

THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION FOR BUILDING EMPLOYEE
RESOURCE GROUPS IN AVIATION

by

Lynnette Darnell

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Liberty University, School of Business

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Abstract

In this qualitative case study, the research explores the importance of strategic communication for building employee resource groups in aviation, specifically at a regional airline. To expand and develop knowledge regarding employee resource groups, the researcher looks at a widely distributed workforce to understand how the lack of strategically planned communication can impact employee resource group development and employee engagement. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and a focus group of the employee resource group members, which provided insight on their experience engaging with the employee resource groups, preferred communication methods and tools, and their perception of leadership involvement. The worldwide pandemic influenced the results, COVID-19; at the time of the data collection, all communications at the regional airline had transitioned fully to a virtual platform. Finally, the findings show that strategic communication is vital to ensure effective communication and employee engagement, critical for growing employee resource groups. The results showed that for a widely distributed in an unconventional industry such as aviation, the virtual platform allowed for a centralized meeting location accessible to everyone at any site. Unfortunately, the findings highlighted the discrepancy in access to some of the media based on employee job classification, which is a barrier that prevents many from engaging. Additionally, the findings highlighted the preference for having multiple engaging methods within the virtual platform, the convenience of media available through portable devices, and the need for leadership involvement in strategic communication for growing employee resource groups.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother (Abuela Sama) and my dad for always inspiring me to further my education, always believing in me, and teaching me the value that continued education can have in life and everything we choose to do. As a Latina and a first-generation to graduate college in my house, I also dedicate this to and hope to inspire my siblings and many others.

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I want to acknowledge and thank my husband, Ron, for putting up with the last four years as I pursued my doctoral degree. He has waited and dealt with me not attending events, gatherings, and putting trips on hold because I had school work to get done and deadlines to meet. I would also like to acknowledge and thank old friends (Allie and Daria) who encouraged me, prayed, and empowered me during this demanding journey. Also, my new friend (Kristen) I met in a class we took together during this program; without her texts, calls, and support, I would not be here today. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the help and advice of my Chair, Dr. Kimberly Johnson.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Approvals.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgments	v
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xii
Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose Statement.....	4
Nature of the Study	4
Discussion of Method.....	5
Discussion of Design.....	7
Ethnography	7
Grounded Theory.....	7
Phenomenological.....	8
Case Study.....	8
Summary of the Nature of the Study	9
Research Questions	9
Conceptual Framework.....	10
Uses and Gratification Theory	11
Diffusion of Innovation Theory	12

Transformational Leadership Theory	14
Discussion of Relationships Between Concepts	15
Summary of the Conceptual Framework	17
Significance of the Study	17
Reduction of Gaps	18
Implications for Biblical Integration	19
Relationship to Field of Study	20
Summary of the Significance of the Study	21
Definition of Terms	21
Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations	23
Assumptions	23
Limitations	24
Delimitations	25
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature	25
Research Purpose	26
Background	27
Theoretical Framework	29
Uses and Gratification Theory	31
Diffusion of Innovation Theory	32
Transformational Leadership Theory	33
Employee Resource Groups	34
Purpose of Employee Resource Groups	36
Business Case	38

Types of Employee Resource Groups	42
How Employee Resource Groups Relate to Diversity and Inclusion	45
Impact of Employee Resource Group.....	49
Role of Employee Resource Groups in Employee Engagement.....	51
Impact of the Employee Resource Groups on Other Organizational Processes...	52
Strategic Communication	54
Principles of Strategic Communication	56
Strategic Communication Management.....	59
Conclusion.....	62
Section 2: The Project.....	64
Purpose Statement.....	64
Role of Researcher.....	65
Role of Participants.....	66
Research Method and Design.....	67
Discussion of Research Method	68
Discussion of Research Design	69
Summary of Research Method and Design.....	70
Population and Sampling.....	71
Discussion of Population.....	71
Discussion of Sampling.....	72
Summary of Population and Sampling	75
Data Collection	76
Interviews.....	77

Focus Groups.....	78
Pre-existing Data	79
Summary of Data Collection	79
Data Analysis.....	80
Data Analysis Process.....	81
Summary of Data Analysis.....	83
Reliability and Validity	83
Reliability.....	84
Validity	86
Summary of Reliability and Validity.....	87
Transition and Summary of Section 2.....	88
Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change	89
Overview of the Study.....	89
Presentation of the Findings.....	91
Overview of Themes Discovered.....	95
Discussion of Themes	97
Relationship of Findings.....	111
The Research Questions	111
The Research Framework.....	118
Anticipated Themes	121
Summary of Findings.....	122
Application to Professional Practice.....	123
Recommendation for Further Study	127

Themes.....	128
Leadership.....	128
Reflections.....	129
Personal and Professional Growth	129
Biblical Perspective.....	130
References	134
Appendix A: Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University.....	167
Appendix B: Participant Criteria	169
Appendix C: Participant Consent Agreement.....	170
Appendix D: Interview Protocol.....	173
Appendix E: Focus Group Protocol.....	177
Appendix F: Candidate Recruitment Letter.....	181

List of Tables

Table 1. Data Summary of Code Frequency.....	98
Table 2. Themes from Individual Interviews, Focus Group, and Data	99

List of Figures

Figure 1. Strategic Communication for Employee Engagement and Growing ERGs.....	17
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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

This case study's foundation includes information on the background, a problem statement, the nature of the study, and the specifics of the research approach. The emphasis in this case study is on the importance of strategic communication for building employee resource groups in aviation. This study specifically observed the comparison of two different work groups to identify the best practices for both groups, to determine the best methods to use for attracting, engaging, and growing the employee resource groups within a regional airline. This section provides insight and reflects upon those crucial details.

Background of the Problem

Employee resource groups are employee-led groups in an organization to create and promote a diverse and inclusive work environment (Dutton, 2018). Employee resource groups, to be successful, must align with an organization's mission, values, and goals (Lee et al., 2019), which impact the organization's culture and environment. Studies have shown that growing and promoting employee resource groups can increase employee satisfaction and engagement in the workplace (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). In turn, better employee resource groups lead to an increase in retention and other benefits that can have a positive impact on the bottom line. Because organizations have seen the impact and benefits of having employee resource groups, they are encouraging and supporting the growth of these groups among their employees and, in many cases, turning them into a competitive advantage (Morgan, 2019). Employee resource groups are a tool for communication within an organization and they can assist the organization in communicating its goals, objectives, expectations, and the groups can provide leaders with a platform to promote the organization's initiatives. In addition, employee resource groups provide opportunities for employees to engage with one another and with their leadership (Dutton, 2018).

In aviation, one of the organizational challenges is the development of the right communication strategy to help grow and influence employee resource groups for employees, particularly those employees who have unconventional and nontraditional jobs or positions. Many employees in aviation have nontraditional jobs and these jobs may require the employees to be traveling for days at a time, to work at different locations, and to work odd schedules. Employees may not have a traditional office space, or they may commute to work by flying (Antunes et al., 2019), which can create additional challenges for organizations to promote and grow their employee resource groups.

Looking for alternatives to promote and grow employee resource groups among a workforce with traditional and nontraditional job situations requires a nontraditional communication approach. Because aviation is such a unique employment circumstance, it is ideal to look at how to reach that particular workforce and to seek what may work best for the circumstances and environment surrounding these particular individuals. In addition, it is essential to determine what are the most effective and reliable methods of communication for aviation employees (Mishra et al., 2014), and the methods may have the greatest impact. The more effective and appropriate the communication methods, the higher the chances of engagement with the individual employees (Reissner & Pagan, 2013). These communication methods increase the ability of the employees to transfer information, and it strengthens employee resource groups. To achieve the most effective results, Gill (2015) posited that there needs to be a focus on technology and devices that facilitate interactive multimedia-based formats and channels. The information must be conveniently available and must meet the audience's needs (Gill, 2015). Studies also show that for a communication strategy to work and remain strong, it must be supported by active, key, influencing leaders at an organization

(Kamon, 2016). Ideally, the communication methods should be available to everyone, regardless of their location, position, and responsibilities at the organization (Abrashi, 2018). Another essential part of promoting and growing employee resource groups is getting support from managers and leaders as part of the process. Having leaders support any organizational initiatives is an essential part of success, as it helps with buy-in, integration, relationships, and ongoing communication (Siva et al., 2016).

Problem Statement

The general problem addressed was the lack of strategic communication for promoting employee resource groups, resulting in the inability of organizations to establish and grow employee resource groups (Ruck et al., 2017). Finding the most efficient and reliable ways for employees to communicate can have a positive effect in fostering a stronger employee engagement culture, which can help grow employee resource groups (Green, 2018). The lack of communication or lack of strategies for communication at an organization can negatively impact internal and external employee interactions, negatively impact learning opportunities, and it can ultimately have an impact on diversity in the workplace, which is critical for growing employee resource groups (Luca & Alessandra, 2018). Mazzei et al. (2019) stated that if an organization does not provide a way for its employees to communicate constantly and effectively, it may hurt building employee resource groups, given that there would be no consistent method that promotes employee engagement.

Promoting employee engagement and constant communication can become more challenging for organizations that have employees in multiple locations, employees who travel, and/or employees who are in nontraditional office jobs. For these reasons, why strategic communication is essential. The specific problem to address is the lack of strategic

communication plans for employees within the aviation industry work groups, resulting in the inability for airlines to establish and grow employee resource groups (Mazzei et al., 2019), which are critical for fostering employee engagement (Welbourne et al., 2017).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to expand and develop knowledge regarding employee resource groups by looking closer at a workforce that is widely distributed and to understand how the lack of strategically planned communication can impact employee resource group development and employee engagement. In this qualitative approach, the design was a case study, with a constructivist worldview and observations of behaviors. The qualitative approach, case study design, and constructivist world view will allow for the researcher to investigate the patterns of behaviors and perspectives of the study participants (Harper & Thompson, 2012) to establish meaning to a phenomenon (Elliott et al., 2017).

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study gave clear sight into the research method and design used to properly conduct the research study and gather the proper information that helped answer the research questions. The nature of this qualitative case study was to establish if communication strategies can influence participation and engagement in employee resource groups. The qualitative case study method allows the experiential understanding of two particular work groups (Stakes, 2010). The case study focused on a widely distributed workforce in the aviation industry. Many businesses, in all sectors, are developing employee resource groups that can promote, encourage, and support a culture of inclusion (Welbourne et al., 2017). Employee resource groups can increase employee engagement in the workplace, creating an overall better place to work (ERGs Benefit Employee Wellbeing [ERGs], 2019), and they can have a direct

impact on organizational culture. One of the critical aspects of employee resource groups is that they provide a setting to engage with employees, and they provide employees with opportunities for development, to communicate concerns, and opportunities to empower them to grow, which is why the communication strategies and methods selected here are essential for success (Kang & Sung, 2017).

The participants involved in this case study will be aviation employees with traditional, no-travel and nontraditional, with travel positions who are members of an employee resource group or who are interested in joining an employee resource group. This group of associates was utilized to explore their perceptions, likes, and experiences with engaging in employee groups. In addition, this study investigated the main obstacles for leadership when promoting employee resource groups among employees. The leaders and members who participated in this study were from the main airline operating locations where the participating organization has the most employees.

Discussion of Method

There were three main research methods that were potentially used to explore this study. These methods were qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Below is a brief overview of each method along with why the qualitative method was selected and why quantitative method and mixed methods were not selected.

The qualitative method is normally used to help understand ideas, points of views, or experiences to get a more in-depth understanding of a problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Some of the characteristics of the qualitative method are (a) the researcher is the main instrument for the collection of data; (b) the interviews are used to collect additional data, which is a common practice using open-ended questions; and (c) there is a need for fewer respondents than with

other research methods (Butina et al., 2015). In addition, contrary to other research methods, the qualitative approach allows for comments and information regarding the researcher's role, opinion, and designs to be included (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The quantitative research method is used to understand and try to give meaning to an individual's approach to a human problem (Stakes, 2010). The quantitative method is used to confirm or test something such as a theory, hypothesis, or assumption (Stakes, 2010). The quantitative research method is interpreted by numbers, graphs, and tables that can be used to establish facts about a topic (Brunsdon, 2016). Quantitative research tests theories by examining the relationship among variables, which then produce numerical data that are analyzed statistically (Butina et al., 2015). Additional characteristics of the quantitative research method are that it typically requires large amounts of data and participants, and it uses close-ended questions to gather the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The mixed-methods research approach combines the qualitative and quantitative methods for an in-depth evaluation of the data. The two different methods are applied during the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Östlund et al., 2011). Using the mixed-methods approach can be advantageous because it can combine the best of both methods for a better study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Some of the advantages of mixed-methods research are the ability to collect data using several methods, understanding the connection and relationship between both types of data, and providing a more comprehensive look at the issue being studied (Huan-Niemi et al., 2016).

The qualitative research method was ideal for this study because the main goal was to understand human behavior rather than to explain human behavior (House, 2018). The qualitative research method helped provide insight into communication trends and what may

work more effectively to build a more complete communication strategy to increase engagement. The qualitative research method, which can be a dynamic approach to research, allows collecting real-time insight on the specific-industry employee perspective. The qualitative approach allows for the exploration and discovery of perspectives, needs and likes, and understandings (Stakes, 2010). Quantitative and mixed-methods approaches were not selected for this case study because the focus is on the experience and perspectives of the participants, which will help us understand the needs of a specific work group. The focus of this study was not to explain a theory or hypotheses, which would align with the quantitative or mixed-methods approaches.

Discussion of Design

Qualitative research has several designs that can be used, and the most common include:

Ethnography

The ethnography design allows the researchers to emerge themselves in the study. This study normally takes an extended period of time and the data collection is done by observation and interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design is not appropriate for this study because this study is focused on specific work groups, it does not require emerging in the organizational culture or environment for long periods of time, and there is no need for acting as an observer for data collection.

Grounded Theory

Ground theory is focused on social analysis and explaining the reason or the core of a process, action, or interaction based on the participant (Thomas & James, 2006). This type of design requires several stages of data collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design was not appropriate for this study because the study was not trying to develop a theory. It

was only looking to gather information about a particular work group to know the members' needs and preferences.

Phenomenological

The phenomenological design is focused on explaining or describing a lived experience or phenomenon by individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data are gathered using multiple methods such as interviews, documents, videos, or sight observation. This design looks at understanding the meaning that the participants give to what is being studied (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2018). This design was not appropriate for this study because the focus of this study was not to understand the meaning of a phenomenon for a group of individuals. The focus was primarily to gather information.

Case Study

The case study design focuses on a specific group, organization, event, process, or activity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design allows the use of multiple methods for data collection, which can include interviews, evaluation of data, and focus groups, for a more solid and in-depth study (Farquhar et al., 2020). This design was appropriate for this study.

In this qualitative research, the case study design allowed for a better view and understanding of the specific workforce and the workforce's communication needs. This design helped to explore the behaviors and limitations amongst the work group being studied. The data collection consisted of historical documentation and interviews of current and potential members of employee resource groups. It triangulated the data collection, which resulted in a detailed case description (Ridder, 2017).

Summary of the Nature of the Study

The qualitative research approach in this case study allowed for an understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of those enrolled in employee resource groups. The information gathered was critical to define the impact of the communication strategies and methods (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The development of these strategies and methods can be used for increasing employee engagement with a nontraditional work group (Welch, 2011) in aviation. In addition, it gave a comprehensive outlook at the difference between the traditional, non-traveling, and the nontraditional traveling employees, which was insightful when developing a more effective communication strategy within an organization.

Research Questions

The use of strategic communication in the workplace has been linked to many advantages, such as improving employee engagement and improving performance, by providing a wider range of options to reach individuals and transfer knowledge (Zhang & Huai, 2016). Employee resource groups in the last decade have proven to also impact employee performance, engagement, and overall employee's well-being (Welbourne et al., 2017), which has consequently translated into less turnover, better performance, employee satisfaction, culture enrichment, and an increase in diversity (ERGs, 2019). However, there is little experiential evidence to support the mechanisms by which organizations can promote employee engagement within changing organizations and grow employee resource groups in a broad location spectrum and with unique jobs. This case study gathered the perceptions, standpoints, methods, and interactions used to encourage and promote communication with disseminated employee resource group members by interviewing the employee resource groups' leaders and members to

address the research questions. The research questions used to elicit the necessary data for this study were:

RQ1. What impact has communication methods had on the ability and productivity of engaging with a widely distributed workforce?

RQ1a. What communication tools are perceived as the best way to engage with the “no-travel, traditional” workforce?

RQ1b. What communication tools are perceived as the best way to engage with the “travel, nontraditional” workforce?

RQ2. How does the “no-travel, traditional” and the “travel, nontraditional” workforces compare in engagement and communication satisfaction among the employee resource group members?

RQ3. What are the most effective communication methods for increasing employee resource group engagement?

RQ4. How can organizational leaders develop more effective strategic communication plans to provide employees with resources to increase workplace engagement and employee interaction?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework allowed for getting an overview of the case study, including the structure and the analytical approach, as a whole. The framework highlights the areas of study, decisions made, outcomes, measures, and how these can relate to each other (Horowitz et al., 2019). In this case study, the idea was to understand the missing communication links to better engage with the workforce and understand what areas can be influenced to promote and grow the employee resource groups.

There were three phases of focus in this case study. The first phase was driven by the need to attract and capture the interest of the employees. This phase focused on the needs and desires of the individuals to connect and the specific communication tools and media they sought out. This area can influence the initial communication strategy to attract and engage with employees. The second phase was driven by the need to engage and develop ways to connect with employees. This phase focused on what individuals need to feel connected, engaged, and a part of a new concept, which is employee resource groups. The third phase was driven by the need to identify the obstacles that prevent the leaders from strategizing to transform processes and how they engage with employees and promote the employee resource groups. This phase focused on identifying the existing roadblocks that managers in the workplace face that prevent them from promoting employee engagement and the growth of employee resource groups. Additionally, there were three theories considered in this case study and those theories influenced the process and the outcomes. They are described below.

Uses and Gratification Theory

The uses and gratification theory stems from the belief that individuals will select and use media to satisfy their personal needs or to achieve a particular goal (Chen et al., 2010). The theory was first introduced by Elihu Katz. It assumes that individuals are capable of evaluating the communication tools or media they select based on their personal needs and gratification, and they will select media outlets based on their personal needs and goals (Ifinedo, 2016). The theory highlights the influence and impact of an individual over the power of the media, suggesting that people use media channels for intrinsic gratification and to satisfy their cognitive and emotional needs (Florenthal, 2015). The uses and gratification theory assumes that individuals have goals, needs, expectations, and they know what they are looking for in media (Hossain et al., 2019).

Therefore, people are keen to take the initiative to assess and select media that seems likely to meet all their needs (Hossain et al., 2019). Another critical aspect of the uses and gratification theory is the impact of the media content on each individual. Because each individual has different needs, goals, and expectations, the media content or message may impact everyone differently (Ku et al., 2013), making content an influencing factor when engaging with a particular group of individuals.

In this case study, the uses and gratification theory was considered when evaluating the needs of work groups, taking into consideration their preferences, special needs, goals, and expectations from the organization and the employee resource groups. Work group references will influence the development of communication strategies by influencing and supporting the selection of the best communication tools and media format to engage more effectively with individuals (Florenthal, 2015). This first part of this study helped with understanding the impact that the different communication methods had on employee engagement and the preferred communication tools or methods among work groups. Comparing the responses of a widely distributed traveling, nontraditional and no-traveling, traditional workforces, allowed us to see the preferred methods and communication tools used, and that data helped determine how efficient the interaction is among the groups. The themes for this phase of the study were the communication discrepancies between the work groups, inconsistent interactions, and different communication tools each uses for the technology.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The diffusion and innovation theory evaluates how a phenomenon, new idea, new technology, or innovation is adopted and how fast it can spread among a group of individuals (Williams et al., 2019). The author of this theory was E. M. Rogers in 1962 (Olsson et al., 2016).

The adoption of a new idea or concept is caused by human interactions through social networks, which can happen in different stages or time frames (Weil, 2018). Studies have shown that diffusion of information is within human nature because humans normally interact and like to belong and be part of social groups, increasing the likelihood of adopting new innovations if they are perceived as a benefit or they are attractive (Zhou, 2008). It is critical to keep in mind that the diffusion and innovation theory can also be interrupted or deviated from if the right individuals are not reached. This is why it is critical to maintain an ongoing distribution of and adoption (Meade & Islam, 2006).

The diffusion and innovation theory focuses on the distribution of information, taking into consideration the social system, communication channels, time, and a social system and its adopters (Williams et al., 2019). There are several categories of adopters or individuals. Some individuals will adopt the new idea faster than others, depending on interest, information, urgency, motivation, or the risk involved (Bianchi et al., 2017). In general, some individuals are very interested in new ideas and will act immediately. They are respected leaders who can influence others, ones who will adopt a new idea as soon as they see the interest from others. And there are those individuals who will wait around for others to join first (Li & Huang, 2016). These were all critical for leaders to consider for strategic planning and exploring what satisfies and meets employee needs in communication outlets, which influenced the distribution of information.

In this case study, the diffusion and innovation theory was considered when looking at ways to introduce and diffuse the idea and concept of employee resource groups and the development of key information in the communication strategy. The information in this case study was gathered by comparing the engagement, satisfaction, and perceived advantages among

the currently used communication methods and tools in traveling, nontraditional and no-traveling, traditional work groups. The purpose of this phase in the case study was to develop information and identify strategic methods that attracted and motivate key adopters, which influenced the distribution of information and promote engagement.

In addition, the information gathered helped with the strategy for promoting the growth of the employee resource groups. The two work groups in this case study were able to provide feedback on group engagement and satisfaction within the employee resource groups. In addition, feedback in understanding what it is that promotes engagement within the groups. Knowing this information helped in understanding what directly influenced how information can be transferred among employees. The themes for this phase of the case study were differences in engagement and satisfaction between both groups, different perceived benefits, and tools available for each group, differences in participation of events and learning opportunities, and a variation in the effectiveness of communication for promoting employee engagement.

Transformational Leadership Theory

The transformational leadership theory was considered in the third phase of this qualitative case study. The transformational leadership theory was originally introduced in 1978 by James McGregor Burns (Andersen, 2015). The transformational leadership theory refers to leaders who are inspiring and creative, who work through obstacles, and who look for the best interest of the people they lead (Steinmann et al., 2018). Transformational leaders use more than their abilities in the organization to make things happen, they invent and innovate their work areas if necessary (Andersen, 2015). Transformational leaders see issues, raise them, study them, and influence them to exceed their self-interests for the good of the group or organization, which is why organizational leadership has become more important, and it is considered a critical

success factor for leaders in organizations (Ramsey et al., 2017). Transformational leadership refers to leaders who seek to develop ideas and new perspectives to create new ways of growth in organizations (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). Unfortunately, this cannot be done without identifying the roadblocks to develop commitment and work with teams to move in a different direction (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016), which is critical for change. Part of changing the normal way of doing things and engaging with a workforce is to create a vision and guide individuals through this vision by inspiring them and showing the benefits involved (Ramsey et al., 2017). In this qualitative case study, the obstacles faced by managers to engage and promote the employee resource groups were identified.

The clearer the obstacles, the more efficient and effective the strategic approach for changing the existing processes. In addition, knowing the obstacles will enable managers to seek the tools and resources needed to encourage and promote employee resource groups. Some of the themes in this phase of the study were lack of knowledge about employee resource groups, lack of understanding of organizational benefits, lack of buy-in from upper management, unclear expectations, and lack of tools and resources.

Discussion of Relationships Between Concepts

The three concepts taken into consideration for this case study include uses and gratification theory, diffusion and innovation theory, and the transformational leader theory. The three theories were applied to understand better the influence of strategic communication and leadership in employee engagement and the growth of employee resource groups. The qualitative case study gathered data from two different work groups, travel, nontraditional and no-travel, traditional, to explore the differences in communication preferences, and their satisfaction and engagement levels. Finally, this case study looked at what the main roadblocks for leadership in

developing or implementing strategic communication for engagement and growth of employee resource groups.

Figure 1 illustrates how the theories and concepts are taken into consideration at the three phases of the case study. Phase one illustrates how knowing the preference of communication tools and media can help develop more effective ways to attract individuals (Ifinedo, 2016). This information and purpose of the information was in alignment with the uses and gratification theory, and it helped develop ways to attract individuals and provide a more organic interaction (Chen et al., 2010). Phase two, the diffusion and innovation theory, was used because the search was for new ideas, new ways to engage, and new ways to diffuse information amongst the particular work groups (Weil, 2018). In this phase, there was a closer look at the participants' experiences, their satisfaction levels with the tools available, and the content and their interaction with the tools. This information will help in understanding what may be the key to engaging and diffusing new information more effectively once individuals are attracted to the media outlets (Weil, 2018).

Finally, phase three of this case study looked at why leaders fail to strategize to promote employee engagement and employee resource groups. The theory highlighted in this phase of the study was transformational leadership theory. The transformational leadership theory aligns with the concepts of looking at roadblocks in an organization or process and developing solutions to drive the organization and individuals forward (Ramsey et al., 2017). As the different roadblocks for leaders are identified, the different needs, resources, and tools for developing an effective and transformational plan can be put in place (Ramsey et al., 2017). Once a guide to change is in place, the leadership should be aware of the impact and benefits and should be willing to put it into action; change can happen (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). A transformational leader

and strategic communication planning can help engage employees and grow employee resource groups, which can have a positive organizational impact in the future.

Figure 1

Strategic Communication for Employee Engagement and Growing ERGs

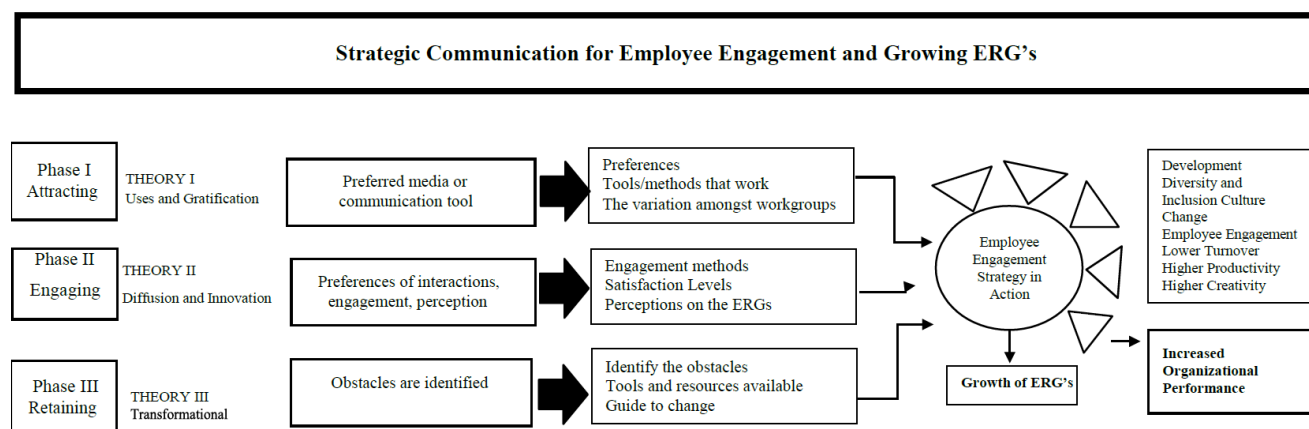


Figure Created by Lynnette Darnell

Summary of the Conceptual Framework

The three theories and the concept in this case study helped in understanding and providing a better outlook at the needs of the selected workforce to build a more complete communication strategy for employee engagement. Having a more sophisticated and thought-out communication strategy can help engage and improve communication with employees, facilitating the promotion of the employee resource groups (Giordan et al., 2019). The more effective the communication strategy, the higher the chances for developing stronger, more diverse employee resource groups, which can help improve employee retention, engagement, performance, and overall organizational profits (ERGs, 2019).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this qualitative research case study was to contribute to the body of knowledge relating to the development of employee resource groups and the influence that strategic communication has in the process of growing these groups (Ruck et al., 2017). The

study will add to the body of knowledge for engaging with work groups that are not in a traditional work environment, such as employees who travel days at a time, which is unique to the aviation industry. This study also evaluated how strategic communication can be adjusted and applied contingently for the audience's needs and find out the phase of the organization's employee-engagement process (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Additionally, this study will add to the body of knowledge regarding how employee engagement and employee resource groups can contribute to overall organizational performance (Hanaysha, 2016). Finally, the study is likely to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding how to engage and grow employee resource groups in aviation among the different work groups to promote a better workplace and culture.

Reduction of Gaps

The literature available describes many aspects of strategic communication in business and employee engagement. There is no literature that focuses on strategic communication as a business tool to improve communication and engagement among global, virtual teams (Shaik & Makhecha, 2019). There is literature, however, on employee resource groups and the value they can provide to an organization (Welbourne et al., 2017). Some literature explores participatory communication as a function between management and knowledge, which can improve engagement (Mutyalu, 2019). Much of the literature that does exist is on communication implications when managing employee engagement in the workplace (Welch, 2011). Another area with a vast amount of literature is the study of organizational communication that promotes employee engagement for communication behavior (Kang & Sung, 2017) and the value and role of employee engagement in human resource management functions (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). However, this literature was not as prevalent in addressing strategic communication for

promoting employee engagement to grow employee resource groups (Saeed et al., 2019). The literature was not prevalent concerning the growth of employee resource groups for remote employees (Dutton, 2018). Therefore, a lack of literature exists on the topic of promoting and growing employee resource groups among aviation employees and the impact employee resource groups can have on organizational performance (Jano et al., 2019).

This case study will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding employee resource groups and how organizations can adapt their communication strategies to promote and engage with employees in the workplace (Dutton, 2018). Also, this case study can contribute to the body of knowledge that exists in employee engagement for remote (nontraditional) employees, which is critical for performance. Finally, this case study can help reduce the gap in strategic communication among the traditional, non-traveling employees and the nontraditional, traveling employees in aviation (Jano et al., 2019), if it exists.

Implications for Biblical Integration

In business, embracing diversity and encouraging an inclusive workplace has become essential and, in many cases, part of the business models as they can impact the overall organizational performance (Ohunakin et al., 2019). Taking care of individuals and managing resources has become critical, “*The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles*” (Psalm 34:17, New International Version). God is watching the stewardship of the people in our care, and He will hold leaders accountable. Employee resource groups will promote caring for others and ensure everyone’s religious beliefs and differences are considered to develop policies and practices that help create more positive work environments (Bednarczuk, 2019). An essential tool to promote and grow the employee resource groups is strategic communication and ensuring the message is spread to everyone,

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. (Corinthians 1:10, New International Version)

This will allow everyone to have the same opportunities and unite. Words can teach, encourage, influence, or they can tear down, but no matter what, they are powerful. Words are an image of what is in individuals' minds, hearts, and what they stand for, "May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14, New International Version), which is why the words and actions must match the ultimate plan of someone representing God. This is also presented in the workplace by caring for people, embracing them, and always considering everyone's emotional and physical well-being (Bednarczuk, 2019).

The concept of strategic communication and ensuring it helps to promote and grow employee resource groups in the workplace can help create better workplaces. Empowering everyone to embrace and respect each other creates an inclusive work environment. Growing employee resource groups can have a positive effect on an organization's culture and workforce (Dutton, 2018), ultimately creating a safe and respectful place to continue to promote God's word and message.

Relationship to Field of Study

The Gyurák Babel'ová et al. (2020) qualitative case study on strategic communication for growing employee resource groups is related to human resource cognate. In today's competitive markets, the following functions are a critical part of human resources: creating a workplace that encourages diversity and inclusion, ensuring the integration of different backgrounds, and

encouraging the well-being of employees (ERGs, 2019). Employee resource groups provide employees with a sense of belonging and with learning and development opportunities, and it reduces bias and encourages inclusion (ERGs, 2019). All these elements are critical for fostering a positive organizational culture, which is also part of human resources. To promote employee resource groups, there must be employee engagement, which also is a function of human resources (Fairlie, 2011). Employee engagement can increase awareness, involvement, sense of belonging, and pride, which are all significant when growing employee resource groups (Fairlie, 2011). This case study reviewed available literature that was related to communication theories and aligned it with new information to determine what methods were best to promote and grow employee resources groups in aviation.

Summary of the Significance of the Study

This qualitative case study was significant because it contributed to the body of knowledge relating to strategic communication and employee engagement to promote and grow employee resource groups in aviation. This study also contributed to the field of human resources and business by adding to the body of knowledge relating to methods of communication for nontraditional employees. Finally, this case study provided information that can benefit other studies in the areas of strategic communication, employee engagement, and employee resource groups.

Definition of Terms

Aviation industry (Commercial): For this case study, the focus will be on the commercial side of the aviation industry. Commercial aviation is when there are scheduled flights from an airport for either passengers or cargo, and where there is a purchase of a ticket. For this case study, the focus will be on commercial aviation in a regional airline (Honn et al., 2016).

Employee resource group: Employee resource groups are also known as social identity-based affinity groups. These employee resource groups are made of individuals who share similar identity characteristics, which can be based on race, color, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation (Welbourne et al., 2017). Employee resource groups are designed to provide individuals with a place for sharing concerns, for development, for connecting with the community, and for enabling experiences that promote organizational change and a culture that promotes diversity and inclusion (Welbourne et al., 2017).

Nontraditional employee: Nontraditional employees are those who do not have a regular office schedule. They are characterized by having less time inside the organization's environment, which can reduce the allotted time to interact with other members, participate in events, and learn about the policies and normal practices (Stiehl & Forst, 2018). The nontraditional employees in aviation may be required to be traveling a few days at a time; they could, at a minimum, visit one new geographical location on a daily basis, and they will most likely only visit an office on a monthly basis. In addition, many of these nontraditional aviation employees have jobs that are considered high stressed and they are in unique environmental conditions and of high responsibility (Demerouti et al., 2019).

Strategic communication: Strategic communication is a term that involves more than one aspect of communication. It the use of multiple communication sources and the strategy that is set in place for engaging and creating a purposeful communication at an organization to achieve their goals (Heide et al., 2018). Strategic communication has become a vital part of organizational survival and success (Falkheimer et al., 2017). Also, strategic communication has proven to have an impact on how an organization disperses information and engages with its employees at all levels and stages of their employment (Falkheimer et al., 2017).

Traditional employee: Traditional employees are those individuals who have a set regular work schedule, who have an assigned location to report to within the organization, and they normally do not travel. The individuals who are considered traditional employees normally have the opportunity to learn and experience policies, events, and culture more closely and frequently than a nontraditional employee (Stiehl & Forst, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are all essential aspects to consider in any study, because they can prepare the researcher for questioning, gathering information, and analyzing data. The assumptions are ideas or concepts in the research, which can influence how to frame the study and formulate the solutions, and they are specific to the investigation (Wolgemuth et al., 2017). The limitations are flaws that may be prevailing within the study (Boyko, 2013), which researchers have no control over. Finally, the delimitations are elements within the researcher's control. The delimitations are parameters and characteristics that will assist in setting boundaries for this specific study. Below are the specifics for each area for this qualitative case study.

Assumptions

The assumptions, or ideas that are perceived as being true for this case study, are the following. The first assumption is that the employees who participated in this study truthfully answered the questions and made accurate statements. The second assumption was the sample of selected employees were a valid representation of other employees and their needs in non-traveling, traditional and traveling, nontraditional jobs in aviation. The third assumption was the employee resource groups continued to be perceived as an organizational tool to foster employee engagement and diversity in the workplace (Welbourne et al., 2017).

Another critical aspect of the assumptions in this research was that because the assumptions had not been validated by facts, there was a risk involved that required taking into consideration a mitigation strategy (Fjeld, 2018). In this case study, the first assumption of entrusting the data collected was true, was mitigated by ensuring the participants did not feel obligated to answer in a specific way, they could withdraw from the study at any time, and everything in the study was confidential. The second assumption was of ensuring the sample of participants was a valid representation of the group the study sought to understand, which was mitigated by planning the selection process carefully. Finally, the third assumption that the employee resource groups continued to be a resource for this organization to engage with individuals, was mitigated by the increase in the need to engage with employees at different locations.

Limitations

The limitations or weaknesses that prevailed in this qualitative case study were the interview expectations, the sample or group being studied, and the demographics among the participants. The first limitation, the interview expectations, stemmed from having different individuals that interpreted questions differently (Affleck et al., 2013), which can have a direct impact on the answers. The researcher read the questions to participants and addressed any follow-up concerns or follow-up questions to increase understanding and clear interpretation of the research questions (Affleck et al., 2013). The second limitation was that this case study was conducted for those employees who fell under the traditional and nontraditional work setting category in a commercial airline. Because the study was limited to these specific groups, the application of the results could only be suggested and not applied to other groups or industries (Palinkas et al., 2015). This limitation can be influenced by modifying the participant criteria or

expanding the pool of candidates in the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). The third limitation was the influence that the demographics may have had on the participants. In aviation, in general, there is a known discrepancy in minority representation (Ison et al., 2016). In the most recent years, minority groups in aviation have increased significantly (Martin-Nagle, 2017). Unfortunately, there are several groups that remain on the lower spectrum, such as the pilot groups. For example, worldwide, less than 10% of pilots are females, and an average of 6% of pilots are females in the United States (Opengart & Germain, 2018). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2015, showed that from approximately 140,000 individuals employed as aircraft pilots, only an average of 2.6% were Black, 0.7% were Asian, and 5.7% were Hispanic (Ison et al., 2016). However, these potential variations may be in specific experiences, culture, and attitudes, and they will not be considered in this study.

Delimitations

The delimitations or boundaries of this qualitative case study included the participants of the study were employees in commercial aviation at a regional airline. The employees at a major airline were not a part of this case study. The participants of this case study were distinct by having different jobs categorized as non-traveling, traditional or traveling, nontraditional jobs. The participants also were individuals with an interest in joining the employee resource groups, or who, at the time of the study, was an employee resource group. Finally, the individuals at the manager level who were part of this case study were those based out of the airline's primary operation locations, which was where the largest concentration of employees were located.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this literature review was to provide background information significant to the understanding of the positive correlation, which exists between strategic communication

and employee engagement and their relationship in building and growing employee resource groups. This section discussed the study's purpose and background, which described the relevance of the case study to the aviation industry and its potential influence in building employee resources groups in aviation. The literature review also discussed the theoretical framework and how this influenced and contributed to this case study. The discussion of the theoretical framework and theories applied in this case study included previous data and anticipated outcomes in this case study. The resources reviewed in this literature review will help understand the value of the employee resource groups, how employee engagement can impact these groups, and how strategic communication can build and grow the employee resource groups in aviation. Finally, the literature review compared previous studies and related information considered in this case study.

Research Purpose

The research purpose of this case study was to contribute to the developing knowledge of employee resource groups in aviation. The research also sought to better understand the workforce and their communication needs to engage more effectively and frequently with the purpose of promoting and growing the employee resource groups. Because aviation work environments and travel can vary by type of job or time of year, engaging with employees can become challenging (Lemon, 2019). The research can provide information and valued insight on communication media preferences and perceptions among the work group members about the employee resource groups. Knowing this information can provide the organization with valid data for creating more influential strategic communication practices (Lemon, 2019). More meaningful communication practices in the workplace can result in the increase of employee engagement and improve the process of transferring information (Lemon, 2019), which can

improve overall performance. In addition, this research gave insight regarding the influence leadership may have on employee engagement and the ability that leaders have to encourage employees to adopt a new concept or idea (Milhem et al., 2019). Building a communication strategy that is effective and impactful takes into consideration an understanding of an organization's workforce, what they value, what they like, and what works for them. The purpose of this research was to understand the work groups and to identify the most effective ways to impact and engage with those work groups, regardless of their job functions, to build a stronger community of employee resource groups.

Background

The background for this study came from the need to promote and foster a more inclusive workforce through the development of employee resource groups in aviation, which have proven to improve culture and overall organizational performance (Dutton, 2018). This research also evolves from the need to improve the success of building employee resource groups in aviation, a process influenced by unique industry characteristics that impact how employees interact and communicate (Kim, 2018). Furthermore, the information available relating to communication strategies and employee resource groups in aviation was limited, creating a need for further research.

A wide range of similar studies incorporating the theories and framework used in this case study were conducted in different industries. For example, the uses and gratification theory has been used to determine factors associated with what affects an individual's continuous content contribution in blogs and other media (Liu et al., 2020). Other common studies exist relating to social media use, which sought to understand the users better, such as to why and how users are motivated toward a particular behavior, and if this behavior causes an intention to

continue using a specific media outlet (Hossain et al., 2019). Other related studies are on consumer motivation for media usage and access, and what appeals the most to the consumer from the media outlets (Korhan et al., 2016).

In this case study, the objective was to understand what media outlets are mostly used or preferred by two work groups that include a traveling, nontraditional work group and a no-traveling, traditional work group to determine if there is a difference between the two groups. The goal was to understand how to improve engagement with these individuals.

Studies associated with the diffusion and innovation theory focus on how new concepts and ideas are received and disseminated among a particular group of individuals (Dearing, 2009). Other common studies focus on diffusion and innovation with the purpose of process intervention, or to find best practices that will increase the likelihood of adaptation (Dearing, 2009). The theory has also been a guiding tool for studies that look at identifying the beliefs and attitudes of individuals who play a critical part in the diffusion of innovative concepts (Franceschinis et al., 2017). In this case study, the attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of the work groups participating will be identified to better understand their perception of the new concept (employee resource groups). Understanding how an employee resource group is interpreting a new concept or idea in this case study will help adapt the dissemination process and tools to be used for a more effective outcome (Lien & Jiang, 2017).

The transformational leadership theory is considered in the studies to be focused on identifying key characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes in leaders that can be contributors to positive outcomes in different settings (Price & Weiss, 2013). In the education setting, the theory has proven to have an influence and contribute to the instructional process, resulting in a positive influence amongst students (Kwan, 2020). In business, the theory and characteristics of this

theory have a positive influence on organizational results, such as increased performance and meeting goals (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). Other studies in business have compared the transformational leadership behaviors between leaders from different backgrounds (nationalities). The Burris et al. (2013) study shows that leaders, even when showing the same leadership behaviors, may be perceived differently among other leaders, mainly based on social practices.

A distinct characteristic of transformational leaders is that they lead others in ways that inspire those others to be innovative, try new things, and take action, while making everyone feel included and valued (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). In this case study, the leaders' behaviors and obstacles that prevent them from putting transformational leadership into practice will be identified. The purpose of identifying these obstacles is to eliminate or reduce them to increase the effectiveness of the communication strategy. Leadership is critical for effective strategic planning and putting into action all phases of a strategic communication plan (Hunitie, 2018).

The results of this case study were based on the collection of information regarding media preference, perception, and diffusion of the new concept (employee resource groups). Additionally, it gathered information on any obstacles that were an issue for the implementation of a strategic communication plan that promoted and increased employee

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in this study focused on three areas of communication that could have a direct impact and influence on the relationship with employees in the workplace, and these areas of communication could be critical for success when it came to employee engagement. Studies have shown that organizations that provide frequent opportunities for

employees to communicate can improve the use of employee resources that the organization has to offer, and those opportunities will increase employee satisfaction (Tate et al., 2019). As organizations look into building and growing employee resource groups, the way they engage with employees, the tools they use to communicate, and how this information is transferred is essential for success (Kang & Sung, 2017). In this case study, the goal was to look at how to purposefully design a more effective and impactful communication strategy for building and growing employee resource groups. This case study applied three theories: the uses and gratification theory, the diffusion and innovation theory, and the transformational leadership theory. The three theoretical theories set the structure for the rationale of the study and set the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (Birken et al., 2017). In addition, the theories allowed for the design of a more impactful communication strategy that aligns more effectively with and that meets the needs of the work groups involved in this case study.

The uses and gratification theory and the diffusion and innovation theories set the foundation for this case study for the part that mainly focused on communication. The uses of gratification theory helped drive the study to better understand why and how employees are seeking particular media (Hossain et al., 2019). Knowing why and how employees are seeking a particular media can help adapt communication strategies and increase employee engagement by enhancing the experience (Hossain et al., 2019).

The transformational leadership theory sets the foundation when exploring why and how leaders embrace new ideas and create a foundation for promoting change, new concepts, and ideas (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016), while also looking at the obstacles that these leaders have encountered. The proper identification of the obstacles faced by leaders allows them to take

action and work on building a pathway to a more effective method (Richter et al., 2015), which is a critical step in being a transformational leader.

In this case study, the theories setting the framework allowed for the identification of the link between the employees who are more attracted to communication, to interest employees more effectively (Lowry, 2016). It also allowed for the evaluation and understanding of how to better connect with employees and to determine how the leadership can accelerate and influence the process of employee engagement for growing employee resource groups in aviation.

In addition, one unique element within this case study was the comparison of two work groups. One group was characterized as being constantly on the road, traveling, and the other group was a more traditional office group that did not travel at all. This allowed for determining if there were any similarities, advantages, or disadvantages between the two. The contrast of findings was mainly when looking at the differences of media preference among the employees and the methods of engagement they preferred that were associated with the uses and gratification and the diffusion and innovation theories.

This study looked at the experience and perceived obstacles leaders face that may affect communication and their ability to effectively promote the employee resource groups. Understanding the obstacles will allow for a better outlook to work more effectively toward a common goal (Han et al., 2018). To better understand the framework of this study, it was critical to understand the theories and how these influenced and contributed to this case study.

Uses and Gratification Theory

The uses and gratification theory seeks to comprehend why individuals seek out the media that they do, and what they use it for (Hossain et al., 2019). The uses and gratification theory assumes that individuals have control over the media they use, and the theory explores

how individuals purposely seek out media to satisfy specific needs or goals (Kujur & Singh, 2020). The application of the uses and gratifications theory, in this case study, allowed for a better understanding of the preferences relating to employee engagement in social media (Kujur & Singh, 2020), which was a critical aspect of connecting with employees. Understanding the preference of media outlets and using them as a strategic advantage can increase employee engagement by increasing the chances of education and participation from the employees. Studies have strongly proven that the use of media in the most recent years, with the increase of technology, has become more accessible and available (Liu et al., 2020). Consequently, organizations are reevaluating and adapting practices for more efficient engagement and results (Liu et al., 2020). In addition, the uses and gratification theory support that individuals' use of media can be predicted mostly by the personal needs of the individuals (Liu et al., 2020); however, this can vary by individuals or work groups. In this case study, the focus was on the media selection and needs of aviation employees.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The diffusion and innovation theory looks at how information (innovation or a new practice) is communicated and adapted in a particular culture over time (Franceschinis et al., 2017). Studies show that the adoption of the information may be influenced by the type of innovation, influential role models, social context, degree of difficulty, and whether or not the change is in alignment with organizational value and culture (Dingfelder et al., 2011). In this case study, the theory application helped identify key aspects of the diffusion and innovation theory that can influence the communication strategy for successfully promoting employee resource groups in aviation.

The diffusion process is when the information about a new concept is communicated to a specific group (Dingfelder et al., 2011), which will not happen immediately. The distinct process has four stages: dissemination, adoption, implementation, and maintenance. The dissemination stage is when the new concept is introduced. The adoption stage is when individuals start building their opinions, attitudes, and beliefs of the concept. The implementation stage is when individuals start participating or using the new concept. Finally, the maintenance stage is when individuals have adopted the new concept (Franceschinis et al., 2017).

The four stages are driven and influenced by information that is presented, timing, motivation, attitudes, encouragement, support, social systems, and commitment (Lien & Jiang, 2017). The diffusion and innovation theory has been applied not just in business but also in other industries to better comprehend how individuals assimilate new concepts and ideas through the use of high technology media (Lien & Jiang, 2017). Adapting this theory helped the leaders to understand how to better plan and strategize the introduction and diffusion of information amongst aviation employees about employee resource groups.

The innovation (information or new concept) in this case study was the promotion and growth of two different types of employee resource groups in aviation. These are the traveling, nontraditional and the no-traveling, traditional work groups. Identifying and learning more about the individuals' perceptions of the innovation, what communication channels they would prefer, adoption timing, and the social system that is in place, will allow for a more effective and influential communication strategy (Franceschinis et al., 2017).

Transformational Leadership Theory

The transformational leadership theory is characterized by the concept of leadership that influences, motivates, inspires, and provides opportunities for others to grow (Moradi Korejan &

Shahbazi, 2016). These types of leaders are known for promoting and adopting practices that are new, innovative, and beneficial for all to reach everyone's full potential (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020). These leaders are normally linked to organizational performance. Studies have demonstrated a positive correlation and strong relationships between transformational leadership and organizational performance improvements in areas such as performance, engagement, satisfaction, and commitment (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020). Another characteristic of a transformational leader is that they ensure an individual's best interest, treat everyone as a valued member, and promote everyone's unique abilities and strengths (Álvarez et al., 2016), which can increase motivation and satisfaction.

In this case study, the transformational leadership theory was applied to better understand how leaders in the organization have embraced the new concept of employee resource groups and what they have done to promote these groups. Also, this case study helped to identify difficulties and obstacles the leaders encountered that prevented them from executing in a more inspiring and motivational manner to inspire and influence others. The transformational leadership theory framework will provide an outlook on the connection that may exist between unique leadership characteristics and the success of a new concept (Turnnidge & Côté, 2018), in this case, the employee resource groups.

Employee Resource Groups

Employee resource groups or business groups are employee-led groups at organizations that promote an inclusive culture and support diversity in the workplace (Brotherton, 2011). Many organizations encourage and support these groups for the many benefits the groups can provide (McNulty et al., 2018). Employee resource groups can support areas such as research, training, recruiting, and employee development, providing valuable contributions to improve

practices, performance, and culture (Brotherton, 2011). Employee resource groups are known for building and encouraging employees to be innovative and for creating a sense of belonging, which creates a safe space for everyone to feel free to be creative without feeling excluded or not valued. In today's competitive environment, organizations that continue to grow and expand domestically and globally have made diversity and inclusion a common practice.

Employee resource groups support and promote diversity and inclusion while also providing employees with an environment where they can grow and share concerns while still positively contributing to the organization (Brotherton, 2011). A crucial aspect of employee resource groups is that members participate on a volunteer basis because they identify with the groups or are allied to the group members. Employees can develop employee resource groups, but larger organizations generally will provide a set of structured guidelines for consistency and to ensure the groups and practices are in alignment with organizational values and goals (McNulty et al., 2018). Diversity and inclusion and the employee resource groups should align with organizational goals, values, objectives, and missions for more effective results (McNulty et al., 2018).

Employee resource groups frequently develop around a shared trait of diversity such as gender, race, national origin, lifestyle, age, or ethnicity (Employee Resource Groups Offer Built-In Volunteer Teams [Built-In Teams], 2016). The foundation and practice for the development of employee resource groups have been growing and becoming more popular in organizations because the groups help organizations eliminate stereotypes and bias, and they help to educate everyone—regardless of position or demographics. Employee resource groups promote and encourage being respectful, building trust, and understanding each other's differences, which can

help create a bridge, or a better connection, among different groups and the leadership (Flory et al., 2019).

Research on employee resource groups is not prevalent (Welbourne et al., 2017). The studies available on the topic focus on the influence that the groups have on organizational processes (Welbourne et al., 2017). Other studies have focused on the development process for employee resource members, evaluating the benefits or skills the employees gain through the participation of the groups (ERGs, 2019). There are also studies on how the employee resource group can facilitate learning and development by incorporating additional practice communities to help develop employees (Green, 2018).

Purpose of Employee Resource Groups

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environment where they can grow and share concerns while still contributing positively to the organization (Brotherton, 2011). A crucial aspect of the employee resource groups is that members participate on a volunteer basis because they identify with the groups or are allied to the group members. The employees can develop the employee resource groups, but larger organizations will generally provide a set of structured guidelines for consistency and to ensure the groups and practices are in alignment with organizational values and goals (McNulty et al., 2018). Diversity, inclusion, and employee resource groups should align with organizational goals, values, objectives, and mission for more effective results (McNulty et al., 2018). Employee resource groups are frequently developed around a shared trait of diversity, such as gender, race, national origin, lifestyle, age, or ethnicity (ERGs, 2016). The foundation and practice for the development of employee resource groups have been growing. They have become more popular amongst organizations because they help organizations eliminate stereotypes and bias, and they help to educate everyone regardless of position or demographics. Employee resource groups promote and encourage being respectful, build trust, and facilitate understanding each other's differences, which can help create a bridge or better connection among different groups and leadership (Flory et al., 2019).

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Business Case

Employee resource groups seem to be a new concept adopted by many organizations in the last few years, but these groups have been around for decades. Employee resource groups date back to the 1960s, and they started because of racial tension (Welbourne et al., 2017). In 1970, Xerox was the first known company to support employee resource groups. Their first group was the National Black Employee Caucus, and in 1980, Xerox formed the Black Women's Leadership Caucus. The goal was to help eliminate discrimination and initiate change for a more unbiased and reasonable work environment (Welbourne et al., 2017). Throughout the years, many organizations have followed the same practice to ensure employees feel safe, have a sense of belonging, and are more engaged. As a result, these groups have translated into excellent organizational benefits (McNulty et al., 2018). Employee resource groups allow organizations to increase business value, increase employee engagement, increase development opportunities, and they provide critical information that can be essential for improving business processes.

Employee resource groups allow their members to develop and contribute to the organization in various ways. Most importantly, employee resource groups promote and support diversity and inclusion in the workplace, which is critical for a business to stay competitive in today's markets (ERGs, 2019). The benefits to the organization from the employee resource groups is attributed to the organizations taking an active role and ensuring these groups align with the organizational strategy and business goals (ERGs, 2019). Because these groups are more in alignment with their organizations, the results and benefits have become more evident and tangible than ever. Below are some areas within an organization where employee resource groups can contribute and would be important in a business case.

Human Resources. Employee resource groups can impact different areas of an organization. The area of human resources covers many employee functions that are directly influenced by these groups (Lee et al., 2016). As employees get involved, participate in events, and contribute to the groups, these actions can directly or indirectly have an influence on employee engagement, training and development, recruitment, and an overall positive organizational culture.

Employee Engagement. An employee resource group can help familiarize employees and build a sense of trustworthiness and belonging at an organization. It provides a space for employees to share and speak of their concerns and issues, which can help improve the work environment and build trust with employees (Khemlani, 2016). Employee resource groups provide employees with a place where they feel supported for who they are, which can increase confidence and self-assurance, creating a place of belonging and satisfaction (Welbourne et al., 2017). Some studies have shown that employees who are members of an employee resource group have higher levels of individual job satisfaction than those who are not part of a group (Welbourne et al., 2017). The employee who feels engaged, satisfied with work, and part of the organization will generally stay longer and will want to continue to grow with the organization (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). When employees stay longer, the organization's recruiting, marketing, and training costs can be reduced, ultimately impacting the bottom line (Kumar & Pansari, 2015).

Training and Development. One of the advantages employee resource groups typically offer is development opportunities for all members. The development opportunities can improve skills and increase knowledge that employees can transfer and apply in their work areas, such as soft skills training (Karam, 2019). Offering employees development opportunities through these

groups has proven to improve overall performance, spark creativity, and increase productivity, which can positively correlate with organizational profits (Karam, 2019).

Recruitment. Employee resource groups can also influence recruiting. When members of these groups feel a sense of belonging and are happy with their workplace, they will want to bring others along, which can increase an organization's talent pool (Gyurák Babel'ová et al., 2020). Expanding the talent pool and reducing applicant flow can reduce recruiting and sourcing costs. The groups can also promote hiring individuals from different backgrounds and interests, which supports a more diverse workplace, impacting organizational culture (Gyurák Babel'ová et al., 2020).

Organizational Culture. One of the many essential functions of human resources is to create a safe workplace and foster a positive organizational culture in a sustainable way (Gyurák Babel'ová et al., 2020). Employee resource groups allow organizations to continue to build and foster a desirable culture and a positive workspace. The groups can help to reduce bias and increase diversity, which helps employees feel a sense of equity and belonging at their workplace (Carvalho-Freitas & Stathi, 2017). A positive and more inclusive workplace has been proven to be linked to the overall organization performance and is considered a competitive advantage in many industries (Alshamari, 2017).

Policies and Procedures. Employee resource groups have also proven to have a positive influence on policies and procedures. Historically, these groups were created to get better insight from the employees and improve conditions in the workplace, and they continue to do just that (Welbourne et al., 2017). These groups allow employees from all backgrounds and differences to share concerns, issues, and information essential for policy change or process review (Lee et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2019). The insight and information that employee resource groups provide

allows organizations to adapt and change as their workforce changes, therefore, creating a more inclusive workplace (Lee et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2019).

Marketing and Communication. Employee resource groups can often contribute to an organization by providing information and data that may be useful for better marketing and communication. The group members often are willing to assist the organization with brand awareness (Glassman & Glassman, 2017). Because the employee resource groups are specialized network groups, it is an excellent platform for brainstorming new ideas, and the employees can provide feedback on products, campaigns, or cultural preferences. Also, some organizations use employee resource groups to learn and understand a market and clients better when entering new and diverse markets (Glassman & Glassman, 2017).

Employee Insight and Cultural Perspectives for Innovation. Some organizations look at the employee resource groups as useful sources of information, especially when targeting new areas or breaking into new markets (Glassman & Glassman, 2017). Many organizations have utilized the feedback of these groups for the development of new products or creating new campaigns, which can contribute to the organization reaching its business goals (Glassman & Glassman, 2017).

Branding. Creating brand awareness internally and externally at an organization has become essential for businesses as they build trust, earn repeated business, and increase product recognition (Fahmi et al., 2017). Today, some organizations are improving brand recognition and improving employees' views of the corporate brand by using brand communications within the employee resource groups and other employee groups (Fahmi et al., 2017). A sense of connection and trust with the brand has also proven to have a positive impact and influence on

retention, which can have a positive effect on many other organizational processes (Fahmi et al., 2017).

In today's very competitive business world, employee resource groups can give an organization a competitive advantage among other similar competitors within an industry (McNulty et al., 2018). Employee resource groups can benefit an organization's overall productivity, performance, culture, and profitability by influencing many processes within the organization, making it easy to build a business case for having these groups (McNulty et al., 2018).

Types of Employee Resource Groups

Organizations today can have different types of employee resource groups. There is evidence that these groups have become very popular and have proven to bring organizations many benefits. Of the Fortune 100 companies, 66% have announced they have some type of version of employee resource groups (Glassman & Glassman, 2017). Employee resource groups can be inspired, and they generally have a focus on three areas of interest: a profession or career, social goals, and diversity (Glassman & Glassman, 2017). The professional and career employee resource groups are also known as a community of practice (Welbourne et al., 2017), and they are focused on a specific job or skill. The next type of employee resource group focuses on a common goal or social cause, which can generally benefit United Way, Stand Up for Cancer, and many other organizations (Welbourne et al., 2017). The next type of employee resource group can focus on diversity, which centers on personal characteristics and demographics (Welbourne et al., 2017). In this case study, the type of employee resource groups studied are diversity-focused.

The goal for the employee resource groups is similar across many organizations and even industries. One of the main goals for employee resource groups is to build a diverse and inclusive organizational culture that fosters and promotes diversity and inclusion in the workplace while creating a unified work environment (Dutton, 2018). These groups require leaders to strategize to ensure goals and objectives are in alignment with the organizational strategic plan, therefore, increasing the chances of success (Dutton, 2018). The unified work environment within the groups increases in cultural awareness, makes the employees feel valued, and improves employee engagement (Built-In Teams, 2016). Because the groups are employee-led, the organization of the employee resource groups is voluntary and there has to be a connection to the employee (Dutton, 2018).

Many organizations will have different types of groups. The makeup depends on the demographics and differences of the workforce at an organization. Employee resource groups are made up of employees within the minority of their workplace. When referring to minorities in the workplace, this can be based on race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, and other characteristics that can inadvertently distance someone from the bigger group (Dutton, 2018). Diversity employee resource groups can help employers identify the best ways to overcome and prevent cultural challenges in the workplace that can negatively impact other processes (Busse, 2017). Some of the most popular diversity employee resource groups at organizations include People Respecting Individuality, Diversity and Equality (PRIDE), women, race, and ethnicity groups (Built-In Teams, 2016).

One of the qualities of employee resource groups is that regardless of the groups' identity, overall, they all have similar goals and practices to promote and maintain the groups'

success (Built-In Teams, 2016). Some of the most common activities can be divided into three categories: formal, community outreach, and educational (Built-In Teams, 2016).

Formal Activities. Formal events can promote and maintain the employee resource groups that are specific to the type of employee resource groups such as conferences, seminars, and workshops. For example, the PRIDE groups may attend the Out and Equal Conference each year, which can help members and allies understand new concepts and build helpful knowledge (Schimanski & Treharne, 2019). Employee resource groups can also include events organized by the groups for skill-building purposes, team building, or networking, which increases employee creativity and engagement (Chen et al., 2020).

Community Outreach Activities. Many employee resource groups are connected to the local community and collaborate with local organizations to give back to the community. In addition to helping the community thrive, community work, affiliations, and partnerships can help the organization with its brand recognition and recruiting (Fahmi et al., 2017). Also, fun community activities for employees, such as games and concerts, can create a sense of community, which helps employees feel more excited and happier to work at the organization (Frauenheim, 2016).

Educational Activities. Some of the typical educational activities in employee resource groups are webinars on the topics of interest to the groups, mentoring opportunities from employees with more experience, and lunch and learning with company executives or other areas of the organization (McNulty et al., 2018). Employee resource groups can also host events that create cultural awareness, that assist in reducing implicit bias behaviors in the workplace and encourage personal awareness (Sherman et al., 2019). In addition, the educational activities can

increase the assimilation of diversity and inclusion and promote the employee resource groups (McNulty et al., 2018).

Overall, employee resource groups can provide employees at organizations with countless opportunities that can help develop talent, encourage creativity, promote employee engagement, and help employees navigate through different career challenges (Major et al., 2014). In addition, employee resource groups create a sense of community and connectiveness with the outside world, benefiting the organization and the community (Roberson, 2006).

How Employee Resource Groups Relate to Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and inclusion have become more relevant and familiar for organizations worldwide because of the positive impact they can have on their businesses (Grissom, 2018). As the new workforce enters the workplace, demographics are also changing, and these are expected to be older employees who are more racially and ethnically diverse (Grissom, 2018). Diversity and inclusion require organizations to assess and build company strategies that support a diverse and inclusive workplace and that are more effective (Traweck, 2019). Employee resource groups can allow organizations to connect with employees from all backgrounds and differences to incorporate best practices and drive change throughout the workforce (Traweck, 2019). Some studies have confirmed that a diverse and inclusive workplace can be a competitive advantage for many organizations, regardless of the industry, impacting organizations' profitability (Murphy, 2018). The benefits of an organization embracing and taking an active stand for diversity and inclusion can be many. Employee resource groups are a critical part of guiding the strategic plan into action (Traweck, 2019). To better understand how employee resource groups can contribute to diversity and inclusion, there has to be a clear understanding of the difference between diversity and inclusion.

Diversity. Diversity can mean variety, and in the workplace, it can mean several underrepresented groups within the organization (Vargas et al., 2018). Diversity is where there are many individuals together in one place with different backgrounds. They look different from one another, with a wide range of experiences, different types of education, varied ethnicities, and a different story that makes each person unique (Holmes et al., 2020).

Inclusion. Inclusion is when organizations take an active role in ensuring all employees, regardless of their backgrounds, or how they identify themselves, feel welcome and part of the organization. It is when a work environment is respectful of others, everyone is treated equally, where everyone has the same opportunities, and where everyone's voice and contributions are valued (Hurd & Plaut, 2018).

The difference between diversity and inclusion is that diversity refers to a group of people, and the other inclusion is how a specific group interacts and feels within the workplace (Hurd & Plaut, 2018). Diversity is essential for growth and innovation, while inclusion is critical for future success and the long-term effects on organizational culture (Hurd & Plaut, 2018). Inclusion is also an ongoing process that takes time, support, and employee engagement. Some of the most common measures and ways to actively foster diversity and inclusion in the workplace are by adapting to new employees' needs, promoting diverse participation throughout the organization, adapting recruiting efforts, and providing education. Employee resource groups take an active role and contribute to many of these actions. Examples follow.

A More Inclusive Workplace. Making a workplace more inclusive takes an understanding of the workforce, which will allow for creating an environment where everyone feels welcome (Burtka, 2020). One of the benefits of employee resource groups is that employees have a safe place to share concerns and talk about important matters in the workplace,

which is an excellent source of information for leadership. There are many ways an organization can make employees feel valued, appreciated, and included. Some of the most common practices are providing gender-neutral bathrooms to promote an inclusive environment, and it lets the workforce know that the organization cares about diversity (Rad et al., 2019). Another way an organization can make a difference is by providing a designated space for mothers to breastfeed their children (Tiyas et al., 2016), allowing mothers to return to work sooner. Providing prayer rooms and making accommodations for individuals with specific religious practices are common in an inclusive workplace (Farmer & Nimon, 2011). Improving diversity and inclusion means organizations must ensure all policies and procedures are in alignment with fairness and that it supports a more inclusive workplace (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016).

Encourage Diverse Participation and Thinking. Employers can promote inclusion in the workplace by openly inviting employees to participate in events, meetings, projects, and discussions. Ensuring diverse participation will bring different thoughts, ideas, and thinking, which has proven to benefit organizations in many areas (Marimon et al., 2020). Employee resource groups can be an excellent source when promoting the participation of employees. The groups can promote opportunities and encourage members to participate and take advantage of leadership opportunities.

Recruiting Practices. Finding diverse talent with the right qualifications can be a challenge for many organizations, so recruiting efforts are critical. Some studies have found a link between open and transparent recruiting practices and employee inclusion (Vohra et al., 2015), which is why ensuring best practices is essential. To increase and provide a well-diverse candidate pool, organizations can collaborate with schools, work on branding and social media, collaborate with specific organizations, develop referral programs, and conduct host-specific

events (Kilburn et al., 2019). Internally, the organizations can actively seek help from employee resource groups to source from a diverse pool of potential internally qualified candidates (Brotherton, 2011).

Ensure Education is Available to Everyone. Education is one of the most critical steps in building and fostering a diverse and inclusive culture (Fermín-González, 2019). Employee education and training must supplement a culture of diversity and inclusion by providing the knowledge necessary to assimilate new practices, adapt to new changes, and motivate employees (Goldberg et al., 2019). For an inclusive workspace, educational and training opportunities must be available and offered to everyone (Murphy, 2018). This action supports an inclusive organizational culture. Implementing strategies based on inclusion has proven to direct organizations toward equality, general well-being, and affluence (Murphy, 2018). Employee resource groups can contribute to education in the workplace by providing training and seminars on cultural assimilation, cultural backgrounds, diverse practices, and many other topics that can benefit all employees (Murphy, 2018).

Evaluate Management and Executive Teams. Strategic plans for diversity and inclusion, along with change, have to be initiated from the top of the organization down to the lower levels of supervision. Leadership must reflect the evolution and culture the organization is promoting and trying to achieve (Ellis et al., 2015). Organizations must consider best practices for succession planning to promote diversity among executives, management levels, and board members (Ellis et al., 2015). Also, organizations must ensure that executive teams and managers are on board with diversity and inclusion and they are held accountable for actions and progress in this area within the organization (Ellis et al., 2015). A common practice at many organizations for holding leaders accountable in the diversity and inclusion space is supporting and sponsoring

employee resource groups, which allows employees to connect with leaders, improve engagement, and build trust (ERGs, 2019). The benefits of having a diverse executive team and a diverse group of managers have proven to influence and impact the organization in a positive way. There is evidence that shows organizations with gender diversity and ethnic diversity at the executive levels deliver better performance (Perryman et al., 2016). Studies show a statistically significant relationship between a diverse leadership team and more substantial financial outcomes (Augustin & Stumpf, 2018), critical for all organizations.

Diversity and inclusion conceptionally go together. Diversity is identifying what differences exist within an organization and the structure of an organization, while inclusion is an ongoing process of ensuring the structure continues to stay solid, together, and adaptable to ensure the organization stays strong. Undoubtedly, diversity and inclusion are essential for organizations to thrive in a changing world (Fermín-González, 2019). Diversity and inclusion practices will allow organizations to continue to adapt to the changing markets and demographics, which ultimately will help organizations stay relevant and be successful (Fermín-González, 2019).

Impact of Employee Resource Group

Employee resource groups can impact many areas of an organization and influence many processes. Some of the most impactful and influential benefits of these groups are creating an inclusive, open setting for employees to share common interests or concerns and to meet and support one another. Employee resource groups promote and encourage employee development and engagement, which leads to many organizational benefits. Finally, they provide the organization with valuable information to ensure issues and needs are met (Fermín-González, 2019).

Open Setting for Employees Who Share Common Interests. Employee resource groups allow employees to come together in a safe place where they can learn together. Most importantly, they provide a platform to discuss issues and concerns that might be affecting them. Problems and concerns that employees may be facing can negatively impact their work relationships, performance, and productivity (Lee et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2019). Creating an inclusive workplace includes understanding employees and providing resources to ensure everyone is safe and feels like they belong (Lee et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2019). When employees feel like they have and work at a safe location that practices mindfulness and empathy, it becomes easier to prevent inappropriate situations and behaviors that can lead to legal matters (Hambler, 2016). In addition, by providing this unique platform, employees can learn and communicate better with other employees and leaders, which allows leaders to better understand what motivates and drives employees (Rožman et al., 2017), increasing job satisfaction and productivity.

Employee Development and Engagement. Employee development and engagement are some of the most valuable impacts employee resource groups can have on the workforce. The groups bring individuals together who share the same interests and provide unique opportunities to employees that they would typically not receive (Kingo, 2020). Employee resource groups foster employee development and engagement by conducting meetings, having guest speakers, offering training, hosting networking events, conducting fire chats, and providing mentoring opportunities (Tian & Robertson, 2019). By promoting employee development and engagement, an organization can show its commitment to the employees, who consequently feel more valued, engaged, and inspired to contribute more to the organization. Employee development and engagement lead to increased employee satisfaction, growth, and better productivity (Tian &

Robertson, 2019). In addition, creating opportunities for development internally means growing future talent and the next generation of leaders in the organization (Tian & Robertson, 2019).

Source of Essential Information. Understanding the workforce and gathering information about what employees need can be hard. Employee resource groups can facilitate this for leaders (ERGs, 2019). The groups can collect information from employees and can voice employee concerns in a professional and impactful manner. Employee concerns, needs, and issues have led organizations to update policies and procedures to improve safety and create a more inclusive workplace (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016). Employee resource groups can also serve as an excellent source of information for marketing and product research, which can have an impact on the direction an organization goes when exploring a new market (Fahmi et al., 2017).

The impact employee resource groups have on an organization can be significant because they can benefit everyone. These groups can impact and influence employees, leaders, and the overall organizational culture, which is critical for maintaining a positive work environment.

Role of Employee Resource Groups in Employee Engagement

As demographics continue to shift and the workforce continues to age, the ability to engage employees has grown and has become a priority because engaging employees has proven to benefit organizations in numerous ways. The employees, how they feel, how they interact, and how they have treated influences the workplace environment (Lundy, 2019). The workplace environment impacts organizational culture, employee morale, employee satisfaction, and productivity (Lundy, 2019). Employee resource groups can help organizations ensure employees come together as they share interests and values, and the organizations provide opportunities to improve overall interactions and promote the organizational culture (ERGs, 2019). Through employee resource groups, employees can engage in many different ways, and most importantly,

the development of these groups can help avoid perceptions of cultural insensitivity (Lundy, 2019).

Overall, the benefits of employee resource groups and the results they have typically had on employee engagement have proven to benefit organizations long term by reducing overhead expenses (Lundy, 2019). The reduction of overhead expenses is the result of better productivity, improved efficiency, increased creativity, and teamwork (Lundy, 2019). A study with similar employee workgroups found that these groups' effect not only benefited the members who joined and participated but also had a positive impact on others around these individuals (Koch et al., 2019). These groups are usually in organizations where individuals share new ideas, help employees achieve goals, network, and grow, which has proven to foster teamwork, confidence, empathy, and better team spirit in the workplace (Koch et al., 2019).

There is a clear positive correlation between employee engagement and employee performance and satisfaction, which translates into many organizational benefits (Gupta, 2017). Employee resource groups are a critical tool for fostering employee engagement at an organization because it allows employees to engage while embracing differences and creating a safe forum for communication.

Impact of the Employee Resource Groups on Other Organizational Processes

Employee resource groups have proven their value in many ways. The groups provide employees with unique opportunities that can reflect on other processes throughout an organization. Employee resource groups are highly effective and are, in many cases, considered crucial components of organizational success (Gupta, 2017). Employee resource groups can influence many processes and areas throughout organizations, they can change the culture, and they can affect employees' work experiences in a positive way (Green, 2018). Studies also show

that organizations that do not implement similar strategies to support minority groups of employees within their workplaces may result in less productive and less innovative organizations (Green, 2018). For organizations to understand and ensure positive results, it is essential to understand the link between the employee resources groups and other organizational functions (Green, 2018).

Employee resource groups can influence an organization's processes to improve employee well-being and to foster organizational growth and performance (Nielsen et al., 2017). These groups can increase cultural awareness among all employees, and they can help improve issues relating to culture in the workplace by creating awareness, reducing bias, and promoting inclusion (Nielsen et al., 2017). Employee resource groups can improve employee morale by making employees feel accepted and valued through the use of perks and incentives to help employees grow and feel more comfortable contributing to the organization, which can have a direct impact on productivity (Chukwudumebi & Kifordu, 2018). Numerous times it has been confirmed that employee resource groups have increased employee engagement and job satisfaction by offering development opportunities and encouraging being their best self at the job they do (Lundy, 2019).

Employee resource groups also serve as a platform for developing future leaders within an organization. They offer numerous learning opportunities that range from webinars to developing hands-on leadership skills by joining as a board member or planning an event (Jaremczuk & Mazurkiewicz, 2014). The advantage of developing employees is that it builds a robust pool of talent for future jobs. It changes employees' mindsets positively, and it forms a more substantial community (Jaremczuk & Mazurkiewicz, 2014).

Another process that can be influenced by employee resource groups is the onboarding process of new employees. The groups can assist by connecting new employees with more experienced employees to help them navigate through their new job responsibilities and get them more acquainted with the organization's goals, values, rules, and policies (Caldwell & Peters, 2018). Many organizations in today's competitive environment have made it a priority to foster and create cultural awareness in the workplace (Stork et al., 2017). Employee resource groups can help employees become more knowledgeable of cultures other than their own, and the employees can acquire the necessary cultural understanding to navigate a diverse workplace (Stork et al., 2017), which is critical for building an inclusive work environment. Finally, another organizational process that can be highly influenced by employee resource groups is recruiting. Employee resource groups can help organizations seek a diverse group of talent. This can improve turnover and reduce recruiting costs, and the employee resource groups can help an organization build relationships and collaborations that can improve recruiting efforts to increase diversity in the workplace (Augustin & Stumpf, 2018).

Overall, employee resource groups have many benefits and can strongly and positively impact other organizational processes. These groups and the wide-spectrum effect they can have within an organization can change the financial outlook for organizations, as it can have a significant impact on the bottom line (Augustin & Stumpf, 2018). But most importantly, employee resource groups create a culture of inclusivity, foster creativity, help build leaders, and create a better workplace environment for everyone (Augustin & Stumpf, 2018).

Strategic Communication

Strategic communication is defined as a multidimensional concept that involves several steps, tools, and resources for an organization to achieve its mission (Heide et al., 2018).

Strategic communication consists of the development of a concept, idea, or process for a specific group of individuals, which is why it may involve planning, audience segmentation, message design, communication management, designing campaigns, networking, and the evaluation of the process (Heide et al., 2018). Strategic communication includes public relations, organizational communication, marketing communication, and other areas. Because the concept is so broad and includes so many parts, some argue there is not enough research or data available that explains a specific process to follow or steps involved in strategic communication (Nothhaft et al., 2018). Many agree that the goal of strategic communications is to help organizations understand how to effectively deliver their message to a specific audience, which has become more complex and critical as markets get more competitive, technology gets more sophisticated, and globalization continues to expand (Falkheimer et al., 2017).

Another essential part of strategic communication is understanding its relationship to other areas and individuals within an organization to ensure effectiveness (Falkheimer et al., 2017). The organization must understand and value what strategic communication can provide and be on board for the execution of strategic communication to be successful (Falkheimer et al., 2017). It has been proven that strategic communication efforts will not be as successful if there is a lack of overall collaboration. If the strategic communication stays within a communications department, it will not work. Leaders and employees from all areas of the organization must take part, understand it, and be willing to collaborate to get the best results (Heide et al., 2018). Collaborating and working together as an organization in strategic communication requires better communicative awareness throughout the organization, which is why communication professionals must be willing to educate and include others when planning (Falkheimer et al., 2017). The impact of strategic communication depends on many areas and how they come

together to reach a goal, the better understanding and collaboration, the higher the success rate (Macnamara, 2018). Measuring the success rate of strategic communication is another area that continues to be explored. Evidence shows that organizations must align their outcomes and impact with organizational goals and objectives, and evaluation should be based on those circumstances (Macnamara, 2018).

In this case study, the goal was to determine what were some of the steps in strategic communication that could be adapted and modified to promote employee resource groups within aviation employees. Part of working on strategic communication is to increase the effectiveness and impact it has on individuals' target groups (Heide et al., 2018). In this case study, the aim is to get information regarding communication methods, communication tools, impact and feedback of current practices, best-perceived methods for communication, and leadership ability to collaborate (Heide et al., 2018). The goal is to facilitate the message about employee resource groups and their benefits by improving the methods and tools used to engage with employees and members. Ultimately, the way this can be measured will be by tracking enrollment of employee resource groups and active participation within the groups (Macnamara, 2018).

Understanding strategic communication involves acknowledging all of the areas that are essential to the process and how these can all work together to benefit an organization. This starts with some of the principles of strategic communication, then having strategic communication management, and, finally, investigating the impact strategic communication has on business.

Principles of Strategic Communication

The principles of strategic communication may be different and vary by organization and industry. Even when there is no perfect structure or formula, the main concepts seem to prevail

in many studies and across many sectors (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016). Organizations use strategic communication to increase their organizational value by shaping and building their image and reputation, internally and externally (Lim, 2015), which can influence corporate value and brand. Strategic communication is seeing an instrument that can affect individuals' thinking by creating awareness and changing attitudes and performance (Lim, 2015). The task of strategic communication is not a simple one, as it involves a combination of steps and considerations (Lim, 2015). Developing a reliable and unified communications strategy within an organization will help improve the message and experience of clients (internal and external; Lim, 2015). Some of the key principles that are most common across many industries and organizations follow.

The Message and Objectives. Identifying the message the organization wants to send is crucial for building a communication strategy (Aydarov et al., 2019). Once organizations know the direction and the outcomes they are seeking, they can develop a clear mission, a statement of purpose, and objectives aligned with their organizational goals (Aydarov et al., 2019).

Targeted Audience. The target audience is critical because it influences the strategy, implementation process, and ultimately the results (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2017). Once an organization has the message, it can determine the ideal audience (Fiske & Dupree, 2014). The audience can vary, and the audience depends on what type of communication strategy the organization wants—an internal or external communication strategy (Fiske & Dupree, 2014). The audience for internal communication may include employees and managers, while external communication can be customers, influencers, and social media (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2017). Another characteristic of the audience is that it influences the methods that are used to

communicate because they can have different attitudes, values, and preferences of media (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2017).

Communication Methods. Knowing the audience and the outcome of a communication strategy will allow for a better selection of the methods, media, and type of communication for an organization to use (Shin et al., 2012). Within the type of communication, multiple options may fit the different expected outcomes, audiences, or circumstances. Some of the most common choices of communication methods are social media outlets, emails, articles, speakers, local media, and newsletters (Lee et al., 2016).

Collaborations. Strategic communication requires the communication team's partnership with leaders, other areas within the organization, internal and external clients, and stakeholders (Cho et al., 2017). Selecting the right members for a network is crucial. The more prepared and capable the network, the better the organization will be with the implementation, handling unexpected issues, and adapting to change (Marynissen & Lauder, 2020).

Evaluation Plan and Timeline. The evaluation of strategic communication is crucial to determine and confirm if it is working, if there is progress, and if there needs to be a change (Macnamara, 2018), provide insights into strategy. Having a clear vision of what the outlook will look like can help develop attainable and measurable benchmarks (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018). The development of timelines is vital to helping everyone stay on schedule and accountable for assigned tasks, which can increase the chances of achieving the goals on time (Bartlett et al., 2014).

Strategic communication requires planning and ensuring all areas are in alignment with the message and the organizational goals. Providing all the basic principles are being considered, there is a good chance for successful implementation and getting the results the organization

wants. Before achieving the results, there is the critical process of strategic communication management. Strategic communication management occurs after gathering all the necessary information and before attaining the results. Strategic communication management, if not done well, may affect the desired results (Brunton et al., 2019).

Strategic Communication Management

In general, strategic communication management has no perfect equation because each road map can be different depending on the industry, problem, message, cultural values, country, and organization (Brunton et al., 2019). In addition, the growing globalized workplace and multicultural environment continue to introduce new values and perspectives to be considered in strategic communication management (Brunton et al., 2019). As organizations continue to look for ways to stay relevant in the market, stay competitive, and continue to thrive as solid organizations, strategic communication management is more significant than ever before (Wiggill, 2011). Strategic communication management involves gathering information, which may include, but is not limited to, setting the objectives for what needs to be communicated (Andersson, 2019). It consists of studying the environment and influencing factors that may hinder or contribute to the plan. Another crucial aspect of strategic communication management is evaluating the organization and identifying internal and external competition (Andersson, 2019). It also involves mapping the strategy, including the methods to use, the resources, and the timing. Finally, it includes getting support from leaders and building relationships with everyone involved to succeed (Wiggill, 2011). Studies have shown that communication and relationship building between communication experts and internal or external clients can improve an organization's competitive advantage by enhancing the effectiveness and the organization-public relationship, which is vital in strategic communication management (Andersson, 2019).

This case study intends to understand how to improve communication with the workforce in aviation to enhance employee engagement and promote employee resource groups. This case study will provide valid information to enhance formulated communication strategies that are already in place, which may not align with the organization's existing diversity and inclusion objectives (Hedman & Valo, 2015). Because strategic communication management involves identifying gaps and getting to know the targeted group, the information gathered in this case study will be essential for better planning and ensuring the effectiveness of the communication strategy (Kotamena et al., 2020). The collaboration among the departments at any organization is critical and can help build stronger communication management practices, increasing the chances of success (Hedman & Valo, 2015).

In most recent years, the role of human resources in business has become a strategic role and is one of the main contributors to modern communication strategies at many organizations (Benz, 2016). Employee resource groups are a direct function of human resources departments. The collaboration between human resources and the communication team is vital for better results (Kotamena et al., 2020). Employee resource groups can also influence employee satisfaction and have an indirect long-term effect on employee performance (Kotamena et al., 2020). The collaboration between departments to manage the communication functions at an organization can help maximize modern communication strategies and resources and influence employees to make the organization a better one (Benz, 2016).

Relevance of Strategic Communication in Business. Strategic communication in today's business world has become a complex and multidimensional process that requires, more than ever, vast research, planning, networking, and collaborating (Brunton et al., 2019). It is also an ongoing process of continuous communication strategy building and rebuilding to meet the

requirements of changing needs and environments (Kim, 2014). Incorporating strategic communication at an organization can have a positive impact in many areas. Some of the areas are responding to corporate social responsibility, and strategic communication can improve relationships with stakeholders and the public. It can enhance essential processes within an organization, and it can create a strong network of collaboration that will help an organization be more successful.

Social Responsibility. Strategic communication is essential for business, as it helps the organization navigate corporate social responsibility more efficiently (Kim, 2014). Many organizations can struggle to navigate situations and media crises or unexpected events. Having a strategic communication plan means being prepared to navigate through difficult or unforeseen similar circumstances (Kim, 2014).

Relationships. Strategic communication can help build a better relationship with stakeholders and the public, which is crucial for organizations (Wiggill, 2011). Strategic communication requires open communication and ongoing interaction with all involved in the business while maintaining high standards and a professional reputation (Kim, 2014), critical for building trust in the community and markets they serve.

Influence in Other Processes. The implementation of strategic communication involves the collaboration of many departments or areas in an organization working together (Heide et al., 2018). Strategic communication can be considered an intersection of organization and communication that can yield excellent results (Heide et al., 2018). For example, the collaboration of human resources in strategic communication can impact the employees, which can improve employee engagement.

Strong Network. The stronger the strategy and the more efficiently the strategic communication is managed, the more reliable the networks will be for organizations (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018). The stronger the network of internal and external clients and collaborators, the easier it is to adapt and grow as needs and markets change. Strong networks mean better insight and probability of effectively aligning strategic communication with organizational goals (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018).

Strategic communication can create a competitive advantage for an organization if it aligns with the overall core values, goals, and mission of the organization (Rutsaert et al., 2014). Effective strategic communication can ensure effective communication within and outside of the organization (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). It will ensure employees are well-informed and engaged in communication practices, which can improve employee engagement and performance (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018). Outside of the organization, strategic communication helps with maintaining healthy relationships, maintaining collaborations, and maintaining a strong reputation (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018). Strategic communication encourages and facilitates a consistent message for all organizational strategies and business objectives that are essential for success (Andersson, 2019).

Conclusion

In business, strategic communication is an essential function for an organization to stay competitive because it can influence different areas and functions of an organization (Kamon, 2016). Strategic communication is the key to helping everyone stay engaged and actively involved, which is why it is critical to implement diversity and inclusion strategies. One function of diversity and inclusion strategies is the development of employee resource groups, which help foster a more inclusive workplace and build a better culture (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017).

Employee resource groups have many advantages, such as developing talent, educating the workforce, reducing bias in the workplace, promoting creativity, improving performance, and increasing employee satisfaction (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Unfortunately, the concept of diversity and employee resource groups is still new to many leaders and employees. The lack of understanding and the need for awareness is why effective and consistent communication efforts are essential (Luca & Alessandra, 2018). The less informed individuals are about a concept, the less priority it will be to them. Unfortunately, the aviation industry has not been immune to this issue. In addition, the nature of many jobs in aviation creates even more obstacles for employee engagement and promoting employee resource groups, which leads to the need of understanding this workforce better and the need for this case study (Mishra et al., 2014).

This case study investigated the existing, preferred communication methods and practices, and the employee perceptions of both the conventional and nonconventional employees in aviation. In addition, this case study sought to understand the obstacles leadership and managers face that can prevent more productive employee engagement and promote employee resource groups. These findings will help to understand how to modify communication strategies and increase the chances of engagement and participation in employee resource groups.

Section 2: The Project

This project investigates how a communication strategy can be adapted and modified by exploring theories associated with communication and leadership to build employee resource groups amongst the aviation industry. This study uses the qualitative case study methodology, which allows exploring similar case studies, and data collection to understand the phenomenon (Farquhar et al., 2020). This case study's target group is regional airline employees that are members or interested in joining the organization's employee resource groups. There are two subgroups within the employees' target group: No-travel, traditional, and travel, nontraditional employees. The data collected will be from interviews, focus groups, and existing data to understand both groups' types, preferred communication tools, and needs. This section of the case study describes the research method and design and defines both the researcher and participants' roles. The section will also describe the population and sample, collection procedures, and data analysis methods used. Lastly, this section of the case study includes the reliability and validity of the data collected, which will support the findings are credible and trustworthy (Chan et al., 2016).

Purpose Statement

This qualitative case study aimed to expand and develop knowledge regarding employee resource groups by looking closer at a widely distributed workforce and understanding how the lack of strategically planned communication can influence employee resource group development and employee engagement. This qualitative approach was ethnographic, with a constructivist worldview and observations of behaviors. The qualitative approach, case study design, an ethnographic approach, and the constructivist world view allowed the researcher to

investigate the patterns of behaviors and perspectives of the study participants (Harper & Thompson, 2012) to establish meaning to a phenomenon (Elliott et al., 2017).

Role of Researcher

The role of the researcher in this qualitative case study was to ensure guidance, collect data, and conduct the analytical interpretation of the findings (Fernau et al., 2018). Some of the most critical functions of the researcher are to develop an interpretation and clear understanding of the participant's thoughts, the relationship and impact of the theories, and to answer the research questions (Råheim et al., 2016). The researcher gathered data via interviews and observation while focusing on communication and employee engagement within the aviation industry. The researcher participated in all data gathering methods by engaging directly with employee resource group members and employees who were interested in joining any of the employee resource groups within the regional airline part of the study. To ensure the validity of the research, the researcher did two things. The first was to conduct a follow-up check discussion with each participant after the initial interview, which helped validate data during the information gathering process (Cypress, 2017). The second was to use data triangulation to help validate emergent themes within the data acquired from each source (Fusch et al., 2018). The researcher ensured those data collection methods were consistent to ensure the effectiveness of the process (Cypress, 2017). In this case study, the interview process was semi-structured to allow participants to express themselves with genuineness while maintaining an organized process and asking critical questions first (Eltaybani et al., 2020). In addition, the semi-structured interview has proven to be both adaptable and flexible and can influence the quality and trustworthiness of the process (Kallio et al., 2016). Another role of the researcher was to ensure that all participants understood the study was an overt process by explaining the purpose and

objective of the research (Sundqvist et al., 2017). Lastly, the researcher guaranteed that the outcome and analysis of the data were in alignment with the theories and framework established by making sure interviewees were not influenced in any way during the process, that the researcher remained unbiased, and that the study remained ethical at all times (Hewitt, 2007).

Role of Participants

In this qualitative case study, the participants were regional airline employees who were members of the employee resource group or were interested in joining them. The participants fell under two categories: No-travel, traditional and travel, and nontraditional employees. Because this case study explored the participants' perceptions and experiences while understanding the phenomenon within this population, participants were selected using a purposeful sampling method (Ames et al., 2019). Using the purposeful sampling method allowed for a random selection of participants while reducing the chances of any bias in the selection process and any control over the potential influence of known and unknown variables (Ames et al., 2019). The participants of this study were particularly knowledgeable about or experienced the phenomenon of interest and were willing and capable of sharing their experience and insight (Ames et al., 2019). The participant pool was generated from employee resource group member lists and interest forms, providing information on whether the participants fell into the no-travel, traditional, or travel, nontraditional category. The manager of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the organization provided the possible participants' list. These participants had a clear understanding of what the employee resource groups were and understood the significance of communication. The interviews were semi-structured to keep consistency throughout the process (Eltaybani et al., 2020). The setting and process remained private and confidential for all participants to avoid any inhibition or guarded responses (Dixon-Woods et al., 2017). The

interviews were pre-scheduled to prevent distractions or any strain while employees were at work, traveling, or on duty (Eltaybani et al., 2020). The interviews were one-on-one with the researcher via online video conference to ensure confidentiality (Drinkwater et al., 2017). Additionally, to avoid any bias during the interview process, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded using content and thematic analysis (Katzman et al., 2018). To ensure privacy and confidentiality throughout the research process, only the researcher and dissertation committee accessed the participant's information and the data collected (Dixon-Woods et al., 2017). Finally, the participants understood the purpose of the study, their interviews remained voluntary, and they were able to stop participation at any time of the process (Dixon-Woods et al., 2017).

In summary, the researcher's role was to collect the data and conduct the data analysis to answer the research questions while remaining unbiased during the research process (Fernau et al., 2018). The role of the participants was to provide insight into their experience, feelings, and thoughts to understand better the phenomenon that was being studied (Dixon-Woods et al., 2017), which enabled the researcher to identify essential information, and to code and analyze data to answer the research questions (Sundqvist et al., 2017).

Research Method and Design

The research method and design in this research were critical for ensuring the study's appropriate exploration and plan (Kelly, 2017). The method chosen for this study was the qualitative methodology, which helped look into the participant's behavior and views to help answer the research questions (Kelly, 2017). The method was also how the researcher visualized and made decisions about the study (Kelly, 2017). The study's research design was a case study, commonly used to explore the how and why, behaviors observed, and to understand and analyze

a phenomenon through multiple methods of data collection (Ling et al., 2016). Both research design and methodology were essential to ensure the data collected answered the research question more efficiently and accurately (Ling et al., 2016). The research focused on employee resource group members and potential members' experiences, opinions, and perceptions of communication methods and how to better engage with them to promote and grow the organization's employee resource groups. The data collected through interviews, focus groups, and existing data records helped identify themes related to communication theories that can help improve strategic communication and employee engagement (Ling et al., 2016).

Discussion of Research Method

The research method was qualitative research, frequently used to obtain an in-depth understanding of participant's perceptions by exploring thoughts or feelings through the collection of verbal or written data (Vass et al., 2017). The qualitative methodology helped drive the process and research to understand the research problem better and answer the research questions (Vass et al., 2017). In addition, the qualitative methodology can be flexible and adaptable to influence how the researcher collects and evaluates the data, which can be guided by the research questions (Köhler et al., 2019). For this case study, the qualitative methodology allowed the exploration of the participants' experiences, feelings, and understanding to identify the existing phenomenon to adapt communication strategies to better engage with aviation employees (Vass et al., 2017). Additionally, because the qualitative methodology allowed the use of multiple data collection methods, it enabled the researcher to better understand if there was a significant difference in experience and feelings between the two types of employee group categories, no-travel, traditional or travel, nontraditional (Vass et al., 2017). The case study methodology captures and considers the complexity of similar studies and where the data and

research may be multifaceted to identify better essential information to answer the research questions (Ling et al., 2016). The use of multiple data collection methods provided better data and insight, which was critical in this study to understand the experience of members, or potential members of employee resource groups (Ling et al., 2016). The better the insight, the better the researcher was able to answer the research questions and improve communication for better employee engagement (Ling et al., 2016). Simultaneously, underlining and exploring if there was a difference or preferences between the two group categories, No-travel, traditional or travel, nontraditional in perspectives, feelings, or preference of communication methods (Ling et al., 2016).

Discussion of Research Design

The research design was a case study, as this study aimed to understand the group of employees and their perspectives by using multiple sources of data (Vass et al., 2017). The case study design enabled the triangulation of data collection methods and sources of information to explore a phenomenon, which were interviews, focus groups, and pre-existing data (Paddock et al., 2019). Another characteristic of the case study design was that it worked for exploratory research (Paddock et al., 2019), allowing the researcher in this case study to explore the group of employees and the information gathered from participants. The selection of this research design stems from the effort to understand a specific group of individuals and what they experience (Paddock et al., 2019). This case study assisted in answering the research questions and concluded how strategic communication can be improved for growing employee resource groups (Paddock et al., 2019). The case study design was ultimately used because the study looked at a particular and specific event or phenomenon, which was the influence of communication methods for engaging with employees (Vass et al., 2017). Wrona and Gunnesch (2016) stated in

their research that the qualitative case study design is appropriate when there is little information about a phenomenon, which is why this design is suitable in this case. Another critical aspect of a qualitative case study is that it allows for the bounding of the study (Harrison et al., 2017). Bounding the case allows focus, framing the study, and managing data collection and analysis more effectively (Harrison et al., 2017). In this case study, the bounding consisted of all identifying parameters such as participants, location, process, and timeframe for interviews (Harrison et al., 2017).

Summary of Research Method and Design

The research method and design are critical for ensuring the research are correctly conducted, the right information is gathered, and ensures the research questions are properly answered (Vass et al., 2017). The method and design will be guided by the research questions. In this case study, they will help understand the experience, feelings, and perspectives of employees in aviation about communication methods (Kelly, 2017). Because this is an exploratory study where the researcher was looking to identify a phenomenon and gather data from different sources to answer the research questions, the best suitable method is qualitative research and case study design (Wrona & Gunnesch, 2016). Finally, to ensure the study's validity, the qualitative case study allowed the use of different data collection methods, also known as triangulation, which strengthens the results (Harrison et al., 2017). In the end, the objective was to ensure that through this process the results lead to an insightful understanding of the behaviors, methods, practices, and relationships associated with communication methods amongst employees in aviation.

Population and Sampling

In this part of the case study, the researcher described the population, the characteristics, and the criteria for selecting participants. This section also included the description of the sampling method and details of the process to ensure proper screening of the participants, appropriate sampling size, and sampling categories to gather enough information to answer the research questions.

Discussion of Population

In research, some describe a study population as a group of individuals with similar characteristics, experiences, or attributes that are of interest to the researcher to conduct a study (Thomas et al., 2020). A target population is a group of individuals that meet specific criteria and experience critical to the study and how the population sample can be collected (Thomas et al., 2020). Understanding and defining the target population, correctly selecting, and evaluating the sample population to ensure they meet the criteria, will help properly align the study with the research questions (Stuart et al., 2018). In this case study, the population consisted of regional aviation employees that were members or interested in being members of the employee resource groups at a regional airline. The five employee resource groups at the regional airline represent different characteristics, backgrounds, jobs, nationalities, and locations, which is why it will be critical to have participants from each group in the sample population (Stuart et al., 2018). Even when the characteristics such as backgrounds, age, nationality, job, or location were not considered in the study, having representation from all the employee resource groups ensured that the sample population was diverse and represented all groups (Stuart et al., 2018). There were two specific general characteristics amongst the target population in this study: No-travel, traditional or travel, nontraditional distinction. The objective was to understand the employee

group and learn how to better communicate and engage with them to continue to increase the membership of the employee resource groups. In this case study, the population was knowledgeable about employee resource groups. They understood the value the groups have for the organization. They engaged with the groups at least two times, even if they were not active members. Another criterion was that the target population had at least 12 months of experience working in aviation to ensure they had a clear understanding of the environment, situations, and different scenarios unique to aviation that may influence communication or employee engagement in the workplace. The manager of diversity, equity, and inclusion helped identify the population at the regional airline. Each leader of the employee resource groups helped the researcher identify the sample population that met the criteria. The manager of diversity, equity, and inclusion arranged permission from the airline to allow members to participate and schedule the interviews in-person or video conference.

Discussion of Sampling

Planning research sampling was an essential step in any study because it helped frame the data collection process. It can also reduced cost and time by gathering the data more efficiently (Asiamah et al., 2017). The proper sampling method can also increase data accuracy, reduce any mishandling of data, and facilitate the analysis of the data (Ames et al., 2019). In this case study, the researcher explored themes or phenomena amongst a specific target population with unique experiences and conditions. The researcher wanted to know more about aviation employees' opinions and experiences in the employee resource groups at the regional airline. Because the participants in this study met specific criteria while simultaneously representing a broad range of perspectives, this case study's appropriate sampling method was the non-probability purposive sampling (Ames et al., 2019). Some of the advantages of using purposive sampling include

conducting an in-depth and thorough inquiry of data permitting the researcher to use a vast amount of information related to the specific population to correctly answer the researcher's questions (Ames et al., 2019). The purposive sampling method is unique as it allows the researcher to select participants with the specific criteria, which can make the process more efficient, timely, and cost-effective (Asiamah et al., 2017). In addition, the method is flexible as it can be adapted to increase the effectiveness of a study by adjusting or modifying the participant criteria, number of participants, and the data gathering method (White et al., 2018).

Criteria for Sample Population. The sample population's specific criteria in this case study were the following. They must be active employees of the regional airline associated with the research. The participants must have at least 12 months of experience at the regional airline working in an area related to the study to ensure knowledge and understanding of the environment and industry. Participants must also be active members of any of the five employee resource groups or have participated in at least two events or meetings associated with the groups as potential members. Finally, the participant must clearly understand the employee resource groups, the benefits, and their impact. Meeting these criteria allowed the researcher to get reliable insight into how the organization can improve its strategic communication to increase employee engagement amongst employees at this regional airline (Asiamah et al., 2017). Ultimately, an increase in employee engagement influenced the enrollment of employee resource groups.

Sampling Size. The research goal was to aim for a sample size appropriate for the study to gather ample information to answer the research questions (Farrugia, 2019). In qualitative research, the sample size is generally smaller than in quantitative research, mainly because qualitative research tends to allow for a more in-depth interview process and the detailed

evaluation of the data collected (Farrugia, 2019). Another characteristic of sampling in qualitative research is that the study can advance until reaching a point where the data are no longer providing new themes, ideas, concepts during the analysis, which is commonly referred to as reaching the data 'saturation' level (Farrugia, 2019). An essential detail to consider during the sampling and data collection process is to ensure the researcher has enough information to answer the research questions but avoids using repetitive data or unwieldy volumes of data (Farrugia, 2019). In this case study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews, allowing the researcher to gather significant amounts of data and enabled the sample to be on a smaller scale compared to quantitative sampling (Campbell et al., 2020). In addition, because purposive sampling allowed the researcher to select participants who provided useful and rich information, the need for a large number of samples was not practical or efficient (Campbell et al., 2020). For this case study, the participants were selected based on a criterion that included experience in aviation, knowledge of the employee resource groups, and if the participant was a no-travel, traditional, or travel, nontraditional employee. The researcher included participants from each employee resource group at this regional airline, including the Latin Diversity Network, Black Professionals Network, Pride, Professional Women in Aviation, and the Military and Veterans. The sample from each group also represented the two work categories of employees. The sample consisted of a mixture of participants that represented no-travel, traditional employee and travel, a nontraditional employees. The initial sample was an estimate of 10 participants. Suppose this sample size was not providing the researcher with enough information to reach a data saturation point. In that case, an additional participant from each group was added to the sample until gathering enough valid data to answer the research questions (Campbell et al., 2020). In qualitative research, the principle was to collect data until reaching data saturation (Moser &

Korstjens, 2018). The researcher in this study set a starting line for the sample size and continued to expand the sample size as needed until reaching the data saturation (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This case study's sample size resulted in a total of 14 participants, which was a vast sample to reaching data saturation (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Sampling Categories. The sampling in this study fell under non-probability, which allows the researcher to select individuals that meet specific criteria (Ames et al., 2019). The purposive sampling enables the ability to strategize and ensure specific participants are part of the final sample in the research study (Campbell et al., 2020), allowing the flexibility of adding to the sample size if needed. In the study, to ensure there is representation from each employee resource group at the airline, a pre-determined number of participants will be selected. Also, a participant from each of the two-employee categories no-travel, traditional or travel, nontraditional was included. The sampling strategy chosen for this study was the quota sampling method, which is flexible. It allows for specific categories, setting a minimum sample quota for each category (Campbell et al., 2020). The use of minimum quota sampling made sure that crucial participants were part of the final sample. This case study, the minimum quota, ensured that the researcher had two participants from the target population in each employee resource group. Finally, it guaranteed there was at least one participant from each of the work categories. The quota sampling approach allowed more flexibility in shaping the final sample in the event the researcher had to add additional participants to achieve data saturation (Campbell et al., 2020).

Summary of Population and Sampling

In this case study, the population was composed of aviation employees that were members or interested in being members of the employee resource groups within the regional

airline's five available groups. There were two specific general characteristics amongst the target population in this study: The no-travel, traditional or travel, nontraditional distinction. The participants in this study were members of an employee resource group or participated in a minimum of two events as potential members. Participants must have a minimum of 12 months of tenure in aviation and a basic understanding of the benefits the groups have on the organization. The sampling method used was purposive sampling, allowing the researcher to set the criteria, select the participants, and maintain a flexible process to ensure proper selection (Campbell et al., 2020). To ensure the validity of the data and criteria when selecting the participants, the researcher ensured a screening process is in place. To ensure valid representation from all the employee resource groups at the organization, the researcher set a quota sampling strategy with minimums from each of the groups selected. The sampling method, strategies, and screening procedures in selecting research participants and collecting the data ensured there was vast, valid information to answer the research questions effectively.

Data Collection

The data collection process in qualitative research enabled the researcher to collect data that helped answer the researcher's questions by understanding the participants' experience more in detail (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). In this case study, the data collection process allowed the researcher to understand the participants' insight to comprehend how strategic communication can influence employee engagement to benefit employee resource groups (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). The data collection process in qualitative research is an organized approach to gather and explore a phenomenon using multiple sources of information (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). In this case study, the data collection involved various methods. The data collection methods included structured interviews, focus groups, and pre-existing data sets, which allowed data triangulation,

supporting the validation of data as themes emerge during this process (Fusch et al., 2018).

Another data validation technique used in this study was follow-up checks for all interviewed participants, which permitted strengthening the findings (Cypress, 2017).

Before data collection, the researcher received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University (See Appendix A). The researcher also got approval from the regional airline. This, in turn, facilitated getting information from employee resource groups related to their members and gave access to all the participants. The next step was identifying the participants and ensuring they met the pre-determined criteria (See Appendix B), including being an active member of the employee resource group or participating in at least two events as a non-active member. Participants needed to have at least 12 months of experience working in aviation and have a clear understanding of the employee resource groups and their impact on the organization. All participants signed a consent agreement (See Appendix C) or were required to consent at the beginning of the interview recording verbally. The participant's demographic information was recorded along with the employee resource groups they identified with. Finally, the participants were classified based on the job category: no-travel, traditional employee, or the travel, a nontraditional employee.

Interviews

The interview process in this case study was a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview format allowed for consistency in the process and facilitated the use of open-ended questions to explore the participant's perspective (Kallio et al., 2016). In this case study, the participants had two options for the interview setting. Participants were able to interview in person or using video conferences. Providing the participants with the flexibility on what method to use can facilitate participation and response rate, which is critical when working

with employees in different locations and settings (Heath et al., 2018). The researcher cross-examined the recording and field notes once the interviews were completed. The follow-up checks were conducted via telephone with all participants to ensure data validation (Fusch et al., 2018). The researcher started the interview, confirmed consent had been granted in writing or verbally (See Appendix C), and verified the participant's information. The researcher then made sure participants understood that the process was voluntary and they could choose to end the interview at any time. Next, the researcher explained the study's purpose to the participant and proceed with the interview questions. It was essential for the researcher to always be clear and maintain transparency throughout the process, as it ensured participants had a better appreciation for the study and purpose of the research (Heath et al., 2018). The interview process was a semi-structured process with open-ended questions (see Appendix D) to encourage participants to share as much information as possible (Kallio et al., 2016).

Focus Groups

The focus group method was the second source of data for this case study. The focus groups will allow the researcher to interview several participants in form of a discussion (Gill & Baillie, 2018). The benefit of using the focus group in conjunction with the interview methods is that it will allow the researcher insight into the possible communal perspectives, attitudes, behaviors, and experiences (Gill & Baillie, 2018). The group setting can also create an environment for interaction and discussion between participants, which can result in new insights or information not identified in the individual interviews (Gill & Baillie, 2018). The focus group setting for this case study will take place via video conference to facilitate participant participation from numerous locations (Heath et al., 2018). In addition, to ensure proper moderation of the process and documentation of data, the researcher had an observer and

recorded the discussion, facilitating the transcription and analysis of the data (Gill & Baillie, 2018). In this case study, the researcher selected three or four participants who met the participant criteria (see Appendix B) to ensure the data collected answered the research questions. The session was pre-scheduled, and the participant's attendance was confirmed. Before the focus group discussion, the researcher confirmed consent from all participants (See Appendix C). Next, the researcher discussed the purpose and details of the research and made sure participants understood they were volunteering the information and could withdraw from the research at any time. Finally, the researcher guided the focus group discussion, which was guided by a set of pre-determined questions (see Appendix E).

Pre-existing Data

The researcher considered information, pre-existing studies, and interviews related to employee resource groups and how strategic communication can influence employee engagement. The pre-existing data allowed the researcher to support, contribute, and validate the data in this case study (Solli, & Hvalvik, 2019). The data used for data validation in this case study were the literature review's information. Once the data are collected, themes are identified, and data analyzed, the pre-existing data can enhance the reliability of the study results (Fusch et al., 2018).

Summary of Data Collection

In this qualitative case study, the data collection process allowed the researcher to collect data from multiple sources to ensure data triangulation, which yielded reliable information to answer the research questions (Fusch et al., 2018). The three main data collection methods in this case study were interviews, focus groups, and previous data. An advantage of having multiple sources of data is that it can reduce bias by allowing the researcher to discover different

perspectives and views from the data collected, which can help frame the findings (Fusch et al., 2018). In this case study, the researcher ensured all data were collected, recordings were transcribed, and field notes were detailed to facilitate data analysis. Ultimately, this study aimed to identify and understand the phenomenon to answer the research questions by using the most effective, ethical, and appropriate data collection process.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this qualitative research helped the researcher organize the data collected and interpret the data to give meaning to the information gathered from the participants (Sechelski & Onwuegbuzie, 2019). The data analysis allowed the researcher to explore the data and identify the categories, patterns, and themes that stand out to explain the phenomenon (Sechelski & Onwuegbuzie, 2019). The outcome of the analysis was a detailed description of themes that capture the crucial meaning of a participant's experience (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). As a result of the data sources in this study being interviews and a focus group, the narrative analysis was the best approach (Aysola et al., 2018). The narrative analysis allowed the researcher to formulate the data to help interpret the context of each interview while taking into consideration the answers and experience or background of the participants (Aysola et al., 2018). In this study, the goal was to gather information from participants that were members or potential members of employee resource groups in aviation using their experience, perspective, and thoughts about communication and employee engagement practices. With this data, the researcher answered the research questions and contributed to the body of knowledge on employee resource groups in aviation.

Data Analysis Process

The data analysis process will start simultaneously with the data collection process to ensure the researcher identifies critical data and findings as the data are being gathered (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The data analysis process will start as soon as the first interview is completed, and the researcher will have the ability to move back and forth between sampling, data collection, and data analysis, which could assist the researcher in determining successive sampling decisions (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The next critical aspect of data analysis is the transcripts. The transcripts of all interviews and focus group recordings will be typed out verbatim to ensure the accuracy of conversations and that it accurately reflects the interview or focus group discussion experience (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). To confirm the transcripts' integrity and lower the risk of error, the main researcher in this study will be transcribing the interviews and focus group recordings (Parameswaran et al., 2020). In the data analysis process for qualitative research, three general steps will guide the researcher to explore the data more efficiently and to give data meaning and accurate interpretation of the data (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Coding. The first step is coding. Coding will allow the researcher to represent a theme or category such as events, behaviors, activities, and meanings (Raskind et al., 2019). Coding is usually a word or short phrase that representatively allocates a collective and prominent set of data done with numerous types of text and non-text data (Parameswaran et al., 2020). In addition, coding will help the researcher reduce the vast amount of data collected from the interviews and focus groups to make the data analysis more manageable, and to provide a structure that allows for more straightforward assessment and comparison of information (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The focus in qualitative research is an interpretation within the

qualitative framework of the data, which can vary based on the purpose and type of study (Parameswaran et al., 2020). For this case study, the researcher will be using a deductive coding approach, which will ensure the coding process is focused on the data collected while remaining a flexible process (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). For example, the coding frame can be adjusted if differences stand out within a given code or if the researcher discovers new codes not included in the original list. The number of codes for this case study will remain in a range of 5 to 10 to stay devoted entirely to the data and to avoid the process from becoming too difficult and unfocused (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

Themes, Patterns, and Relationships. The second step identifies themes, patterns, and relationships within-participant data, which will help the researcher understand how the data will link and relate to the codes (Sechelski & Onwuegbuzie, 2019). In addition, during this step, the researcher will identify patterns that may emerge that are critical for the data analysis (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). In this case study, the researcher will be using qualitative data analysis software to assist in the data management and analysis, including analysis of the transcripts, coding, and text interpretation (Cypress, 2019). The software will ensure that data are handled and managed efficiently, which will positively influence the validity of the study (Cypress, 2019).

Summarizing Data. The final step is to summarize the data. In this last step, the researcher will highlight any themes and information relevant to the study or contradict it (Cypress, 2019). During this process, the researcher will have the opportunity to understand the participants, give meaning to the information, and identify phenomena that will lead to a comprehensive understanding of participants' views and actions from their perspectives

(Sechelski & Onwuegbuzie, 2019). Finally, the researcher will link the findings to the research questions, objectives, and purpose of the study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Summary of Data Analysis

The data analysis is essentially one of the most critical aspects of the study because it will help the researcher give meaning to the participants' information during the study (Belotto, 2018). The process will involve collecting, transcribing, and coding data that leads to systematic data analysis (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The data analysis will allow the researcher to answer the research questions and highlight new findings, contributing to the body of knowledge on the topic (Belotto, 2018).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are concepts that assist the researcher in evaluating and ensuring the quality of the study while increasing trustworthiness (Pons et al., 2018). The reliability looks at the consistency, which focuses on the technique and if the results are the same after multiple or repeated attempts (Pons et al., 2018). The validity is about precision, which refers to the effectiveness of a technique to measure what it is intended to measure (Pons et al., 2018). In qualitative research, because there are no specific measuring standards or one particular method to follow, the researcher must ensure scientific thoroughness, transparency and avoid bias during the process (Cypress, 2017). The research can ensure thoroughness and transparency and prevent bias during the process by incorporating techniques that can increase the study's reliability and validity, which is essential to reduce errors and avoid inaccurate conclusions (Cypress, 2017). The higher the error the less precise and truthful the conclusion will be, affecting the entire study (Pons et al., 2018). In this case study, the researcher ensured appropriate steps were in place to

guarantee the study's reliability and validity and that the data collection and analysis were the most accurate possible.

Reliability

To ensure the study's reliability, the researcher needs to gain a closer insight into the techniques, application methods, and consistency of results, helping the researcher maintain stability throughout the study (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Maintaining stability throughout the study and making sure methods are consistent, including the data analysis, will increase the study's reliability and guarantee that other researchers can duplicate the study and get similar outcomes (Rose & Johnson, 2020). To ensure reliability in this case study, the researcher implemented several techniques described below, which included ensuring participants understood the study and purpose, that the participant's criteria was appropriate, consistency in application of method, bias reduction, and triangulation of data.

Participant Understanding. To ensure the study's reliability, the participant should have a clear understanding of the objectives and purpose of the study (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Explaining and answering questions before the data collection will allow participants to understand the questions and the requested information, allowing for precise information (Pons et al., 2018).

Participant Criteria. The participant criteria is another technique that will ensure the reliability of the study and will assist with the credibility of the data as it will ensure that participants have the knowledge, experience, and attributes needed to answer the questions in order to get reliable data (Rose & Johnson, 2020). In this case study, the participant criteria were that they had at least 12 months of tenure with the airline, were active members of one of the employee resource groups, or had attended at least two events hosted by the groups. Finally,

participants should have had a basic understanding of the employee resource groups and their benefits. The researcher ensured the participants met the criteria before the interview by completing the criteria form.

Application Method. Reliability is influenced by having a consistent process and providing all candidates with the same opportunity (Pons et al., 2018). In this case study, the researcher will ensure the participants go through the same semi-structured process, guided by properly developed guides. The researcher had two guides, one for the individual interviews and one for the focus groups.

Reducing Bias. A technique applied in this case study to ensure the authenticity and proper interpretation of the participant's experience and perspective were the transcripts reviewed by participants. The transcript reviews ensured accuracy and reduced inaccurate researcher interpretation that could lead to analysis error (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Data Triangulation. Data triangulation in qualitative research is critical to get a more accurate understanding and interpretation of the data by providing the research data from multiple sources, which leads the researcher to the phenomenon in question and understanding of the issue (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). The triangulation will also strengthen findings by reducing bias and improving reliability by increasing trustworthiness and understanding of the participants (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). The three sources of data for this study were the following. The literature review provided a clear overview of employee resource groups and communication strategies for employee engagement. The individual interviews of airline employees provided data on the participant's experience, feelings, and thoughts about employee resource groups and the current communication methods. The last source of data was the focus group, which allowed

participants to share their insights and experiences along with communication methods in a group setting with employee resource groups.

Validity

The validity of qualitative research data refers to the credibility of the data collected and how accurate the findings reflect the population being studied (Hayashi et al., 2019). Studies associate validity in qualitative research with the trustworthiness and quality of the data in a study, strengthening the credibility of qualitative research (Hayashi et al., 2019). Validity is also associated with the suitability of the research data, tools used, the process followed, and collection methods making validity critical in every study (Rose & Johnson, 2020). The techniques used in this case study to ensure validity were appropriate with sampling and enough vast amounts of data, data processing effectiveness, respondent validation of data, and accurate data analysis.

Sampling and Amount of Data. In this case study, the researcher used purposeful sampling, which meant the participants were knowledgeable and met specific criteria, making them the appropriate individuals to participate and respond, which increases validity (Hayashi et al., 2019). The researcher must have enough data to represent accurately the full picture of the phenomenon being studied, which is why the researcher collected data until saturation was reached. Reaching data saturation will indicate and support the comprehensiveness necessary to make a valid analysis (Hayashi et al., 2019).

Data Processing. The processing of data is a critical step that must occur throughout the entire process to ensure validity (Cypress, 2017). The researcher audio recorded, took notes, and transcribed interviews. Having both the transcription and the audio recording of the interviews

strengthened descriptive validity. The recordings provided a tone of voice, pauses in statements, and details that can be missed when using written transcript alone (Hayashi et al., 2019).

Validation of Data. To ensure data validation and that the participant's perspective is interpreted and depicted accurately, participants were asked to review the transcripts of the interview. This step aims to confirm that the researcher did not misinterpret any information and that the information is accurate (Hayashi et al., 2019).

Data Analysis. The data analysis is certainly a process that begins when the researcher initiates the data collection process, which allows for flexibility and adaptation if needed (Hayashi et al., 2019). The data analysis is a simultaneous process that happens between the data and the research, which allows the researcher to ensure the study is on track with the research questions and purpose of the study (Cypress, 2017). A tool used in this study to increase validity and ensure a rigorous and productive analysis was the use of NVivo data analysis computer software (Maher et al., 2018). This software will assist the analysis process and the researcher in data management, organization, and time management to ensure a more effective process (Maher et al., 2018).

Summary of Reliability and Validity

The study's reliability and validity are essential to ensure the data collected accurately represents the group being studied and that the researcher can answer the research questions effectively (Rose & Johnson, 2020). The applications of different techniques throughout the research process was implemented in this case study to reduce errors and increase validity and reliability to reach the most accurate conclusion possible.

Transition and Summary of Section 2

Section 2 of the study provided a detailed description of the qualitative research and how it will be conducted, the researcher's role, and participants' role to ensure a clear understanding of other processes taking place. Among the procedures discussed in Section 2 are the research method and design, which are essential for ensuring efficiency and effectiveness and being critical for gathering the right information to answer the research questions (Vass et al., 2017). Other necessary details covered in this section are the population sampling, criteria, data collection, data analysis, and how to ensure the process remains credible, valid, and reliable. In addition, this section provided all the forms, scripts, guides for interviews, and checklists that would guide the researcher through the data collection process (Cypress, 2017). Finally, Section 2 enables the research to consider and ensure all functions remain effective, ethical, and appropriate for everyone involved (Parameswaran et al., 2020). Furthermore, Section 2 has prepared the researcher to move to the next section, which is applying professional practice and implications for change. In this case study, data were gathered, and data analysis was conducted to explore how strategic communication at the regional airline influences employee engagement for growing employee resource groups.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The third section of this case study reviews the research conducted at a regional commercial airline located and operating in the Northeast of the United States. The research conducted focused on the employees that are members or actively participating in the employee resource groups available at the organization and their experience engaging and communicating with the groups. The section includes an overview of the study, followed by the presentation of the findings. Lastly, the section discusses the applications to professional practice and recommendations for action and further research. Finally, Section 3 will conclude with a reflection from the researcher and a summary.

Overview of the Study

This case study focused on how strategic communication can help increase employee engagement, which is essential for growing employee resource groups in aviation. The case study focused on employee resource group members representing two general employee categories: the traditional non-travel employee and non-traditional travel employee. The objective of the case study was to identify any difference in engagement amongst the two groups by taking into consideration preferred engagement methods, communication devices, perception of leadership, and challenges faced. The data collection methods used were focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews. The researcher included previously published data from the literature review to ensure data validation, which provided data triangulation. After the data analysis, the researcher discovered that because of the recent global pandemic COVID-19, the airline had shifted to an all-inclusive virtual employee engagement platform for the employee resource groups that allowed all employees to engage using the same tools. The virtual platform allowed everyone to engage the same way. There was no longer a significant difference between

those who worked at the office and those who traveled. Knowing that all employees were embracing and assimilating a centralized virtual platform allowed the researcher to explore the differences between the two workgroups in one platform and with participants in many of the organization's locations. It also allowed the researcher to learn about differences and challenges that employees were having. The ability to gather data from many sites and employees with numerous jobs allowed the researcher to get a more realistic and meaningful insight on attributes that are critical for improving communication strategies and increasing engagement amongst the employee resource groups.

The findings confirmed that the centralized virtual platform communication was making it accessible to most employees, in any location, at any time. The communication methods for engaging with employee resource groups at the airline have been embraced and there was active participation. Within the virtual platform, the employees can access multiple engagement methods or media and employees can access from many devices. In addition, employees can participate in many events and activities from a phone, iPad, or computer, making it more accessible. Piedmont's communication methods have allowed the employee resource groups to connect with employees all over the United States to provide support and tools that benefit all. Overall, the data shows that employees have embraced and adapted to the new virtual platform relatively easily. Also, the participants recognized the benefits and value the groups have in the workplace. Additionally, the study also highlights some challenges that affect productivity and engagement such as equal access to virtual platforms for a specific workgroup (customer service and ground handling agents) and lack of devices available to employees to access and engage in virtual events and meetings. Finally, the data show a lack of senior leadership involvement critical for communication and transferring information.

In conclusion, to promote engagement and grow the employee resource groups, the organizations must focus on removing communication barriers and foster leadership involvement. In addition, the organization must continue to evaluate and develop strategies for a workforce that is changing and will continue to change. Finally, leadership must continue considering offering employees in this complex industry variable communication methods to promote engagement and grow employee resource groups.

Presentation of the Findings

The research focused on employees who were members or actively participating in the employee resource groups available at Piedmont Airlines, a regional airline owned by American Airlines. These employees who were members of the employee resource groups represented various workgroups and locations, but the study focused on two main job categories. These categories were non-travel, traditional, and travel, nontraditional. The study's objective was to identify any differences in their experiences while engaging with the employee resource groups and using different tools and communication methods to participate in these groups. I also looked at the influence and employee perception of leadership engagement and its impact on employee engagement. This information gathered has allowed the researcher to understand if the current communication strategy has been effective and how the strategy can be adjusted to increase employee engagement and grow the employee resource groups amongst aviation employees.

The majority of the data collected came from individual semi-structured interviews. All research participants were recruited via email. The recruiting email was sent to a randomly selected group of employee resource group members representing all of the workgroups at Piedmont Airlines. Once a participant confirmed their interests in participating, they were

scheduled for the interview. All interviews were conducted virtually and recorded using Microsoft Teams. All interviews were transcribed, and participants were assigned a code, which allowed for maintaining a participant's information in a confidential format. All participants met a specific set of criteria for the study, and it was verified before scheduling the interview. The participant's criteria requirements were to have at least 12 months of experience at the regional airline working in an area related to the study to ensure knowledge and understanding of the environment and industry.

Additionally, participants were required to be active members of any of the five employee resource groups or have participated in at least two events or meetings associated with the groups as potential members. Finally, the participant needed to clearly understand the employee resource groups, the benefits, and their impact. Because of the criteria and specifics of this study, the sampling method used was non-probability purposive sampling (Ames et al., 2019).

The purposive sampling method allowed the researcher to select participants with the specific criteria, making the process more efficient (Asiamah et al., 2017). The total number of participants in the study is 14, of which 11 are individual semi-structured interviews and one focus group with three participants. Because this study is qualitative, the sample of participants is relatively smaller than it would be in a quantitative study (Campbell et al., 2020), and data were collected past reaching data saturation (Campbell et al., 2020). Moser and Korstjens (2018) suggested that the saturation sample size for qualitative research can range from 10-35 participants, and in this research, the data saturation point was reached early in the interview process. No new information relevant to the study was revealed after the tenth participant, but all interested in participating were encouraged to do so. It is critical to highlight that the 14

participants represented different workgroups and positions, which allowed for a better understanding of the challenges and preferences amongst a diverse sample, which positively correlates with the aviation workforce. Participants represented workgroups from departments such as flight, inflight, maintenance, corporate communication, human resources, customer service, ground handling, corporate, recruiting, and operational control center. Finally, the sample represented different position levels which included entry-level and management.

This qualitative study focused on communication methods, tools, and devices that influence employee engagement with employee resource groups, impacting development, retention, and other employment opportunities via these groups. This study evaluates the potential association between theories and aspects impacting employee engagement, which shows the importance of strategic communication for this specific aviation workforce. For this reason, the participants were selected based on the particular criteria, which included experience and understanding of the topic and would enable the researcher to gather valid information to answer the research questions.

All participants and the researcher communicated via email, starting with the recruiting email, which was soon followed by the participants' responses saying they wanted to participate, and then the researcher scheduled the interview date and time. The researcher scheduled all interviews around the participant's availability and schedule. Once the participant and researcher confirmed the date and time, the researcher sent a confirmation by sending a Microsoft Teams calendar invite with all the details. On the day of the interview, the researcher would welcome the participant, verify that the consent form was signed and returned, and brief the participant on the process and key steps within the interview. The researcher would then proceed to start the recording and start reading the interview script and questions. During the interview, the

researcher maintained a relaxing, friendly, and engaging dynamic to ensure participants felt comfortable. The researcher took notes and paid close attention to the participants' voice tones, pauses, and hesitation when asked the research questions. Each interview lasted from 8 to 20 minutes.

To ensure the accuracy of the information, the researcher allowed participants to call or email any additional details after the interview. Transcript reviews and data clarification and validation followed thereafter. All participants were assigned an identification number that would allow their identities to remain confidential and unknown. The label consisted of six items, P # L D R I or FG; P stands for participant, # participant number, L researcher first name initial, D researcher last name initial, and I for an interview or FG the focus group. Once the interviews were completed, all recordings were saved, transcribed, and verified. The next step was to load all transcripts into the qualitative software NVivo, which assisted the researcher in the data analysis by helping understand the participant's perceptions and experience. The NVivo research software was used to identify themes, validate data saturation, and reduce bias. Finally, the NVivo software allowed the researcher to identify relevant and influential themes in strategic communication for growing employee resource groups. To ensure the validity of the data, in this case study, the researcher used the triangulation of data collection methods and source of information to explore a phenomenon, which were semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and pre-existing data (Paddock et al., 2019).

One last item to address about this study was the potential influence of a pandemic. Starting in March of 2020 through March of 2021 (the date the data were collected), the world experienced a pandemic, which directly impacted aviation in many ways. During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone's role at the airline shifted and perhaps changed

completely. At the beginning of the pandemic, many stopped traveling, others started working from home, and many even left the industry. During the pandemic, communications became more critical than ever and the one thing everyone looked forward to each week. At that time, virtual communication exploded and became the one safe way to bring people together (Henderson et al., 2020). The employee resource groups at Piedmont Airlines embraced the virtual world and continued to promote and engage with employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. The employee resource groups also became a safe space for employees to navigate and deal with uncertain times. By the time the data were collected, the airline slowly got back to a full schedule and partially brought people back to the office. Most of the individuals with travel, nontraditional jobs were resuming normal functions and schedules. For these employees, working from home was probably different. Still, their ability to work in various locations such as airports and hotels probably allowed them to adapt to the change easier. For the traditional, non-travel employees, working from home was different from working from the office setting. Both types of employees, traditional, non-travel, and nontraditional travel, experienced changes and adjustments. Everyone had a new normal, which may have changed through the course of the pandemic many times, potentially influencing their experience with communication.

Overview of Themes Discovered

The objective of looking at the information collected was to identify themes and information that can help identify barriers to modifying the strategic approach to improve the existing communication strategy and effectively increase employee engagement. Identifying this information can enable leadership to use tools and communication methods that increase, encourage, and promote employee engagement amongst the employee resource groups. The anticipated themes for this case study were the perception of employees' not knowing or

understanding the objective, purpose, and benefits of the employee resource groups.

Understanding this information and the employees' perception amongst the employee resource groups will enable the researcher to explain the Diffusion of Innovation Theory and how it applies in this case study. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory tries to understand how information is adopted and how fast it can spread among a group of individuals (Williams et al., 2019). Human interactions cause the adoption of a new idea or concept through social networks (Weil, 2018). The anticipation is that the group members and leaders are disseminating the information about the employee resource groups. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory focuses on distributing information while considering communication channels, time, and a social system and its adopters (Williams et al., 2019). The next anticipated theme is leadership buy-in and support for the employee resource groups, which can harm employee involvement and participation if it is lacking. Identifying this information will distinguish trends and actions that align with the Transformational Leadership theory, which refers to inspiring and creative leaders who look for their team members' best interests (Steinmann et al., 2018). Finally, the next theme anticipated was the lack of communication tools, media, and resources available for engagement. This theme aligns with the Uses and Gratification Theory, which believes that individuals will select and use media to fulfill their personal needs or accomplish a specific goal (Chen et al., 2010), specifically looking at employees' needs based on the nature of their jobs.

To identify the themes in this study, the researcher followed the succeeding process: First, the researcher reviewed transcripts and audio recordings while taking notes. During this process, the researcher was able to identify quotes, phrases, and information related to the study that could help answer the research questions. Second, the researcher identified the codes or labels to assign the quotes and phrases. There were 22 codes or descriptors related to

communication, communication tools, communication devices, and overall experience. Third, the researcher grouped or clustered the codes into specific themes. All codes that did not align with the themes, or were not relevant to answering the research questions, were excluded. Fourth, the researcher developed the themes and descriptions that would guide the researcher in answering the research questions. Fifth, the researcher compared the differences between traditional, non-travel and nontraditional, travel participants to determine the differences in code frequency and overall themes. The themes in this case study are the following: Theme 1. The employee's ability to engage with the employee resource groups using different methods. Under this theme, the participants share what methods have effectively worked while engaging with the employee resource groups. The researcher also explains the difference between the two overall groups, the traditional non-travel, and the nontraditional travel. Theme 2. Engagement and communication experience with the employee resource groups. The discussion of this theme explored the participant's experiences and why they remained members of the groups. Theme 3. The difference and preference in communication tools, media, and resources available for employees. The discussion of this theme explains the different methods available to workgroups. Theme 4. Leadership influence to join the employee resource groups. This theme explains what has motivated the participants to join the groups and the little to no influence leadership has had on the participants. Theme 5. Lack of leadership buy-in and action. This theme explores the level of leadership buy-in and actions and how it impacts participants' perception and motivation.

Discussion of Themes

The theme discussion will go into details and examples for each theme, including relevant data, quotes directly from the participants, and data collected. The researcher conducted a complete review of the participant's responses for the individual interviews and a focus group

to create the themes. Also, the researcher corroborated the information by gathering published information about employee engagement and communication. Collecting data from multiple sources allowed the researcher to use the data triangulation process to ensure data validation.

The themes were identified after classifying numerous codes in the data transcripts. To ensure the most dominant codes and data saturation frequency, the researcher created a frequency table. Table 1 shows all the codes representing quotes, comments, or thoughts from the participants that contributed to the overall study.

Table 1

Data Summary of Code Frequency

[illegible]

P8LDR	x	x		x		x				x		x		x		x		x	x	x	x
I																					
P9LDR				x	x		x		x	x	x	x		x		x		x	x	x	x
I																					
P10LD	x		x		x	x			x	x	x		x		x				x	x	x
RI																					
P11LD	x	x	x							x	x		x	x	x	x		x			
RI																					
P12LD	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x		x
RFG																					
P13LD	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x			x	x	x		x	x		x
RFG																					
P14LD	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x
RFG																					
	9	10	3	10	8	9	3	6	11	14	12	7	7	12	9	9	3	7	7	6	10

The table above shows the 22 codes or descriptors represented in this case study. Once the codes were identified and validated, the codes were grouped into five themes. The themes identified represent and align with the information gathered from all sources, including the interviews, focus group, and pre-existing data. Table 2 below shows the five themes and the data resources taken into consideration in this case study:

Table 2

Themes from Individual Interviews, Focus Group, and Data

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
The employee's ability to engage with the employee	Engagement and communication experience with	Difference and preference in communication	Lack of leadership influence to join	Lack of leadership buy-in and action.

resource groups	the employee	devices available	the employee
using different	resource groups	for employees.	resource groups.
communication			
methods.			

The table above shows the themes that were identified when all the codes and data were grouped. The first theme is the employee's ability to engage with the employee resource groups using different methods. Under this theme, the participants share what methods have worked when engaging with the employee resource groups. The researcher also explains the difference between the two overall groups, the traditional non-travel, and the nontraditional travel. In addition, the researcher incorporated data gathered in the literature review that is related to the findings. The second theme is the engagement and communication experience with the employee resource groups. The discussion of this theme explores the participant's experience and why they remain members of the groups. In addition, the researcher included data from the literature review that aligns and supports the information. The third theme is the difference in communication devices available for employees. The discussion of this theme explains the different methods available to different workgroups and the exploration of data related previously gathered in the literature review. The fourth theme is the lack of leadership influence to join the employee resource groups. Here the researcher explains what has motivated the participants to join the groups and the little to no influence leadership has had on the participants. The fifth theme is the lack of leadership buy-in and action. This theme explores leadership buy-in and actions and how it impacts participants' perception and motivation, which the researcher supports with previous studies. Below is the discussion of the themes:

Theme 1. The employee's ability to engage with the employee resource groups using different communication methods. Participants interviewed often highlighted that their experience communicating with the employee resource groups could vary by day, schedule, availability, or job tasks assigned on a particular day. All these factors would also determine the type of methods they would use to engage with the groups. For example, participant P1LDRI shared,

As long as I don't have anything going on during the day, it's usually pretty easy to join the meetings', and participant P3LDRI said 'as long as I have the time and my calendar allows it I will join the meetings.

The majority of the participants also highlighted the effect that the pandemic COVID-19 had on communication. For example, participant P14LDRFG in the focus group mentioned, “COVID-19 and not being face to face has allowed having meeting times that are accessible virtually,” having virtual meetings made events more accessible to all employees regardless of location. Regardless of the benefit of virtual meetings, participants such as P6LDRI expressed their enthusiasm for future in-person meetings “I look forward to more of the Community involvement. Post COVID-19 and the networking aspect of it.” Because most of the events hosted by the organization's employee resource groups were virtual, participants shared their experiences and their preferences with different virtual platforms. Some of the comments from the participants included the following:

P4LDRI.

I would say...the teams platform and emails are my preferred. The Microsoft Meetings because you can see the people as you're talking to them. I think there's a value in being able to see the faces as you were communicating.

P9LDRI.

I would say. As far as communication tools, WebEx because we are able to talk with just audio, but also see everyone in the group regardless of where we all may be, because there's a lot of people involved and we're all kind of scattered out throughout the country.

Most of the interview and focus group participants shared similar comments, which supported employees to virtually engage and interact with the groups and others without being in the same room. Virtual meeting platforms, such as Microsoft Teams and WebEx, became critical and essential for businesses when the pandemic COVID-19 emerged (Wijayanto et al., 2021), allowing for safe global communication. Another appealing aspect of these virtual platforms was connecting via audio and video, which was one safe option for live interaction (Henderson et al., 2020).

Another critical concept posed by participants was how some platforms allowed for engagement outside of a set schedule and between meetings. For example, by using Facebook like it was stated by participant P7LDRI, "I think the Facebook groups that we've started are definitely a great way to engage because people can engage outside of a set specific time." Using passive interaction can increase communication and employee engagement frequency (Ramawela & Chukwuere, 2020). Recent studies have confirmed that the use of technology has increased, and social media platforms such as Facebook can influence the workforce by directly impacting organizational culture (Ramawela & Chukwuere, 2020). Other participants mention other passive methods such as emails and websites. For example, participant P5LDRI stated, "I feel like the best way of communicating is our web pages and email because of our various schedules." Ramawela and Chukwuere (2020) highlighted that organizations can influence employees' readiness and assimilation of new information through different platforms. In this

case, it would be affecting how employees acclimate and learn about the employee resource groups.

Theme 2. Engagement and communication experiences with the employee resource groups. The participant's experience engaging and communicating with the employee resource groups seemed overall positive and rewarding. The participants shared comments expressing their satisfaction with communication like the ones shown below:

P10LDRI.

My experience with communication has been positive. I found there was a lot of information when I came to Piedmont about how to start a group, there was a clear outline. I think all of that was a positive experience. The communication is excellent.

P11LDRI. "They're doing good at getting the information to everyone."

P5LDRI. "Communication with the ERGs has always been good in all reality."

Other participants shared comments highlighting some of the things they like the most about the employee source groups, such as the opportunities for learning, interacting with others, and sharing best practices and stories with employees all over the country. For example, participant P9LDRI shared, "My experience has been great. It's been a great experience to be able to connect with people from all walks of life, learn about inclusivity and diversity, and their jobs," and participant P4LDRI shared, "I have enjoyed hearing the different perspectives and learning from members at many locations."

Participants shared what they look forward to and all the resources and benefits they get while engaging. Participant P3LDRI highlights the value of learning from others

The ERGs provide the opportunities to connect with people with various interests. It gives me the opportunities to connect with people that I wouldn't otherwise connect with just because of the nature of my work allowing me to expand my ideas and network.

Participant P9LDRI talks about how it has expanded her business acumen and knowledge,

My experience has been great. It's been a great experience to be able to connect with people from all walks of life, to learn about inclusivity and diversity. It has also helped me learn roles that everyone plays with within the company and best practices. Overall, it has been extremely informative and very enjoyable as well.

The focus group participants had similar thoughts and experiences about the engagement experience and communication so far with the employee resource groups which were overall positive. For example, participant P13LDRFG stated

I think communicating with members and groups has been very a very everyone is approachable. They have all embraced me. I'll say this is, you know, I don't feel uncomfortable reaching out in any capacity and I love that we (ERG leaders) meet weekly.

One of the employee resource groups' functions and roles is to provide a platform for safe communication, development, and interaction, critical for employee engagement (Kang & Sung, 2017). When employees are engaged and can see the value of being part of the groups where they learn and grow, it can positively affect their ability to immerse themselves in their jobs through the feeling of empowerment and confidence (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018). In addition, employee enthusiasm and involvement can influence others inspiring them to be part of the employee resource groups by sharing the learning experience (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018).

Positive interaction, engagement, and communication are critical in maintaining and growing employee resource groups because they will influence members to continue coming back.

Theme 3. Difference and preference in communication devices available for employees. Under the third theme, the participants shared the most convenient communication device they use when communicating and engaging with the employee resource groups. The devices' selection or use was mostly driven by the device's convenience and how easy it was to transport to different environments, such as airports and traveling. The most mentioned devices were mobile phones, laptop computers, and the iPad. The majority of the participants agreed that the phones, laptops, and I-Pads were convenient and, for the most part, easy to bring along in many settings and situations. The participants shared comments such as:

P14LDRFG.

I certainly use my phone a lot more to send quick messages, communicate with some of my team members who are reaching out via teams, email, and to use the Facebook groups... on my phone is much easier for me to access that information.

P9LDRI.

I would definitely have to say between my phone and iPad, so just depends on what the nature of you know what I'm trying to connect? But definitely because you're constantly just moving around in a regular workday, being able to have the phone to constantly, you know, respond or connect or be a part of something or stay up to date.

Some participants shared examples of why the mobile device works better, which did not have anything to do with mobility but with equipment available to the workgroup. For example, some computers available to a specific workgroup such as ground handling and customer service do not have cameras and audio. It was also highlighted that this particular workgroup could not

access Microsoft Teams from any device as the company does not provide them this access. Not having a computer with audio and video and not having access to Microsoft Teams prevented employees from participating in the live meetings and events. Participant P7LDRI shared,

I say the ability to use my mobile device to connect to WebEx is great because my workstation doesn't have audio with it, there's no microphone or camera. I think me being able to use my personal device to connect is great.

Other participants were aware of the discrepancy between the workgroups and how it impacts the communication and engagement of some of the team members at Piedmont Airlines. For example, some of the participants expressed concerns such as the ones below:

P1LDRI.

I know that most the meetings are on WebEx and I know WebEx is a good way to get everyone to connect in the same place. I am also a huge fan of Teams, but I know that not everybody has access to Teams.

P12LDRFG. "I wish Teams was a little bit more effective because what I found is that our frontline employees, some of them like at the agent level they have problems with Teams and that's a lot of members."

Overall, all participants agreed that the best and most effective way to increase communication and engagement with employee resource groups is to make available as many tools and resources as possible for engagement. Participant P2LDRI statement summarizes it by saying, "I think any communication tool that engages with the ERGs, is effective. Whether that is through phone conversation, email, Microsoft Teams, or WebEx. I feel like it's all beneficial." Since the Pandemic COVID-19 started, the airline's communication has been virtual and decreased the centralized meetup and in turn has created a more neutral setting for all employees located all

over the country. Unfortunately, the customer service and ground agents still has limited access to all the tools, which has nothing to do with traditional non-travel and nontraditional travel employees. Instead, it is a matter of employee classification at Piedmont Airlines.

Studies have shown that organizations have increased accessible devices and virtual platforms and serve as a reliable and effective way to engage with employees. It is also a means to create value and promote culture as a group and not just as an individual, standalone organization (Mirvis & Googins, 2018) by providing a global platform for shared values. Similarly, alike studies support that providing employees with tools that are easy to use and available to everyone can positively influence their engagement (Kim & Ausar, 2018).

Theme 4. Lack of leadership influence to join the employee resource groups. During the discussion of theme 4, the participants shared their perspective of the little to no leadership influence in their decision to join the employee resource groups. Most of the participants repeatedly reported having joined because it was a personal desire. They felt passionate about being part of the groups because they wanted to contribute to the company culture. The following statements captured and summarize the findings:

P3LDRI.

I feel like I feel a personal sense of responsibility. To participate and to be a part of something. The group that I participated in, I am not of that ethnicity and I don't share any of that cultural heritage, but I find tremendous value personally for myself in hearing other perspectives and learning. It was not influenced by any leaders or leadership.

P6LDRI.

I don't know. I mean, I don't know if any of my necessarily leaders had an impact on me being a part of the ERGs. I think just collectively as a team. We embrace this thought,

you know of having these employee resource groups. You know that mainline have had for a long time. Also, the world has changed a lot. So it has become important.

P14LDRFG. “I feel the same way. I feel that what has pushed me to want to stay and like be a part of the ERGs is because I feel very passionate about.”

P2LDRI. “Well, I wanted personally to be part of ERGs regardless of whether my leader knew about it or not. My leader did not impacting my decision, it was my choice to be part of the ERG.”

Overall, the consensus is that members joined the employee resource groups because something interested them or they felt connected with the group in more than one way. It was clear that it was a personal choice for most participants and something they thought they could do without leadership endorsement. These findings can be validated by a study on employee resource groups that suggests these are natural social creature behavior (Welbourne et al., 2017). Individuals wanting to come together for the same interest and wanting to belong and be part of something is ordinary and function of many organizational structures today (Welbourne et al., 2017). Other data show that individuals will join because they see these groups as communities brought together by social identity characteristics. They established as support systems and provided networking opportunities that are enticing and promising for employees (Green, 2018).

During the data collection, participants also shared that even when it was a personal choice to join the employee resource groups, none of the participants reported having any push back from their managers. Most of the managers were in approval with employees participating and taking part in the groups. One participant shared how they explained to their manager what the employee resource groups were all about, which was the case of participant P14LDRFG.

“When ask my boss if he was ok with me joining, he said “what are ERGs?” (Laugh) “I had to explain it.”

Theme 5. Lack of leadership buy-in and action. The participants shared as part of this theme the need for leadership buy-in and action to support the employee resource groups throughout the organization. When referring to leadership in this theme, the researcher is referring to senior and executive leadership. Some participants highlighted that there are many leaders involved. For example, this included the group leaders, executive sponsors, and council members. However, this was only a small representation of all the leaders at the organization. Many participants shared comments such as the one participant P2LDRI shared, “I personally feel that our company's senior leaders are somewhat apprehensive about supporting the ERGs.” During the focus group, participants discussed the comment P12LDRFG made, and the group was in total agreement. The participant stated:

OK, now I'm going to say this and I don't want to sound negative, but the fact that so many of our leaders aren't aware of how our frontline employees are managing and how they're dealing with things and what they're going through is sad.

Participants also shared what they would like to see from leadership and how leadership can get involved. The following comments summarize the information gathered:

P12LDRFG. “When the whole Black Lives Matters thing happened to me. The fact that we were not responsive and we were not saying anything, was frustrating. Leadership did not want to take action, they need to take action.”

P11LDRI.

I think. We could do a better job of upper management being part of the ERGs. I know that the Maintenance Department can do a better job. We need to continue to

communicate, it's just a matter of trying to get the word out to people and push to get people involved.

P5LDRI.

I think that it is hard for our senior leadership, especially right now. It's extremely difficult for them to find a time and is not part of their priority right now to support the ERGs. They are making sure the airline is capable to run, especially now with it COVID-19, but it would be great if they can get more involved.

P2LDRI.

I would like to see more senior leaders be involved in ERGs and educate themselves or take the initiative to educate themselves more to see the value in inclusion and diversity and want to actively be a part of it.

The participants showed a tremendous amount of concern and desire for senior leadership to get involved and learn about the groups along with the value they bring to the organization.

Participants want to feel supported and inspired in the work that they do with the employee resource groups. Leadership support and involvement are critical for any initiatives and change at an organization because it influences employee behaviors, attitudes, and performance towards the job and culture (Onyeneke & Abe, 2021). Another essential piece of information is that if leadership support and involvement is not strong, it can affect the future and outcome of the employee resource groups. Previous studies have suggested a positive correlation between leadership support and employee's motivation, desire to continue to engage, and be part of organizational initiatives (Hoert et al., 2018). Leadership involvement and interaction can influence how long a member of the employee resource group stays with the group (Hoert et al.,

2018). In this situation, participants want to see more involvement and action from the leaders, and if not demonstrated, it can harm membership retention.

Relationship of Findings

Here, the researcher will present the case study's primary outcomes, data, and overall results. In addition, it will also explain why the results are essential and influential to adding value to strategic communication. Additionally, the researcher will answer the research questions, explain how the study and outcomes relate to the framework and discuss the anticipated themes. Finally, the discussion will highlight some of the relevant literature associated with the findings.

The Research Questions

Strategic communication has been associated with increasing employee engagement by purposely providing employees with a more effective way to communicate and exchange information (Zhang & Huai, 2016). The research questions in this case study will answer critical information that will allow for effective and impactful strategic communication planning to further engage with employees and ultimately grow employee resource groups at Piedmont Airlines. This information is significant because employee resource groups have proven to have a direct impact on employee performance, commitment, and overall welfare (Welbourne et al., 2017), which can have a positive effect on turnover, performance, employee satisfaction, work culture, and diversity at an organization (ERGs, 2019). The communication methods utilized by employee resource groups to engage with Piedmont Airlines employees were entirely virtual at the time of the study. The virtual communication strategy has been in place since the Pandemic COVID-19 started in March of 2020. Since then, employees have embraced the virtual platform. At the time of the study, in March of 2021, employees had experienced the communication

methods for about a year. The organization has no plans of moving away from the virtual platform and communication strategies at this time. They have plans to incorporate and bring back ways to engage with team members in person and following safety guidelines and social distancing policies that the organization has in place. Below are the research questions:

Research Question 1. What impact has communication methods had on the ability and productivity of engaging with a widely distributed workforce? Piedmont Airlines had close to 10,000 employees throughout the entire United States in about 78 locations (at the time of the study), making strategic communication for engagement a critical part of the organization. Especially for the employee resource groups, which are new and in need of continued growth. Most participants in this study shared their positive experiences with the current methods and their ability to engage, learn, and network with other members throughout the United States using these methods. The offering of virtual meetings, the use of virtual communication platforms (i.e., Microsoft Teams, WebEx, Zoom), access to the website, and Facebook groups enable employees to engage from any location, device, and in any time zone. The constant offerings and opportunities to engage using these methods have increased interest in the employee resource groups and have motivated employees to join the groups.

The data also show that employees may have difficulties participating in live events mainly because of work schedules and tasks on a particular day. Most participants were able to engage with no problem using passive methods such as the website, emails, and Facebook. The data also highlighted an element that was not considered before the data collection, an employee classification access issue that prevents agents from accessing all virtual platforms. Choose a better word to more clearly or effectively convey this point. During the data collection, the researcher found a specific workgroup to which the organization will not grant access to virtual

platforms such as Microsoft Teams. This decision by the organization reduces the ability of this workgroup to participate in any meeting or event on this platform. It is critical to highlight that this workgroup is distributed in most locations and is the largest workgroup at the organization. The referenced workgroup is categorized as traditional non-travel, ground handling, and customer service agents.

Research Question 1a. What communication tools are perceived as the best way to engage with the non-travel traditional workforce? The non-travel traditional workforce is those who do not travel as part of their typical jobs and tasks, which may include but are not limited to administrative staff, ground handling, and customer service agents, and base assigned mechanics. Based on the responses in the study, most of the participants appreciate having multiple communication methods, especially those classified as customer service and ground handling agents, since they have limited to no access to some tools. The majority of the non-travel traditional participants mentioned mobile phones were used the most because it is always available. They can access most of the platforms from it, and it is easy to move from location to location. The non-travel traditional participants that work at a station where they do not have to move consistently preferred their computers. Many participants mentioned alternating the devices depending on their task and location. Many mentioned I-Pads as their second choice, which is also made available to many employees. The participants shared their preference for virtual platforms. The virtual platforms used at Piedmont Airlines for the employee resource groups are Microsoft Teams, WebEx, the company website, and Facebook. Most of the participants like and use WebEx as it is the one everyone can access during live events. The company website was mentioned as the place where they got all the information. Additionally, Facebook was referenced as the place where they interacted with others between meetings and

events. The use of Microsoft Teams has been encouraged at the organization, but employee resource group leaders have chosen to limit the platform used as it excludes many employees.

Research Question 1b. What communication tools are perceived as the best way to engage with the travel nontraditional workforce? The nontraditional travel employees are those who travel as an essential part of their job, which requires them to be on the road many days at a time. This group may include but is not limited to pilots, flight attendants, recruiters, mechanics, human resources staff, and safety personnel. In this case, participants under this classified as nontraditional travel employees favored the mobile device as their preferred go-to device when on the road, which is similar to the response from the other traditional non-travel employees. Most of the participants preferred the mobile device for easy access, connectivity and because it is with them most of the time. Individuals can have it at the airport, plugged in a rental car, or even on a plane. It is convenient, and they can access all the platforms from mobile devices. The other preferred devices depend on the job the participant did. For example, all crew members and mechanics preferred the I-Pad as their second choice which they are issued for their jobs. The I-Pad is also considered easy to manage on the road and is always with them while traveling. Other nontraditional travel members who were not crew members preferred the laptop and I-Pad as the secondary choices as they have all the options available.

Research Question 2: How does the "no-travel, traditional" and the "travel, nontraditional" workforces compare in engagement and communication satisfaction among the employee resource group members? The study reveals that there was no noticeable difference between employees' two classifications, traditional non-travel, non-traditional travel when it refers to engagement and communication satisfaction. All participants showed a positive response when asked about their experience and engagement with the employee resource groups

and their preferred communications method and device. Some participants shared some similar issues, but they were unrelated to the actual communication methods or events. However, they were related to work schedules or tasks they were performing. For example, a pilot (travel) working a flight leaving from Gate 24 in Charlotte and the agent (non-travel) working Gate 24 were both going to miss the same meeting regardless of their classification. They were both performing a task that was part of their job that prevented them from joining.

Participants shared that they enjoy the opportunity to engage and connect with other members in between meetings through Facebook groups. Furthermore, participants agreed on how much they appreciate the emails and information posted on the webpage. Another area to highlight is the participant's shared enthusiasm for being part of the employee resource groups and their reasoning behind their joining. Many see the employee resource groups as a resource for development, networking, corroboration, and sharing concerns for a better good. Most participants shared having a passion or a personal affiliation with them, inspiring them to remain part of the groups. Finally, everyone that participated shared an appreciation for the opportunity to learn about other cultures, topics and to meet individuals they would have never known about or met if it was not for these employee resource groups.

Research Question 3. What are the most effective communication methods for increasing employee resource group engagement? Overall, this workforce is unique, and depending on whether an employee has a traditional non-travel or a nontraditional travel job, schedules and tasks are dynamic and unpredictable at times. The nature of this industry and the participants' feedback suggested that there is no one way to engage with prospective members or active members of the employee resource groups. Ideally, what would work best is to have multiple methods to engage with this workforce in many settings, different schedules, and platforms.

Based on the participant feedback in this case study, participants joined because they want to be part of the group and are willing to give their time. Many participants enjoy the different opportunities the employee resource groups have to offer and look forward to the activities. There was also a noticeable agreement amongst participants wanting constant engagement and not just a monthly meeting. Most were in favor of multiple approaches to interact. For example, a combination of such meetings, emails, and discussion on Facebook allows the members that missed the meeting to catch up and at least read about the meeting while engaging and allowing them to contribute differently. Most participants also mentioned that they are looking forward to in-person events once the pandemic is behind everyone. This alone will add another source of communication and engagement. In summary, the more available communication options, the higher the chances are of increasing engagement and attracting more members.

Research Question 4. How can organizational leaders develop more effective strategic communication plans to provide employees with resources to increase workplace engagement and employee interaction? During the interviews and focus group, participants shared concerns about the lack of leadership involvement with the employee resource groups. This quickly became apparent that this is a critical step leadership must take. Leadership needs to get involved with the employee resource groups to learn and connect with team members. Leadership getting involved will help them understand the employees better and inspire and motivate employees, as stated by some participants. During the data collection, some participants mentioned the need for leaders to take action in critical matters such as racism and complicated issues during group meetings. Leaders need to get involved in learning about member concerns and be willing to take action. Leadership must understand the employee resource groups' goals and benefits and take an active approach at promoting the groups, participating, and encouraging employees to join.

Additionally, leaders should continuously evaluate the communication strategy to ensure it reaches as many employees as possible and ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to participate and join the employee resource groups. Finally, leaders need to ensure the employee resource groups provide useful and critical tools and opportunities for continued talent development and ensure they are promoting the culture desired by the organization.

In summary, all employee resource groups' communication is currently virtual at Piedmont Airlines. The virtual platform has allowed the organization to continue to engage with employees all over the United States and continue to promote the groups. The current strategy has been effective at getting the groups started and going as it has allowed everyone to stay connected and engaged even during a world pandemic. When the researcher compares the two workgroup classifications, traditional non-travel, and nontraditional travel, there is little difference in tools and engagement responses. The mobile device is everyone's favorite communications tool. When considering the virtual platform, the most effective and that is available to everyone is WebEx. Participants all agree that it is essential to stay engaged and connected between live events, which the website, emails, and Facebook groups allow them to do. It is also clear that communication strategies will have to be diverse because this is such a unique and distinct workforce. Communication strategies will have to ensure that they connect different audiences at various times and through multiple sources to engage continuously. Leadership is a big part of the employee resource groups' future success, and they need to take an active role and get involved for employees to stay engaged. Finally, ensure equitable engagement opportunity. It would be beneficial for the organization to remove the barriers that prevent some employees from using specific platforms and ensure everyone has access to reliable equipment at the workplace.

The Research Framework

The conceptual framework involved reviewing three theories, included Uses and Gratification Theory, Diffusion of Innovation Theory, and the Transformational Leadership Theory. In addition, the researcher looked at how strategic communication influences employee engagement for growing employee resource groups. This framework attempts to understand how individuals select a communication method, how social groups work, and what motivates individuals to join social groups. The researcher also looked at the influence leadership has on employee engagement to better understand the value and impact when strategizing for communication.

Uses and Gratification Theory. The Uses and Gratification Theory suggest that individuals will select and use media to satisfy their personal needs or to achieve a particular goal (Chen et al., 2010). The finding suggests that individuals will use the media available that will allow them to engage when needed to be part of the employee resource group and take advantage of the events and activities. For example, participant P1LDRI shares that for them Facebook is most convenient because they can interact at their own time,

I really like the Facebook Groups. I think it's nice that we can put something out there and people can interact in their own time because I know it can be difficult to get everybody in one place at the same time.

The Uses and Gratification Theory also suggest individuals are more likely to take part and select media that seems beneficial or likely to meet their needs (Hossain et al., 2019), which can align with the comment made by participant P2LDRI who states during the interview:

I want to personally educate myself on inclusion and diversity, so I choose to participate in all of the, ERGs. As far as attending events, it depends on the event and what I can learn from it and whether it is at a convenient time for me.

Making sure communication efforts keep individuals interested and engaged is critical. Also, the theory suggests that media must align with the needs of the individual. In this case study, we saw the media must be convenient for the type of job and tasks part of their job.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory looks at how a new concept, new technology, or innovation is assumed and how fast it can extend in a group of individuals (Williams et al., 2019). In this case study, the new phenomenon or concept is the employee resource groups, which, based on the study participants, spread through peers and corporate communications. Many participants shared that they knew they wanted to be part of the groups after reading or hearing about the employee resource groups. This intuitive desire to be part of the groups and a new idea is seen in many individuals whose instincts are driven by interest, information, urgency, motivation, or the risk involved (Bianchi et al., 2017). In general, some individuals are very interested in new ideas and who will act immediately, but there are those individuals who will wait around for others to join first (Li & Huang, 2016). Most of the participants in the current study have expressed joining the groups fast and as soon as they had the opportunity. They associated the groups with great opportunities. Participant P3LDRI knew there was value in the groups, “I joined because I saw value. I look for opportunities, not just for me, but for those around me as well,” which instinctively shared the information with peers. Individuals will be drawn to what benefits them and where they see the value, and if the experience is positive, there is a high chance they will share the knowledge and attract more people. In strategic communication, it is critical to keep in mind how new concepts spread as

current members' experiences can influence other potential members. Also, as gathered from the participants, it is essential to understand what satisfies and meets employee needs in communication for further strategic planning and influences information distribution.

Transformational Leadership Theory. The transformational leadership Theory talks about leaders who inspire, develop, motivate others, and work through obstacles (Steinmann et al., 2018). Transformational leadership seeks to develop ideas and new perspectives to create new and better ways of growing an organization (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). In this case study, participants shared the lack of transformational leadership attributes amongst executive leadership. Participants highlighted the lack of participation and involvement at events and meetings. These leadership actions can jeopardize the employee resource groups' future growth as the lack of senior leadership involvement can send the wrong signals and demotivate current members. A lack of leadership involvement will reduce the strategic effort's value, which can hinder the groups' benefits (Ramsey et al., 2017). Comments like the one from participant P11LDRI shows the need for more transformational leadership behaviors and attitudes,

I think we could do a better job of upper management being part of the ERGs. I know that the Maintenance Department can do a better job. We need to continue to communicate, it's just a matter of trying to get the word out to people and push to get people involved.

On the other hand, participants see these supportive and transformational leadership behaviors from the team members leading the groups, which is having a positive effect on members. Participant P2LDRI says “I enjoy assisting the ERGs, with spreading awareness and educating Piedmont employees. Through the best communication channels that we have available.” Transformational leadership skills and behaviors can significantly impact

organizational culture and assimilation of new concepts, which is why senior leadership at Piedmont Airlines needs to get involved.

Anticipated Themes

A review of the anticipated themes and the findings in this case study shows the complexity of building a communication strategy to increase employee engagement in aviation. Moreover, the study reveals the anticipated and additional themes and gives insight into strategic communication in aviation. It was anticipated that the study would show noticeable communication discrepancies between the workgroups, inconsistent interactions, and differences in communication tools. What was not expected was the unique situation that forced the industry to gravitate to a virtual solution, which created a one-stop and solution for the employee resource groups to interact. Having the virtual setting only reduced the discrepancies and allowed for more consistent interactions. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone has the same communication solution, opportunities, and platforms for interactions.

The study revealed that regardless of the workgroup, the selection of devices and media would be based more on schedule and unique personal needs at meetings and events. Another anticipated theme was differences in engagement, satisfaction, and perception of the benefits involved with engaging in the groups. The participants revealed that perception of the benefits and overall engagement and communication satisfaction was driven by the desire to be part of something new or the benefits involved. Individuals were attracted by what was in it for them, opportunities for development, networking, and growing. The study also revealed that there was not an evident distinction between the two workgroup classifications. Finally, the last theme anticipated was the lack of knowledge about employee resource groups, lack of understanding of organizational benefits, lack of buy-in from upper management, unclear expectations, and lack of

tools and resources. The participant data corroborated these anticipated themes as the data revealed a lack of understanding and lack of involvement from senior leadership and the need for leadership buy-in. Finally, the study showed that the lack of resources and tools is related to a specific job classification and not an overall deficiency, which is what was anticipated. In summary, the themes anticipated were, for the most part, validated with the data from participants in the case study. Some unpredicted themes gave additional information about the workforce and will be beneficial for future strategic communication planning.

Summary of Findings

This case study's findings are supported by data from individual interviews, focus groups, and preexisting data. The researcher's objective was to address the lack of strategic communication for promoting employee resource groups, resulting in the organizations' inability to establish and grow employee resource groups. The data collected helped the researcher take a closer look at current communication strategies and what areas can be improved to increase engagement amongst aviation employees, which was the purpose of the study. This qualitative case study aimed to expand and develop knowledge regarding employee resource groups by looking closer at a widely distributed workforce and understanding how the lack of strategically planned communication can impact employee resource group development and employee engagement. After gathering the data and analyzing the information, the researcher answered the research questions and arrived at the following conclusion. The first finding and highlight were that the organization was only engaging with employees virtually, which allowed for a centralized communication platform.

The communication methods for engaging with employee resource groups at Piedmont Airlines have been successful. The employee resource groups can engage with employees by

using multiple platforms to access from various devices. Employees can participate in many events and activities at different times and from many devices, making it more accessible. Piedmont's communication methods have allowed the employee resource groups to connect with employees all over the United States to provide support and tools that benefit all. The organization can improve productivity and engagement by considering the obstacles preventing some employees from engaging, such as looking at ways to provide equal access to virtual platforms to all employees at the organization.

Another recommendation is to ensure at least one computer at each location has audio and cameras, which would allow employees to participate more often when they have free time. The study also highlights the lack of senior leadership involvement that is critical for communication and transferring information. The organization's leaders should look for new and innovative ways to get involved and take active roles with the employee resource groups. The organization has provided multiple communication engagement methods for employees, aligning with this industry's complexity, employee schedules, and unpredictable tasks. Leadership must continue to offer employees variable communication methods to promote engagement and grow employee resource groups. Lastly, the researcher would suggest incorporating in-person communication and interaction once the COVID-19 Pandemic restrictions are lifted, which can help increase engagement and propel the growth of the employee resource groups.

Adapting and adjusting communication strategies can assist in growing employee resource group membership by increasing engagement. Through these employee resource groups, the organization can impact the employee experience and create a better workplace. Piedmont Airlines still has a long way to go. At the time of the study, the total number of employees at the organization was 10,000. Only 609 employees were members of at least one

employee resource group, accounting for only 6% of the workforce. From the 79 locations, the organization serviced and had employees; only at 54 of those locations did the organization report having employee resource group members, which account for 68% , giving the organization significant room for improvement.

Application to Professional Practice

The application to professional practice will include discussing the value this case study has and the potential impact on the aviation industry. It will include how this study can improve general business practices that will improve employee engagement and grow employee resource groups. Finally, it will discuss the possible implementation strategies that organizations can use to leverage the findings of this study.

This case study can influence how airlines that are looking to grow employee resources groups evaluate and look at strategic communication. Clearly, in this case study, the data shows that it is an intricate process when strategizing for employee engagement. This process includes considering the workforce, the demographic distribution, resources available, leadership buy-in, and employee perception. The study has also increased awareness of the discrepancies in employee access to resources within the airline, which is a critical and urgent in order to increase employee engagement and grow the employee resource groups. Furthermore, the case study shows the impact and influence that leadership has on employee engagement and employee retention within the employee resource groups. This is critical for airlines to consider as they implement new strategies to grow the groups and add value to the organization's diversity equity and inclusion initiatives. Some general business practices that this case study can influence in the area of strategic communication for employee engagement and growing employee resource groups are the following:

First, it will emphasize the value and encourage leaders to understand their workforce and how systems work. If leaders at the airline want to take an active approach at making sure employee resource groups are available for everyone, there has to be a better understanding of all areas, workgroups, and how these work. Especially, if the initiative is intended for all employees to engage. The assumption that everything works the same for everyone has prevented many individuals from engaging and in the long run can hinder success.

Second, the study highlights that employees, regardless of the type of job they do, are considering accessibility as one of the main factors when engaging—emphasizing the use of mobile phones, iPads, and laptops. This finding will allow leadership to consider methods and tools easily viewed and compatible with these types of devices for a higher chance of engagement amongst the workforce.

Third, the study shows that many jobs in aviation that do not require travel, still require the employee to be ‘on the go,’ to have unpredictable schedules, and tasks that can change within minutes, preventing employees from committing to a set schedule and participate in live events. This information shows that it is essential for leaders to consider having multiple engaging methods and platforms that can accommodate employees from all areas and still make them feel included and engaged.

Fourth, the data in this study shows the desire from employees to see leadership take an active role, be more involved, and increase presence within the employee resource group events. This data serves as the foundation for understanding the need for leadership to be active and engaged when developing communication strategies for growing employee resource groups and promoting employee engagement. The data proves that it impacts employee retention and motivation within the employee resource groups when leadership is involved and present.

Fifth, the study encourages leaders to consider looking at any organizational policy that may be modified, updated, or even created to support the change in practices that prevent employees from participating and engaging with employee resource groups.

In the end, the findings of this case study can influence how leaders in aviation look at communication strategies for growing employee resource groups and promoting employee engagement in such a unique and diverse workforce. Additionally, the findings can encourage the implementation of new strategies that can help leverage the results in this study by giving leaders in aviation a broader spectrum of what may work for this specific industry.

One of the critical aspects to consider in strategic planning for aviation is the uniqueness of the industry and all the unpredictable circumstances that exist that impact the ability to engage with employees. This study shows that it is also critical for leaders to consider all angles that can influence the overall outcome of communication strategies. Some of the essential areas to consider and that emerged from this case study include employee classification, employee locations, resources, technology, leadership involvement, and job type. This insight provides the airlines and other similar organizations with the perspective to assist in strategic communication planning and implementation.

One strategy that organizations such as airlines and similar industries can embrace is developing incentive programs for leaders who contribute and participate in the employee resource groups and employee engagement initiatives. By promoting leadership involvement, the organization can increase buy-in, communication, participation, and employee morale (Steinmann et al., 2018). Leadership involvement can also help to identify influencing factors in strategic communication, which can help effectively adapt strategies as needed to benefit a specific workforce (Hunitie, 2018).

After the data analysis in this study, the data highlighted how organizations need to consider a broader worldview in strategic planning to ensure that all perspectives are considered and that all employees are represented. A more comprehensive worldview can ensure everyone has a voice and that the strategy does not leave any workgroup out, limiting engagement opportunities (Elliott et al., 2017). To achieve an environment where all perspectives are considered, organizations can develop councils that meet each quarter and constantly discuss new opportunities to improve communication strategies for increasing employee engagement through employee resource groups.

Finally, the employee resource groups promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace; embracing diversity and encouraging an inclusive workplace is essential and, in many cases, a critical part of the business strategy to succeed (Ohunakin et al., 2019). Introducing the employee resource groups to new employees through the onboarding process and orientations are a great strategy to introduce employee engagement and promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace, which can have a positive impact in new hire retention and the growth of the employee resource groups (Ohunakin et al., 2019).

In summary, the finding of this study gives a good overview of the potential areas to consider when working on communication strategies to grow employee resource groups and employee engagement. The results have highlighted some of the critical areas at Piedmont Airlines can provide other similar organizations with a base idea of crucial areas to consider that will have an impact on the success of the communication strategies.

Recommendation for Further Study

This study was conducted at Piedmont Airlines, a regional airline owned by American Airlines, and the study was comprised of employee resource group members and their experience

engaging with the groups. To expand the study results, the same research can be replicated at the other two regional airlines owned by American Airlines which includes Envoy and PSA.

Collecting data from all three carriers will allow the expansion of the body of knowledge, which can be used to compare significant findings. Two areas that can be looked at as the body of knowledge grows with the two additional airlines would be the following:

Themes

It will be ideal to determine if the themes generated amongst the three regional carriers are similar. All three carriers are based in different locations and have some operational differences. Understanding the variations between all three airlines can help identify best practices and barriers that help understand areas with significant impact in strategic communication.

Leadership

The comparison in leadership involvement and employee's perception of leadership involvement is another area that can be compared amongst the three careers. This will help determine if there is a positive correlation between leadership involvement and employee engagement. Ultimately, the study can be expanded to American Airlines employee resource groups and determine if there is a significant difference between regional airlines and major airlines. The anticipated results will be a difference between the regional airlines and major airlines, but understanding these differences can help the organizations strategize and collaborate for a more efficient communication strategy for employee engagement and growing employee resource groups.

Reflections

The opportunity to study strategic communication for growing employee resource groups within the aviation industry, specifically the regional airline Piedmont Airlines, has brought up many questions about how the organization can successfully engage with as many employees as possible and provide everyone the same opportunities all the differences amongst the workgroups. There is no doubt that the organization can benefit from the employee resource groups and continue promoting them while making sure no one is being excluded. Learning all the influencing factors for communication strategies makes it somewhat of a complex process requiring continuous effort to improve best practices, adaptability to incorporate new ideas, and flexibility to ensure compliance.

Personal and Professional Growth

From a personal and professional perspective, the study has provided me with an incredible amount of knowledge and a comprehensive view about the employee resource groups in general. Knowing the benefits of the employee resource groups and how useful they are to growing employees within the organization, changing culture, and creating a better workforce, has made me a better advocate for these groups. Having a vast understanding of some of the barriers that the workforce at Piedmont Airlines deals with has given me a new outlook on strategic communication and how to communicate the information to the right individuals to create change. The study has allowed me to look at how I contribute to the organization and the human resources department in the diversity, equity, and inclusion space. Increasing my self-awareness in this topic inspired and allowed me to successfully implement new ideas and strategies that have resulted from this dissertation process. As a result, I provided the leadership and created the diversity equity and inclusion council, promoted changing policies for a better

workplace and formally facilitated equitable access to communication resources for all employees. In addition, I have been able to take an active role with the employee resource groups as a mentor and leader for content development, creation of events, and providing training. Understanding the impact of the employee resource groups in the aviation industry, learning about this topic, and creating change with Piedmont Airlines has also allowed me to become a key contributor and collaborator within aviation organizations, other airlines, and with aviation schools.

In general, being part of the doctoral program and conducting this study has influenced my career and personal perspective on goals and life in a positive way. Going through the doctoral journey has made me more conscious of time management, the meaning and impact of the work I do, and the contributions I can make at work and in the lives of others I come in contact with in workplace and outside of work. As a Human Resource professional, this doctoral journey has helped me develop better critical thinking skills, written and oral communication skills, analysis and problem-solving skills, and leadership skills. Overall, this process has made me a better professional.

Biblical Perspective

As a leader in human resource, I have been exposed to and have experience in many areas such as employee relations, training, talent acquisition, and most recently the diversity equity and inclusion space. This time around, the role in diversity equity and inclusion felt like I was meant to be in the role, or like says in Ephesians 4:1 (ESV) “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,” it felt I was called to do this job. When deciding on a research topic, this one felt right and I organically pursued it. I genuinely believe we are all destined to serve God in many vocations, and my

vocation is giving others a voice through the work I do in the diversity equity and inclusion space. In Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV), it states “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” I intend to serve the Lord through this work and in many other ways throughout my career.

This case study from a biblical perspective shows communication strategy as a way to help individuals from all backgrounds and experiences come together and grow through different methods. In proverbs in the 22:2 (ESV) it says, “The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all.” The same way the Lord saw us, we should see each other, regardless of our backgrounds, experience, and difference, together we are one. As the workforce continues to shift and become more diverse, we must continue to look for ways to embrace each other.

Learning to work together and engage with one another provides a sense of community and support that creates a bond and a stronger workforce. In Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (ESV) it says,

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken, together we are stronger and it allows for individuals to support each other through difficult times.

In this study, we saw how in the midst of a pandemic, employees still engaged and adapted to a virtual platform, which resulted in a steady growth in membership and engagement. Having the centralized virtual communication platform allowed employee resource group members to continue to support one another and engage throughout the uncertain times.

The case study highlights the need for additional leadership support in strategic communication and the initiatives created to promote and grow the employee resource groups. Proverbs 16:12 (ESV) states, “Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness.” Leading requires integrity and giving it your all. If you want to have an impact on others and eventually lead to great outcomes, you need to weed out compromise and shortcuts, which means getting involved. Proverbs (27:23–24) says, “Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations.” The added benefit of leaders getting involved with the employee resource groups is that they are able to continuously monitor what is working and what is not. They are able to identify barriers easier, and ensure keeping track of resources to be able to act and adapt to any change more efficiently.

Strategic communication involves working together and considering many areas and circumstances that influence and that have an impact on the overall goals. Leaders must engage and work together to create a vision to help the organization succeed. An employee resource group is a tool that allows employees to embrace a vision and work together. This can give employees hope for a better culture and a great future. This case study emphasizes how critical it is to ensure a worldview for success and making sure everyone is heard and included, as stated in Proverbs 15:22 (ESV), “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers, they succeed,” ensuring a diverse perspective in strategic communication, will increase success.

In summary, working on this case study had a significant impact on my perspective towards the employee resource groups, strategic communication, employee engagement, and leadership as it expanded my knowledge and allowed me to learn about these areas. The case study influenced how I approach communication strategies for aviation employees. For example,

one must never assume there will be one communication method that will work for all workgroups. Instead, there needs to be a broader perspective and a close look at each workgroup to see what may work best. In addition, this case study has personally inspired me to continue to research employee resource groups in aviation and other related topics in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 22, 2021

Lynnette Darnell

Kimberly Johnson

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-460 THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION

FOR BUILDING EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS IN AVIATION

Dear Lynnette Darnell, Kimberly Johnson:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR

46:101(b):

Category 2. (iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Participant Criteria

Participant Criteria Form

Date: _____

Participant Criteria Form

Date: _____

Name: _____

Participant randomly selected for: _____ Individual Interview _____ Focus Group

Criteria	Meets Criteria √
The employee is a member of an ERG, or has attended two or more ERG events.	
The employee has worked in aviation for 12 months or longer.	
The employee knows what the ERG's are and is familiar with the dynamic of the groups.	
The employee is familiar with the benefits the ERG can have on the organization.	

Appendix C: Participant Consent Agreement

Consent Form

The Importance of Strategic Communication for Building Employee Resource Groups in
Aviation

Lynnette Darnell
Liberty University
School Of Business

You have been selected to participate in a research study that will explore the experience and perception of regional airline employees related to communication and the impact on employee engagement. You have been selected because you are a member of an employee resource group at the organization or have participated in at least two events hosted by the groups. You have also met the candidates' basic criteria, which include tenure in aviation and knowledge about the employee resource groups.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

Lynnette Darnell, a doctoral candidate in the School of Business at Liberty University, will conduct the study.

Background Information:

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to expand and develop knowledge regarding employee resource groups by looking closer at a widely distributed workforce and understanding how the lack of strategically planned communication can impact employee engagement and development of employee resource groups.

Procedure: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to do the following:

Interview or Focus Group. Participate in a 40-minute, in-person or video call, semi-structured interview, or focus group with open-ended questions. The format and procedure are designed to understand your perspective on the employee resource groups and communication methods used for employee engagement. The interview or focus group will be recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Transcript Review. Review the completed verbatim interview transcript for accuracy and to ensure that your perspective is accurately reflected. This process will take approximately 20 minutes and will take place.

Risks: This study's risks are minimal, which means they are equal to the risk you would come upon on your everyday life.

The minimal risk the study may present are the following:

Participant fatigue. The interviews and focus groups may last up to 30-40 minutes, increasing the chances of fatigue for participants. To reduce participant fatigue, the participants will have the opportunity for breaks at any time during the process.

Emotional outbreaks. Because the process will be asking participants about their personal experiences, opinions, and perspectives, there is a chance to relive a personal negative experience. Participants will be allowed to skip any question they feel uncomfortable answering to ensure participants feel safe and avoid any emotional outbreaks.

Understanding capacity. All participants for this study will be capable and able to answer all the questions and participate with no limitations. To ensure this is not an issue, the researcher will review the consent form, process, and purpose of the study with the participants and not proceed until the participant has asked questions and has agreed to participate.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit for being part of this study. The benefit to society can potentially include for the organization to enhance communication strategies that may increase employee engagement for the aviation workforce. In addition, the body of knowledge on how communication strategy can be improved to develop employee resource groups can assist other airlines and organizations in the diversity and inclusion space.

Compensation: No compensation.

Confidentiality: All records and participant information will remain confidential. Researcher records will be stored securely, password-protected, and only the researcher will have access. If necessary, any identifiable information will be removed before the information being shared to share data. The following steps will be followed to ensure confidentiality:

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym that they will be referred to in an effort to protect confidentiality. The interviews will take place in a location where others will not hear or see the participant while the interview is taking place.
- Data will be stored in a safe and password-protected file on the computer. If necessary, in a locked file in a private home. The information may be shared in future research. Finally, three years from the date of the study completion, all records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher only. Recordings will be stored on a password-protected file for three years and then erased. Only the researcher and the program director and committee members will have access to the recordings upon request. The researcher's notes will be stored in a residence inside a lockable drawer. Three years from the date of the study's completion, the data, notes, and digital recordings will be destroyed.

Nature of the Study: Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you will not be penalized or lose benefits if you refuse to participate or decide to stop. The decision to participate or not participate will not affect your current or future relationship with Liberty

University, the airline, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting the relationships listed above. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and not included in this study.

You may contact Lynnette Darnell at xxx-xxx-xxxx/xxxxxxx@liberty.edu any time you have questions about the research. The researcher's faculty mentor is Dr. Kimberly Johnson, and you may contact her at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

If you agree to participate, you must be given a signed copy of this document and a written summary of the research.

Signing this document means that the research study, including the above information, has been described to you orally and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

Signing this document means that I have agreed and given the researcher permission to audio record my interview as a participant of the study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol and Guide

Ensure the following items are completed:

Prior to the interview:

_____ Confirm participant the day prior. Make sure they have the data, time, location. If the interview is online, make sure they have all the links and video call information.

_____ Create a private (password protected) for the participant.

_____ Ensure the criteria form is completed.

_____ Ensure consent form is signed, or ensure participant consents prior at the start of the interview.

Day of the interview:

_____ Test all equipment and technology.

_____ If the interview is in-person, set up the room, and eliminate any potential distractions. If the interview is online, ensure the background is appropriate, and make sure there are no pets or possible distractions.

_____ Review all research questions before meeting each participant to refocus on the research objective.

During the interview:

_____ The following script: Read to each participant to ensure uniformity with all participants.

“My name is Lynnette Darnell. I am researching the importance of strategic communication for building employee resource groups in aviation. As an employee of this regional airline that has embraced the employee resource groups and meets the criteria for this study, you are ideal for this research. Your experience, perspective, and

involvement with the ERGs will allow you to best answer the following questions and give valuable insight. My goal is to help determine how we can improve our communication strategies to better grow the employee resource groups. I will ask you numerous questions, which I want you to answer your thoughts, feelings, experience, and perspective in your own words. Please respond to in your own words, take your time, and not be afraid to be 100% honest. I will record the information to guarantee I have precisely captured your thoughts and will provide you an opportunity to correct or add clarifying comments to any of my records. All recordings and notes will be kept confidential and destroyed after three years. The only individuals who will see the information gathered here today will join my dissertation team and me. Lastly, you are volunteering your time and information, if at any time you wish to end the interview, you can.”

Preliminary interview questions:

- Do you have any questions for me before the start of the interview?
- Do you agree to the participant of a follow-up call with me to ensure the accuracy of the information the following interview?

“Next, I am going to proceed with the interview questions. Please describe in detail your response. Please provide as much background and context to help me understand your perspective. There is no wrong answer, only your perspective on the question being asked”

Interview questions:

Interview question 1: What has been your experience engaging and communicating with the ERG leaders and members so far at this airline (Airline name)?

Interview question 2: Based on the type of industry and nature of your job (“no-travel, traditional” or “travel, nontraditional”), what are the most effective communication tools and methods that best meet your needs and allow you to engage with the ERG groups?

Potential follow up question A: Is there a tool or method that works best, or that you prefer and why?

Potential follow-up question B: Would you like to suggest a new tool or communication method for employee engagement?

Interview question 3: What are the deciding factors for you to participate in ERG meetings and events?

Interview question 4: How does your current job requirements or nature of the job influence you to stay engaged or connected with the ERG and their events?

Interview question 5: What would you consider the most effective, useful, and engaging communication tools/methods are to participate and engage with the ERG’s based on you the type of job you have at the airline?

Interview question 6: What is your perception of leadership’s support for the ERG and communication methods and tools for employees to engage in these groups?

Interview Question 7: How do the leaders you have known and worked for impacted your decision to remain in an ERG member?

Potential follow up question A: What are the character or leadership qualities of these leaders that influenced you either positively or negatively?

After the interview:

_____ “At this time, I would like to review the questions and responses and confirm if the information I have recorded is accurate. Please let me know if there is any information I need to modify?”

_____ Make sure you thank that participant for being part of the research.

“Thank you for your time and insight on this topic. I appreciate your contribution to this study. I will be doing a follow-up check-in 24 hours. If there is any additional information or if you think of anything else, you can provide me the information on the call.”

Appendix E: Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Protocol and Guide

Ensure the following items are completed:

Total Amount of Participants: _____

Prior to the interview:

_____ Confirm participants the day prior. Make sure they have the data, time, location. If the interview is online, make sure they have all the links and video call information.

_____ Create a private (password protected) for the data.

_____ Ensure the criteria form is completed for all participants.

_____ Ensure consent form is signed, or ensure participant consents prior at the start of the interview.

Day of the interview:

_____ Test all equipment and technology.

_____ If the interview is in-person, set up the room, and eliminate any potential distractions. If the interview is online, ensure the background is appropriate, and make sure there are no pets or possible distractions.

_____ Review all research questions before meeting each participant to refocus on the research objective.

During the interview:

_____ The following script: Read to all participant.

“My name is Lynnette Darnell. I am researching the importance of strategic communication for building employee resource groups in aviation. As an employee of this regional airline that has embraced the employee resource groups and meets the criteria for this study, you are ideal for this research. Your experience, perspective, and

involvement with the ERG's will allow you to best answer the following questions and give valuable insight. My goal is to help determine how we can improve our communication strategies to better grow the employee resource groups. I will ask you numerous questions, which I want you to answer your thoughts, feelings, experience, and perspective in your own words. Please respond to in your own words, take your time, and not be afraid to be 100% honest. I will record the information to guarantee I have precisely captured your thoughts and will provide you an opportunity to correct or add clarifying comments to any of my records. All recordings and notes will be kept confidential and destroyed after three years. The only individuals who will see the information gathered here today will join my dissertation team and me. Lastly, you are volunteering your time and information, if at any time you wish to end the interview, you can."

Preliminary interview questions:

- Do you have any questions for me before the start with the focus group discussion?
- Do you agree to the participant of a follow-up call with me to ensure the accuracy of the information the following interview?

"Next, I am going to proceed with the interview questions. Please describe in detail your response. Please provide as much background and context to help me understand your perspective. There is no wrong answer, only your perspective on the question being asked."

Interview question 1: What has been your experience engaging and communicating with the ERG leaders and members so far at this airline (Airline name)?

Interview question 2: Based on the type of industry and nature of your job (“no-travel, traditional” or “travel, nontraditional”), what are the most effective communication tools and methods that best meet your needs and allow you to engage with the ERG groups?

Potential follow up question A: Is there a tool or method that works best, or that you prefer and why?

Potential follow-up question B: Would you like to suggest a new tool or communication method for employee engagement?

Interview question 3: What are the deciding factors for you to participate in ERG meetings and events?

Interview question 4: How does your current job requirements or nature of the job influence you to stay engaged or connected with the ERG and their events?

Interview question 5: What would you consider the most effective, useful, and engaging communication tools/methods are to participate and engage with the ERG’s based on you the type of job you have at the airline?

Interview question 6: What is your perception of leadership’s support for the ERG and communication methods and tools for employees to engage in these groups?

Interview Question 7: How do the leaders you have known and worked for impacted your decision to remain in an ERG member?

Potential follow up question A: What are the character or leadership qualities of these leaders that influenced you either positively or negatively?

After the interview:

_____ “At this time, I would like to review the questions and responses and confirm if the information I have recorded is accurate. Please let me know if there is any information I need to modify?”

_____ Make sure you thank that participant for being part of the research.

“Thank you for your time and insight on this topic. I appreciate your contribution to this study. I will be doing a follow-up check-in 24 hours. If there is any additional information or if you think of anything else, you can provide me the information on the call.”

Appendix F: Candidate Recruitment Letter

Recruitment Letter

Dear []:

As a graduate student in the School of Business at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for doctorate degree. The purpose of my research is to expand and develop knowledge regarding employee resource groups by looking closer at a workforce that is widely distributed and to understand how the lack of strategically planned communication can influence employee resource group development and employee engagement.

I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

Candidates selected for this study have met following criteria

1. Have worked in aviation 12+ months.
2. Be a member of any employee resource group at the organization
3. If not a member, a potential member that has participated of a minimum of two events hosted by any of the groups.
4. Have a clear understanding of the employee resource groups and their impact.

Candidates who are willing to participate, will be asked to participate in a recorded in-person or video interview. In addition, you they will be asked to review the verbatim interview transcript to ensure the transcript reflects an accurate depiction of your answers and experience. The process should take approximately one hour for you to complete the procedures listed. Your name will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential and an alias will be used to avoid identifying you in the responses.

To confirm your participation, please respond to this email confirming your interest, and willingness to share your perspectives and experiences in a truthful, open, and detailed manner. I will contact you via email within seven days of your response to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this message. Please review, sign the consent document, and return it to me when we meet for the interview.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Lynnette Darnell



February 8, 2021

Lynnette Darnell

Human Resources Manager
[REDACTED]

This letter is to inform you that after evaluating the request for recruiting candidates at Piedmont Airlines for the doctoral research study on 'THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION FOR BUILDING EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS IN AVIATION' - This request has been approved. The expectation is that during this process, you follow all safety and employee confidentiality protocols. Please be advised that this is an approval to recruit participants, but given the unknown number of participants, dates, and duration of the interviews, Piedmont Airlines cannot guarantee space to conduct interviews at any of the operating locations. Finally, proper COVID-19 guidelines and procedures will need to be followed at all times.

Your study and findings may potentially have a positive impact on all our employee resource groups; we look forward to the results of the study. Any questions, please contact me at [REDACTED].

Regards,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Director, Human Resources
Piedmont Airlines