collaboration is conducted differently than information-seeking activity. This activity tends to be more political and less routine. Managing the vertical system requires negotiating at every level.

The strategic orientation and administrative infrastructure of government agencies are significant determinates of current collaborative levels. The variables can make it difficult to predict the variation in horizontal activity patterns. According to Lewis (2015), a considerable difference in collaborative usage is found in the linkages between horizontal players and

activities. Reliance on different parallel operations is determined by managers and the salience of the organization's workers.

Additionally, Agranoff and McGuire (2003) indicated considerable dyadic interaction between government agencies and the typical organizational worker. The collaboration was measured as the relationship of three players working within the context of a specific activity. Relationships of three or more workers exist in a context of multiple goals with potential conflict agendas and high interaction costs. By examining three workers, the additional complexity of adding a fourth worker to an existing network becomes apparent. If an agency has an established policymaking strategy relationship with another organization, it is referred to as a cluster.

**Table 1**

*Typical Density of Collaboration*

Player	No. of Links	Centrality Percent
Local Development Agency	787	17.6%
County Governments	751	16.8%
Chamber of Commerce	748	16.7%
Utilities	548	12.2%
Other Cities	389	8.7%
Special Districts	360	8.0%
Neighborhood Associations	260	5.8%
Township Governments	248	5.5%

Player	No. of Links	Centrality
		Percent
Private Industry Council	217	4.8%
Foundations	172	3.8%
Total	4,480	

*Note.* Adapted from *Collaborative Public Management: New Strategies for Local Governments* (p. 116) by R. Agranoff, & M. McGuire, 2003, Georgetown University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2tt2nq> Copyright 2003, by Georgetown University Press. Adapted with permission from Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

The study showed that the average collaborating city operates through over sixty horizontal linkages per year. Table 1 illustrates the number of collaborative links and the percent of centrality within each type of organization.

Their data suggests that an essential aspect of collaboration is also related to jurisdiction management, which seeks out collaborative players for a specific purpose. The players are important because they can perform a function that fills a need in the agency. Many agencies link with players strategically, and these managers build them for jurisdictional purposes. Agency officials pursue different collaborative linkages depending on the activity. The complexity of management increases when the number of players increases, and the combination of events is incremental in every situation (Bynander & Nohrstedt, 2020). Some of the notable differences in the development of collaborative linkages are as follows:

- Written and phone communication are the preferred mode of interaction during vertical activity.
- Horizontal collaborative arrangements that produce policy and strategies by agencies will play the most central role.
- Resource exchange networks are defined by structure and composition.
- Project-based activities create collaborative linkages that are not as complicated as other types of ties (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003).

Franks and Johns's (2015) results indicate the need for collaborative networks during economic development activities. The array of connections gives government agencies great flexibility and power to add or subtract players (Howes et al., 1992). The possibilities increase the work of the managers that develop and maintain collaborative relationships. This view of horizontal and vertical linkages demonstrates that the variation of joint management is a function of the players and the agency's activities (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003). The networks that make up the agency's environment are complex and differ with each strategic purpose (OD Network, 2012).

There are multiple forms of collaborative infractions and transactions, and formal and informal network contacts agencies achieve more through partnerships that operate and reciprocate with key players. With strategy and activity at the forefront, government agencies need to develop their style and approach to collaborative management. Agranoff and McGuire (2003) suggested that organizational collaboration management typically employed five practices:

- Action planning
- Problem-solving



- Force field analysis
- Team building
- Process consultation

These practices fall into two domains. First, in collaborative management, empowerment is based on information rather than authority; there are no subordinate relationships in collaboration. Second, collaboration involves staff from several organizations working together to develop new systems using open communication of overall policies to link the information (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004).

Shared learning is another potential component of effective collaboration as it is developed throughout the organizational workforce. An environment conducive to learning is created when collaborative players follow respectful discourse (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010). Jurisdiction-based managers facilitate collaborative discussions that create shared meaning to encourage new knowledge. The group process is also developed through negotiating, which makes a culture of joint problem-solving. Developing an ethos that values equality is key to overcoming the organization's bureaucratic tendencies and maintain employee satisfaction levels.

When staff from other agencies are not legally bound through authority relationships, they come together to solve and clarify problems and develop solutions (Schwemmer & Havrilla, 2011). When there are multiple contacts with players, it establishes trust, shared purpose, and mutual dependency that collaborative management strives to create without the force of legal authority in a bureaucratic government agency.

## **Collaborative Leadership**

Collaborative cohesion must offer an equivalent structure to the hierarchical format. Mutual dependence is what holds collaborative linkages together (Tritt & Kendrick, 2014). The program rationale can be established when collective goals benefit all players involved. Power in collaboration can be portrayed neutrally or as a property that can prevent or facilitate action. According to Schwemmer and Havrilla (2011), individuals' veto power can be used in different ways to exclude individual players, put potential actors outside of the network, or not allow certain viewpoints to be expressed solutions, which can dampen employee satisfaction.

Conversely, there is an enabling network component that can create a synergistic team. The use of power does not always include all players to act in synchronicity. It is assumed that social forces are described as a lack of coherence and that many activities are autonomous and require middle-range collaboration rather than cohesive control (Rogers et al., 2016). Lechner (2020) indicated that in any collaborative setting where one player does not have control, the main concern is how to cooperate with the community to benefit the organization and get things done. Under most conditions, the power is that interdependence and complexity are better than situations where one has control over the other.

The social production model against veto power brings to light two dimensions of power within groups. Power could inhibit or facilitate collective action within collaborative networks. Some observers characterize collaboration as power-sharing. Different types of power are critical to collaboration, as noted by Ronchi (2019):

- The power to mobilize and organize
- The power to strategize and control information
- The power to exercise influence and authorize action

The same individual will rarely exercise all types of power within a coequal setting. Temporary redistributions of power will occur throughout the process. The redistribution of power enables stakeholders to engage in domain transformation.

When the collaborative setting is not coequal, alternative strategies of engagement can develop to foster participation. Equality of power can be eroded when a player exercises formal or legal authority, controls the distribution and flow of resources or directs lower-level players (Daft & Lane, 2016). Power is a property that can inhibit or facilitate collaborative action. The concern for the loss of accountability in multi-organizational settings developed as contracting relationships have the potential to become more prevalent. There is a fear that employees of contracting organizations will pursue actions inconsistent with the elected officials' goals.

Ronchi (2019) notes that two critical factors contribute to accountability in collaborative management systems. First, accountability relationships in a dynamic, collaborative setting differ from those found in contractors' dyadic relationships. Second, when there is no obvious principle in collaboration, the issue of accountability with elected officials can become unclear. Everyone is in charge with no single authority, and responsibility becomes shared, although no one is entirely accountable.

The expectations of being accountable to an entity are not consistent with collaborative linkages that create democratic legitimacy, as indicated by Ronchi (2019). The public sector's responsibility for affecting the public interest can be compromised and limited by collaborative policymaking and management. The objective of collaborative liability is accountability for these outcomes to ensure the goal is achieved (Ricucci & Van Ryzin, 2017). The management concept of responsibility does not apply to the collaborative process.

To some degree, collaborative decision-making can seem more logical than individual decision-making. More input means more alternatives, more information, and a decision system with less personal thinking (Berardo et al., 2020). Transforming leadership is needed in specific settings such as teaching and other professions that require independent thinkers. Mariama-Arthur (2018) stated collaborative leaders are distinguished thinkers that understand how to align people with systems to accomplish goals.

The first step in thinking like a collaborative leader is to view work through relationships. Collaborative leaders place goals at the center of their vision and then build and manage connections to develop and lead the right people towards those goals (Bakken, 2018). The collaborative approach creates collateral benefits of shared ownership of the products or outcomes of the efforts. According to Renkert-Thomas and McCracken (2015), shared ownership in the process means that the process will be smarter and more inclusive than the decision-making of one manager and has the potential to increase satisfaction levels.

Collaborative leadership cannot be successful with a closed mindset. External forces that have a positive or negative influence must be addressed. Some of those stakeholders and decision-makers that are key to a collaborative team include the following:

- The people that you would want to engage with, who have shared goals and vision
- Members that share cultural, social, and commercial forces
- Players that have the capacity to influence and have a stake in the outcome

Rubin (2009) conceptualized the process to help members reflect and envision the collaborative journey over time. By developing a mental model of the players and strategy, the group can begin to work through the collaboration phases.

## **The Collaborative Life Cycle**

According to Rubin (2009), a collaborative lifecycle can be grouped into five main activities. The first is to launch the initiative and determine whether there is sufficient reason to achieve the goal. The second is to develop a collaborative team and increase the knowledge base of the group. The third is to build the system and enhance the administrative structures in place. The fourth is to make a collaboration culture through partners' connections, both internal and external. The last is to craft a plan to create accountability and sustainability.

Rubin (2009) identified fourteen phases within the collaboration life cycle that are important for leaders to know. These building blocks are fundamental to collaborative leadership and provide practical application for group problem-solving. Reflection and planning are essential to hone the collaborative lens and provide a roadmap for collaborative progression.

- Phase 1: Evaluate what you want to achieve; then decide whether collaboration is the right tool to achieve the goal.
- Phase 2: Determine who the important decision-makers are; then decide whether any key players need to be on the team because of their ability to influence.
- Phase 3: Develop a base of shared knowledge between the team members. Ensure the members understand the political history. Then, frame the purpose of collaboration based on the facts.
- Phase 4: Reconsider the stakeholders with interest and capacity to influence the assessment of the financial resources.
- Phase 5: Frame and recruit, develop a strategy to recruit other stakeholders, and then build a plan to retain the partners. Solidify the connections with the emerging interests in the mission.

- Phase 6: Develop a strategic plan to maintain continuity, accountability, and responsibility for fulfilling the goal.
- Phase 7: Circulate the plan to review an endorsement by all team members and partners. Encourage partners to discuss action plans and their connection to the corporate mission.
- Phase 8: Continue to build and revise the action plan based on prior successes. Develop the experience into a symbolic event that can be memorialized through storytelling.
- Phase 9: Document how the collaborations have built bonds between partners and improved trust, loyalty, and professionalism. The strengthened relationships make future collaborations more productive, and the players more willing to make compromises.
- Phase 10: Celebrate the success of the accomplishments with the partners. Make the collaborators feel rewarded for their efforts and use external publicity to build momentum to support the goal.
- Phase 11: Check in with the partners to ensure they feel connected and supported through the collaborative process; the communication can occur in a one-on-one or group setting.
- Phase 12: Begin measuring and tracking progress towards the goal and set a schedule to monitor progress to ensure continued success and determine how the partners will follow the performance.
- Phase 13: Ensure that continued resources are available to fulfill the purpose. Two types of change need to be monitored for continued success: first, a facilitative shift

that has been developed through better relations; second, the targeted change that the goal was intended to fulfill. Evaluate the forces that could potentially derail reform and take measures to mitigate the effect.

- Phase 14: Continually remind the collaborative team how the goals have made a difference and utilize benchmarks to track change. Ensure that the ongoing collaborations are flexible enough to explore future options for replacement or modifications of the policy.

The life cycle of collaboration helps develop a mental model for the process to ensure continued success. Moreover, senior managers must provide ongoing support and commitment to ensure future achievements. Studies by Ford (2020) have reported that executive leadership's dedication levels through financial support and role modeling are noticeable to the entire organization. Senior managers need to create dialogue and supportive stances with staff to build cross-institutional collaboration in the organization. Grogan and de Weck (2016) claim the social cohesiveness of trust and feelings of belonging to the team enables groups to build collaborative learning patterns.

### **Encouraging Collaboration in Organizational Settings**

Research has illustrated that collaborative learning discussions help encourage education and gain support for new learning outcomes. Throughout the cooperative learning process, employees must be able to take risks and make mistakes. It is essential to increase the collaborative knowledge and build an influential collaborative culture that will strengthen the organization by improving retention, engaging the workforce, increasing satisfaction levels, and enhancing innovation capacity (Simper et al., 2018). The workforce will always make decisions with the best intentions for the organization. However, Schuman (2006) indicated they may still

not feel they have the authority to act on their choices unless they have participated in the decision-making process. A collaborative organizational culture gives everyone a voice, so employees know how to communicate in the collaborative process.

Aligning performance metrics between business units is critical for everyone to ensure that effective collaboration occurs between departments. When parameters are not aligned within the organization, silos can develop from the lack of inclusion and transparency (Schuman, 2006). In collaborative organizations, managers and leaders must understand their role in facilitating the organization's collaborative culture. Leaders need to support collaboration by investing time and financial resources to support and reward cooperative behavior, according to Nicholas and West-Burnham (2016). In addition, leaders need to develop accountability by promoting change through collaborative processes that enrich the organizational culture.

### **Culture Change to Increase Employee Satisfaction**

Overcoming resistance to change is a complex task; according to Kelman (2005). The factors of resistance to change can be grouped into indigenous and exogenous factors. These internal and external drivers can create conflict at the individual and organizational levels. One additional component is personality dynamics; many theorists claim that change is related to the individual's psychological state. Other aspects of personality traits related to change are the individual's expectations, attitudes, and aspirations. Schnugg (2019) suggested that these individual emotions and interactions can play into the resistance to organizational change. Utilizing collaboration and building a blueprint for successful partnerships will provide the greatest chance for victory.

At the corporate level, the development of new proposals can impact the attitudes and behaviors of the workforce. Influencing change plans by encouraging or discouraging specific



paths and showcasing the benefits to an organization's individual can help create cooperation. Some additional skills to be showcased could include learning new and different skills and developing new experiences that broaden corporate exposure, according to Bernato (2017). The collaborative organization will experience success and failures as the workforce's competence increases (Kelman, 2005). Most employees resist change because it requires something new that has the potential to make procedures worse. Workers feel comfortable performing repetitive actions for long periods, and typically, less competent employees resist change initiatives. Innes and Booher (2018) implied that more competent employees embrace change and are more willing to see improvements and efficiencies through new processes.

Success stories are used extensively to market services and educate the staff. These collaborative organizations are characterized by the commitment to humanitarian and participatory ideologies (Moshtari, 2016). Over time, corporate workers' behaviors become embedded in the culture and their environment, constraining the ability to change the future. Knowledge structures that are created by organizations encourage workers to focus on what they are trained to accomplish, which makes it hard to notice signals indicating that change is needed (Drummond, 2019). Job satisfaction is an essential organizational factor related to the resistance to change signified by Kelman (2005). It increases when the interest and expectations of workers match their perception and achievements. Job dissatisfaction is displayed as an unwillingness to cooperate and contribute to the organizational goals.

### **External Environmental Factors of Job Satisfaction**

People have differences in values and assumptions, and collaborative management practices can help reconcile differences and bring a workforce in alignment with goals. As organizational values and goals change, it may be useful for some and bad for others. The

socialization process has a significant impact on human values, attitudes, and characteristics (Moshtari, 2016). Calagione and Shister (2016) suggested that small organizational environments can be described as comparatively stable and less likely to change. Small organizations can also provide a healthier relational and better collaborative environment for the workforce.

One of a leader's difficult tasks is to behave in a fair, unbiased, and objective fashion (Trevino et al., 2000). Corporate leaders can influence the workforce with the vision they create and the attitude that is used to convey the vision. Lough and Von Treuer (2013) found that positive leadership styles can increase employee satisfaction levels and create a higher probability for better organizational outcomes. Different leadership styles (Calagione & Shister, 2016) have been shown to increase or decrease employee satisfaction and productivity levels within the organizations.

Traditionally, workers who are more resistant to change, feel more secure in a small environment that collaborates versus a sizable top-down organization. Calagione and Shister (2016) indicated that participatory and collaborative approaches to organizational development programs could work for or against the organization. The concept of participatory management can create a sense of ownership that leads to better sustainable growth (Kolavalli & Kerr, 2002). Through collaborative management practices and organizational development programs, participants feel empowered and develop better managerial capabilities that result in better workforce opportunities.

Advocates of collaborative learning often utilize the learning culture as the key to building an encouraging collaborative workplace training. One workplace model that has been validated by Marsick and Watkins (2016) shows that empowerment and collaboration can

enhance the capacity to learn and change. The model defines seven levels to increase job satisfaction and promote ongoing change and learning:

- Continuous learning opportunities: Ongoing education and growth are needed to provide a learning environment to learn on the job.
- Inquiry and dialogue: The organization resists creating a yes culture and supports questioning and feedback. Through exploration, people gain interpretation skills to express their views and develop the ability to listen and inquire.
- Team learning: The use of teams is needed to access various thinking types; culture desires collaboration.
- Embedded system: Learning systems are with technology and are designed to share, create, and maintain and are integrated with work.
- Empowerment: Leaders involve the workforce to develop and implement a shared vision, and responsibility is distributed to encourage growth, satisfaction, and learning.
- System connection: The organization is engaged with the community, and the workforce understands the environment; hence, modifications can be deployed to achieve effectiveness.
- Strategic leadership: The agency leaders use learning and design strategically for business results, and the workforce is used to champion and support organizational goals.

The model creates a continuous learning opportunity, generates inquiry and dialogue, and encourages collaboration through team building. The model by Song et al. (2009) also

establishes a system to capture learning and build connections to the organization, and it utilizes collaboration to create a collective vision.

Bruggen (2015) investigated the relationship between the employees and how the organization fulfilled its needs to influence job performance. The hypothesis presented suggested that positive relationships result when the group fit of the environment filled the employee's psychological needs and allowed for autonomy in their jobs. Increased feelings of competence, satisfaction, and commitment within the organization developed along with job performance as autonomy and collaboration increased. Bruggen's (2015) results showed that internal motivations influence employee workplace fit and that the employees need to meet their psychological needs intrinsically or extrinsically.

A combination of experiences can drive motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) defined the different types of motivation as autonomous and integrated into the self by an independent individual. The employee's perception of work related to self-autonomy determines how the relationship with the organization and their job performance improves performance both for the individual and the organization with increasing competency perception. Kuvaas (2007) studied the relationship between intrinsic motivation and job performance in public sector employees to explore the need for job satisfaction and the employee perception of support from the organization. The results indicated that work conditions that support task interdependence increase intrinsic motivation.

Managers from all types of organizations interact in different ways that could be interpreted as aggressive rather than motivated for a collaborative relationship. Adversarial relationships between managers and staff can be difficult for the organization and the staff members they supervise. Finding shared interests can mitigate hostile relationships and develop

better corporate managers. Leaders from all sectors can accomplish more by nurturing collaborative partnerships that serve the interests of everyone, according to Rubin (2009). By being proactive with collaborative efforts, managers can build resilience within their organization to successfully create win-win results and make themselves more valuable.

The collaborative process can also present an opportunity to build social capital and networks that can enhance problem-solving capabilities, increase employee satisfaction levels, and develop better communication skills. The collaborative process serves as a mechanism to get to know one another on the team, according to Ford (2020). When problems arise during the implementation process, the team can work together collaboratively to create a fair resolution to solve the problem. By building rapport and trusted relationships, team members are more likely to work together to problem-solve and create a beneficial synergistic response.

### **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

A research project's methodology is essential to ensure a step-by-step plan is established to provide qualified work direction. A phenomenological research design was chosen to analyze human resource executives' life experience and techniques to determine the best practices for increasing employee satisfaction levels (Groenewald, 2004). This chapter will illustrate the research design and methodology employed for this study. The research questions will first be reiterated, followed by a dialogue of this qualitative study's nature. The nature of the research will also describe the assumptions and the strengths and weaknesses of a phenomenological process used in research. An outline of the structured process of phenomenology (Van Manen, 2016) will be presented along with the methodology used for conducting the study. The research design section will go into more detail about the participants and how they were selected. Protection of human subjects is a sensitive topic that must be respected to ensure the participants' safety. The researcher will provide a plan to provide complete anonymity, and the research protocol was reviewed by the Internal Review Board (IRB) before any research was conducted.

The data collection techniques will be provided in detail, and a plan to transfer the audio data into a format that can be coded and analyzed to develop a conclusion. The interview protocol is reviewed, and the peer and expert review process support the interviews' validity and reliability. A statement of personal bias is discussed through the bracketing and epoche method. The data analysis and coding section will also be presented to gain further insight into the research process. The analysis will be processed through a four-step interrater reliability method. Once consensus is reached with the initial interviews, the process will continue with the remainder of the interview sessions. Finally, a summary of the chapter will be presented to conclude the methodology and introduce the research findings.

## **Restatement of Research Questions**

The research questions focus on the study and document experience, as understood by the participant. The following questions were asked to accomplish the objectives of this study, which is primarily to determine the answer to these following four research questions:

- RQ1: How do human resource executives define, measure, and track desirable levels of job satisfaction?
- RQ2: What challenges do human resource executives face in implementing these strategies?
- RQ3: What challenges do human resource executives encounter when trying to increase employee satisfaction levels?
- RQ4: What advice would human resource executives give aspiring human resource executives for increasing job satisfaction levels?

## **Nature of the Study**

Human Resource Directors highlight the importance of employee satisfaction levels within organizations. Ongoing theoretically grounded qualitative research is needed to advance the sector further. Furthermore, organizational leaders recommend that qualitative research methods provide a sound rationale for selecting research designs and developing related concepts to organizational problems (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). They maintain that qualitative research can improve the ideas regarding human resource management practices and influence decision-makers on experiential service-learning.

This qualitative descriptive research studied the unique phenomena of human resource directors' working in various public agencies and how they approach employee satisfaction levels. The public organizations considered for this study's purpose are all based in California

and range from medium to large in terms of employee staffing levels. The qualitative research involved an inquiry into the experiences of work-related social problems as revealed by the participants. The study attempted to quantify and create meaning from individual experiences. The qualitative method applied involved using open-ended questions that allowed the subjects to expand on their encounters (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). These responses were then categorized into overarching themes (Lewis, 2015). Some of the strengths of this research study include:

- Knowledge-based information on the phenomenological experience
- Analysis of the events is completed in a systematic format analyzing themes.
- The research is organized utilizing a theoretical format.
- More details about complex issues can be attained.

Some of the weaknesses of this phenomenological study are:

- The experience is through the viewpoint of one individual.
- The information could be misinterpreted
- The data can be challenging to analyze
- The research data gathered may not be typical of the broader community

This awareness helped ensure the interview process and the data generated through the interviews are of high quality. They will be useful for further research about employee satisfaction.

## **Methodology**

The methodology utilized in this research employed a qualitative, descriptive, phenomenological research approach to gain an understanding of human resource directors' opinions about their team members' current workplace satisfaction. The study utilized a semi-structured interview technique. The essential advantage of this method is that the collected data



can be analyzed and differentiated to prove or disprove a hypothesis. The semi-structured interview is an interview-style where discussion with guiding questions is somewhat informal and systematically leads the conversation. It is also less rigid and lends itself to gather unfiltered information (Seale, 1999). This technique has proven extremely suitable for research methods as it is flexible and provides more latitude for the participants to share more details.

### ***A Structured Process of Phenomenology***

Richards and Morse (2012) explain that the phenomenological research approach is an essential philosophical effort established by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Within phenomenology, there are two underlying assumptions. The first assumption is that the world's perception creates an inference of evidence through the lens of how it has been lived. The second assumption is that the consciousness of life experiences makes human existence meaningful. However, this existence relates to being in the world only within an individual's personal context.

The primary characteristic of phenomenological research is its detailed and in-depth phenomenological investigation. In this method, the interview process aims to determine how the research participants experienced the phenomenon instead of how they perceive the studied phenomenon (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The phenomenological reduction process used by Eddles-Hirsch (2015) helps the researcher keep an open mind and listen to the participants' answers. Traditionally, phenomenological research was accomplished through the process of epoche, wherein the researcher maintains an open mind, and purposely sets aside any preconceived knowledge or beliefs that could be used to explain the phenomena being studied. At the completion of the interviews, the researcher would develop a report based on the structural description to provide a fundamental understanding of the researched phenomena.

### ***Appropriateness of Phenomenology Methodology***

Research that studies employee satisfaction levels requires a flexible framework that will allow the problem to be considered from different angles. For this study, a semi-structured interview process was used to generate data to frame an interpretive approach in a business setting (Reiter et al., 2011). Seidman's (2013) assessment indicates that a flexible research methodology would be more valuable when studying multi-concept phenomena in an applied professional setting. Therefore, the phenomenological approach was used to accomplish the research.

According to Richards and Morse (2012), a phenomenological inquiry does not need a targeted direction. Researchers might be interested in understanding the participants' experience and the experience's effect during a particular phenomenon. When thinking phenomenologically, researchers attempt to understand how people view the world around them (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Every individual's description of events is based on their perception and form of interpretation. People consciously experience objects through intuition; however, phenomenological experiences may not be realistic because lived experiences are essential to understand the former.

### **Research Design**

This research study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to inquire and answer the research questions. To develop accurate qualitative data from the participants, selection criteria were established within the analysis unit, population, sample size, and sampling technique.

### ***Analysis Unit***

This study's unit of analysis is one organizational leader with the human resource director's job title. Employees with this job title are typically responsible for the development of corporate culture and employee satisfaction levels. This position is targeted because experienced human resource directors have developed strategies to navigate employee satisfaction concerns. The human resource director position has the highest probability of knowledge and work experience with employee satisfaction levels within the organizational setting.

### ***Population***

The population of participants consisted of both male and female executives. All participants were in the state of California at the time of the interview. The population for this research study was retrieved from the Transparent California website (<https://transparentcalifornia.com/>) during January 2021. This website lists all public agency employees with their job titles and their annual salary. The total number of positions listed on the website for 2019 exceeds two million total employee records. The job title "Director of Human Resources" was searched within the website, and the year was set to 2019 data using the advanced search feature. These settings were chosen to attain the highest probability that the individuals will still be employed in their current role as human resource director. The human resource director's position will have detailed knowledge and share experiences and strategies to overcome problems related to the situation.

### ***Sample Size***

The search results yielded 108 potential candidates for the interviews. To narrow down the potential interviewees, the search was made more specific. An email invitation was sent to each potential participant who met the qualifications. The email indicated that they were chosen

to participate in a research study regarding employee satisfaction. The email also stated that there would be discussion through an interview process on the best practices they use to measure and manage organizational satisfaction levels. A postcard invitation was also sent in January of 2021 to the pool of potential candidates. The additional effort of two modes of contact helped ensure the minimum candidate sample of 15 participants could be achieved.

The requirements for a population sample size of a qualitative study vary greatly by different phenomenological researchers. Flynn and Korcuska (2018) reported that a three-phase investigation around the standards of phenomenological research practices identified the sample sizes needed for a valid phenomenological study is three to nine subjects. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the sample size of 15 was sufficient to ensure data saturation was achieved during the coding process. To confirm there would be adequate data to explore multiple concepts, 15 participants were selected to understand the phenomena clearly.

### ***Purposive Sampling***

A purposive sampling methodology was utilized to acquire participants from other public organizations to show different perceptions of employee satisfaction levels. The information provided by the participants included personal stories, observations, and documents. The purposive sampling interviews provided phenomenological data based on experience in attaining the organization's desired overall employee satisfaction levels. A purposeful sample of 25 was chosen to optimistically interview 15 participants. The final participant sample was selected based on the level of experience with managing employee overall satisfaction levels.

According to Emmel (2013), six common themes highlight the strengths and weaknesses of purposive sampling:

- Researchers make judgments about what to sample and how to sample their research

- The judgments reference what is known about the phenomena being studied
- Researchers are meticulous in selecting a limited number of instances that produce the most data
- Knowledge of the audience for the research can bias sampling strategies
- Decisions are constrained by resources and addressed after the first four items are considered
- There are many different logics to qualitative sampling strategies, and the approach is based on the researcher's purpose

Purposive sampling, if performed appropriately, can give an equal chance of inclusion and selection. Various strategies can randomize or stratify the study to provide credibility to the research and the audience.

### **Participant Selection**

A phenomenology study component is to choose participants who have knowledge and experience in the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following steps were taken to derive the list of potential interviewees who could have experience with managing employee satisfaction levels. A master list was generated using a database of public agency employees. The list was copied and pasted from the Transparent California website to an excel worksheet. The initial list was further refined using criteria for inclusion and exclusion. Last, the criteria for maximum inclusion were applied to generate a sampling list of 25 potential candidates to attain 15 interviews.

### ***Sampling Frame***

The initial sampling frame was comprised of a queried list of 108 individuals who worked for California public agencies and held the job title of Human Resource Director during

2019. The list was moved to an excel spreadsheet and every record contained the job title, name of the individual, and the agency where they worked. The duration for which these personnel were employed in their positions was not considered for the participants' initial selection. These personnel were working for various public agencies across the state of California. The types of agencies represented included cities, water districts, school districts, and counties.

**Criteria for Inclusion.** The first criterion for inclusion in the research was the use of the job title, "Director of Human Resources," pertaining to the year 2019, which was queried from a list of all California public agencies listed on the Transparent California website. After the initial list was developed, additional criteria were added in the following order:

1. The Human Resource Director was responsible for managing and maintaining employee satisfaction levels.
2. The organization was greater than 50 employees.
3. The organizations conducted an employee survey on employee satisfaction within the last 24 months.

**Criteria for Exclusion.** A criterion for exclusion was also applied to reduce the number of eligible participants further to reach the target sample size. The criteria for exclusion were applied as follows:

1. The director has less than five years' experience in the position.
2. Unavailable to meet for a virtual interview during January or February.
3. Would disapprove of the interview being recorded.

**Criteria for Maximum Variation.** The maximum variation technique was utilized to distinguish and understand how a phenomenon can be experienced by different people (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). This strategy aimed to increase the perceptions coming from a diversified group of public agency human resource directors. The variation of the respondents was maximized to ensure diversity in the responses. Agency employee totals were also used to categorize each candidate who met the criteria for inclusion. The final list included a diversified group of candidates from medium and large organizations. The subjects were selected because they had the work experience and knowledge to be of value to the study.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Research permissions and authorization were obtained from the IRB before contacting participants or acquiring survey data. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before beginning the interview process. A confidentiality clause was included with the preamble instructions, along with the proposed interview questions. Ethical concerns were addressed by utilizing the following guidelines while the research was conducted:

- Respect for privacy interests
- Concern for welfare and respect of the individual
- Equitable and fair treatment of the participants

The interview instructions informed the subjects that their participation in the study is entirely voluntary and that the risk level of participation is expected to be low. They were then provided with an overview of the interview risks, including potential stress concerning job satisfaction. There were no conflicts of interest related to this interview because there was no association between the interviewer and the interviewees.

The researcher made every attempt to ensure that the respondents were not deceived or misled by the survey questions at any point in time. Participant anonymity was affirmed by ensuring that responses cannot be tied back to any participant. The interview transcriptions were assigned a number based on the date and the order in which the interview was conducted. An excel spreadsheet with the participant's name, the agency, and the corresponding identification number is stored on a personal computer with no public access to ensure the transcript cannot be connected to any individual. The collected data will be retained by the researcher for three years, as required by federal law. The survey results were confirmed to be used solely for societal benefit purposes and better understand the best practices that can be employed to increase employee satisfaction levels and how collaboration is related to job satisfaction. No money or compensation of any kind was provided to the participants for taking part in the survey.

### **Data Collection**

Before the data collection process, all participants were initially notified via email and after agreement followed up with the IRB-approved recruitment script. The script provided detailed information about the purpose of the study and introduced the researcher to the subject. Once the participant provided approval to take part in the research study, an interview time and date was arranged. Approximately twenty minutes prior to the scheduled interview meetings, the researcher prepared the audio recording devices, and the Zoom website was set up to record the interview. At the scheduled appointment time, the Zoom session was initiated, and the interviews began.

The discussions were conducted using a semi-structured interview method. The meetings were audio-recorded using a high-quality device that was later used to transcribe to text format using Otter AI software on the investigator's personal computer. Upon completion of the



transcription process, the data was reviewed for accuracy and clarity. The data was further analyzed and labeled with an alias and generic titles to also protect the participants. The transcripts were indicated only by a serial number assigned to each participant that only the researcher could access. The audio recordings were stored on a USB memory stick in a locked cabinet drawer located in the researcher's home. After three years of retention as required by Federal law, the data will be erased and destroyed.

### **Interview Techniques**

The interview meeting dates and times were scheduled individually with each research participant through email. Before starting each meeting, an interview guide was assembled, and basic broad-level questions were first asked to establish trust and comfort. A quick cultural assessment was performed to safeguard sensitivities to the interview questions were meeting expectations. The interviewer approached the interviewees with an open and curious attitude to quickly build rapport.

Data was collected by interviewing the participants over Zoom and by telephone with the research questions in a semi-structured open-ended style. The discussion involved social interfacing and encouraged conversation to extract further details about the phenomena. In qualitative research, the researcher uses the conversation to understand the experience more fully from the participant's perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study used semi-structured interviews, which utilized open-ended inquiries to elicit detailed responses (Baumbusch, 2010). The researcher used an established interview protocol to elicit responses that helped gather additional research questions. During the meeting, follow-up questions were invited to confirm whether the participants correctly understood the questions. The researcher used active listening skills and, in some cases, limited the responses to ensure all

questions could be answered in the allotted time. After the meeting, the researcher expressed gratitude for participating and provided contact information for further follow-up after completing the study.

### **Interview Protocol**

Face-to-face interviews were not possible due to the current worldwide COVID-19 pandemic situation. All the interviews were conducted and documented using the Zoom web-based video conferencing, which provides a platform wherein individuals can see and hear each other in a live setting. The sessions were also audio recorded with a high-quality device to facilitate replaying, transcribing, and coding of the spoken words into data. The semi-structured interviews were restricted to one hour to keep the conversations on track and to the point. The validity of the questions is imperative to the study's rigor and to ensure the quality of information.

### ***Interview Questions***

The following interview questions were asked during the meeting:

Ice breaker: How did you get started in the human resources field?

- IQ 1: How would you define the desired level of employee satisfaction you aspire to reach?
- IQ 2: How do you measure the level of employee satisfaction?
- IQ 3: What indicators do you use to track them?
- IQ 4: If you had to pick one, what would you say your single most effective strategy is to increase employee satisfaction?
- IQ 5: What other strategies do you use at your organization to increase employee satisfaction?

- IQ 6: How are these strategies arrived at?
- IQ 7: What obstacles do you face in achieving your desired level of employee satisfaction?
- IQ 8: What internal and external resources do you use?
- IQ 9: Look for follow-up questions to get clarity
- IQ 10: What are some strategies you have used to improve employee satisfaction you would want NOT to repeat? Why?
- IQ 11: What pitfalls would you warn aspiring HR execs to avoid?

**Validity and Reliability.** The first step in ensuring the research's validity was to suspend expectations and bias in the research questions and answers during the interview process. The second phase of the validation check was performed through a three-step peer evaluation process (Golafshani, 2003). In this phase, the questions were rephrased based on peer feedback and asked by reversing the original questions' wordings. The researcher plans to maintain the highest integrity level throughout the research procedure to ensure reliability and validity are incorporated into the final data.

**Prima Facie Validity.** The prima facie and validity will be established with all question by determining the level of experience and awareness each participant has with the topic. Creating prima facia ensures the interview questions are valid and helps to focus the participants on the subject. Each of the research questions was devised through the literature, along with a colleague and expert review procedure. All the interview questions were related to the four research questions and were shown to be valid for clearness and use. Prima facie validity was determined positive and is shown below in Table 2.

**Table 2***Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Corresponding Interview Questions</b>
RQ1: How do human resource executives define, measure, and track desirable levels of job satisfaction?	IQ 1: How do you sustain employee engagement and job satisfaction?  IQ 2: How do you maintain employer/employee relationships?  IQ 3: How do you ensure open communication within the workforce?  IQ 4: How does absenteeism and employee productivity affect employee satisfaction levels?
RQ2: What challenges do human resource executives face in implementing these strategies?	IQ 4: How do you measure employee satisfaction?  IQ 5: How do you improve workplace satisfaction?

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ3: How do human resource executives define, measure, and track job satisfaction levels?	<p>IQ 6: Do you track your employees' motivation levels by observing their enthusiasm and engagement in collaborating with their colleagues and involvement in team activities?</p> <p>IQ 7: In your organization, are employee opinion surveys used to determine the level of job satisfaction among your workforce?</p> <p>IQ 8: In your organization, are annual performance appraisals used to measure employee performance and job satisfaction levels?</p>
RQ4: What advice would human resource executives give for increasing job satisfaction levels?	<p>IQ 9: How would you evaluate the effectiveness of your measures towards ensuring employee satisfaction?</p> <p>IQ 10: What should human resources managers measure to increase awareness for job satisfaction levels?</p>

*Note.* Table 2 Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions. This table identifies four research questions and related interview questions as developed by the researcher.

**Peer-Review Validity.** An outside expert provided a peer review to review and validate the data collection methods and interview protocol. A list was developed to help support the research questions and with the subsequent interview questions. The researcher identified and recruited one subject matter experts to take part in an assessment process. The reviewer was provided both the research and interview questions. The peer reviewer was then asked to complete the following in order:

1. Examine each research question, along with the matching interview questions.
2. For each interview question, think about how well the question focuses on the research question.
3. If the interview question is appropriate for the research question, mark it as "Keep as stated." If the question is not relevant mark as "Delete."
4. If the interview question can be modified, suggest your modification, or additional questions can be recommended as you see necessary.

Following the peer review validity process, the recommended changes were made to the interview questions, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Peer-Review Validity*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What challenges do human resource executives encounter when trying to increase employee satisfaction levels?	IQ 1: What challenges do you face when trying to increase employee engagement and job satisfaction levels?

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	<p>IQ 2: What challenges have you personally experienced in maintaining or increasing employee satisfaction levels?</p> <p>IQ 3: Why do you think there are so many constraints in increasing employee satisfaction levels?</p>
<p>RQ2: What strategies do human resource managers utilize to overcome the challenges of employee satisfaction?</p>	<p>IQ 4: What type of collaborative strategies are utilized in your organization to increase employee satisfaction levels?</p> <p>IQ 5: How does the overall working environment impact employee satisfaction levels?</p> <p>IQ 6: What strategies have you deployed to increase employee job satisfaction levels?</p>
<p>RQ3: How do human resource executives define, measure, and track job satisfaction levels?</p>	<p>IQ 7: What should human resources managers measure to increase the awareness of job satisfaction levels?</p>

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	<p>IQ 8: How do you conduct employee performance appraisals used to track employee job satisfaction levels?</p> <p>IQ 9: What tools do you use to determine the level of job satisfaction within your workforce?</p>
RQ4: What piece of advice do you wish you were given when you first started this position?	<p>IQ 10: What strategies have you successfully used to increase employee job satisfaction levels?</p> <p>IQ 11: How does employee satisfaction results influence your organization's HRM policy?</p>

*Note.* Table 3 Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions (Revised). This table identifies four research questions and related interview questions with revisions based on feedback from peer reviewers. Following this, subsequent changes were made to the order and phrasing of questions within the interview protocol.



**Expert Review Validity.** An expert review validity procedure was determined and deployed to remedy suggested peer revisions to the research and interview questions where the researcher disagreed. The dissertation committee provided the professional evaluation to decide whether the researcher should implement the peer review recommendations in the interview procedure. Some questions were modified, and the changes were incorporated during the expert review process. The final changes are noted in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Expert Review Validity*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: How do human resource executives define, measure, and track desirable levels of job satisfaction?	<p>IQ 1: How would you define the desired level of employee satisfaction you aspire to reach?</p> <p>IQ 2: How do you measure the level of employee satisfaction?</p> <p>IQ 3: What indicators do you use to track them?</p>
RQ2: What strategies do human resource managers utilize to overcome the challenges of employee satisfaction?	<p>IQ 4: If you had to pick one, what would you say your single most effective strategy is to increase employee satisfaction?</p> <p>IQ 5: What other strategies do you use at your organization to increase employee satisfaction?</p> <p>IQ 6: How are these strategies arrived at?</p>

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ3: What challenges do human resource managers encounter when trying to increase employee satisfaction levels?	<p>IQ 7: What obstacles do you face in achieving your desired level of employee satisfaction?</p> <p>IQ 8: What internal and external resources do you use?</p> <p>IQ 9: Look for follow-up questions to get clarity</p>
RQ4: What advice would human resource executives give aspiring human resource executives for increasing job satisfaction levels?	<p>IQ 10: What strategy have you used to improve employee satisfaction you would want NOT to repeat? Why?</p> <p>IQ 11: What pitfalls would you warn aspiring HR execs to avoid?</p>

*Note.* Table 4 Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions (Revised). The table identifies four research questions and related interview questions with revisions based on expert reviewers' feedback (committee). Subsequent changes were made to the order and phrasing of questions within the interview protocol.

**Reliability of the Study.** The reliability of the study was determined by testing the research data. This procedure is commonly performed in most other research methods, and good qualitative research helps comprehend unclear phenomena. Unexplainable cases or situations can provide better results in a qualitative study when the reliability is tested to check qualitative research's preeminence. Coded data can help create an understanding of what the study intends to investigate (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Since the purpose of the research is to understand and improve employee satisfaction levels, the qualitative process is reliable. Reliability can be assessed when planning or undertaking qualitative studies, assessing study findings, and determining the research condition.

**Pilot Study.** An initial pilot was tested to confirm if the process, as theorized, could be put into practice. Many audio platforms that provide transcription services are available with a wide selection of output variables. The reliability of the transcription process was tested through trial audio that was transcribed by various transcription platforms. The application that provided the most reliable and best transcription accuracy was selected as the final choice. Next, the test transcription was imported into two competing qualitative analysis software packages. Although both software's coding ability was similar, one software proved to be much easier to navigate and use. The program also offered a robust selection of graphical features to help illustrate the data. Therefore, this software was selected as the final option for use.

### **Statement of Personal Bias**

Bias was excluded by explaining the findings and data collected during the interview process. Consistency was preserved throughout the research study, and personal bias was acknowledged and avoided during the interview process. The interview questions and the interview results were processed by ensuring that the interview questions included demographic

criteria that were adequately vetted and directed to the correct participants. The power of utilizing interviews can be seen when the items complement one another and boost the consistency and validity of the data collected (Gentles et al., 2015). During the data collection research, the knowledge obtained from each interview was complemented by the information learned from the other questions.

Additionally, the interview questions were developed before data collection and were not changed throughout the dissertation study. The static process helped in maintaining focus on the goal of the research. The transcribed data collected from the interview respondents were precisely checked for errors by scrutinizing the information. These tasks helped in ensuring the reliability of this qualitative phenomenological exploratory research dissertation. Two additional factors that could bias the data are personal knowledge of collaborative practices and the potential issue of subject recall bias. Having intimate knowledge and awareness of collaborative management practices could influence how the researcher asks the questions. To avoid this bias, a strategy to not engage in personal stories or inquire about mutual understanding of experiences was utilized.

Recall bias is initiated when people have trouble remembering past events accurately. Interview subjects typically do not have a thorough or correct recollection of past events. To avoid recall bias from causing inaccurate data collection, the questions were methodically defined. Peer review was used to help ensure that there is no misunderstanding about what the research question conveys. Choosing the right data collection method also helped the researcher ensure that the data collected helped achieve the research goals (Schulz & Grimes, 2019). Finally, the subjects were given sufficient time for recall of long-term memory to accurately account for experiences and reduce recall bias

### ***Bracketing and Epoche***

A phenomenological study has the potential power to create a nuanced understanding of a lived experience. The findings of this research were kept free from bias by applying Husserl's concept of epoche and bracketing of preconceived ideas from the researcher (Roberts, 2019). During the bracketing process, ATLAS.ti Version 9 was used to conduct an initial review of common themes. As the automated themes were reviewed, epoche was applied by the researcher to any modifications performed to the selection set and applied to the coding system. As an additional validation process for the codes generated by the software, a peer evaluation was performed by two expert coders, and the dissertation committee approved the final codes and process.

### **Data Analysis and Coding**

Inter-rate reliability was used to consolidate the co-reviewer method. Interview questions were evaluated independently, the key phrases and codes were developed, and significant concepts and themes were developed. The researcher collected qualitative data by scrubbing the transcribed audio and taking notes after each meeting. The researcher incorporated their thoughts into the interviews and properly documented their experience in the notes. The information from the interviews was collected then transcribed and imported into ATLAS.ti Version 9 for coding. To ensure that the transcribed data was meticulously organized, the transcriptions were categorized by their answers. In addition to this, the researcher wrote down specific notes that they had throughout the interview.

The conversations were documented by recording the interviews on Zoom and through an audio recording application as a backup. The recorded audio was then transcribed using the Otter.AI software application. After the data was transcribed, the researcher reviewed the text

and corrected transcription errors. Next, the transcribed data was scrubbed, and the data was loaded into qualitative analytic software to search for the most relevant and common themes. The themes were further reduced and then broken down into smaller categories. These themes were also evaluated and presented to the committee for final approval.

### ***Interrater Reliability and Validity***

To make sure interrater reliability and validity are achieved, a four-step process was utilized as follows:

#### **4 Step Process:**

- **Baseline Themes** – The initial three interviews were performed, the research was transcribed, coded, and the main themes of the study were created for each research question.
- **Interviewer Review** – The researcher shared the findings with two co-raters through the transcriptions and the coding performed. The co-raters provided recommendations for change to the codes and themes. The goal was to achieve agreement regarding the final coding and themes of the research.
- **Baseline Themes** – Once an agreement has been reached, the researcher continued to code the remaining twelve transcripts with the same system as the first three.
- **Interrater Review** – Step two was repeated after the remaining interviews were performed, and the final codes and themes were developed and sent to the committee.

### **Data Presentation**

The data generated by the coding process is presented in tabular and graphical formats. ATLAS.ti 9 provides multiple outputs to help visualize the data. The first is using a word cloud that enlarges the most common wording from the study and minimizes the least used words. In

addition, a Sankey diagram will be presented to visualize the connections between different coded themes. The numerical data results were tabulated by using bar charts and tables provided in Microsoft Excel. The graphical data is presented in chapters four and five.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

The research utilized qualitative interviews to generate data for analytical purposes for employee satisfaction levels. The fifteen research candidates were composed of human resources directors from public agencies across the state of California. Data collection took place using a phenomenological exploratory design methodology. The research questions were asked in a semi-structured interview style. During the discussions, the audio was recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then coded using qualitative software. *Prima facie*, research study content, and peer review validity of the data collection methodology were discussed. The data was then broken down into themes and further utilized to test the dissertation research hypothesis presented in Chapter 4.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

This quantitative study aimed to examine different ways to manage job satisfaction levels in public organizations. The objective was to increase the understanding of various employee and leadership interactions and how they benefit the organization. This chapter illustrates the research questions and the results that the Researcher developed through the semi-structured interview process. The research questions are:

- RQ1: How do human resource executives define, measure, and track desirable levels of job satisfaction?
- RQ2: What strategies do human resource managers utilize to overcome the challenges of employee satisfaction?
- RQ3: What challenges do human resource managers encounter when trying to increase employee satisfaction levels?
- RQ4: What advice would human resource executives give to aspiring human resource executives for increasing job satisfaction levels?

The Researcher utilized 11 interview questions to answer the four overriding research questions. Since human resource directors are in the primary role of managing employees' satisfaction levels within an organization, they were targeted to interview and answer the questions shown below:

Icebreaker: How did you get started in the human resources field?

- How would you define the desired level of employee satisfaction you aspire to reach?
- How do you measure the level of employee satisfaction?
- What indicators do you use to track them?



- If you had to pick one, what would be your single most effective strategy to increase employee satisfaction?
- What other strategies do you use at your organization to increase employee satisfaction?
- How do you finalize these strategies?
- What obstacles do you face in achieving your desired level of employee satisfaction?
- What internal and external resources do you use?
- Look for follow-up questions to get clarity
- What strategies to improve employee satisfaction would you NOT want to repeat?  
And why?
- Against what pitfalls would you warn aspiring human resource executives?

The interview subjects replied to these questions by explaining their experiences with managing employee satisfaction levels through their initiatives. The Researcher utilized a conversational approach to obtain insights into the experiences and recorded each interview to analyze the data and extract themes that could be coded. By examining the coded responses, the Researcher developed the best practices utilized by human resource directors in planning employee satisfaction initiatives. This chapter will provide points of interest to think about and apply within their organizations.

## **Participants**

The participants in this research study consisted of human resource directors employed in California public agencies. Purposeful sampling was utilized to narrow the initial selection set down to 44 participants. After sending 111 emails to qualified participants, and receiving minimal response, follow-up phone calls were made to secure the final 15 interviewees. The

selection process required meticulously selecting human resources directors who were knowledgeable and experienced in managing employee satisfaction levels rather than using a convenient sample. The 15 participants represented a small segment of the human resource directors in California public agency sector. The types of organizations represented included school districts, cities, special districts, and utilities.

### **Data Collection**

After IRB approval was granted on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the Researcher contacted the potential subjects through email. The email addresses were obtained by searching the organizations' websites and messaging the interviewees on LinkedIn. The Researcher followed-up with phone calls to many of the potential subjects. Phone calls were made to confirm that the message was received by the intended person and to potentially set an interview time. The participants were all provided with the IRB-approved recruitment script. After the Researcher confirmed the participants' availability through phone call, the Researcher provided them with an IRB-approved consent form.

All the participants consented and agreed to participate in the interview. Before conducting the interview, the Researcher informed the participants about the purpose of the study. The participants were also told that the Researcher would not disclose their identities. The subjects were then informed that the interview could be stopped at any time, and that during opening conversations, the participants could ask questions about the research and how the information would be summarized and documented.

The interview dates are shown in Table 4 and the time allotted for each interview was 60 minutes, the actual interviews took between 22–43 minutes with the average length being 34 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the participants the opportunity to expand

on the questions with personal knowledge. The interviews were audio recorded using Otter.ai transcription software. The transcriptions were then imported into ATLAS.ti qualitative analytic software.

The informational data was collected using semi-structured interviews where participants were encouraged to talk about employee satisfaction strategies openly. Notes were also used as a backup to the semi-structured interview process. The notes helped document the informal conversations and information obtained by the Researcher during the interview process and served as a reference when coding the themes.

**Table 5**

*Interview Dates*

Participant	Date
A	2/26/2021
B	2/26/2021
C	3/1/2021
D	3/1/2021
E	3/1/2021
F	3/2/2021
G	3/2/2021
H	3/2/2021

Participant	Date
I	3/2/2021
J	3/3/2021
K	3/3/2021
L	3/3/2021
M	3/4/2021
N	3/4/2021
O	3/4/2021

### **Data Analysis**

The Researcher carried out the qualitative data analysis using qualitative research techniques. After reviewing the transcripts, the Researcher created a list of possible categories to code the data. The initial examination revealed 46 keywords that were related to the research questions. The Researcher independently broke down the interview questions into categories after completion of the third interview. The Researcher and two peer reviewers completed the second level of coding by examining the words that were combined into each theme. After agreement on the coded words and completion of the interviews, the Researcher completed the coding process. The ATLAS.ti program was used to manage the data and further examine the frequency of the coded words.

### **Inter-Rater Review Process**

The Researcher met with a peer-review group through a Zoom session that included two doctoral candidates from the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership (EDOL) at Pepperdine University. During the initial meeting, there was discussion about how the Researcher had applied the quantitative analysis to derive the initial codes and themes. Potential changes to the theme organization were discussed and changes were made to the coded words in each category. During the second meeting, additional coded words that the Researcher had initially developed were rebranded to capture broader themes. Most of the coding performed by the Researcher was agreed upon, but there was some disagreement about the meaning and allocation of themes. After further discussions, the Researcher agreed with the peer group and decided to regroup some of the coded words under different themes. The list was further reviewed, refined, and agreed upon. The Researcher completed the remainder of the coding with the agreed methodology. The Researcher then continued to transcribe the remaining interviews and code and categorize the final transcriptions.

### **Data Display**

The data was organized and presented in graphical form. The Researcher identified the transcription questions of the related interview questions and then read and applied the coded words. The Researcher then summarized the information based on the theme's frequency, and the results are presented as a visual bar chart. The charts and graphs were organized by the frequency of the response in descending order. Each research question was summarized and described with a chart. Also, quotes obtained by the Researcher from the interview process were utilized to tie the data together.

**Table 6***Inter-Related Coding Table Edit Recommendations*

Interview Question	Items	Inter-rater Recommendations	Modification Applied
1	Satisfaction	Expectation	Expectation
1	Participation	Happy	Happy
4	Attitude	Engagement	Engagement
6	Feedback	Communication	Communication
7	Competent	Accountability	Accountability
9	Relations	Community	Community
10	Satisfaction	Connected	Satisfaction
11	Retention	Compensation	Compensation

**Research Question 1**

RQ1: How do human resource executives define, measure, and track desirable levels of job satisfaction?

In relation to the RQ1, the participants answered the following three interview questions:

- How would you define the desired level of employee satisfaction you aspire to reach?
- How do you measure the level of employee satisfaction?
- What indicators do you use to track them?

The subjects' responses were evaluated and initially coded into eight categories to establish

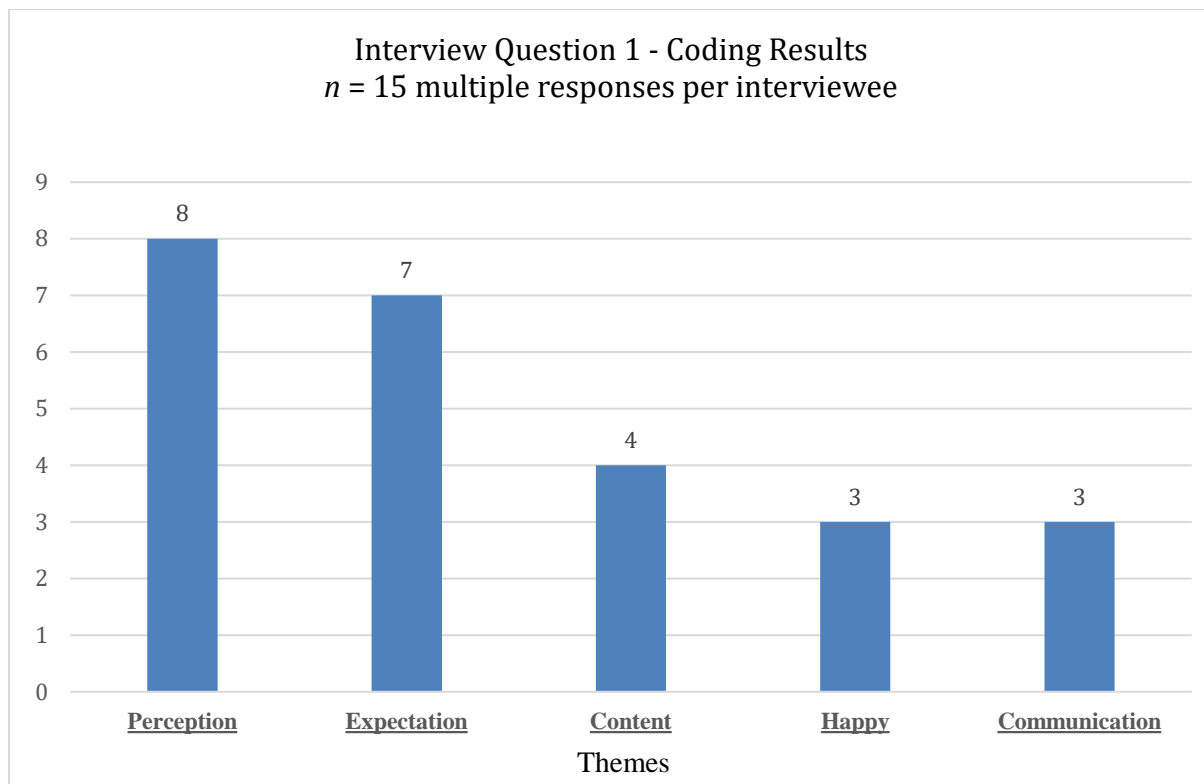
consistency. These were further refined and reported as five themes to answer RQ1.

### ***Interview Question 1***

How would you define the desired level of employee satisfaction you aspire to reach?

**Figure 1**

### ***Interview Question 1***



*Note.* It is essential to know which words each participant used to describe employee satisfaction.

This graph shows the themes that were used to describe the answer to interview question 1. The common themes were allocated based on the number of statements made by each participant who was allotted that theme and were applied to all columns in the same fashion.

Following are the common themes and their descriptions:

**Perception.** The word "perception" is an important theme that emerged. The keyword appeared in 8 (53%) of the 15 responses. Many of the participants described satisfaction as a perceived measurement of employee disposition with the organization. In this case, perception of employee satisfaction can be defined as an awareness through different senses. The participants agreed that perception is based on experience; Participant 4 stated, "So the sum of perceptions employees have about their interactions with the organization in which they work is the employee experience; it's a really good definition for the employee experience." Perception is an important theme because the definition of employee satisfaction can be interpreted in many different ways. The level of desired satisfaction is benchmarked differently by each organization. Perception plays a role in satisfaction because there are different sensitivities to beliefs.

**Expectation.** One aspect of employee satisfaction expressed by the participants was expectations from the workforce. In the participate responses there were 7 (47%) that indicated expectations play a role in employee satisfaction levels. Participant 7 said, "Things that lead to satisfaction are really the transaction or contractual part in the employer–employee relationship." Managing employee satisfaction expectations is a challenge since it's tremendously difficult to measure. In addition expectations can vary between employees and managers which can create tension between work groups that could cause employee satisfaction levels to worsen.

**Contentment.** Determining the level of satisfaction is a challenge. According to 4 (27%) of the 15 respondents it is vital to keep employees engaged with limited resources; it is not easy to accomplish and deliver a return on the investment. Participant 9 indicated, "Satisfaction is really an important and foundational part of the employee experience." This suggests the greater need for benchmark data to measure satisfaction levels correctly. Ensuring employees are



content is a base level need to maintain productivity levels and cohesiveness throughout the organization.

**Happiness.** Striving to create a happy workforce can also improve satisfaction according to 3 (20%) of the respondents. Participant 11 described how an unhappy workforce could burnout employees: "Satisfaction elements related to the job and satisfaction can be anything from just feeling burned out and stressed to feeling underpaid." Happiness is a choice, and helping employees learn to choose their sentiment can foster a more satisfied workforce. Happiness can be fostered at a low cost through recognition and tokens of appreciation.

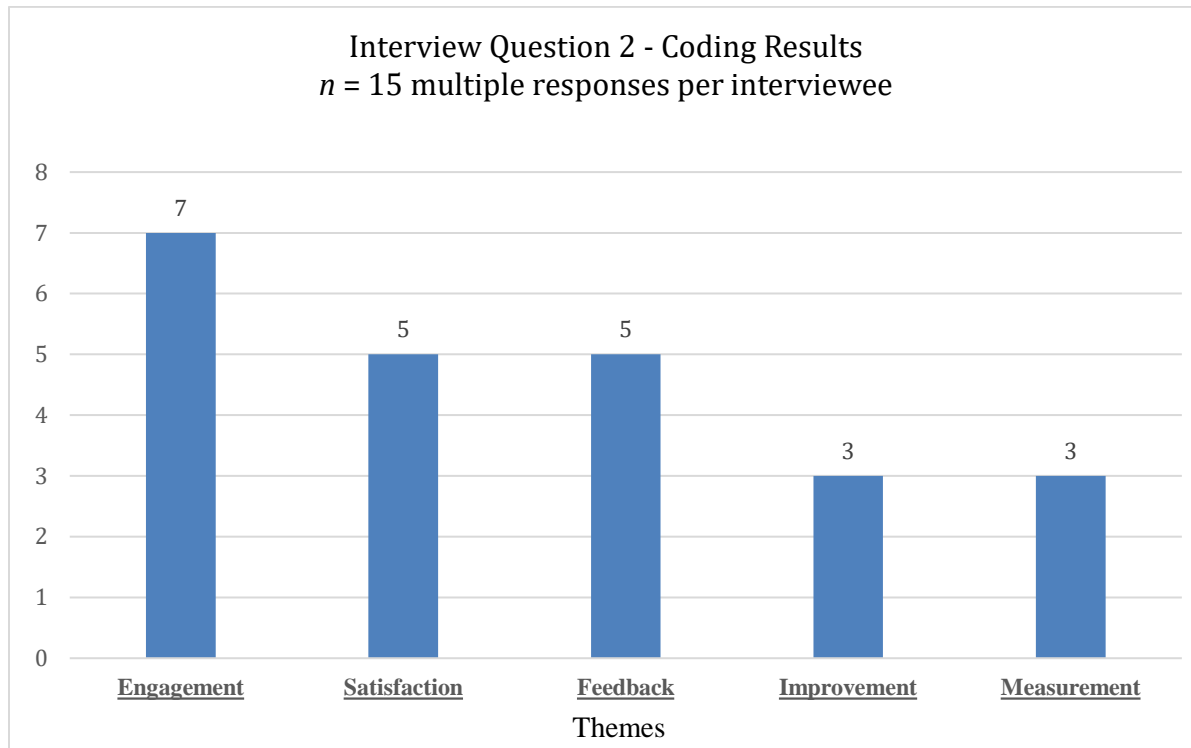
**Communication.** Without quality communication, employee satisfaction can quickly fall apart. Communication is a critical component of any good organization. A good communication model can help manage expectations and maintain high levels of employee satisfaction. Three (20%) of the respondents discussed the importance of communication and Participant 9 confirmed this by stating, "If you see improved perceptions around communication, I'd say that it's worth examining." Good communication is an essential component of employee satisfaction and engagement. Without accurate and frequent communication employees can be left in the dark guessing the goals and objectives of the organization. A clear and consistent communication plan can help to foster increased employee satisfaction levels.

### ***Interview Question 2***

How do you measure the level of employee satisfaction?

**Figure 2**

*Interview Question 2*



*Note.* This graph shows the themes that were used to describe the answer to interview question 2.

The common themes were allocated based on the number of statements made by each participant who was allotted that theme and were applied to all columns in the same fashion. Following are the common themes and their descriptions:

**Engagement.** Seven (47%) of the participants mentioned employee engagement during the interviews. Some of the participants combined engagement with satisfaction, and some differentiated them. Participant 5 said, "Organizations that do not engage, that do not care about engagement, do not think about engagement still have employees either engage or disengage based on what they're doing in the organization; we call that passive." Disengaged employees

can lead to decreased satisfaction levels. Employee engagement is better achieved by creating emotional connections to the organization through symbolic elements.

**Satisfaction.** Measuring the level of satisfaction has proven to be a defining public perception. Participant 11 stated, “If you just do a survey and have an organizational action plan and call the day, you're at the measurement level, and that's okay, and you'll likely see some improvement in the first couple of years.” In total, 5 (33%) of the participants described satisfaction when responding to the question. Changing attitudes seemed to be the best way to improve employee satisfaction levels within organizations. It is important to establishing the appropriate level of employee happiness or contentment desired by the organization to establish a benchmark for satisfaction.

**Feedback.** Gathering employee feedback is critical to keeping connected to the pulse of employee satisfaction. There are many ways to gather feedback and many opportunities throughout an employee's career to gather information. Some of those opportunities that were mentioned through the interviews include the employee onboarding process, an employee suggestion box, pop surveys, and exit interviews. There were 5 (33%) of the participants that discussed different methods of obtaining employee feedback and the importance of the data. However, once the data is collected an action plan must be created to ensure the information is to create a plan of action. Participant 9 confirmed the importance of an action plan by stating that “a common concern is how do I take action on the feedback, taking action on survey data is the single greatest challenge of an engagement program”.

**Improvement.** Starting within the company is the optimal place to develop an organizational improvement plan. The plan must start with employees and include a robust engagement program. Other strategies indicated through the interview process included the

development of a strong mission and vision statement, a plan to leverage high impact leadership practices, and methods to identify and remove internal roadblocks. Participant 7 stated that “elements about growth and innovation focuses on achievement, guidance, and progress.” A total of three (20%) of the participants described improvement as a theme when discussing employee satisfaction measures.

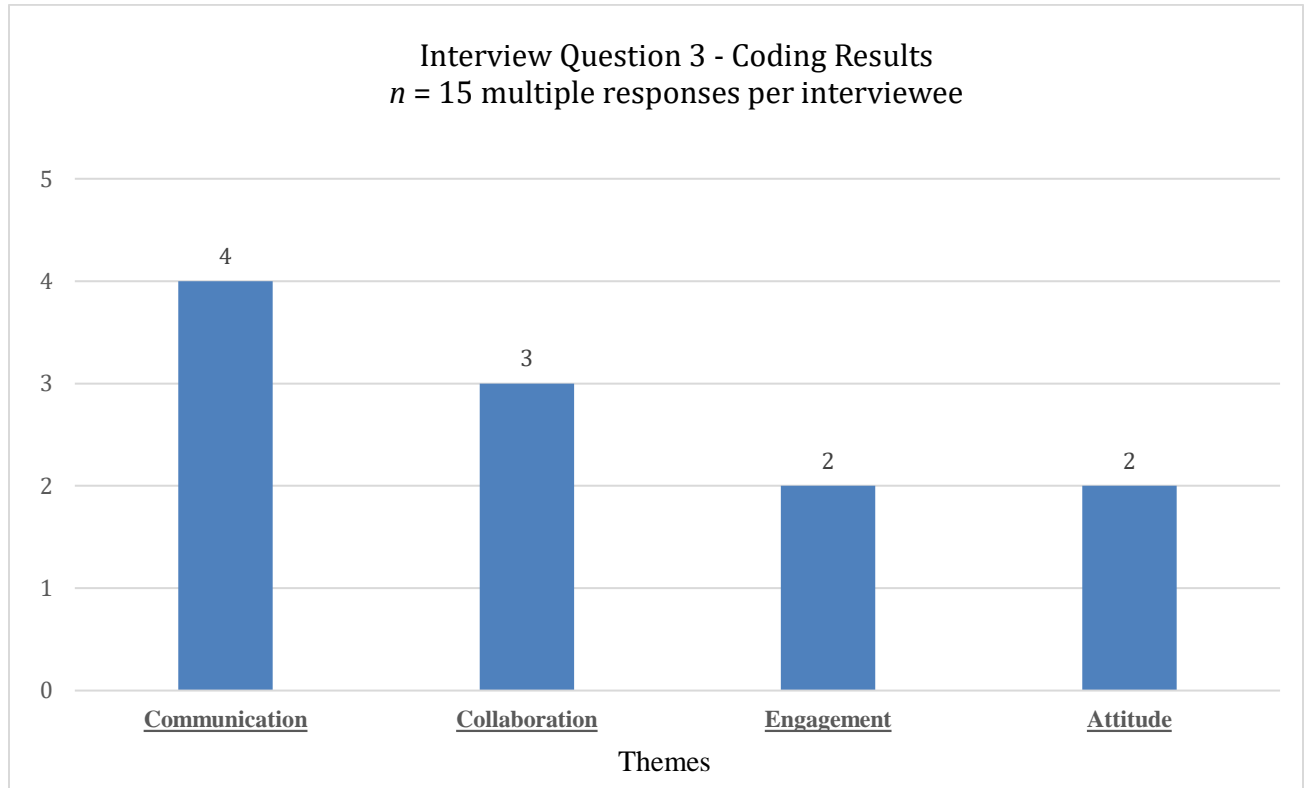
**Measurement.** In all, there were three (20%) out of the 15 participants that indicated it was important to measure employee satisfaction levels through a biannual survey. How employee satisfaction is defined is subjective, as pointed out by Participant 1: "So a big part of measurement challenge comes back to the issue of the definition." Defining what employee satisfaction is through the organization and developing measurement abilities is the first step in achieving the desired level. For the purpose of this research employee satisfaction will be defined as the level of employee contentness.

### ***Interview Question 3***

What indicators do you use to track them?

**Figure 3**

*Interview Question 3*



*Note.* This graph shows the themes that were used to describe the answer to interview question 3.

The common themes were allocated based on the number of statements made by each participant who was allotted that theme and were applied to all columns in the same fashion.

Following are the common themes and their descriptions:

**Communication.** Establishing acceptable communication practices was mentioned by 4 (27%) of the respondents for Interview Question 3. Even though few participants reported communication as a theme, communication is important because the level and types of communication that takes place can be an indicator of employee satisfaction levels. Indicators such as employee sentiment is one fundamental way to track satisfaction levels. Employee

sentiment is another indicator that can track both communication and employee satisfaction levels. According to a statement by Participant 7, managers need to establish open communication channels: "Conversations are essential for modeling that two-way communication." A communication model can help to establish organizational norms regarding communication expectations. When expectations are managed appropriately levels of employee satisfaction will rise.

**Collaboration.** Developing a collaborative organization allows employees to bring new ideas to the table. These ideas can be tracked and utilized to better the organization. Participant 12 was quoted as saying, "Fostering community space design from an entire floor to a department or simply added collaboration stations in the existing plan will bring people together to be more productive." A total of 3 (20%) of the participants indicated that collaboration is a tracking method for employee satisfaction and actively soliciting employee ideas is a useful indicator. Although collaboration was mentioned by few participants, for interview question 3, when employees make decisions jointly employee engagement will increase.

**Engagement.** Developing an engagement program can foster increased employee satisfaction and act as an indicator for organizational satisfaction as described by 2 (13%) of the participants. Participant 9 went into detail about a new intranet program: "We've got photographs; people are actually sharing all kinds of content. It's really helpful to understand really what's top of mind for the organization. It's a great way to get that engagement and to help sustain that engagement in between all of those different events that we're doing." Good engagement strategies can help drive increases in employee satisfaction levels.

**Attitude.** Employee sentiment that comes through attitude can be used as an indicator. Two (13%) of the 15 participants spoke of organizational change programs that change

employee attitudes. Participant 3 spoke of different indicators that gauged satisfaction: "Since job satisfaction is an attitude, we can't directly see or measure it." Developing a culture of appreciative attitudes can be fostered by organizational leaders. Leaders set the tone for the organization and their attitudes are reflected in the employees.

### **Summary of RQ1**

There was no clear definition of what employee satisfaction is among all the participants. However, there were overriding themes describing communication, engagement, and surveys, which are frequently used to help manage and sustain employee satisfaction levels. Although there is no best way to measure and describe employee satisfaction, key indicators such as turnout at company events, optional staff meetings, and corporate morale can provide useful indications of organizational satisfaction levels.

### **Research Question 2**

RQ2: What strategies do human resource managers utilize to overcome the challenges of employee satisfaction?

In relation to RQ2, the participants answered the following three interview questions:

4. If you had to pick one, what would be your single most effective strategy to increase employee satisfaction?

5. What other strategies do you use at your organization to increase employee satisfaction?

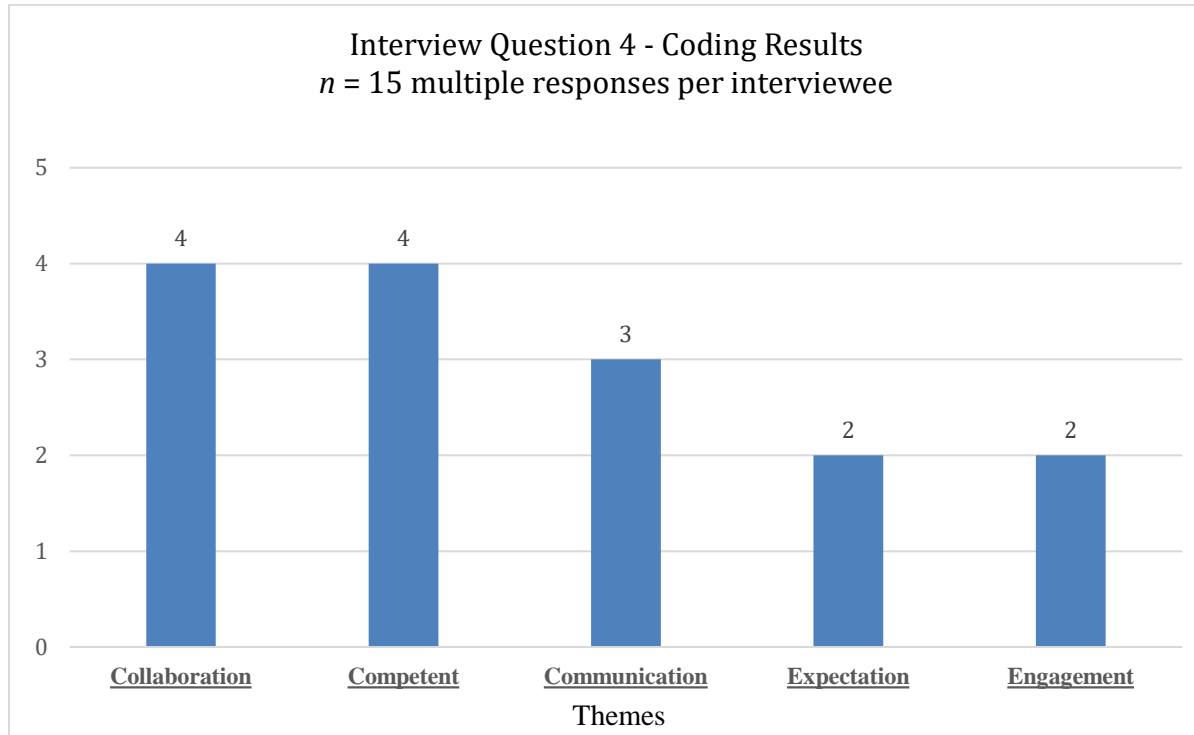
6. How do you finalize these strategies?

### ***Interview Question 4***

If you had to pick one, what would be your single most effective strategy to increase employee satisfaction?

**Figure 4**

*Interview Question 4*



*Note.* This graph shows the themes that were used to describe the answer to interview question 4.

The common themes were allocated based on the number of statements made by each participant who was allotted that theme and were applied to all columns in the same fashion.

Following are the common themes and their descriptions:

**Collaboration.** According to four (27%) of the participants establishing collaboration in the organization is one of the best tools to increase employee satisfaction levels. Getting employees engaged leads to better decision-making in the organization. Participant 9 stated, "There are many benefits in good collaboration, such as engaged and empowered members along with an increased capacity to solve complex problems. Strong relationships grounded in trust,



honesty, respect, efficient use of resources, and a greater overall impact." These core functions boost morale and increase organizational satisfaction levels.

**Competence.** Increasing emotional intelligence can lead to an overall more skilled staff. Moreover, creating a more educated workforce brings organizational benefits at many levels as noted by four (27%) of the participants. Some participants spoke about training programs that have helped to increase the competence level of the organization. Participant 4 stated, "This last year, I had opportunities at work to learn and grow employees that needed to be equipped to perform, then positioned them for individual and team success." Building employee expertise can be accomplished with both internal knowledge transfer and through formal training programs.

**Communication.** Another strategy to increase employee satisfaction is communication models. An exemplary communication model has a well-defined multi-directional flow of information among staff members. Participant 12 stated, "The managers struggle in community gathering and getting communication from their employees, and employees almost always feel negative about communication on balance in organizations." The development of a communication plan can help share organizational knowledge, boost morale, and increase satisfaction. Communication is a recurring theme through many of the research questions and 3 (20%) of the participants considered communication as an effective strategy for increasing employee satisfaction.

**Expectation.** Another strategy to develop satisfaction initiatives is to manage expectations. Two (13%) of the interviewees indicated that it is essential to align employee expectations with business growth, opportunities, and direction. Participant 8 discussed how to manage expectations: "The fear is that you will set an expectation that you'll take action on all

the suggestions. We believe the benefit of listening to your people outweighs the risk of inaction." Unrealistic expectations can lead to overall lower satisfaction levels. It's up to the leadership to define the employee role and inform on how they are connected and contributing to the organization.

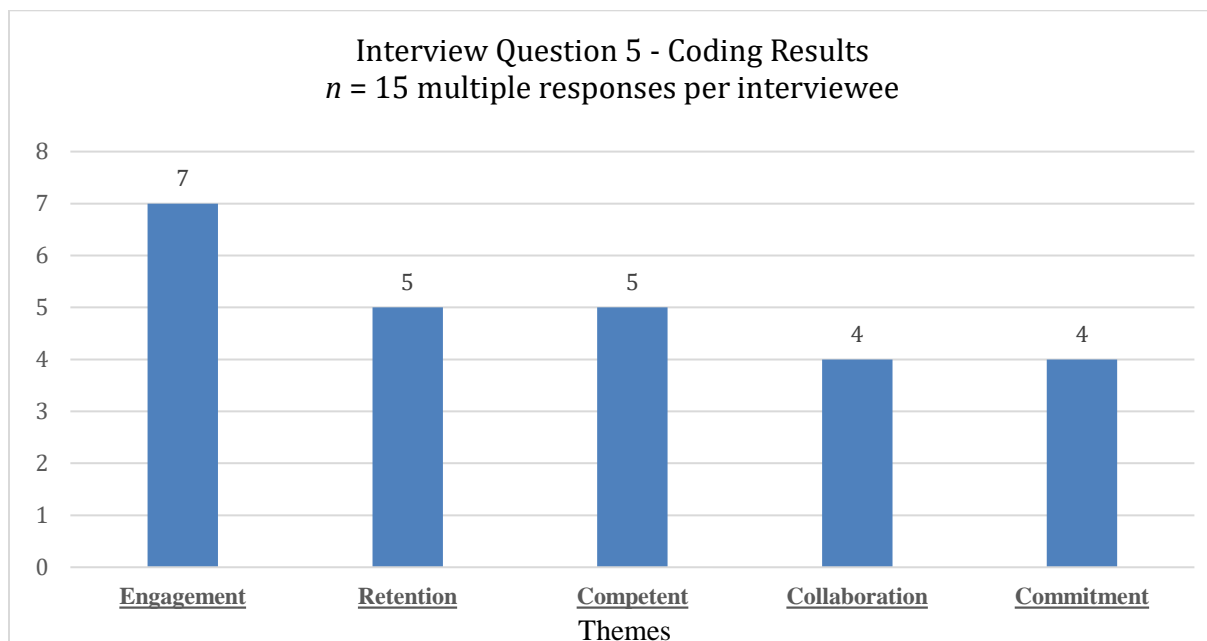
**Engagement.** The term engagement came up two (13%) times as a valuable strategy to manage employee satisfaction. Participant 4 was quoted saying "We call them engagement surveys, we still measure satisfaction elements because of how important they are to retaining employees." Developing engagement strategies helps deliver more effective employee satisfaction programs such as professional development opportunities and flexible work schedules.

#### *Interview Question 5*

What other strategies do you use at your organization to increase employee satisfaction?

**Figure 5**

*Interview Question 5*



*Note.* This graph shows the themes that were used to describe the answer to interview question 5. The common themes were allocated based on the number of statements made by each participant who was allotted that theme and were applied to all columns in the same fashion.

Following are the common themes and their descriptions:

**Engagement.** Developing engagement programs through initiatives such as training programs, friendly competition, and employee perks helps achieve greater satisfaction levels. Participant 6 spoke about measuring engagements: "What's important is that you have an intentional engagement measurement strategy that relies on a model that you've created or that you're leveraging from another source as a reference." In total, 7 (47%) of the participants described various engagement practices that help to increase employee satisfaction levels.

**Retention.** Developing a healthy retention plan is another way to increase employee satisfaction as eluded to by 5 (33%) of the participants. Retention plans can include increased pay and better benefits in a self-directed work environment. However, Participant 1 indicated, "Be careful that your retention strategies don't keep the people that you don't want. Remember you want to reward your A players, not everyone is a winner, and those that don't perform well shouldn't get the same rewards." Managing an environment where people are treated equally can be challenging when the high performers are compensated equally as all employees.

**Competence.** Developing organizational competence is another strategy to increase employee satisfaction. Employee training plans can enhance and improve an organization and increasing competence levels was sighted by 5 (33%) of the participants. According to Participant 4, "Employees do things that they don't comprehend, things that are kind of behind or beyond their skill set, but yet at the same time we want to be pulling our employees or associates up constantly; we want to give them opportunities to succeed, opportunities to advance in our

company." Training to increase organizational competence levels is an ongoing need that all executives need to be aware of to maintain appropriate satisfaction levels.

**Collaboration.** One common theme among many of the research questions was collaboration. Related to this research question, there were 4 (27%) of the 15 participants that described using collaboration as a strategy to increase satisfaction levels. Bringing employees together to make decisions and engage in the organization's outcome boosts employee satisfaction levels. Participant 13 said, "Once you have established your plan to foster collaboration strategically, you need to take a look at how it can further others." Some of the participants described how collaborative policies could help maintain employee satisfaction levels and create better buy-in to increase engagement.

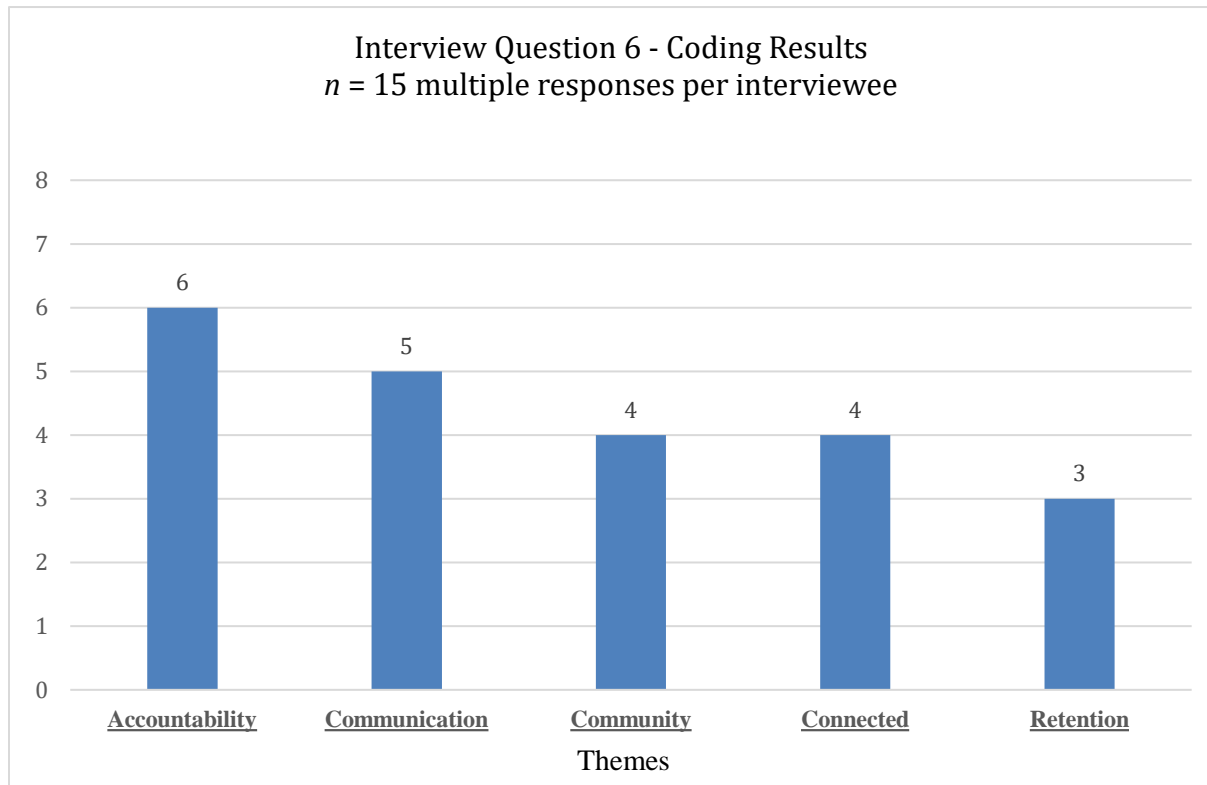
**Commitment.** Developing committed employees is another strategy that four (27%) of the participants discussed. Commitment level can be increased by establishing long-term plans and sharing them between the employee and the organization. While discussing strategies to achieve more significant commitment to increasing employee satisfaction levels, Participant 4 stated, "So the pathway that you have to go to access these higher levels of maturity is through commitment." Increasing satisfaction levels can be attained by creating a committed and loyal workforce where leaders attend to the needs of employees.

### *Interview Question 6*

How do you finalize these strategies?

**Figure 6**

*Interview Question 6*



*Note.* This graph shows the themes that were used to describe the answer to interview question 6.

The common themes were allocated based on the number of statements made by each participant who was allotted that theme and were applied to all columns in the same fashion.

Following are the common themes and their descriptions:

**Accountability.** Making employees accountable is one way to increase employee satisfaction as identified by six (40%) of the participants. Managers can develop accountability through exemplary leadership. When employees are asked to be responsible for an initiative

rather than being told what to do, accountability and satisfaction can rise together. Participant 13 described the measure as "putting it into a performance review to boost the level of accountability you have for driving engagement through your leadership structure." Increasing dialogue and having difficult conversations can help to increase accountability and satisfaction levels.

**Communication.** When goals are attained, an internal communication plan is important to give employees encouragement and information to continue forward. Participant 7 stated that "First determine the levels of employee satisfaction, then you spend time action planning, and then it's time; you probably spend maybe not as much time on communication than actually doing something about those results, and then it's time for another survey to come in." In total, five (33%) of the participants cited communication as a way to finalize employee satisfaction initiatives.

**Community.** Building community is an important strategy to bring the workforce together and build bridges among other organizations and customers. Four (27%) of the participants discussed community and Participant 9 described the strategy as a "new landscape to enable and empower by providing choice, flexibility and fostering community space design from an entire floor to a department." Establishing a strong community is vital to building a sustained and satisfied workforce.

**Connection.** Creating a connected workforce has been determined to be a good strategy for maintaining employee satisfaction levels. According to four (27%) of the participants with the rise in electronic forms of collaboration, it is now easier than ever for managers to create a connected workforce. Participant 13 indicated, "Where a lot of employees work with reporting relationships across lots of different time zones, remote teams working that are not connected in

the same space have different challenges." Making connections throughout the organization will help to increase employee satisfaction at all levels.

**Retention.** Retaining employees is accomplished through a combination of good leadership, competitive wages, and flexible work environment as noted by three (20%) of the participants. More than ever, employees today expect to be treated with a personal and professional dignity. Participant 1 stated "So where satisfaction helps to attract and retain employees, engagement also helps with retention." A solid retention plan is one of the best strategies to manage employee satisfaction levels. Exit interviews can provide key insight to organizational problems that can be fixed. Attention to these details can help to reduce turnover and provide a path to increased employee satisfaction levels.

### ***Summary of RQ2***

Developing strategies to overcome the challenges of employee satisfaction is a critical component of human resource positions. There are many options to consider, and many times blending ideas and initiatives can lead to a win-win for the both the organization and the employee. Crafting those plans takes experience and knowledge, but once mastered, these initiatives can lead organizations to greatness.

### **Research Question 3**

RQ3: What challenges do human resource managers encounter when trying to increase employee satisfaction levels?

In relation to RQ3, the participants answered the following three interview questions:

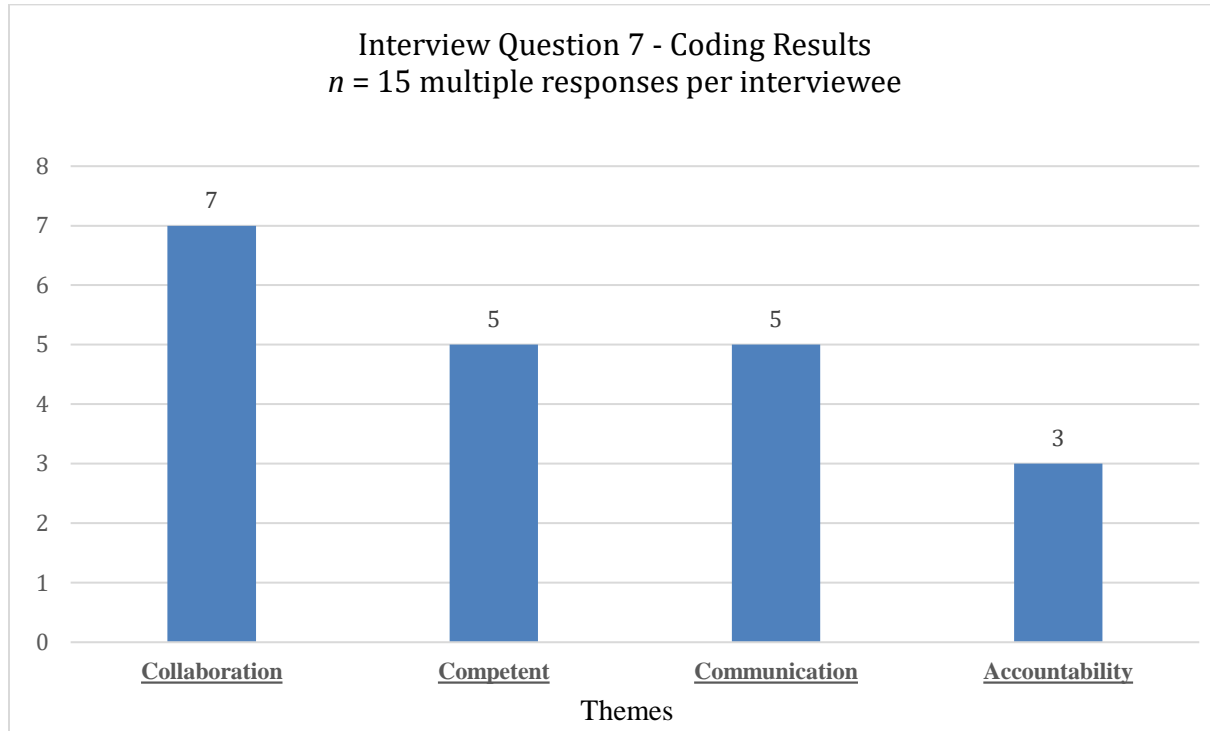
7. What obstacles do you face in achieving your desired level of employee satisfaction?
8. What internal and external resources do you use?
9. Look for follow-up questions to get clarity.

### *Interview Question 7*

What obstacles do you face in achieving your desired level of employee satisfaction?

**Figure 7**

*Interview Question 7*



*Note:* This graph shows the themes that were used to describe the answer to interview question 7.

The common themes were allocated based on the number of statements made by each participant who was allotted that theme and were applied to all columns in the same fashion.

Following are the common themes and their descriptions:

**Collaboration.** There are many challenges human resource directors face while trying to implement employee satisfaction programs. "We can do so much effective virtual collaboration when you can't actually reach out and touch someone" was stated by Participant 11. Deploying collaboration initiatives brings new challenges of getting all managers to buy into the



collaborative methods was a theme in seven (47%) of the participant interviews. Understanding how collaboration works is important to deployment within an organization. Many managers do not understand how giving away power and decision-making can increase leadership ability.

**Competence.** Creating a competent workforce has many obstacles. Getting employees to take ownership of their competencies is difficult. Participant 9 stated, "You might create an environment as productive that's efficient, an environment in which your employees want to be there." Creating a competent workforce can increase teamwork through the creation of communities for practice. According to five (33%) of the interview participants once competencies are developed, the entire workforce can achieve greater levels of employee satisfaction.

**Communication.** Building effective communication models is critical to enhancing employee satisfaction levels was noted by five (33%) of the interview participants. Here, the more significant challenge is to get the workforce to understand and buy-in to the communication model. Participant 14 indicated this by stating, "The key to employee satisfaction is looking at the communication order and what is the benchmarking before or within your industry and what are we going to do with the information when putting together a communication strategy plan." Communication models are crucial to managing expectations that can correlate with employee satisfaction levels.

**Accountability.** One of the participants described some type of obstacle to creating greater employee satisfaction through better worker accountability. For example, it is difficult to get employees to discuss mistakes openly. Two (13%) other participants described accountability issues as barriers to creating employee buy-in during the goal-setting process and providing and accepting feedback. Participant 4 said, "That measure of victory accountability is really

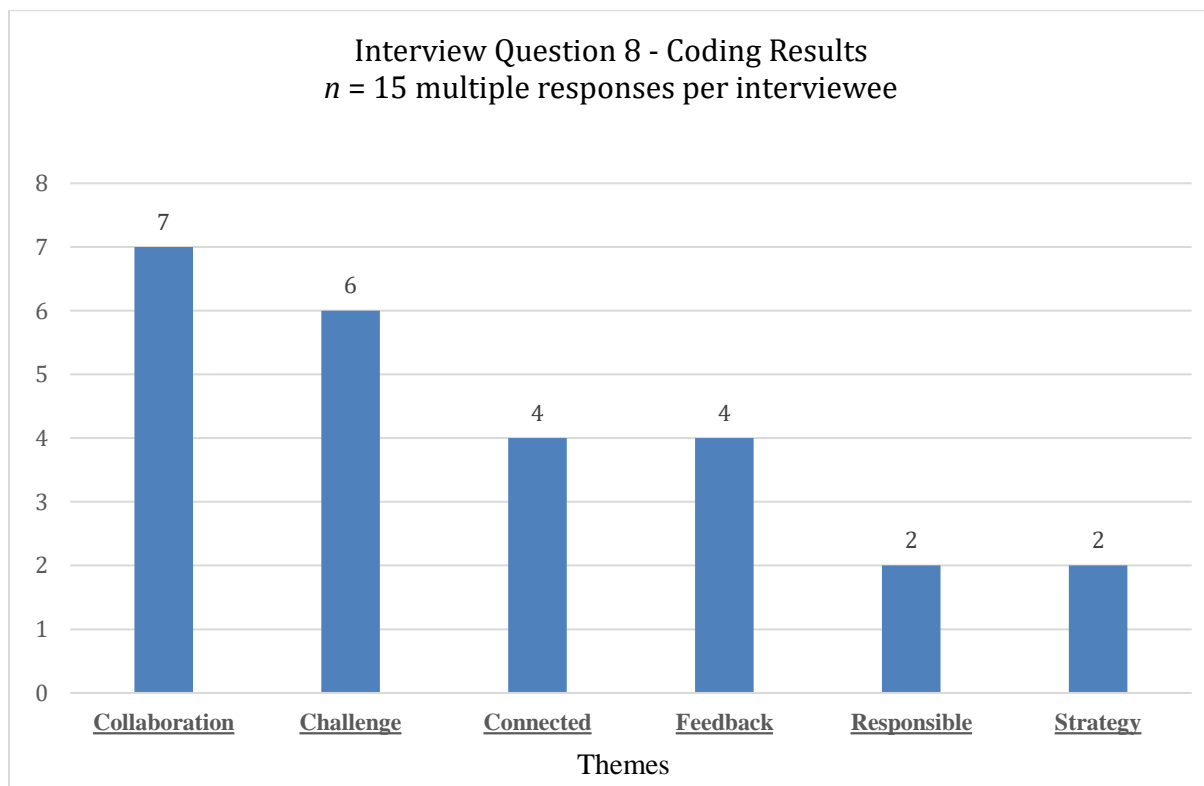
important not only for them to understand what are you looking for as an organization but for them to be able to put up a measuring stick to themselves." Creating an environment where accountability is role modeled is an important task for organizational leaders.

### ***Interview Question 8***

What internal and external resources do you use?

### **Figure 8**

#### ***Interview Question 8***



*Note.* This graph shows the themes that were used to describe the answer to interview question 8.

The common themes were allocated based on the number of statements made by each participant who was allotted that theme and were applied to all columns in the same fashion.

Following are the common themes and their descriptions:

**Collaboration.** Collaborative training is essential so that everyone in the organization understands what collaboration is and how it works to manage expectations correctly. Organizational consultants can provide training exercises to teach and train both employees and managers to collaborate appropriately and actively. Participant 13 said, "Collaboration at work is like observing any high performance dance on some music band or sports team." It is the teamwork and engagement that dictate the success of the collaborative environment and good collaboration is essential according to seven (47%) of the interview participants.

**Challenge.** Any organization faces a multitude of challenges over time. Utilizing the broad knowledge of employees can help confront challenging situations and build a coalition to achieve organizational objectives appeared as a theme in six (40%) of the participant interviews. Getting useful information from quality staff was mentioned by some of the participants. Participant 4 commented, "I would say from a CEO's perspective, often the challenge is what are we doing with that information, right." Creating a employee resilience plan can help organizations to weather hard challenges and navigate through changing conditions while maintaining employee satisfaction levels.

**Connection.** Bringing the workforce together can help increase employee satisfaction through employee engagement. When leaders bring employees together in a non-threatening, non-competitive environment, it gives employees opportunities to build better connections. Four (27%) of the interviews described how utilizing external resources and event planning can help create better relationships within the organization. Participant 9 said, "The typical approach to dealing with these situations is highly unlikely to produce anything of success, which leads us to realize that being in this overly connected internet age, the virtual collaboration that we have figured out is how to work with people electronically." Increasing connections is essential to give

everyone a voice in the organization, including employees that do not have an electronic connection.

**Feedback.** Sound employee practices dictate that managers should use surveys to gather feedback. Four (27%) of the participants indicated using a 360-degree review to help provide feedback to managers. Participant 3 said, "People feel like in an organization and it's impacting engagement; people feel like they're never getting feedback." Creating a culture where feedback is given and accepted is essential to maintaining good employee satisfaction levels.

**Responsibility.** Creating a core culture of responsibility is necessary to manage an organization effectively. Participant 14 discussed an organizational model of accountability and said, "From building their own models, employees need to understand the set of relationships that are responsible for the way that things evolve." Pushing responsibility down to the lowest level possible can help create an engaged workforce that can increase satisfaction levels was noted by two (13%) of the interview participants.

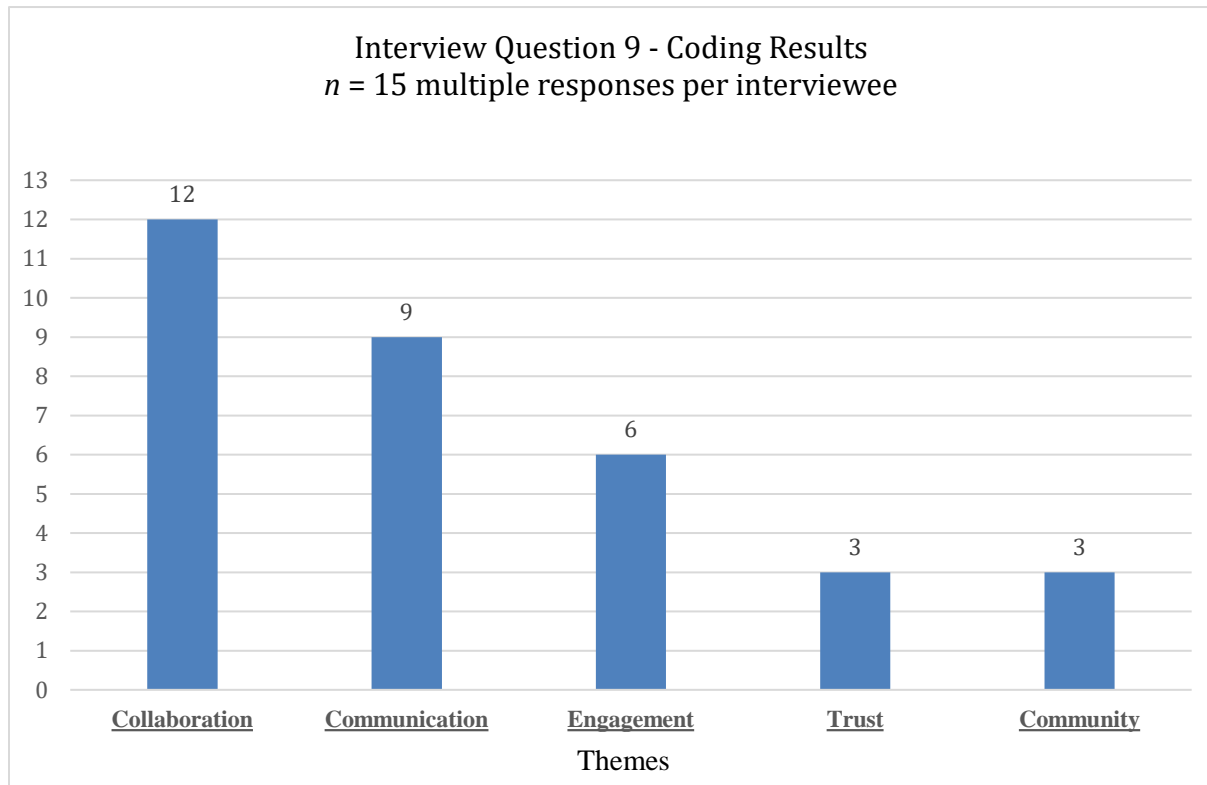
**Strategy.** Developing a strategy and having a plan of action are needed to ensure that internal and external resources are being used properly was described by two (13%) of the participants. Having a system or process in place can help determine when to use internal or external forces to accomplish work. According to Participant 12, "What's important is that you have an intentional engagement measurement strategy that relies on a model that you've created." Creating a clear expectation regarding the use of internal and external forces in an organization can help maintain employee satisfaction levels.

### ***Interview Question 9***

Look for follow-up questions to gain clarity.

**Figure 9**

### ***Interview Question 9***



*Note.* The follow-up questions varied among participants.

This graph shows the themes that were used to describe the answer to interview question 9. The common themes were allocated based on the number of statements made by each participant who was allotted that theme and were applied to all columns in the same fashion.

Following are the common themes and their descriptions:

**Collaboration.** Again, collaboration was a common theme among 12 (80%) of the participant interviews. Building a collaborative organization is essential to make people feel

valued. According to Participant 15, "Once you have established your agenda to strategically foster collaboration, the plan must be carried out." An organization has a better chance of achieving organizational goals when collaboration is embraced.

**Communication.** Without adequate communication, employee satisfaction levels suffer. Determining whom to communicate with and how to communicate within the organization is important. Nine (60%) of the participants described how a useful communication model can help achieve organizational goals and increase employee satisfaction levels. Participant 8 said, "A key element of engagement is open communication and teamwork."

**Engagement.** During the interviews, employee engagement was at times used synonymously with employee satisfaction. Further research indicated that engagement is a measure of an emotional connection with the organization rather than a satisfaction level. Participant 14 said, "What's important is that you have an intentional engagement measurement strategy that relies on a model that you've created." Six (40%) of the participants agreed that engagement is equally important as the transactional-based satisfaction level when managing an organization. Leaders must plan for both engagement and satisfaction sentiment levels with intent. Organizational initiatives need to be designed to achieve the desired level of output.

**Trust.** Three (20%) of the participants cited how building trust in an organization is necessary to create commitment. Without trust, employees feel fearful, and building mutual trust between organizational leaders and employees helps maintain high levels of employee satisfaction. Participant 12 stated, "Strong relationships grounded in trust, honesty, and respect" help preserve a robust and resilient workforce.

**Community.** Creating a culture that values community helps to both engage employees and deliver higher satisfaction levels was a theme in three (20%) of the interviews. When

employees value community, according to Participant 9, it "provides them with a better sense of family, community, school, organization and in the world as a whole." Outreach programs help employees develop a sense of community and can create winning initiatives that benefit everyone.

### ***Summary of RQ3***

When examining the obstacles, the internal and external resources, and the overall objectives of employee satisfaction, the complications, the approach, and the methods for attaining high employee satisfaction levels become much clearer. Successful initiatives to help realize organizational goals of achieving and retaining quality employees can include surveys, engagement plans, and collaborative efforts.

### **Research Question 4**

RQ4: What advice would human resource executives give aspiring human resource executives for increasing job satisfaction levels?

In relation to the RQ4, the participants answered the following two interview questions:

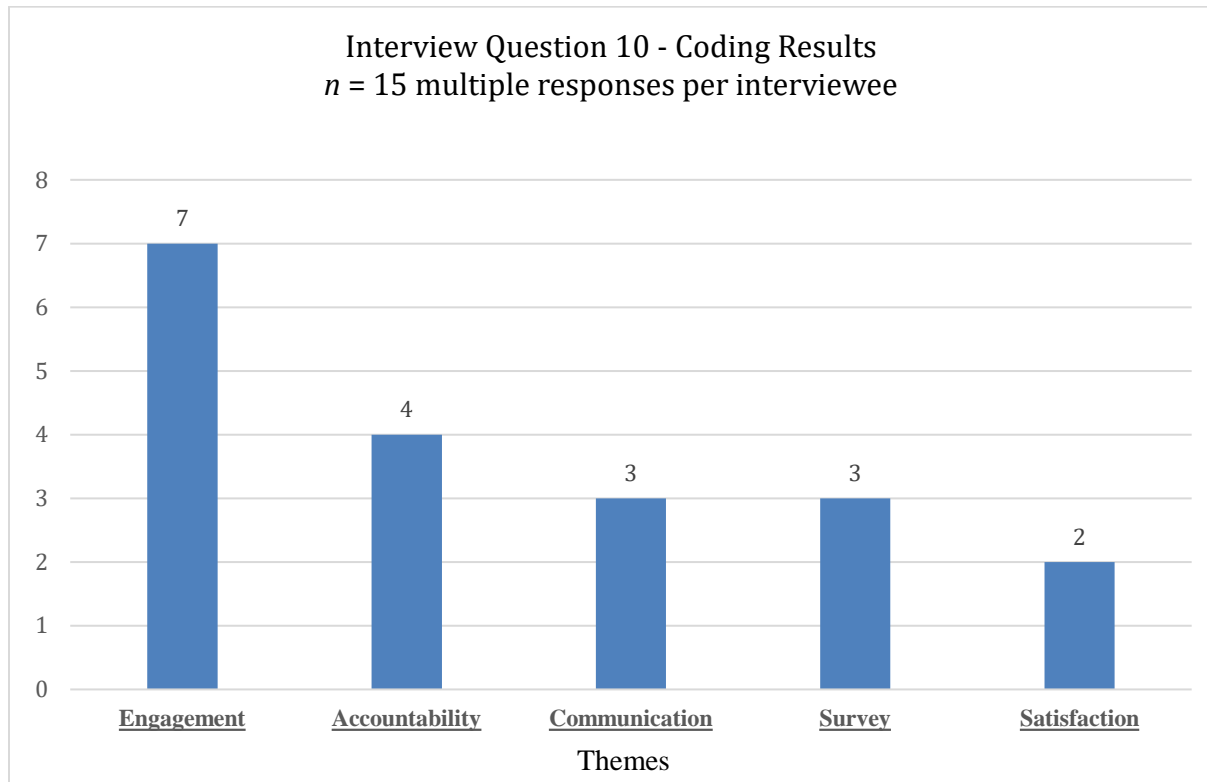
- What strategies to improve employee satisfaction would you NOT want to repeat? And why?
- Against what pitfalls would you warn aspiring human resource executives?

### ***Interview Question 10***

What strategies to improve employee satisfaction would you NOT want to repeat? And why?

**Figure 10**

*Interview Question 10*



*Note.* This graph shows the themes used to describe the answer to interview question 10.

The common themes were allocated based on the number of statements made by each participant who was allotted that theme and were applied to all columns in the same fashion.

Following are the common themes and their descriptions:

**Engagement.** The most popular strategy noted by seven (47%) participants to maintain employee satisfaction is by developing a robust employee engagement program. Therefore, it is



critical that employee engagement is at the forefront of leadership. When the emotional connections are formed and tied to the organization's satisfaction, employee commitment increases. According to Participant 13, "The goal is going to be expand ownership of employee engagement." when employees take ownership of organizational goals, employee satisfaction levels increase. Disregarding engagement practices will cause a decrease in employee satisfaction levels.

**Accountability.** When employee accountability becomes standardized across the organization, employee satisfaction levels become normalized. Participant 9 stated, "When leaders set the expectations for the organization, we need to benchmark those expectations and we need to hold people accountable to those expectations." As noted by four (27%) of the participants, a standardized accountability policy brings stability and uniformity, which helps manage expectations and increase employee satisfaction. When accountability is neglected, discontentment grows.

**Communication.** Communication models can help develop employees and progress organizational goals according to three (20%) of the interview participants. Participant 6 indicated, "Good communication is a way to cultivate an open and creative work environment; poor communication, on the other hand, has proven to stifle creativity and innovation as employees can be reluctant to voice concerns." Poor work communication standards from top leaders leave employees to fill in the gaps and potentially sabotage organizational goals. When communication is clear and distributed frequently, both trust and employee satisfaction levels can rise.

**Survey.** Assessments can help develop gaps in employee needs. Once the requirements are defined, leadership needs to follow through and develop initiatives to fill the needs. This was

apparent as a theme with three (20%) of the participant interviews. According to Participant 15, "Some organizations do a really good job of getting engagement survey feedback in the hands of their direct managers." Survey assessments are one way to expand and develop better employee engagement and satisfaction levels. Failure to check the contentment pulse of the organization through surveys can lead to problems with satisfaction levels.

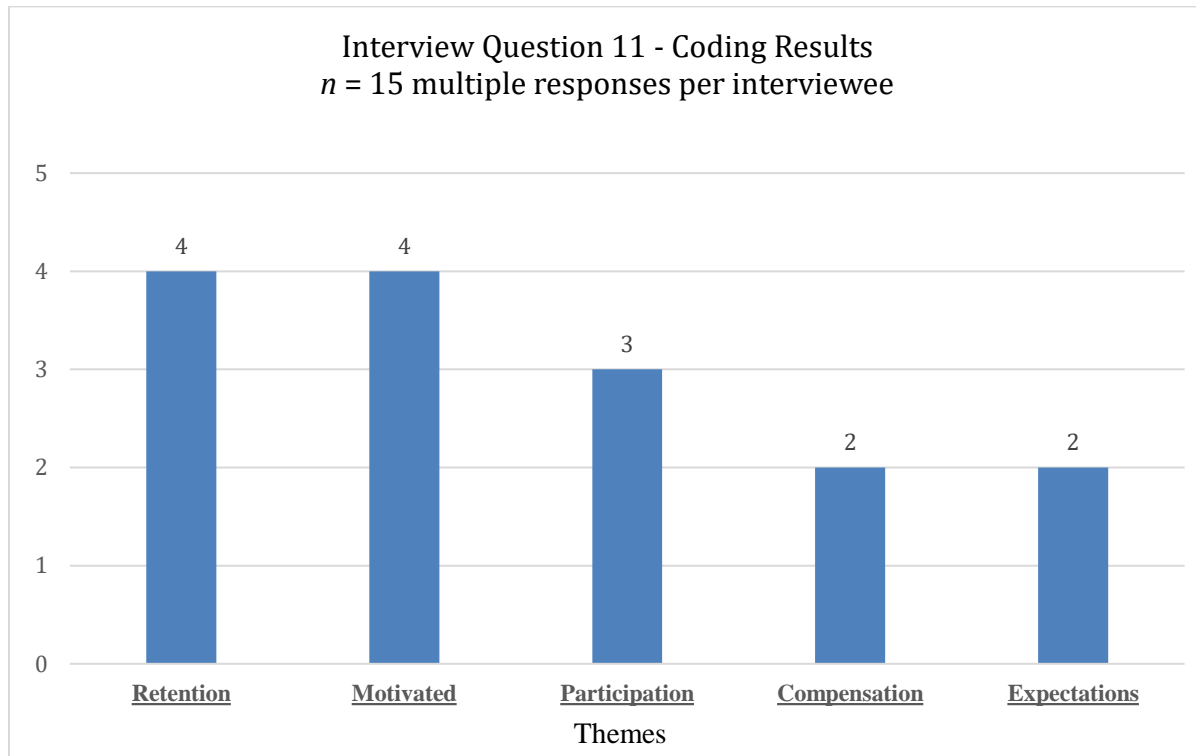
**Satisfaction.** Organizational leaders must choose the level of employee satisfaction they desire appeared as a theme in two (13%) of the interviews. There are several components that play a part in establishing job satisfaction. Participant 12 stated, "The lines of communication will be better and the increased communication will lead to higher employee satisfaction levels." Some additional components included recognition, advancement, pay, and autonomy. When organizational leaders pay attention to satisfaction levels, it can lead to lower turnover, reduced employee absenteeism, and higher productivity. Disregarding employee satisfaction will lead to high turnover, bad culture, and increased operating costs.

### *Interview Question 11*

What pitfalls would you warn aspiring human resource executives?

**Figure 11**

*Interview Question 11*



*Note.* This graph shows themes that were used to describe the answer to interview question 11.

The common themes were allocated based on the number of statements made by each participant who was allotted that theme and were applied to all columns in the same fashion.

Following are the common themes and their descriptions:

**Retention.** Maintaining a high level of employee satisfaction helps retain quality employees. Participant 4 stated, "A lot of the work related to retention can be done with little monetary investment and has more to do with effective leadership." A common theme amongst four (27%) of the participants indicated that sustaining high retention levels helps reduce

training efforts and provide a more stable workforce. Just as workers need to be competitive, employers need to be competitive as well. Organizations need to benchmark themselves to peers in the industry to ensure they remain viable employers.

**Motivated.** Four (27%) of the participants indicated through the interviews that employee motivation is enhanced when commitment and satisfaction levels are at their highest. Motivated employees are better problem solvers and can bring better ideas when collaborating. Participant 7 stated, "Engagement as well as the internal drivers of employee motivation" and high levels of motivated employees can help achieve organizational goals. Motivated employees understand the relationship between job satisfaction and productivity.

**Perception.** Three (20%) of the participants indicated that the way workload balance is perceived influences employee satisfaction. Maintaining a sense of fairness and equality is vital to managing employee satisfaction levels. Participant 12 said, "Organizational perceptions are not just about the bottom line, it's actually about how people feel is a big part of the picture," indicating that getting all employees to engage and collaborate is important to managing perceptions of fairness and equality. When inequalities exist in the workforce it can degrade trust which can lead to a dissatisfied workforce.

**Compensation.** After many years of small pay increases, employee pay is rising as a component of satisfaction levels. However, many other factors also contribute to the total compensation value of an employee. Participant 4 stated, "The role of financial compensation looms large in the minds of employees, and while money is important, it is by no means the entire story," which indicates that employees also compare the competitiveness among other organizations. Two (13%) of the participants discussed compensation and confirming that human

resource directors need to evaluate pay levels and make sure all compensation is in line with industry norms which is vital to retaining valuable staff members.

**Expectations.** The theme of expectations occurred in two (13%) of the participant interviews. Managing employee expectations can help stabilize and maintain employee satisfaction levels. Ambitious employees can have high expectations for their organization. According to Participant 5, "Determining what the expectation that you've set for managers with regard to giving feedback to their employees" also plays a role in managing expectations. Managers must understand the difference between satisfaction and engagement so that leaders can manage expectations appropriately. When expectations are too low or high it can leave employees frustrated and increase staff turnover.

#### ***Summary of RQ4***

Some of the strategies regarding employee satisfaction include managing perceptions, developing a retention plan, engaging employees, and assessing survey results. Improving employee satisfaction involves industry-acceptable leadership practices and their application. Developing a good communication model is a low-cost strategy and can have a multitude of benefits. When employees and managers communicate frequently using an efficient communication model, it fosters upward trust and increases employee satisfaction levels. Employee surveys are useful tools to indicate the status and reveal the gaps regarding employee satisfaction where leaders could improve. Once the gaps are uncovered, organizational leaders must take action to resolve deficiencies between the desired environment and the status.

Avoiding pitfalls that could potentially waste time and resources is vital for organizational leaders. Managing expectations so that employees are not disappointed when initiatives are not deployed, developed, or do not progress is critical. Keeping employees

motivated is important to sustaining employee satisfaction levels. Motivation primarily comes from within the employee, but leaders can also use positive reinforcement as a motivating tool. With acceptable retention practices, employees feel happy and fulfilled and bring stability to the organization. This increases ability, collaboration, engagement, communication, and expectation management help create high employee satisfaction levels.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

To summarize, the Researcher asked 11 semi-structured interview questions to reveal answers to the following four research questions:

- RQ1: How do human resource executives define, measure, and track desirable levels of job satisfaction?
- RQ2: What strategies do human resource managers utilize to overcome the challenges of employee satisfaction?
- RQ3: What challenges do human resource managers encounter when trying to increase employee satisfaction levels?
- RQ4: What advice would human resource executives give aspiring human resource executives for increasing job satisfaction levels?

The inter-rater coding process was discussed along with the data collection process. The Researcher asked the interview questions, and the findings were correlated and generalized with the transcribed correspondence. The conversations were reported with quotations from the participant transcripts. A presentation of the data was provided in both graphical and narrative form. There were 46 different codes that were reduced to themes generated from the data analysis. Table 5 indicates the common words that were frequently used by the participants during the interviews. Chapter 5 provides the study results along with recommendations.

**Table 7***Summary of Themes for Four Research Questions*

RQ1. How do human resource executives define, measure, and track desirable levels of job satisfaction?	RQ2. What strategies do human resource managers utilize to overcome the challenges of employee satisfaction?	RQ3. What challenges do human resource managers encounter when trying to increase employee satisfaction levels?	RQ4. What advice would human resource executives give aspiring human resource executives for increasing job satisfaction levels?
Communication	Engagement	Collaboration	Engagement
Feedback	Expectations	Communication	Expectations
Perceptions	Improvement	Community	Equality
Culture	Retention	Accountability	Culture
Collaboration	Teamwork	Connected	Motivation
Satisfaction	Survey	Engagement	Retention
Survey	Improvement	Empowerment	Support
Expectations	Competent	Feedback	Survey
Engagement	Connected	Competent	Service
Competent	Communication	Ownership	Satisfaction

RQ1. How do human resource executives define, measure, and track desirable levels of job satisfaction?	RQ2. What strategies do human resource managers utilize to overcome the challenges of employee satisfaction?	RQ3. What challenges do human resource managers encounter when trying to increase employee satisfaction levels?	RQ4. What advice would human resource executives give aspiring human resource executives for increasing job satisfaction levels?
Content	Challenge	Responsible	Positivity
Empathy	Commitment	Recognition	Ownership
Measurement	Improvement	Satisfaction	Participation
Relations	Environment	Trust	Responsible
Service	Leadership	Work Environment	Commitment

*Note:* Top 15 themes for each research question are included, and they are not in order of frequency.



## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Introduction of the Study**

This phenomenological study of employee satisfaction aims to study and investigate the best practices for managing employee satisfaction levels described by human resource managers. The study's findings on employee satisfaction levels outline the obstacles and challenges and provide practical knowledge and suggestions to inform aspiring executive leaders. The study's findings will help businesses and government agencies manage employee satisfaction challenges and develop a vision for how future surveys can track and measure their leadership success.

This study intended to generate a list of best practices for managing employee satisfaction levels through human resource executives' experiences. The study examined challenges, strategies, techniques, achievements, and hazards through real-life experiences. The survey findings will also help aspiring human resource trainees develop organizational plans along with practical knowledge for deployment. The research also provides a model for executives to deploy satisfaction initiatives within a corporate setting.

As the global pandemic draws to a close, human resource managers will be facing new uncharted territory as employees start returning to work. Creating innovative work from home policies and maintaining employee connections in a newly defined digital work environment will be a challenge. Knowledge of best practices for managing employee satisfaction levels within the community will help navigate these new employee expectations.

### **Summary of the Study**

The study utilized a qualitative method of phenomenology. The researcher chose the qualitative research path to help human resources managers navigate managing employee's

satisfaction levels. The semi-structured interviews allowed the executives to expand their knowledge of the interview questions.

Chapter 1 provides the history and background of employee engagement, collaboration, and satisfaction levels. Understanding the history of employee satisfaction helped to direct other studies. Chapter 2 offers an in-depth literature review covering all components of employee satisfaction. The literature review is peer-reviewed studies that contribute to the common knowledge of the industry. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology and research design used to collect life experiences from human resource managers. The researcher and expert review committee conceived four research questions to extract the best practices in the industry so that the knowledge could be shared and replicated:

- RQ1: How do human resource executives define, measure, and track desirable levels of job satisfaction?
- RQ2: What strategies do human resource managers utilize to overcome the challenges of employee satisfaction?
- RQ3: What challenges do human resource managers encounter when trying to increase employee satisfaction levels?
- RQ4: What advice would human resource executives give aspiring human resource executives for increasing job satisfaction levels?

Each research question had 2 to 3 interview questions that were designed to answer the related research question. Interview data was collected and recorded, then transcribed and coded. The researcher then categorized the coded data into broader themes to find shared meaning from the interview subjects. Bracketing and epoche were applied to remove personal biases and judgment from the researcher's opinion. The researcher also used two doctoral students to

perform inter-rater reliability and ensure the validity of the questions and interview procedures. The researcher applied the choosing among five approaches by Creswell (2013) to ensure that a quality qualitative study was performed. The internal review board reviewed and approved the study's methodology and nature to provide human subjects' protection. After completing the IRB process, the researcher sent an email blast with the approved recruitment script to 111 potential subjects.

Chapter 4 reintroduced the four research questions and presented an analysis of the interview questions used to collect data for reporting the findings. The interview results were transcribed and rendered through Otter.ai, creating a text document. Upon completion, the researcher imported the transcribed text files into Atlas.ti version 9. The researcher used the qualitative analysis program to reduce the text files to a one-word overriding theme. After the preliminary coding was completed, the methodology and process underwent an inter-rater review for accuracy from two doctoral students within the Researchers' cohort. Upon concurrence with the Researchers' peers, the study's findings were summarized in Chapter 4, including graphical charts showing themes outlined from the participant's interviews. Chapter 4 also includes one emergent question resulted from the interview process. A final summary of the interview process's critical words is shown in Table 6 of Chapter 4.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The study is aimed to determine the best practices to manage employee satisfaction levels. A select group of human resource managers from across California was interviewed and provided its experience in managing employee satisfaction levels. Table 6 provides an overview of the summarized codes for each of the four interview questions discussed during the interview process. An analysis of the results is provided for each question. This study's findings can be

used as a practical recommendation for organizational leaders to reference when undertaking employee satisfaction initiatives.

The following research questions were created by combining recommendations of both a peer review team and an expert review team. The questions help reveal and understand how employee satisfaction plays a role in any organization's success. Each research question had related interview questions designed to inquire about human resource managers' knowledge and experiences while actively managing employee satisfaction levels. The findings will illustrate the best practices utilized in the human resources industry to manage and maintain employee satisfaction levels.

### **Results for Research Question 1 (RQ1)**

The researcher asked the question, "How do human resource executives define, measure, and track desirable levels of job satisfaction?" The results found the definition varied between statements that resembled communication, happiness, content, expectation, and perceptions during the interviews. Some of the subject's interview statements are summarized below:

- Many different categories of events lead to employee satisfaction. Two primary types are separated into factors that lead to satisfaction: transactional events and those that lead to employee engagement: emotional-based connections.
- How one defines employee satisfaction will help to determine how to measure satisfaction levels.
- Establishing employee experiences can be measured and monitored over time through surveys.
- Satisfaction elements help to retain existing employees and acquire new employees.
- Employee satisfaction is measured through four elements: recognition, individual

- needs, engagement, and a state of mind.
- Understand the areas of concern from employees and develop improvement plans.
  - Deploy employee satisfaction surveys that measure areas of employee growth, trust, autonomy, and connections.
  - Conducting one-on-one conversations with a standard series of questions can evaluate satisfaction at the employee level and organizational sentiment.
  - Performing organizational evaluations will help determine if compensation, employee integration, and incentives are on par with similar organizations.
  - The indicators for gauging employee satisfaction levels include employee turnover, internal promotion rates, absenteeism rates, and an employee satisfaction index collected during the annual performance review.

**Figure 12**

*Research Question 1 Word Cloud*



## **Discussion of RQ1**

The findings suggest that there is no uniform way to define employee satisfaction levels. Many aspects of employee satisfaction levels can be attributed to communication and collaboration. The interview participants discussed that managing the frequency of meetings and sharing ideas is essential to ensure that effective organizational communication paths are maintained. Employee satisfaction levels can begin to breakdown with ambiguous communication according to Wiese (2011), which leads to distress in real existence. Meeting are conducted mostly with social media platforms and technologies which have changed the future path of organizational communication. Corporate leaders can increase workforce engagement through collaborative technology that brings people together (Wandera et al., 2016).

Another aspect of the definition of employee satisfaction is the measurement of contentment with their jobs. It is not easy to analyze satisfaction if employees like individual elements of their careers and not others. Keeping employees content with their position will significantly boost productivity levels as stated by De Silva et al. (2018). Human resource managers employee expectations that help to create accountability for the organization and can be accomplished through collaborative measures. Creating shared accountability is a responsibility that each employee and manager should value according to Riccucci and Van Ryzin (2017).

The perception employees have about their interactions at the organization is the employee experience. Human resource directors deemed engagement is an outcome of the employee experience that is generated through the organizational culture. Many organizations target the entire employee experience as a whole while seeking to develop positive organizational experiences. According to Hallinger and Heck (2010), improving satisfaction and

engagement levels requires an adjustment to the corporate culture. When employees are involved in the decision-making process, ownership in the outcome becomes a priority.

Respectful conduct of employees seems to be straightforward and effortless when employee satisfaction levels are high. There is a wide variety of challenges that come with managing employee perceptions related to the workplace. These perceptions can range from diversity and inclusion to workplace harassment and many other facets of the workplace. Olfert and Partridge (2011) also agree that building a culture of equality and respect will create a homogeneous home workforce that respects diversity. Workplace environments that create fairness and allow employees to discuss and value opposing views will thrive with this relationship intelligence level. Individual perceptions can be very different based on life experiences.

The essential item to think about is how one can grow the organization in maturity. One way to accomplish the progression of maturity, as described by human resource directors, is by expanding ownership and develop employee engagement. Organizations that do not care about engagement will have engaged and disengaged employees based on their organization's role according to Wheelan (2020). As soon as passive engagement is allowed, the measurement of satisfaction and engagement can take place. When feedback is captured from employees, a big part of the measurement challenge goes back to the definition of employee satisfaction. Olfert and Partridge (2011) agreed that you cannot measure something that does not have an established definition. Measurement of workplace satisfaction must be done continuously and in real-time according to the responses from Interview Question 2. The feedback and measurement data have to flow to the right people in the right place at the right time. Employee engagement is a tool that can move the needle and give companies a productive environment. The word cloud below in

Figure 13 indicates the most common words spoken in Interview Questions 1 through 3.

## **Results for RQ 2**

The researcher asked the second question, “What strategies do human resource managers utilize to overcome the challenges of employee satisfaction?” There were several strategies mentioned. Some of those are mentioned below:

- It is establishing an environment where collaboration is valued and performed by all members of the organization. When collaboration is a concentric theme in the organization, satisfaction and engagement levels will rise.
- Virtual collaboration can be one strategy to increase employee satisfaction through properly maintained engagement practices.
- Creating a happy environment at work can help to maintain satisfaction levels and increase productivity.
- Asking for feedback through multiple venues, including face-to-face surveys and employee events.
- Increasing the overall competence level through emotional intelligence training. Going beyond emotional intelligence training to relational intelligence training is the next step. Relations training teaches to value other abilities and viewpoints, which can ultimately lead to increased satisfaction levels.
- Sponsoring employee events allows the organization to build the community.
- Giving extra perks can help to show employees that they are valued and appreciated.
- Developing a standardized accountability policy helps to maintain equity and fairness across the organization. The perception of equality helps to maintain satisfaction when all employees are treated in the same way.





## **Discussion of RQ2**

The responses from interview research question 2 indicate that there is no one way to manage employee satisfaction levels. Everybody likes to be recognized, which can be low cost or even free, such as a certificate mentioned in the employee newsletter as noted by the interview participants. Recognition can create a sense of ownership and help people to feel valued. Leaders can cultivate high levels of job satisfaction through a corporate attitude (Bernato, 2017). The finding of the study indicates that boosting the morale of employees is essential to maintain affectedness and dedication to go the extra mile.

Organizations need to focus more on positive attributes because leaders often focus on fixing what goes wrong and not celebrating the good things. The goal is to create a workforce community where teams freely exchange ideas, identify problems, and develop solutions. According to Haugh and Talwar (2014), leaders must endorse behaviors that lead to these exchange actions. Once the agenda has been set to foster collaboration, leaders must look at routing the interaction environment. Workplace designers illustrate effective environments based on workload and landscape that leaders can transform into a collaborative environment, as noted by Orr and Bennett (2017). These unique renderings express the character and enhance the qualities of the work experience. Leaders must foster flexibility into the community space through a design that brings people together to be more productive.

Engagement is more than just a survey as mentioned by the interview participants. It is about leaders being involved and taking action on the feedback that is received. After receiving feedback from employees, managers should develop an action plan that can be acted upon to make sure feedback is being heard. When one communicates new employee initiatives, it needs to connect back to the survey data. Also, leaders should give credit to those who participate in

providing survey data. According to Vande Brake (2010), doing a proper survey and developing an action plan increases engagement through a reactive approach. Surveys intend to understand and determine the level of engagement and satisfaction.

The researcher found through this study that leaders should model engagement competencies at each level of the organization. The organization needs to provide tools and training to educate the expectations of employees in managers. As Biech and Silberman (2015) described, the competency model sets the framework for leadership practices in the organization. To maximize participation in surveys and get candid feedback, employees expect they will be anonymous. Mapping the results to indicators will help build pathways that can tie back to a cultural model. When asking employees for potential solutions, there can be a fear that employees will expect a corresponding action to all suggestions mentioned. Although one interview participant stated that just listening to the workforce can outweigh the risk of inaction.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management (Society for Human Resource Management, 2015), five factors contribute to employee satisfaction. The first is good relations with an immediate supervisor. Good relations can help employees to feel valued and maintain a positive working relationship which was also noted by the interview subjects. The second factor is effective communication in a creative working environment. Effective communication was a constant theme throughout the interview questions. Poor communication can stifle creativity and innovation and leave employees reluctant to voice their ideas or concerns which was also reported as a common theme in seven of the interview questions. The third factor is compensation; ensuring that the organization is compensating employees fairly is essential to maintaining proper satisfaction levels. The fourth is job security, and the fifth is the ability to use expertise and talent and to feel useful.

### **Results for RQ 3**

The researcher asked the participants the third question, “What challenges do human resource managers encounter when trying to increase employee satisfaction levels?” Human resource managers often face methods to overcome challenges and reframe obstacles in increasing satisfaction levels. The suggestions for overcoming these challenges are listed below:

- Creating a work-life balance is essential not just to avoid employee burnout but also to maintain employee satisfaction levels. When employees are pushed too hard, dissatisfaction sets in, and productivity falls.
- Employees need development opportunities when they are not learning, and growing jobs become stagnant. Employees need an environment of growth and progression to the desired outcome.
- Frequent communication is necessary to keep the workforce engaged, informed and build trust. When employees do not have the information, they need or hear organizational news through sources other than workplace leaders it reduces employee satisfaction levels.
- Developing an appropriate reward system is critical to maintaining employee engagement and satisfaction levels. Positive reinforcement is necessary to keep employees’ productivity and morale high.
- Creating connections to the community is imperative for building rapport and positive engagement. Without a sense of community, employees can lack a sense of purpose. Finding ways to integrate employees into community events can be a helpful way to avoid this obstacle.
- Employees need constant feedback given correctly and frequently. Without feedback,



### **Discussion of RQ3**

Many factors can influence an employees' level of job satisfaction, according to the participant interviews. Human resource managers are tasked with creating quality conditions and working relationships. The concept of job satisfaction has increased in complex situations and behavioral tendencies. The key factors that influence employee satisfaction include job security, working conditions, leadership styles, and recognition of achievements, as noted by Collins and Clark (2003). The effects of employee dissatisfaction could lead to a lack of engagement, high turnover, and a lower productivity rate. Good management practices can help to remove or diminish the obstacles and challenges of creating satisfied employees.

The findings from research question 3 indicate many challenges human resource managers face while implementing employee satisfaction measures. Organizational initiatives can be too big and complex for anyone to handle (Smith-Crowe et al., 2003). These challenges require collaboration and commitment to the organization, which requires working together. As defined by the interview participants, good collaboration means sharing the responsibilities, the risk, the credit, and the benefits. Grant and Crutchfield (2008) noted that collaboration requires all employees to work together toward a common goal. According to the interview participants, building a collaborative workforce takes time, and when initiatives are competing for resources, it can be challenging to make collaboration a priority. There are many benefits of good collaboration, such as an engaged and empowered workforce ready to solve complex problems through solid relationships built on trust, respect, and honesty, as indicated by the research participants. This study found that the challenge human resource directors face is creating a collaborative concentric organization that values teamwork and relationships.

The researcher found a variety of viewpoints related to the type and frequency of employee surveys. The three primary components of engagement measures include baseline surveys, employee listening, and impulse surveys. Baseline surveys typically have 12 to 16 questions that inquire about key engagement indicators that assess the organization's overall health condition (Burnett & Lisk, 2019). The interview participants cited baseline surveys at a 2-year interval as the most common form of employee engagement feedback. Obtaining accurate feedback can be challenging, but once collected, it can help formulate a strategic plan to build a more engaged culture. Pulse surveys are typically four to six questions designed to dig deeper and provide more specific data where leaders can act and were reported by the interview participants to be an effective data collection tool. According to Burnett and Lisk (2019), the last component of engagement is employee listening, which involves active listening tools that measure engagement and gather information from individual employees throughout their employment term.

It is vital to have an intentional engagement measurement strategy that relies on models created within the organization, as noted by Barrick et al. (2015). The goal is to isolate one to three low-scoring areas of engagement and drill down using a survey of four to six questions, then a follow-up post-survey on improvements within the organization. Similarly, the study participants described through the interview questions how leaders should repeat the use of surveys every two to three years to contribute to employee engagement success. By benchmarking satisfaction levels, human resource directors can focus on specific areas and evaluate outcomes over time, reducing corporate problems.

Managing the challenges of employee satisfaction are at the forefront of human capital struggles. Organizations must be prepared and ready to act with their employee satisfaction and

engagement initiatives to retain and develop key performers and the changing business climate. The interview participants were in parallel with Simon and Ferreiro (2018) when they discussed creating an environment that promotes honest communication and offers employees opportunities to voice concerns should be a top priority. Training managers need to seek out opportunities for coaching, and employee assistance needs to be built into the culture and help alleviate some of the challenges human resource managers face when attempting to increase employee satisfaction levels. Achieving the most effective level of employee satisfaction is the common goal among human resource managers. Achieving the goal has countless associated challenges, as reported by the interview subjects.

#### **Results for RQ 4**

The researcher asked the participants the fourth question, “What advice would human resource executives give aspiring human resource leaders for increasing job satisfaction levels?” These are the suggestions of what not to do from the interview participants:

- Do not ignore signs of a toxic culture, monitor employee turnover and increased absenteeism as indicators of a broader problem with employee satisfaction levels.
- Do not neglect employee development. Employees need to know that their employer cares about their future and wants to see them succeed.
- Do not allow inequalities to exist in the organization. When employees and workgroups are treated unequally, it strips away trust and degrades employee satisfaction and morale.
- Do not lose touch with the workforce. Don’t undervalue personal relationships within the organization. Healthy relationships are essential to maintain trust, increase morale, and motivate employees.



- Do not under-communicate goals and mission or leave employees in the dark. Poor communication decreases employee productivity and increases mistakes.
- Do not allow employees to be micro-managed. It creates a stressful environment and demotivates employees.
- Do not allow workplace conflict to persist. Continued workplace conflict can create a contentious worker and erode employee satisfaction levels.
- Do not let department rivalry break the company teams. Developing a culture of collaboration will help keep power struggles to a minimum and build camaraderie.

**Figure 15**

*Research Question 4 Word Cloud*



## **Discussion of RQ4**

The findings from research question four indicate that leaders should avoid many pitfalls of employee engagement. The first mistake to be aware of when managing the workforce, as noted by both the interview participants and McDonald et al. (2012), is avoiding an employee engagement action plan. Without a proper plan in place, managers will not know how to handle unsatisfied employees. When managers do not plan, employee engagement will decline and maybe a challenge to recover. Prioritizing engagement initiatives and deploying achievable plans can be the perfect tool to drive positive change in the organization.

Attempting to force employees to be happy and engaged will not work. Managers can't force an employee to be happy and cheerful, as discussed with interview participants during interview question one. Creating an environment that fosters a positive work environment will help employees thrive in the right conditions (Mabey, 2013). Another pitfall noted from the interview participants is to avoid over surveying the workforce. Filling out frequent surveys will not increase engagement or satisfaction. Criticizing performance can be problematic when done too frequently. Correcting behavior issues needs to be handled delicately and in private if employee satisfaction is to remain high. The opportunity to correct diminishes when leaders can't engage in conversation or get to the bottom of the problem, according to Lee and Bozeman (2016). The interview participants indicated that a supervisor's or manager's questioning could exacerbate the situation when they are inexperienced with managing people.

When organizational goals and initiatives are continually changing, it leaves employees confused, leading to a lack of engagement (Axelrod, 2010). Poor communication by managers can also wreck an organizational culture, as mentioned through seven themes of the interview questions. Communication is critical to employees both on a personal level and as an

organization. When employees do not get clear and consistent communication, rumors can begin as employees fill in communication gaps with assumptions (Kim, 2011). Workplace communication allows employees to grow and mature with a better sense of the challenges that organizations face.

Deciphering engagement initiatives and digging into what is working and what is not helps to identify causes of staff engagement or disengagement. At the core of employee satisfaction are collaboration, communication, and company leadership (Lehtinen et al., 2019). The most common theme in the interview process was collaboration which was identified as a theme in seven of the 11 research questions. The second most common was communication in six of the 11 research interviews. Employees feel more valued when their voices and ideas are heard then their ideas are put into action. When the human connection falls apart, and silos develop, it has a detrimental effect on employee satisfaction levels. As businesses are reshaping, the imminent future will be challenging for human resource managers to navigate. According to Froman (2020), utilizing collaborative methods and engagement practices through technology will be in greater demand, while leadership is needed to draw out employee's strengths and build a better future.

### **Implications of the Study**

The findings of this research can provide human resource executives and employees with an upward path to employee engagement and satisfaction alike. As companies adopt socially responsible behavior to attract and retain employees, leaders can also utilize these practices to increase organizational performance. Companies that invest their resources in proactive employee satisfaction and engagement measures can gain competitive advantages. These best practices can promote a good corporate image and positively affect organizational outcomes. By

contributing to the literature and investigating experiences through a human resource manager's lens, leaders can blend emerging ideas with the knowledge and experience documented in this research paper.

This information can be broadened into other industries and applied to human capital management in various forms. The study examined employee satisfaction and engagement as perceived by human resource managers and provided accounts of real-life situations. Business leaders can use this information and determine the impact of these practices and initiatives on their organization. This study has the potential to inspire researchers to expand beyond the field of human capital and into other business-related areas.

### **Study Conclusion**

Many significant themes repeatedly appeared throughout this study about job satisfaction and employee engagement. The recommendations from this analysis indicated that fairness and openness provide structural support for an institution and offer a venue to build its policy and process. Human resource professionals recognize the importance of these concepts and understand how to build a culture where leaders highlight open communication, trust, and fairness as a strategy to maintain employee satisfaction levels and engagement (Di Domenico et al., 2015). When leaders fail to integrate these components, employees can become apathetic, hinder organizational objectives, and develop negative relationships.

With the high cost of lost workplace production, leaders must understand that maintaining effective levels of employee satisfaction is an important step to ensure continued success. Creating an annual satisfaction survey is not enough to create a sustainable workforce with a high level of job satisfaction. The key is to engage all employees through interactions that help them understand each other, and how their actions affect the bottom line. When the best

practices as described by human resource directors are applied, employees will be more engaged, more productive, and communication will improve.

In conclusion, leaders need an easy straight forward plan to help manage employee satisfaction levels. The outcome from this research indicated that increasing employee satisfaction can be made simple and straightforward. There are five basic components that can be used to lead organizations to higher levels of employee satisfaction and engagement. Those include:

- Build
- Learn
- Integrate
- Safe
- Support

Establishing an organization that centers on these concepts, better known as Martins' Model of Organizational B.L.I.S.S., will help human resource leaders create an organizational culture where employees will thrive and aim the company in the right direction.

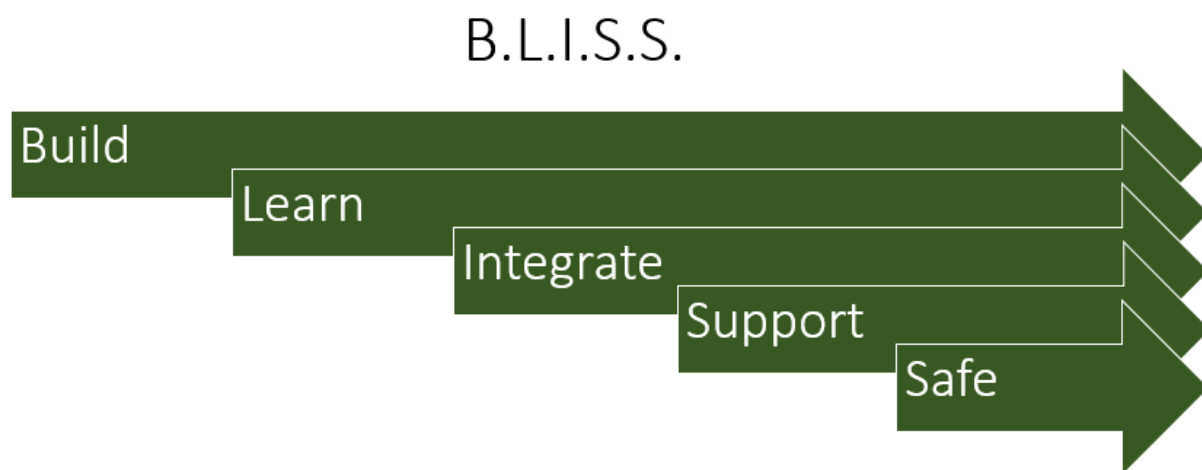
### **Application**

With a rapidly changing environment, the workforce, and the work system's delivery engaging employees will be the key to competitive advantage. If we can show how engagement construct can produce high productivity levels, managers will be more likely to invest in engagement initiatives. The challenge of establishing a case for investing in engagement methods can be simple. Companies that understand conditions and know how to apply engagement practices will have accomplished complexities that competitors will find difficult to imitate.

Developing a department or culture that builds others and role-models quality leadership ability is something human resource managers should consider. Utilizing Martins' Model of Organizational B.L.I.S.S. can give leaders a simple method for increasing employee satisfaction and ultimately leading to better employee engagement.

**Figure 16**

*Martins' Model of Organizational B.L.I.S.S.*



**Build.** Organizational leaders need to build a solid business foundation through careful planning. When business plans are constructed, leaders need to understand the impact corporate design has on the human aspect of satisfaction. Based on the interview questions, some key themes discovered in the research related to building an organization include community, improvement, and engagement. Creating a physical environment that supports satisfaction initiatives has an essential impact on the way employees feel. There are many tools leaders have at their disposal to develop a culture in an organization. Creating space for the community to exist must happen first before collaboration and engagement can occur on a personal level.

**Learn.** Developing a learning organization will help to meet the needs of many employees and benefit the company at the same time. When learning becomes a core value, the commitment to education helps to provide the necessary resources to support employees. Some key themes from the uncovered during the research interviews included improvement, collaboration, engagement, and competence. When leaders get involved with personalized learning plans, it can make the experience more relevant to the organization. Higher levels of employee satisfaction can occur when employees are more engaged in the process and can better see the big picture. The learning environment created by the organization should support learning and facilitate knowledge transfer between employees and managers. To maintain satisfaction levels, employees need to feel like they are part of something bigger.

**Integrate.** Creating an integrated workforce focused on inclusion is essential for leaders to develop a sense of equality. Inclusive behavior starts with leadership and progresses through the development of workforce engagement and active listening. Employee inclusion can bring different views to the decision-making process and develop better employee interactions. When managing diversity, it's vital to cultivate inclusiveness through discussions and interactions. Some themes relevant to integration developed through the participant interviews and included connection, participation, commitment, and equality. Creating a diverse workforce and addressing employee satisfaction levels can help carry a message of equivalence throughout the organization. When managers identify underrepresented groups and balance the situation, it can give employees the necessary support and resources needed to succeed. The extra support helps create a culture where differences are valued, and people feel comfortable to bring themselves and their ideas to work.

**Support.** When leaders build a supportive culture based on appreciation and recognition. Leaders need to listen to their employee's concerns and help to provide emotional support. Supportive leaders actively make time to be involved and engaged with their employees. It's important to remember that employees are human beings and need care. Some key themes related to support discovered through the interview process included accountability, compensation, and feedback. A supportive work environment understands and recognizes the employee's need for work-life balance and reinforces trust in the relationship. When leaders respect employees and their space, organizations can reach a higher level of performance. When goals are achieved, leaders should recognize employees for their achievements and contributions to a positive organizational culture. When employees receive praise, it gives the inspiration to improve overall performance for the company.

**Safe.** Creating an environment where employees feel safe to express their opinions and viewpoints can only increase employee satisfaction levels. Fostering an environment where mistakes are allowed is a pathway to innovation. Businesses should reward leaders and employees for going outside of the box and trying original ideas. This is where discoveries are made, and employees can learn important lessons. Some common themes from the interview participants regarding a safe business environment included engagement, happiness, satisfaction, and collaboration. Leaders need to create an environment where employees do not feel judged. Creating a safe environment where employees can try new ideas can foster innovative abilities and bring new ideas to the forefront. Leaders can use words to strengthen relationships between a workforce.



## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Employee satisfaction measures can take place in many forms and at different levels. Collaborative activities are a determining factor in many human resource directors' strategies for increasing employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Cox et al., 2009). The present study identified several procedures and best practices in managing employee satisfaction levels. This study has laid the groundwork for future research to be completed in an advanced qualitative and quantitative methodology research setting.

Future research and assessments could employ a quantitative comparative non-experimental research plan that would help gain insight into current opinions and employees regarding workplace satisfaction. The current research is lacking when connecting best practices to tested performance outcomes. A possible hypothesis could assume that if the recommended best practices to increase job satisfaction from human resource directors were applied in an organization, employee satisfaction levels would increase. A researcher could measure each best practice through quantitative analysis to determine how dissatisfied or satisfied they are with each recommended practice. The research could help to determine whether the best practices applied in the workforce resolve employee dissatisfaction problems and increase aggregate job satisfaction. The participants could be asked to fill out a survey using the Likert scale with choices from very dissatisfied to very satisfied. The rationale of each research question would be to evaluate the relationship between job satisfaction and the applied best practices. The researcher could process descriptive statistics to report and summarize the aggregate data. The goal of the analytic technique would be to add data to answer the additional research questions and determine if the best practices as stated by human resource directors increased job satisfaction through the lens of an employee.

As a result of this study, further research could help employees increase their opinions on satisfaction surveys. The following list is provided as inspiration for further research:

- Identification and better definition of success factors could indicate employee satisfaction initiatives with proven success factors.
- Quantitative research studies that include frontline employees could be incorporated into a mixed-method study.
- Qualitative research studies can research employee and manager experiences, commonalities, and challenges during the employee satisfaction change process.
- A study of the correlation between the recommended best practices of this report to organizational outcomes.
- Design a replication of this qualitative study that examines the best practices and strategies with recommendations from other government officials. The researcher could include other city administrators, politicians, employee associations, and management-level positions in the study.
- The researcher could perform a cost-benefit analysis after the recommended strategies have been deployed to determine if there are any cost advantages in developing a satisfied and engaged employee workforce.
- Study the effect of the recommended best practices from the employee experience and the challenge of implementation.
- Study of what the primary causes of low employee job and disengagement are.

Future items that human resource managers could study, would be evaluating the time lag between employee satisfaction initiatives and the impact on organizational performance.

Researchers could incorporate some variables into a mixed-methods study that includes drivers

and barriers to a company's implementation of employee satisfaction initiatives. An analysis of the firm's objectives and plans could be further researched and examined. Additional factors to study could be institutional knowledge, culture, and leadership style that could also affect employee satisfaction and engagement programs.

### **Final Thoughts**

In the competitive and fast-paced job market, organizational leaders must engage and motivate the most valuable company asset. Many employees are satisfied and engaged in their jobs, but many others are disengaged and pessimistic. Upon completion of the interviews, the author reflected and realized how challenging managing the employee satisfaction level could be. It has become more apparent than ever that high levels of employee satisfaction lead to organizational success. Some of the benefits of high satisfaction levels include lower turnover, increased creativity through collaboration, and higher productivity. Considering stakeholder's interests, questions can arise as to whether a corporation can create value by deploying employee satisfaction initiatives. Higher levels of investment in employees will lead to higher operating performance and increased value to the company. Corporate leaders have options to engage employees and benefit not just the workforce but society at large.

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## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment Script



Dear [Name],

My name is Tom Martin, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study examining strategies leaders utilize and what challenges they face when implementing employee satisfaction strategies in a governmental organizational setting and you are invited to participate in the study. If you agree, you are invited to participate in the interview process. The interview is anticipated to take no more than 60 minutes and will be conducted via Zoom which will be recorded.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. Confidentiality will be maintained using a password protected laptop to store all data collected including informed consent, the recorded interview, and the transcribed data. All data will also be deidentified using a pseudonym which will be assigned to each individual recording. If you have questions or would like to participate,

Thank you for your participation,

Thomas Martin

Pepperdine University, GSEP

Doctoral Candidate

## APPENDIX B

### Peer Reviewer Form

Dear reviewer:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The table below is designed to ensure that my research questions for the study are properly addressed with corresponding interview questions.

In the table below, please review each research question and the corresponding interview questions. For each interview question, consider how well the interview question addresses the research question. If the interview question is directly relevant to the research question, please mark “Keep as stated.” If the interview question is irrelevant to the research question, please mark “Delete it.” Finally, if the interview question can be modified to best fit with the research question, please suggest your modifications in the space provided. You may also recommend additional interview questions you deem necessary.

Once you have completed your analysis, please return the completed form to me via email. Thank you again for your participation.

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Question
RQ1: Placeholder	Placeholder

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Question
	<p>a. The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></p> <p>b. The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></p> <p>c. The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b>:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
RQ2: Placeholder	<p>Placeholder</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></p> <p>b. The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></p>

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Question
	<p>c. The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b>:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
RQ3: Placeholder	Placeholder
RQ4: Placeholder	Placeholder



## APPENDIX C

### IRB Approval Notice



Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

#### NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: February 25, 2021

Protocol Investigator Name: Thomas Martin

Protocol #: 20-11-1469

Project Title: The Effects of Collaborative Management on Employee Satisfaction Levels

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Thomas Martin:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

## APPENDIX D

### Informed Consent



IRB Number #20-11-1469

Study Title:

***The Effects of Collaborative Leadership Practice on Employee Satisfaction Levels***

Dear Human Resources Leader,

My name is Thomas Martin. I am conducting a study regarding the effects of collaboration on employee satisfaction levels. If you are 19 years of age or older and currently hold the job title of Human Resource Director, you may participate in this research.

**What is the reason for doing this research study?**

This is a research project that focuses on how employee satisfaction levels are managed and maintained. Increased knowledge of management techniques will help others in the human resource field manage employee satisfaction levels. In order to participate you must be 19 years of age or older and lead employee satisfaction initiatives for your organization.

**What will be done during this research study?**

Participation in this study will require approximately 45 minutes of time. You will be asked to describe your experiences managing employee satisfaction levels and the effects of the programs with 11 questions. Participation will take place online via Zoom at a mutually agreed time.

**What are the possible risks of being in this research study?**

The risk associated with this study is minimal and may include potential stress regarding job satisfaction.

**What are the possible benefits to you?**

The results of this study will be used to educate human resource executives with best practices for managing job satisfaction levels in their organization.

**How will information about you be protected?**

Your responses to this survey will be kept confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained using a password protected laptop to store all data collected including informed consent, the recorded interview, and the transcribed data. All data will also be deidentified using a pseudonym which will be assigned to each individual recording.

**What are your rights as a research subject?**

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s):

*Tom Martin*

*Thomas.Martin@Pepperdine.edu*

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

- Phone: 1(310)568-2305
- Email: [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu)

**What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?**

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

***Documentation of Informed Consent***

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By completing your interview responses, you have given consent to participate in this research. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

## APPENDIX E

### Human Subject Research CITI Certification



Completion Date 16-Sep-2020  
Expiration Date 15-Sep-2025  
Record ID 37928383

This is to certify that:

**Thomas Martin**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**GSEP Education Division**  
(Curriculum Group)  
**GSEP Education Division - Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE)**  
(Course Learner Group)  
**1 - Basic Course**  
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**Pepperdine University**

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.



Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/7w79d6010c-87ea-4120-9a48-a495d2fe7d34-37928383](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/7w79d6010c-87ea-4120-9a48-a495d2fe7d34-37928383)