

CULTIVATING EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS

by

Kimberly England

Dissertation

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

Liberty University, School of Business

May 2023

Abstract

The study was a qualitative flexible study on the actions and behaviors of employees and their leaders in cultivating internal relationships that have an impact on the business results of an organization. Using various triangulation methods, interviews, observations, and archived data, the study is constructive in design. I interpreted the experiences of the 20 participants (6 leaders and 14 employees). The flexible design allowed for follow-up questions that required changing the scope of the data collection as more data occurred. Validity and reliability are important factors in the qualitative research as these factors add to the credibility of the findings. Through member checking, validation occurred from the findings from the participants and checked for accuracy in the emerged themes. I was the primary data collector, analyzer, and documentation protector. Protecting the identity of the participants and Company X was done by keeping the documents, transcriptions, and findings on a password protected device. After 3 years, destroying the s information is necessary. Ethically, I did ensure the findings were free from bias using bracketing. Bracketing is a diligent process that involves the researcher to perform self-examinations to ensure that the bias and personal conclusions do not interfere with the true findings of the study.

Key words: *employee engagement, leadership responsibility, exceptional customer service*

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Approvals

Kimberly England, Doctoral Candidate

Date

Dr. Kimberly Anthony, Dissertation Chair

Date

Dr. Maria Garcia de la Noceda, Committee Member

Date

Dr. Edward M. Moore Ph.D., Director of Doctoral Programs

Date

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my daddy. I am daddy's girl and always will be. He was drafted into the military during the Vietnam War and ended up making the Army his career. He always wanted to go to college, but family obligations kept him working. He worked hard and loved without words. My daddy showed me that with hard work, patience, and dedication, anything is possible. He had faith in me when I clearly doubted myself. He taught me how to respect others no matter what they did or said to me. I learned how to speak in a more profound manner, carry my head high, and to act like a lady. He taught me that being an ethical and honest person sometimes meant that I may stand alone in this world. His life is a legacy that I have passed on to my children and grandchildren. Daddy was known, not for the things he did, but how he treated, helped, and encouraged others. He was a personnel sergeant in the Army and seeing someone succeed brought him so much joy. Success did not hold monetary value for him. Success was having a name that other people valued, trusted, and respected. He did not do anything amazing that changed the world. However, he changed my world when he came in the middle of the night when I was just twelve years old and brought me to live with him and my stepmom. They both worked hard to make sure I had everything I needed to succeed. He believed in me. My character and resiliency come from his strength, his walk, and his words of encouragement. When people ask me why I go to school, why I want to pursue a doctoral degree, first I tell them that I wanted the degree because someone told me I was not smart enough to be successful. Most importantly, I also tell them that getting an education was not only my dream, but my daddy's dream. He wanted so much to go to college. He self-taught himself in everything he knew and did. He had no formal education, only what the Army taught him. So, Daddy, this is for you, all for you.

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The next acknowledgement I want to extend is to my amazing family. To an amazing husband that learned to cook when I was sitting at the computer or sleeping with exhaustion, which put up with my tears and my self-doubt, which encouraged me even when he did not know what I was talking about and prayed for me every night. To my children that supported my time to work on my dissertation and understood when I could not be there or missed important events in their lives. To my daughter, thank you for listening to all my complaining, my crying, and then just telling me to just get it done! I also could not have done this without the ‘you can do this’ attitude that my grandchildren gave me. They are the reason I do everything in my life, and they will never know how much I love and care for them. I wanted them to see that you are never too old to chase your dreams. God knew what He was doing when He made me a mother, but He truly loved me more when He made me a grandmother. Being a grandmother will always be my greatest accomplishment in life. I would also like to thank those that said I was not smart enough or that I would not be anything in life. Thank you for the motivation.

Lastly, I thank God every day. I know that I could not have done any of this without Him. I thank Him for loving me even when I could not love myself, for holding my head up when I felt as though I had given all I could, and for putting people in my life that molded me into the person I am today.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore what factors contribute to the failure of a successful relationship between leadership and employees and how the failure of the internal relationship affects the customer relationship with the organization, which affects the customer service ratings and the business results for the company. Dalla Pozza et al. (2018) conducted a similar study and concluded that organizations that include placed employees have a significant potential for higher business results, employee retention, and customer ratings. Yu et al. (2017) indicated that leadership style was a crucial element in the effectiveness of internal relationships on job performance and job satisfaction. Internal branding through the employees is a competitive advantage that sets a company apart from similar companies in the service industry that is dependent on word-of-mouth advertising (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). This study included examining the attitudinal and behavioral factors that affect the ability of employees and leaders to cultivate a relationship that empowers the success of the employees and leaders to provide an ultimate service experience to the customer. This case study explored the relational aspects between the interaction of employees and their leaders and the impact this interaction has on the business results of a company. Small business leaders will need to strategically rethink the importance of internal relationships and how this relationship can affect company morale, productivity, and customer perspective.

Background of the Problem

While there are many different forms of businesses, this research includes a focus on the service industry. Businesses in the service industry rely on the customer base and the demand for the services offered to customers. Schaarschmidt et al. (2018) definition of a service industry organization is a company that provides an intangible activity or professional support to

customers. With this definition, the service industry entails all different types of customers based on the services offered. Bradenberg (2018) stated that little difference exists between a product and a service industry.; However, Bradenberg pointed out that the consumer in a product industry has a tangible product while the service industry customer is purchasing the skills of the service provider or owner. For this research study, the service industry company is a retail service industry that services residents in the rural area of North Carolina in the city of Raeford who had heating and air conditioning needs. The definition of a service company that does not produce goods but provides an intangible product, the primary focus of a service industry, is the customer's view of the service company. Customers views an organization through the reputation of the company, through interactions with the personnel, and the observation on how well the employees work together as a whole to satisfy the demands of the customer who is depending on the service providers' expertise (*Customer Experience Management Market Report, 2021–2028*, 2021). Producing a customer-centric culture must start within the organization.

Yohn's (2018) concluded that every employee, even the background employee, affects the customer in some way, whether the interaction is with the first phone call requesting service, the service itself, billing, or the follow-up. The background employee is the employee not visible to the customer but vital to the organization's daily business transactions. Vasani and Pillai (2019) recommended that creating solid customer centric includes culture. Organization leaders must start by taking care of their employees through cultivating relationships. Vasani and Pillai (2019) indicated that 85% of employees do not engage in the workplace; an unengaged worker is a liability rather than an asset. The biggest challenge in the workplace is engaging employees with the complexities of human nature and strict regulations. Osborne and Hammoud (2017)

indicated that an organization leader's ability to cultivate positive employee-employer relationships is a crucial element in the vitality of the organization, longevity, and bottom-line profitability.

Metwally et al. (2019) concluded that leaders are the most influential aspect in creating and fostering positive relationships through examples, demonstrating clear ethical standards, relating positive teamwork through recognition, respect, and communication. Sawithri et al. (2017) concluded that employer and employee relationships are essential in the growth of the organization and in the productivity of the organization. Employees inspired by an organization's leaders are more prone to produce better and more results, increase competency levels, and improve customer service skills because of positivity, confidence, and a sense of partnership with the organization (Sawithri et al., 2017).

Problem Statement

The general problem addressed in this study was the challenges leaders experience in cultivating the employee and employer relationships that result in the inability of an organization to achieve optimal levels of success. Workplace related stress, such as constant disputes and strained relationships between employee and employers, contributes to the spread of negativity. The stress creates a disconnected company culture, increase absenteeism, and low productivity (Picincu, 2020). Leaders that show a disconnect in employee/employer connections often experience a high turnover rate, low morale, lack of productivity, unhappy employees, and potentially dissatisfied customers (Thiefels, 2019). Most employees leave good jobs because the employer did not honor an intrinsic element of success and growth-developing the relationship between the employee and the employer (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). This problem relates to the leadership cognate because the process organizational leaders choose to implement to build

employee relationships is essential to the internal and external success of the business through its employees and customers. The specific problem addressed was the effectiveness of company policies or procedures on an executive-leadership level to cultivate the primary and secondary employee and employer relationships within a service industry organization, specifically, Company X, a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) servicing organization, resulting in the decline of productivity, low employee morale, and declining customer service ratings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the flexible design single case study was to examine the what the how, and why leaders and employees behave in a way that restricts or enhances the employer/employee relationship and how this behavior is reflected in the business results of a service industry organization. Qualitative research is the systematic inquiry of how people experience certain aspects in their lives, how people behave, how organizations function, and how the interactions shape relationships (Teherani et al., 2018). In the service industry, the intangible product of service is difficult to place value and measure in the customer's eyes that is reliant on the expertise of the organization's employees (Bradenberg, 2018). The research included attempting to determine the factors that contribute to the failure of a successful relationship between leadership and employees. In addition, the research included how the failure of the internal relationship affects the customer relationship with the organization, which affects the customer service ratings.

Research Questions

In developing the research questions for this case study, I addressed several items: failure of cultivating the internal business relationship of company employees, the decline of

productivity, low company morale, and declining customer ratings because of not having a relationship between leaders and their employees, and how the internal business relationship affects the service industry explicitly.

RQ1. What causes leaders to fail in the cultivation of employee/employer relationships?

RQ1a. What leadership actions restrict/enhance the cultivation of employee/employer relationships?

RQ1b. What employee actions restrict/enhance the cultivation of employee/employer relationships?

RQ2. In what way does an engaged employee-employer relationship affect business results for a company in the service industry?

RQ2a. How does the employee/employer relationship increase or decrease productivity?

RQ2b. How does the employee/employer relationship affect company morale?

RQ3. What impact does the employee/employer relationship have on the customer ratings of a service industry's organization?

Research question one (RQ1) and the sub-questions addressed the specific problem statement by examining the actions of both the leaderships and the employees' activities that contribute to or restrict the internal relationship's cultivation. The survival of service-based organizations is dependent on maximizing profits using current tangible and nontangible assets, which focuses on employee capabilities while recognizing the fact that the organization may work today but may not work tomorrow, which is dependent on the service organization's services peak times (Gaytan-Cortes et al., 2018). For organizations to maintain or increase their profitability, leaders must find ways to engage employees, and employees must invest in the

decisions, goals, and objectives of the organization and its leadership (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). The need to understand what actions can impact the growth of the employee-employer relationship can influence the success of an organization.

Houston (2020) indicated that an organ success or failure depends on the social relationships between the employees and the employers. In the RQ2 and the sub-questions, the investigative need was the impact of a cultivated or uncultivated relationship on productivity, employee morale, and customer service ratings in the service industry. Productivity, company culture, and customers are the drivers of success in a service industry organization. Seppala and Cameron (2018) quoted a study by the Queen's School of Business and the Gallup Organization revealed that disengaged workers in an uncultivated internal business relationship or culture had 18% lower productivity, 37% higher absenteeism, and a 65% decrease in customer service ratings.

Subramanian (2018) argued that happy employees generate a persona that customers can feel when dealing with an organization. Subramanian (2018) explained that a happy employee will show an excellent performance in an organization that values the employee as much as the organization values the customer. RQ3 investigative need was how the connection between the employee and employer affects the customer's perception of the service organization.

Bradenberg (2018) described issues that many services organization leaders experience is the unknown value of the intangible product of a service. When the customer cannot touch, feel, or see the value of the purchase, the customer gains the perception of value through the interaction of the organization's employees. This interaction, whether positive or negative, will affect the customer ratings, which, in turn, will affect future business results for the organization.

Nature of the Study

In developing the nature of the study, I first determined the nature of the research problem. Strong work relationships can boost the employees' morale and create a working collaboration that will enhance the working culture and improve the customer's interaction with the organization (Samma et al., 2020). The specific nature of this study was the relationship between the leaders and the employees of a heating and air business in a small, rural community. The research questions in this study attempted to answer the what, how, and why of the cause-and-effect of an organization's leaders' and employees' behavior have on themselves and the organization's culture and success. The specific issue addressed is leadership's inability to connect primary and secondary employers, which results in decreased efficiency, low employee morale, and lower customer ratings (Arimie, 2019).

Discussion of Research Paradigms

A research paradigm or theory is a set of widely held assumptions and ideas regarding methodological, epistemological, and ontological issues within a research community (Fusch et al., 2018). Science, according to positivism, includes discovering more about truth (Marsonet, 2019). Only factual knowledge gained via observation or through emotions, particularly measurement, is reliable by positivists (Park, Konge, & Artino2020). In positivist investigations, the researcher's role limits to data collection and objective analysis (Park, Konge, & Artino, 2020). Positivism reflected in observable data that can include statistical analysis. The positivist paradigm includes cause-and-effect relationship studies that interpret observations as facts or any measurable entities (Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017). The positivist paradigm is a strong advocate for using quantitative research methods because of mathematical calculations and expressions to

derive measurable conclusions (Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017). The four criteria for validation are internal, external, reliability, and objectivity validity.

Positivism is compatible with the existentialist idea that knowledge derives from human experience (Park, Konge, & Artino 2020). Positivism requires an atomistic, ontology view of the universe, in which the cosmos is seen as a series of separate, measurable elements and events that link in predictable, specified, and periodic ways (Kelly et al., 2018). Furthermore, in positivism research, the researcher is independent of the investigation, and includes no allowances for human values inside the study (Kelly et al., 2018). The positivist approach focuses on pure empirical data and facts are uninfluenced by human interpretation or bias (Mathotaarachchi & Thilakarathna, 2021). Positivist studies include a deductive method, while inductive research includes a phenomenological philosophy (Yong et al., 2021).

According to the fundamental principles of positivism, almost no distinctions exist in the inquiry logic among fields (Park, Konge, & Artino,2020). The goal of the research should include illustration and forecasting. The other principle is that the study's findings should be observable in an experimental setting using human senses (Panhwar et al., 2017). Inductive reasoning should construct assertions to test throughout the research process. Positivists create theory after inductive reasoning, which starts with observation, experiment, and measurement, to find patterns in the data to describe the situation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). After the theory delopes positivist researchers will continue to make repeated observations and measures until they are confident that their findings describe the wider spectrum and satisfy the theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The post positivism paradigm helps answer why empirical phenomena occur and to use this explanation to predict what may happen in a similar situation (Kankam, 2019). Post

positivists rely on the scientific method to maximize objectivity and separate what is known and unknown. The maximization leads to a causal explanation by ruling out alternative explanations of the phenomena and establishing time-ordering and covariation (Panhwar et al., 2017). Post-positivism is a methodological position that criticizes and modifies positivism, which influences practices and beliefs in social science, philosophy, and other scientific inquiry paradigms (Hammersley, 2019). Post-positivists claim that the researcher's values, background knowledge, hypotheses, and ideas may affect observation of the observed (McMurtry, 2020). Post-positivism attempts for objectivity by acknowledging the impact of biases. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies are appropriate options for post positivism. In post positivism research, human cognition is on human presumptions rather than a priori judgments from an objective person; post-positivism believes in the existence of reality (McMurtry, 2020). Post positivists use social constructionism to develop their concept and interpretation of reality (Kankam, 2019). Post positivists believe that favoritism is undesirable but unavoidable and that the analyst must attempt to discover and correct the bias (McMurtry, 2020). Post positivism includes an attempt to explain how their beliefs and values affected their study, including selecting measurements, definitions, questions, populations, and the analysis and interpretation of their findings (Panhwar et al., 2017).

The constructivism paradigm is known as the interpretive paradigm as the researcher tries to understand the world around them through human experience (Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017). The constructivist research approach asserts that people learn from books, the world around them, and their experiences (Rahi, 2017). Constructivism is the realization that realism is the result of human intellect integrating with practical life (Bogna et al., 2020). The concept generates the moment one includes human brain activity in the method of accepting reality. Constructivism

sees actuality as a human mental creation; therefore, the reality is subjective (Bogna et al., 2020). Constructivism originates on mental processes, and constructivism roots may trace back to the Socratic ways and ancient Greece (Rahi, 2017).

Nonetheless, constructivism's popularity as an epistemological approach increased rapidly. The theory includes the premise that scientists create knowledge and challenges the notion of a singular approach for generating knowledge (Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017). The theory classifies into several forms, including radical, cognitive, biological, and phenomenological constructivism (Bogna et al., 2020). Constructivism is a qualitative form of research that primarily focuses on a teaching process based on the concept that student knowledge is created by meditation on life experiences and the application of new information to prior knowledge (Roca et al., 2021). Constructivist research practices include positioning the researcher inside the setting, assembling participant-generated meanings, concentrating on a specific notion or phenomenon, and incorporating ideals into the research (Bogna et al., 2020). Interviews, document reviews, and observations are the most common forms of qualitative data collection methods using the constructivism paradigm (Laumann, 2020).

A pragmatic paradigm is a way of thinking that focuses on what works instead of objectively or true (Kankam, 2019). Early pragmatists rejected the idea that social research could obtain insights into real-life using a single scientific approach (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Pragmatists believe that evaluation includes the implications of truth. The pragmatic paradigm is valuable for directing study design, particularly when combining several techniques are philosophically contradictory (Kamal, 2019). Pragmatism is a research philosophy that includes that beliefs and concepts are significant if they promote action (Bachkirova & Borrington, 2019). Pragmatics recognize that several diverse ways of viewing effects and doing research, which no

perspective can ever provide the complete picture, and many realities may exist (Korte & Mercurio, 2017). According to pragmatic research, the most significant factor of the research paradigm is the research question (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Furthermore, investigations premised on pragmatic research can engage a variety of research methodologies, including action research, quantitative and qualitative (Korte & Mercurio, 2017).

In deciding the research paradigm to use for this study, the best advice provided to me was to think about how the research aligns with your view of the world. Žukauskas et al. (2018) indicated that research stems from assumptions, which means that researchers have different assumptions on the nature of truth and knowledge and how truth and knowledge obtain our view. These assumptions base on the different researcher's different perceptions of the world around them. This researcher's perception is that the world is whatever the researcher needs the world to be at that moment in time. The perception of the world around me will change based on experience and how those experiences affect the thought processes based on what is going on during that part of that researcher's life at that moment. In researching into the research paradigms, my belief falls in line with constructivism. Kaushik and Walsh (2019) provided a great illustration of an object with four legs and a flat surface between the four research paradigms-positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, pragmatism. Positivism would always include the view of the object as a table; a post-positivism would view the object as a table but then try to answer the question as to why the object is a table. Constructivists, based on their perspective, would view the object as a table if they were eating off the object, a bench if they were sitting on the object, or a platform if they were standing on the object. Pragmatist would define the object based on how the intended use would help the pragmatist achieve their goal or objective.

People's situations may occur comparable, but their experiences are different because of their experiences and perceptions of life (Andresen et al., 2020). In this researcher's opinion, Christians must understand this concept. Everything in life occurs from a different perspective. Guthrie (2019) stated that the constructivist theory reminds Christians and others that there are influencing factors in life that can contribute to what is seen, done, and projected. The due diligence is up to Christians to give other people the benefit of the doubt, compassion, and understanding that, in other people's lives, the decisions they make are what they feel is suitable in their lives right now.

Through volunteer interactions and my perception of those encounters, the constructive research approach provides an understanding of the whole issue from the leadership and the employee perspectives and the quest for workable solutions (Erdurmazli, 2019). Guthrie (2019) asserted that the constructive theory aligns with a biblical perspective in that all people, regardless of positions within an organization, can add value and insight to a situation or an experience. Workplace diversity refers to the presence of a relationship between the employers and employees (Ng & Sears, 2020). Good employer and employee relationships and respect for diversity boost employee motivation, dedication, and trustworthiness (Maheshwari et al., 2020). Good employer and employee relationships foster an organizational atmosphere that encourages people to reach their maximum potential therefore achieving organizational objectives (Sahoo & Sahoo, 2019).

Human relations centers on developing trust. According to Ogunsanwo and Kazeem (2019), successful employer and employee interactions evoke trust, which demonstrates when a manager displays consistent good behavior in the execution of official tasks and genuine concern for the overall well-being of workers. Mutual respect enhances through employer and employee

relationships (Tewari & Kumar, 2019). Mutual respect comes from how a company leader earns the confidence of staff. Employees may not agree with every choice made by their boss, but they will accept the choice because of the deep bond between them.

Workplace engagement interactions, according to Arimie (2019), provide the framework for integrating employees' demands into the strategic goals. Gull et al. (2020) concluded that leaders should encourage their employees to work for the company's objectives while simultaneously inspiring them to accomplish their personal objectives. In the context of the constructivist assumption that everyone adds value to the organization, Anggraeni (2018) encouraged leaders to engage with employees and employees to engage with leaders in a way that will fulfill the psychological need of self-actualization and self-esteem fulfillment. Employers must comprehend human nature, which includes the natural need to recognize, value, and acknowledge abilities and traits and the ability to complete tasks while interacting with coworkers (Gull et al., 2020). This research included encouraging leaders in organizations to create internal relationships that are beneficial to the organization's business result, to the quality of life to those within the organization, and to the customers.

Discussion of Design

Three types of research designs include fixed, flexible, and mixed research designs. A fixed research design collects data in the form of numbers and is typically in quantitative research (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The fixed research design is a systematic process, typically in the social sciences, to explain variables, investigate the relationship between the variables, and determine the cause and effect interactions between variables (Mohajan, 2020). The fixed research design predetermines in advance and the researcher focuses on the outcome

of the study (Harrison et al., 2020). Since the fixed research design is a predetermined design, the research predicated on theory (Mohajan, 2020).

The flexible research design uses a multitude of data collection and is in qualitative research studies (Harrison et al., 2020). The data is typically not numeric, and the data evolves as the research evolves (Harrison et al., 2020). According to Headley and Plano Clark (2019), exploratory work, ethnographic studies, case studies, or grounded theory studies are best associated with flexible research designs. The flexible research design concerns the why and how of research and focuses on cultures, societies, or human issues (Stapenhurst, 2019). The research findings are subjective rather than objective and place no judgement on the participant's responses (Stapenhurst, 2019). Organizations use flexible research designs for new product ideas, product brands weaknesses, marketing campaigns, and company perceptions (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

Mixed methods research design uses the elements of quantitative and qualitative research. Using the mixed method correctly can add validity but all research cannot include research aspects (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). A mixed research design is best when a researcher wants to develop a theory through qualitative research and then test the theory through quantitative research (Vogt et al., 2017). Stapenhurst (2019) recommended using a mixed method research when research questions need examining from different perspectives to clarify potential contradictions or to elaborate on findings from other methods. Although mixed methods provide more methodological flexibility than the fixed or flexibility methods, this method need time and more resources to invest in studies because of the complexity (Johnson et al., 2019).

I used a flexible research design method for this study to ensure that the process adapts as the data generates (Apuke, 2017). This research did not include variables, but constructs, and the research was not predicated by theory, therefore, the fixed or quantitative research design was not appropriate for this study (Mohajan, 2020). A mixed design method typically develops a theory, which is a flexible or qualitative research objective, and tests the theory, which includes a fixed or quantitative research objective (Vogt et al., 2017). The mixed design method did not fit this research's design because the research did not test any theories. This study's research questions focused on how and why leaders and employees behave in ways that affect the relationship between the two and the organization's success or failure. The research detailed a review of how individuals experience elements of their life, how people act, how institutions work, and how human encounters shape connections known as qualitative research (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018). The data collected and evolved as the study progressed, which is an element of flexible design (Harrison et al., 2020). Since the research was based on the interactions between humans and based on human perceptions and the data evolved as the research evolved, the flexible design was the best research design for this study (Stapenhurst, 2019).

Discussion of Research Method

In various designs, qualitative and quantitative are systematic. Both designs must adhere to a procedural approach that includes identifying a research premise. Quantitative research perceives as objective in general, whereas qualitative research frequently has a subjective component (Bryman, 2017). Quantitative research approaches include experimentation or surveys to assess the connections between variables to clarify knowledge (Apuke, 2017). Quantitative data helps researchers see the ultimate big picture while qualitative data adds the details (Ahmed, 2020). Hamilton (2021) cited the qualitative methods of research as:

biographical, ethnographical, phenomenological, grounded theory, case studies, and descriptive case studies.

Biographical research is a type of qualitative study that follows the social interpretative paradigm (Jamali, 2018). The creation of meaning and reconstruction of life histories based on biographical tales and records are the focus of biography study (Santos & Susin, 2021). Photos, video recordings, interview procedures, and various sources make up the information analyzed in biographical research (Jamali, 2018). Specific standards and procedures help researchers to assess and understand these materials (Hamilton, 2021). The analysis of a single biography based on social structure is the beginning point for this technique. Ethnomethodology, phenomenological sociology of knowledge, and symbolic interactionism inspired the biographical technique (Zahavi, 2019). As a result, a researcher views biography as a social construct (Hamilton, 2021). Therefore, biographies may provide insight into figurations and social processes, bridging the gap between macro, meso, and micro levels of study (Santos & Susin, 2021).

Ethnographic research is a qualitative study that includes monitoring elements in their natural settings or habitats to arrive at objective research conclusions (Allan, 2020). The research method has origins in ethnography, including the study of mutual differences in depth, habits, cultures, and people (Jamali, 2018). This form of systematic inquiry typically interacts with the parameters in real-time and is reliant on data obtained from the research variables' observation (Tolich et al., 2018). The in-depth observation and description of the participants, ethnographic research is frequently characterized as a complete descriptor (Antoniadou & Dooly, 2017). The ethnographer observes, listens to, and asks questions in an individual's everyday life over lengthy

periods, either explicitly or covertly (Allan, 2020). The ethnographer is gathering whatever evidence accessible to give insight on topics that affect them.

Business ethnographic research is a type of study that includes monitoring customer behavior and target markets to learn about actual market requirements and attitudes about a firm's service or product (Kozinets, 2018). Bass and Milosevic (2018) indicated that ethnographic is a useful platform for corporate social responsibility research. Educational ethnography research is a type of study that includes watching, teaching, and learning strategies, as well as how they influence classroom behavior (Antoniadou & Dooly, 2017). Ethnographic medical research is a form of study that occurs healthcare for qualitative research. This study method aids medical professionals in comprehending patient attitudes spanning from the most basic to the most complicated patterns of behavior (Tolich et al., 2018).

The phenomenological method includes providing a comprehensive, precise, clear, and expressive description and comprehension of a specific human experience or experiencing moment (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2018). Researchers conduct a phenomenological method by adopting a unique investigator approach and stance (DeHart, 2020). Interviews can occur with a group of people with firsthand understanding of a topic, event, or experience. Two major questions occur in the interviews: what has been met based on the phenomenon and what kinds of situations or circumstances have impacted the perceptions of the phenomenon (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2018). The phenomenological method describes human interactions and meanings in a complete and detailed way (DeHart, 2020). Results arise despite force by an investigator. Careful approaches are necessary to maintain descriptions as close to the facts as feasible (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2018). The achievement of accuracy occurs by proceeding

slowly and carefully, being careful not to remove, add to, modify, or distort anything initially contained in the subject transcripts' original meaning units (Jamali, 2018).

Grounded theory is an attempt to produce several techniques for performing in-depth qualitative research (Lambert & Belliappa, 2019). The grounded theory analyzes data using inductive techniques. Instead of starting with pre-existing anticipation of results, hypothesis, or framework, the researcher allows a model to develop straight from the facts (Lambert, 2019). Once data collecting phase, generally an interview, builds on the previous information and conceptualizations produced until that time. The researchers collect "dense" data and make the subjects' meanings apparent. The technique repeats until the researcher reaches saturation, where they do not learn any new concepts or ideas. Theoretical sensitivity based on distinct experiences and abilities guides the researcher's conceptualizations (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Grounded theory provides several advantages. The technique entails following strict, methodical, and precise protocols to ensure that theory building begins with and remains close to the qualitative information gathered (Martin et al., 2018). Researchers may examine, revise, and develop their thoughts and intuitions concerning results they obtain data.. Researchers use this technique extensively in various fields and to investigate a wide range of issues (Chun Tie et al., 2019).

In the corporate world, case studies are a common research approach. Case studies investigate unique topics within the confines of a particular setting, circumstance, or organization (Aithal, 2017). Case studies in a business context may classify into three types based on design: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory (Schoch, 2020). Explanatory case studies address "why" or "how" questions with minimal influence over the events' incidence on the part of the researcher (Atmowardoyo, 2018). The explanatory case study concentrates on phenomena that occur in real-life circumstances. Descriptive case studies include examining

the interpersonal interactions' sequence after time passes (Atmowardoyo, 2018). This area of studies in business research focuses on describing culture or subcultures and attempting to uncover the basic phenomena (Hahn et al., 2018). In contrast, exploratory case studies address the questions "who" and "what" (Schoch, 2020). Additional data gathering methods, including experiments, surveys, and interviews, are in conjunction with the exploratory case study data collection technique (Chu & Ke, 2017).

The research method chosen for this research study was the case study, specifically a single case study. Single case studies can provide in-depth explanations for the occurrence of phenomenon (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). A single case study is an ideal choice if the researcher wishes to investigate one object or a single individual from a certain group or a single class or a group of individuals (Algozzine & Hancock, 2017). The case study for this study centers on leaders and employees of a small service industry organization. Company X's chosen members have interactions with engaged and unengaged personnel and company business results. In a qualitative research case study research method, sampling is collecting data from a small group of people or places to draw conclusions to a certain geographic area (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Specific communicative business leaders with at least one year of utmost accuracy with employee satisfaction in a firm with less than 100 workers were participants in this single case study. The sampling criteria were through conscious selection (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). To attain saturation, twenty individuals participated, and the saturation point accelerated by completing participant checks and evaluating archived data (Meyers, 2019). The individuals included six leaders and fourteen employees. The employees ranged from behind-the-scenes employees, such as customer service representatives, to the front-line employees, for example, a

service technician. The archived data included productivity reports and customer service rating reports.

Discussion of Triangulation

Triangulation in research involves multiple data sources to ensure that the research is comprehensive, well-developed, and produces an understanding to the investigation or study (Noble & Heale, 2019). Triangulation generally involves using numerous methods or data sources in qualitative research to obtain a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Moon, 2019). Triangulation increases the credibility and validity of research findings (Noble & Heale, 2019). Credibility is authenticity and believable research, whereas validity concerns the scope to which research accurately reflects the concept or ideas investigated (Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017). Noble and Heale (2019) quoted the four methods proposed by Denzin of triangulation: data, investigator, theory, and methodological triangulation. Data triangulation uses periods of time; investigator triangulation uses more than one researcher in a study; theory triangulation interprets a phenomenon using several theories; and methodological triangulation uses several data collection methods (Noble & Heale, 2019).

Method triangulation involves the use of various sources to study a situation (Dzwigol, 2020). Method triangulation broadens the researcher's perception of the different issues underlying the phenomenon under investigation. Method triangulation helps decrease the deficiencies and biases of an approach. (Olabode & Bakare, 2020). The strengths of one process may make amends for the weakness of another. In methodological triangulation, if different methods yield the same results, then validity (Noble & Heale, 2019). Methodological triangulation may involve qualitative methods such as passive observation, participant

observation, and interviews with open-ended questions (Olabode & Bakare, 2020). These methods are always explanatory and textual.

Passive observation involves gaining information from observing how something works without directly influencing the process of the outcome (Pick, 2021). For example, if water mixes with a common dining salt in a chemistry lesson, the observation is that the salt is vanishing. After some assessment, the conclusion is that the salt is dissolving in water. On the other hand, participant observation is where the researcher observes the research participants and actively takes part in the activities of the research participants (Fusch et al., 2018). Participant observation requires the researcher to blend into the participant's environment while also taking objective notes about what is happening (Pick, 2021). Open-ended questions include gathering information by simply asking participants questions who then answer them in a way that requires more thought and more detail (Roberts, 2020).

Investigator triangulation involves two or more researchers in the same study to give multiple observations and conclusions (Khaldi, 2017). Investigator triangulation can confirm findings and different insightful, adding width to the phenomenon of interest (Noble & Heale, 2019). Typically, this type of triangulation would display as an evaluation team that consists of colleagues within a project area of study. To triangulate, each different evaluator would study the project using the same qualitative methods. While this is a very effective method of demonstrating validity, investigator triangulation may not always be actual to assemble different evaluators because of time constraints (Kern, 2018). The findings from each evaluator would measure up. If the conclusions of the different evaluators end up at the same conclusion, then validity occurs (Kern, 2018). If the decision differs considerably, further study is entitled to determine the factual and certain findings (Kern, 2018). The capability to confirm findings

across investigators without earlier discussions or collaborations between them can remarkably increase the credibility of the results. Investigator triangulation is essential for decreasing prejudice in gathering and reporting study data (Khaldi, 2017).

Theory triangulation involves the use of several professional perspectives to clarify a single set of information (Flick, 2018). The theory triangulation method can involve using professionals outside the researcher's field of study to gain different perspectives (Turner et al., 2017). Therefore, researcher confirm validity from different disciplines however, they interpret the data the same way. The idea of theory triangulation is always to look at a phenomenon from a different angle, through different lenses, and with other questions in mind (Turner et al., 2017). The various hypotheses do not have to compete; the more varying they are, the more likely they are to identify different issues. Theory triangulation may not include feasibility in all situations. Also, theory triangulation is time consuming when involving people from other disciplines. With this type of triangulation, different kinds of hypotheses can enable the researchers to support invalidated findings (Flick, 2018).

Data source triangulation entails the use of different sources of information or data (Kern, 2018). Data sources used may include space, persons, and time in the study (Moon, 2019). In this type of triangulation, the validity and credibility of results can increase by collaborating findings. Jentoft and Olsen (2019) indicated that data source triangulation was useful in their study because the data sources broadened the researchers empirical understanding of their theme or topic of study. The strengths of the other data can compensate for any weakness in other data. The application of data source triangulation has been applied in several sectors to build conclusions about findings to reduce the risk of inaccurate interpretation (Thomas & Raheem, 2020).

For this study, I chose to use the methodological method of triangulation. The investigator triangulation method requires two or more researchers in the same study (Khaldi, 2017). Different perspectives must occur from professionals outside of the researcher's field to use the theory triangulation method (Turner et al., 2017). The researcher would have to find alternative sources of information to use the data source of triangulation (Kern, 2018). The triangulation method was the best option for this research study because of time constraints and availability of other professionals and researchers. In the development of the research for this study, the following triangulation techniques were interviews, business documentations, and observations.

In qualitative research, the most common form of data collection is interviewing (Summers, 2020). I was the main data collection point for this case study and interpreted the interview questions answers from the employees and the leaders of the organization. As the research for this case study focused on the service industry, I decided to interview a service company to find out the relationship between employers and employees and how their answers cultivate into the increase or decrease of productivity, the effect on company morale, and the impact on customer service ratings. The interview questions were pertinent as each subject, the leader, or employee who answered questions that helped me determine the actions that helped or hindered the cultivation of a successful relationship between employee and employer (Flick, 2018). For the interview to be successful, a rapport occurred beforehand. McGrath et al. (2019) suggested drafting a short summary of the research project and sending the draft to the interviewees prior to the interview as a way of informing them of what to expect and why the research is conducted. Giger and Haddad (2020) also suggested that the key to successful interviewing is to listen more and actively listen.

I found that reviewing the business results of Company X was necessary. During the initial research request process, the discovery was made known that there was a time when the management of Company X made revisions of policies and procedures that created a more distinct company persona. Rhodes (2018) recommended that the business documentation would be pertinent if a discovery is made that during this time of revision, the leader and employee relationship affected the business results, whether negatively or positively, as far as customer ratings and productivity. Although employee turnover had not been an issue during the past few years, the management team admitted to a fluctuation in the business results since the revisions of the policies and procedures. The research could help determine if the change in company culture had affected the relationship between the leaders and the employees and, in turn, impacted the business results. Other documentation that management had agreed to allow me to view were the productivity reports of specific individuals, absenteeism reports, customer feedback reports from Google and internal software, and any other reports that were useful or necessary as the research emerged. If an employee feels valued, their productivity will increase, customers will rate them high, their absenteeism will decrease, and their morale will increase (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018).

The establishment and planned topic of the interview questions were relevant to previous research, literature, or previous data collection (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Observations can include planning or no planning. The observer took notes on everything pertinent to the research. There are two types of observations in qualitative research-participant or non-participant (Busetto et al., 2020). For this research study, the observer was a non-participant, observing without interruption. Any non-verbal language of the interviewee during the interview process is the most important observation technique (Chu & Ke, 2017), Although the hope was that honesty

portrayed during the research, the researcher understood that sometimes employees may say what they thought was the right answer instead of what was truly felt. For this reason, observation techniques helped to observe and journal leaders' and employees' behaviors in a natural environment.

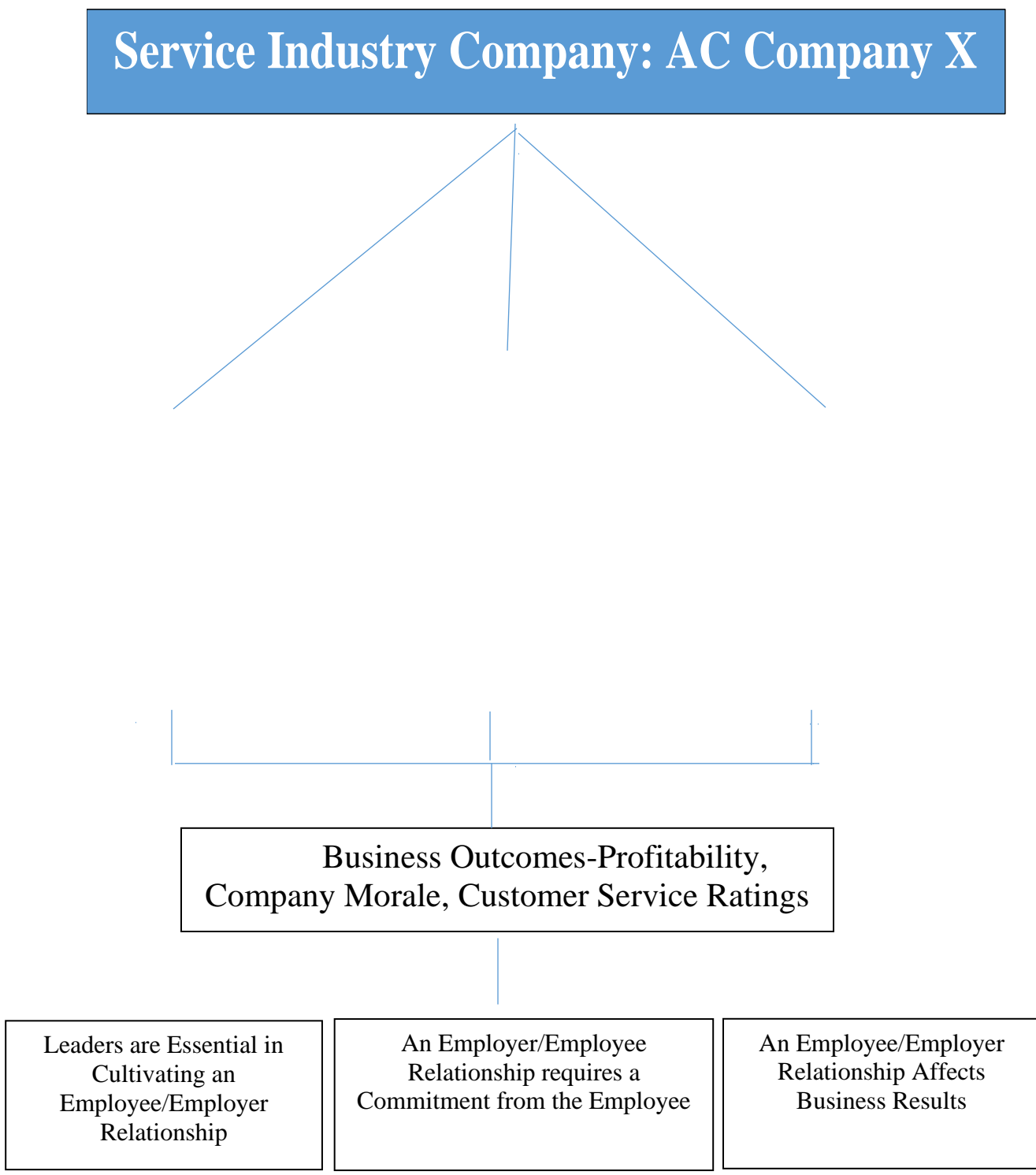
Summary of the Nature of the Study

The research paradigm in this research was constructivist, as this paradigm aligned with my view of their world. Kivunji and Kuyini (2017) indicated that constructivist researchers attempt to understand the world through human experience. For the same reason as the human experience, the flexible design method was the research design. As Stapenhurst (2019) suggested, flexible research design focuses on the why and how humans and society interacts. The flexible design method enabled me to evolve the design of the research as responses from the participants helped examine how the need for leaders and employees to cultivate a good relationship can affect the business results, such as productivity, morale, and customer service ratings (Pultz, 2018). Moser and Korstjens (2018) implied that researchers can conduct studies using a sampling of data from a small group of people of certain geographic area using the case study method of research in qualitative studies. For this research study, the method of research was a single case study of Company X, a heating and air conditioning company in the service industry. The triangulation in this research study was the methodology triangulation method because of the lack of availability of local researchers and professionals for collaboration. Assistance in researching, is a requirement of theory, data, and investigator triangulation, is a time constraint for the researcher (Turner et al., 2017). **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework consists of the theories and concepts discovered during the research of the studied phenomena. Varpio et al. (2020) indicated that the conceptual framework

describes the state of general knowledge, identifies gaps in the understanding of a problem, and outlines the methodological goal of the research project. The conceptual framework for this research study is the illustration in *Figure 1*. The primary actor was Company X, a company that is in the service industry that installs and repairs heating, ventilation, and air conditioning components. The secondary actors were the leaders, the employees, and the customers. The primary constructs were leadership style, service productivity results, and company persona. The dependent constructs in this case study were productivity results, customer loyalty, and customer referrals. This framework allows researchers to evolve the design. Responses from the participants help examine how the need for leaders and employees cultivate a good relationship is crucial to the business results for the company, such as productivity, morale, and customer service ratings (Pultz, 2018).

Figure 1
Relationships between concepts.



Concepts

Leaders are essential in the cultivation of an effective and prosperous employee and employer relationship. An effective leadership style guarantees that an employee will gain expertise, share knowledge, and help set and reinforce policies and procedures that will allow organization leaders to reach their goals and objectives (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). A leader that can motivate through example, encouragement, and the understanding of the importance of human relationships are more apt to have employees that are willing to listen, adhere, and seek critical solutions to make the company successful and customers happy (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Leaders primarily have a unique style based on their personality, but their style and personality impact the company culture and how the company was perceived as indicated in *Figure 1* (Groysberg et al., 2018).

Commitment from an employee is the other side of cultivating an employee and employer relationship (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). When company officials hire an employee, the expectations will vary depending on the company; however, some fundamental commitment expectations occur. A few examples of those fundamental commitment expectations are not limited to punctuality, performing the tasks as they are outlined in their job descriptions, working with reasonable care and skill, and presenting reasonable and professional behavior (Barik & Kochar, 2017). The Gallup poll in 2018 found that only 34% of U.S. employees engage in their jobs (Harter, 2020). While many expect the leaders of the company to facilitate and maintain the relationship, Harter and Mann (2017) recommended that unless employees take responsibility for their roles in cultivating the relationship between employer and employee, the efforts of the company's managers and leaders, will have a limited effect on their ability to meet goals and objectives.

A business thrives on relationships outside of the company, such as vendors, suppliers, and marketing; however, the employee and employer relationship affects the outside relationships and business results (Butt, 2019). The employee and employer relationship can affect the profitability, company morale, and customer service ratings of the organization (Panagiotakopoulos, 2020). Employees who feel recognized for their job performance, valued for their expertise, and appreciated want to do a good job and will optimally perform the job requirement to get the job done (Gull et al., 2020). Harter (2020) quoted a 2017 Gallup Poll that statistically calculated the relationship between employee engagement and performance outcomes; companies that scored in the top half had four times the success rate than those at the bottom. In the same Gallup Poll study, the success rate was in three categories: 10% higher customer ratings, 21% profitability, and 17% productivity (Harter & Mann, 2017).

Theories

The leader-member exchange theory (LMX) is the quality of the exchange relationship between leaders and their members or employees (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017). The implementation of the LMX theory has increased employee morale, increased productivity, job satisfaction, and higher employee engagement (Kovach, 2018). According to Cote (2017), the idea behind the success of the LMX theory is that communication between the leader and the employee occurs through a “vertical” exchange that relies on more of a social exchange rather than the employment contract obligations exchange. The three components to the relationship-building process between leaders and employees are, according to De Roeck and Farooq (2018): leaders and employees come together as strangers with a more contractual exchange. Leaders and employees progress from strangers to acquaintances through increased social exchanges that enhance the relationship. Finally, through a higher degree of exchanges, the relationship matures

and develops into a relationship of respect, trust and mutual obligations to the company, each member of the team, and themselves. The LMX theory can result in the leaders and employees cultivating a strong relationship built on trust and respect that leads to the internal success of the business that will show in the business results through profits and customer ratings (Omillion-Hodges & Ptacek, 2021).

A theory that some may not find as a management technique but rather a way of life is the servant leadership theory (SLT). Pawar et al. (2020) posited that Robert Greenleaf coined the SLT in the 1970s, however, many studies have shown that the SLT has shown effects of servant leadership have been increased profits and employee satisfaction. Pawar et al. (2020) also notated that there has not been a set definition of SLT; however, the consensus of the key variables of an effective servant-led organization are: values people, develops people, builds community, and displays authenticity. Each of the key variables is about putting others first and, in the long run, benefiting the key actors along with the organization's business results. On an important note, no empirical data exists to support the claim. Andersen (2018) claimed that servant leadership is a tool that has the potential to influence and improve an organization's productivity, financial performance, employer/employee morale, and boost internal and external business relationships.

In the cultivation of an employer and employee relationship, success is not just dependent on what the employer does; success depends on the employee's commitment level (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). Andresen et al. (2020) noted that the average worker would change jobs twice as much within the first five years of working than new employees did thirty years ago. Employees have been able to empower themselves in their personal and professional lives. Now organizations must find ways to engage and motivate employees to maximize productivity and

wellness. The self-determination theory (SDT) is the framework for the motivational quality that produces outcomes derived from employee and employer engagements. In addition, the framework includes greater commitment, creativity, higher productivity, persistence, and overall positive organizational culture persona (Rigby & Ryan, 2018). The SDT includes three psychological needs attribute to high-quality motivation: autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Autonomy is fulfilled when leaders can make even the everyday tasks seem meaningful and important; relatedness is the sense of belonging and that we matter to others or the feeling of connection; competence in the workplace comes from the vision of growth and new challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The fulfillment of these basic needs can lead to security, job satisfaction, positive job outlook, trust, a decline in absenteeism, and loyalty to the organization (Mira et al., 2019).

Actors

The lead actor in this case study was Company X, which is a heating and air conditioning company in the service industry. Company X has served its community and customers for approximately 32 years. The company currently has approximately 100 employees with three divisions: Install, Service, and Customer Service. Company leaders are open about the various issues that they have experienced over the course of their business years. High and low times, employee turnovers, customer loss/retention, and fluctuations in productivity during the first six years, which are classified as the learning years, and during transitional phases of business throughout the course the many years occurred.

Disconnection in communication and disconnection from the goals and objectives can happen when managers and leaders focus on the profit line than human value (Swenson et al., 2019). In Company X, the ability to gain the upper management perspective in comparison to the

employees helped the study find the disconnection of past events in cultivating a relationship between employees and employers. Since the company has been in business for 32 years and management has been consistent, but employees have fluctuated, patterns in business results were seen. As seen in *Figure 1*, the employee will produce results if the leader is presenting a company culture persona that motivates and uplifts the employee's morale. When an employee feels motivated, the motivation and feeling of power impacts the service that the customer is receiving (Ali & Anwar, 2021). A motivated employee will make sure the customer's needs are met and the experience is satisfactory from all levels (Collier, et al., 2018).

Employees provide a front-line perspective that upper management or executives cannot see because of the level of interaction with the customers at various times (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2021). As the company has different levels within the organization, the perception of leader and employee engagement differs. Without the employee being the middle person between the service and the customer, no business results exist (Krekkel et al., 2019). The employee is vital to the business process and expected to produce not only a profit but a long-term income or returning customers (Binyamin, 2020). Leaders should motivate and enhance the skills of the employee, however some form of work ethic from the employee to want to produce results that better themselves, the company, and the customer experience must exist (Binyamin, 2020). For this study, the employee was able to indicate the level of commitment that they have, but also the motivation factors that leaders or management established and maintained a relationship that was motivational to achieve Company X's business results.

A service company depends on their customers to stay in business. A company that has sustainability will typically have customers that will constantly refer the company to their friends and family and will write favorable reviews (Kuang et al., 2021). Word of mouth is the best form

of marketing because word of mouth advertising does not cost a company any money (Viswanathan et al., 2018). Company X is a service company where employees understand that they may not work tomorrow, and every opportunity for income must come from the work they perform today. Burmeister (n.d.) shows there is a direct correlation between engaged employees and customer satisfaction and achieving optimal business outcomes. The Demand Metric 2013 Employee Engagement Survey indicated that companies that have more than 50% employee engagement retain over 80% of their customers (Burmeister, n.d.). A service customer depends on the talents and the working relationship between a company's leader and employees for a reliable service (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). A service is an intangible product that many times, a customer has very little knowledge about (Ahmed, 2020). For this reason, consumers will research a company on the internet and ask others before making that initial call to get opinions or feedback from others that engaged in business with them to get at least a small indication to find out what type of trustworthy service they can expect to receive for their valuable money (Kuang et al., 2021). A customer wants to feel valued and feel value in the service that is being provided. This value comes from the experience they will receive from the first phone call to the customer service representative to the technician and finally to the follow up call from the manager, if necessary (Borchardt et al., 2018).

Constructs

The primary constructs in this single case study were multi-dimensional constructs, consisting of multiple underlying concepts (Bhattacharjee, 2020). In this case study, the primary constructs were leadership style, service productivity results, and company culture persona. I identified these constructs in the case study through various interviews and interpret and were defined by the researcher during the transcription process. There were conditional constructs in

this study, the effect and its value depend on the changes in the independent constructs (Calder et al., 2021). The conditional constructs in this case study were customer loyalty, productivity results, and customer referrals.

People follow different leadership styles within the company. Xenikou (2017) defined leadership style as the way a leader behaves with his or her colleagues and the way they exercise the leadership role. Leadership style ultimately plays a vital role in the relationship engagement in today's businesses. Al-Khaled and Chung (2020) concluded that a leadership style influences job satisfaction, employee willingness to achieve company goals, and employee retainability. Company X had influential leaders over the years and leaders that have not had a great impact on company morale. Through this study's interviews with the employees and data observations, the correlation between the impact of the leadership styles of the leaders of the company of the business results were prevalent.

Measuring productivity in the service industry is difficult. Having served a multitude of customers does not mean that company leaders provided quality service ("Reasons that productivity is difficult," 2021). Scientific literature defines service as a human activity that is an economic activity directed towards customer satisfaction (Álvarez-Garcia et al., 2019). The performance of a service provider depends on the perceived service quality by the customer and the service productivity (Scerri & Agarwal, 2018). The employee is the front-line indicator that is a factor in the perception of quality to the customer (Alexiadou et al., 2017). The customer depends on the skills, the knowledge, and the integrity of the employee to produce a service that is the standard that will fulfill the intended purpose (Scerri & Agarwal, 2018). The employee depends on the leader to provide a company culture that encourages training and professional development so that the employee can deliver that exceptional service (Groysberg et al., 2018).

Low employee morale or a lack of employer to employee communication causes poor productivity (Elendu, 2018). Quality service or high productivity in the service industry measures by maximizing efficiency by helping the greatest number of customers and keeping them satisfied at the same time (“Reasons that productivity is difficult,” 2021). This case study includes identifying the direct correlation between employee/employer engagement and service productivity through the interview process and data observation along with the customer retentions reports.

How the employee, employer, and customer perceive the internal relationship between the employee and employer impacts the company culture (Asante Boadi, et al., 2019). A positive company culture typically involves appropriate engagement between employees and employers (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). Metz et al. (2020) suggested that a company’s service culture determines the attitudes and behavior of the leaders and employees and supports the customer service culture. The company culture also depicts at what level the leaders and employees should provide services to customers (Metz et al., 2020). The company culture engages the relationship between leaders, employees, and customers. The company culture places value on the human aspect of the company. Begeny et al. (2021) posited that organization leaders that can recognize and appreciate all member’s relevant qualities, skills, and ideas are able to create a company culture that promotes sustainability, individual self-worth, and community belonging. The perception of the company culture that was revealed during the interview process of this study. The perception of the company culture was different for everyone’s past experiences and interactions within the company (Asante Boadi et al., 2019).

Employee engagement drives customer loyalty because engagement allows employees to reach their full potential (Murphey, 2019). Customers can feel the enthusiasm and commitment

from the employee. Ranjan et al. (2021) notated that the number one reason most companies are customer focused is that they lose sight of the real value-the front-line employee. In the service industry, the front-line employee meets the expectations of the employee by answering all questions to ease any anxieties, worries, or apprehensions about the services (Ranjan et al., 2021). Davidovitz and Cohen (2021) noted a customer will develop their first impression about the company with the first encounter with the service employee about the overall quality of the service performed before performing the service. Martinaityte et al. (2019) indicated that although many employees are driving by the self-determination theory (SDT), leaders create a high-performance work system (HPWS) through the engagement of training, professional development, and overall incentive programs. A HPWS provides a front-line employee with confidence and the creative engagement to influence customer satisfaction and promote customer loyalty (Martinaityte et al., 2019). During the interview process, the perception of confidence in the abilities of the leader and the employee was able to define and reveal through the open-ended questions. This perception was an indication of the level of engagement between leaders and employees as the level of engagement pertained to the development of skills and training pertaining to customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

If a customer is happy and feels leaders value them as a customer, then they are more prone to refer the company to someone (Parasuraman, et al., 2020). In the service industry, the most effective form of marketing and growth comes from word of mouth. Epti (2019) quoted a survey from *Social Media Today* stating that referrals are the 2nd highest source of leads, and referrals bring in money with almost no financial output. However, Viswanathan et al. (2018) concluded that a customer might become motivated to tell others if a service exceeds their expectations or talk about their positive experience, but if the service experience fails to meet

their expectations, they have a greater motivation to engage in negative word of mouth to reduce to their anxiety or to warn others; there is comfort in vengeance. For this fact, companies must think about customer satisfaction proactively and begin the process internally (Viswanathan et al., 2018). Rioux (2020) quoted 77% of customer would recommend a brand to a friend after a single positive experience. However, customer referral is about keeping a company's existing customers happy while attracting new customers (Epti, 2019). Rioux (2020) also notated that keeping a company's existing customers happy can increase a company's profits from 25 to 95% but new customer acquisitions costs have risen almost 50% over the past five years. I reviewed the documentation from the customer service ratings concerning Company X to evaluate the customer perspective and derive a direct correlation between the internal relationship engagement between the leaders, the employees, and the impact this relationship has on the customer experience.

Relationship Between Concepts, Theories, Actors, and Constructs

Human relationships are the essential ingredient in the success of an organization in the service industry (Anwar & Ghafoor, 2017). The leader and employee relationship must build on trust and mutual respect. Many factors can affect the relationship status between and leader/manager and the employee. The leader's leadership style and the company culture can positively or negatively impact the employee's morale depending on the employee's perception (Harter & Mann, 2017). An employee that feels valued, trusted, and respected will go the extra mile to ensure the company goals and objectives are met, but their coworkers and the customers have the best experience possible with the company (Rogers, 2018). The employee's attitude of going the extra mile is a self-determination attitude and ties in with the Self-determination Theory of Management (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The productivity results are the measures that

relate output to the hours of all persons or employees involved in producing that output (Kiran, 2019). The people involved include self-employed and unpaid family workers. The productivity results impact by the relationship of the leaders and employees, the customer relations, and the company culture persona (Ali & Anwar, 2021).

Summary of the Research Framework

As indicated in *Figure 1* of Company X, the actors, leaders, employees, and customers, were the primary components in the business results that affect the employee and employer relationship. Leaders need to have a leadership style that positively impacts the company culture that brings up employee morale and increases employee service productivity results (Fachri et al., 2021). When a leader and employee can commit to doing what is best for the customer, who is the ultimate actor in obtaining positive business results, the results increase customer retention because of satisfaction, profitability, and customer referrals (Murphey, 2019). In the service industry, the best form of marketing is word of mouth. When leaders lead by example, employees challenge each other to be leaders and to optimally perform to meet the company's goals and objectives. The customers are the winners in the end in this situation (Andersen, 2018).

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined to help the reader understand the context of each term in this case study.

Company Culture: the attitudes and behaviors of the people in a company that support the company's goals and objectives (Bhat & Bharel, 2018).

Corporate Social Responsibility: the perception on corporations, their employees, and business activities for organizational performance achievement towards goodness of society that can impact an employee's attitude and behavior (Sarfraz et al., 2018).

Customer Loyalty: the preferred purchase towards a brand or brands over a period because of superior perceived value of service or quality of goods (Tankovic & Benazic, 2018).

Customer Perceived Value: a customer's overall assessment of the value of the service or product based on what perceives of what receives and what is given and is connected to the customers attitudes and behavior (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Customer Satisfaction: a measure of the difference between customers' expectations before purchasing a service and their evaluation of this service after delivery (Nunko et al., 2020).

Employee Commitment: a multidimensional employee loyalty that encompasses the willingness to exceedingly perform on behalf of the organization to achieve organizational and professional goals, and a desire to remain loyal to the organization (Opoku & Arthur, 2018).

Employee Engagement: the level of mental and emotional connection an employee has toward the company where they work r, the team, and the work they perform (Lappalainen et al., 2019).

Front-line Employee: an employee whose role is to be the face of the organization to provide direct exceptional service to the customer (Kim, 2017).

Job Satisfaction: the feeling an employee has towards their work and place of work because of their evaluation of the job (Ramawickrama et al., 2017).

Motivation: a psychological desire that leads to a direct, intense, or persistent behavior to achieve completion or goals and objectives (Yazdanifar, 2018).

Organizational Commitment: a strong identification with an organization's goals and values and the willingness and desire to become involved and stay with the organization to achieve the goals and enhance the values (Palupi et al., 2017).

Service Productivity: the efficiency of input resources in a service process to produce an output result for the service provider and a valued service for the service provider's customer (Scerri & Agarwal, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

Assumptions are the notions that appear as true by the readers of the research study. An act of faith or a realistic expectation with no adequate or empirical evidence to support the act or expectation is an assumption, according to Theofandis and Fountouki (2019). The limitations of the study are the characteristics that impact the findings of the research (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). Assumptions and limitations should not include contradiction (Davis, 2021). On the contrary of limitations, delimitations help define what the researcher has control over while conducting a study (Naar, 2021). Delimitations are what the researcher chooses not to focus on within the scope of the study.

Assumptions

Several assumptions underlined this study. First, the assumption was that the participants interviewed would be honest with their responses since there is a confidentiality statement between the participants and the researcher. Kristal et al. (2020) indicated that participants do not deceive or lie intentionally but may become dishonest because of their individual perspectives of the world. The participants lack knowledge on what is being asked during the research, or the fear of being inferior or shamed is an assumption. Levine and Cohen (2018) conducted research and concluded that participants find honesty to become hard if they think they will become outcasted for being honest about their colleagues or receive judgement by the results of the research. Second, the assumption was that the participants were aware of the intent of the research, as there was an advanced letter of explanation prior to the anticipated interview day.

Xu et al. (2020) concluded that participants who learned about why a study was conducted were more able to become open and willing to offer more information during the interview process. Lastly, there was an assumption that all participants have a willingness to be a participant and be open with their responses to the betterment of the research and the results of the study. Cargill (2019) indicated three elements that are important when approaching potential research participants: information, comprehension, and voluntarism. Communicating why the research was done, ensuring an understanding of the procedures of the study, and that participating is completely a decision that is up to them can promote a sense of confidence and openness from the participants to become honest, volunteer to participate, and to become open in their discussion or interview (Palk et al., 2020).

Limitations

Limitations are a study's weaknesses that are out of a researcher's control and are typically related to such things as time constraints, methodology, statistical model constraints, or other factors (Theofandis & Fountouki, 2019). According to Ross and Zaidi (2019), researchers that provide generic limitations or abbreviated limitations may limit the impact of their research. The first limitation in this study was the collected data were the opinions and beliefs of the participants. The views of the participants may not reflect all the employees of Company X. Therefore, the conclusions reached may not represent all employees or leaders of service organizations. Open ended, non-judgmental, and detailed follow-up questions can help uncover any bias or opinions from the participants (Roberts, 2020). Observing the participants while they are working in their daily routines allowed me to see how the participants interacted with other employees and leaders and uncovered some of the biases (Bäcklander, 2019). The observations can also determine the role of the participants and their feelings toward the organization

(Roberts, 2020). A second limitation for this study was time constraints for the observational data. Although there was observational data collected, there were time constraints or limitations as I was not able to observe all of employees and transcribe all findings; therefore, the observational findings limited to the few participants that I observed or interviewed. For this study, I examined each level of employees at Company X and invited several employees from each level to participate in the study. By inviting or including employees from all levels, I was able to gain a better perspective of the employee and leader interactions and create a greater degree of reliability and freedom from bias and opinions (Natow, 2019). Time constraints also played a factor in the analysis of the business results of the participating organization (Theofandis & Fountouki, 2019). In the service industry, the business results will fluctuate throughout the year because peak times will create the demand for services (Stiles et al., 2021). The financial reports from Company X detailed the productivity of the employees and leaders. The analysis of these reports occurred for several peak times to get a better understanding of Company X's performance. An analysis of the reports occurred when the company flourished and when the company was going through financial transitions. The questions transitioned participants to look back on these times and provide information on how the internal relationships impacted these results. Some participant's memories were not as clear and precise as others, therefore, the data reports used in the research study were dated back to five years to current.

Delimitations

Miles and Scott (2017) defined delimitations as the researcher's self-imposed restrictions to the study, or the reason the researcher is not doing something. Theofandis and Fountouki (2019) suggested that researchers set the boundaries, or the reasons on why they are not doing

something, so that the study's purpose, or objectives do not become impossible to achieve. The delimitation of this a single case study-Company X. The lack of time prevented the study from being conducted among several service companies in the area. However, the extensive research and thorough data collection and analysis, the study produced results that are more widely applicable to other service industry companies.

Significance of the Study

A disengaged employee costs a company 34% of an average annual salary, or \$3,400 for every \$10,000 they make (Borysenko, 2019). Osborne and Hammoud (2017) indicated that companies are finding ways to reduce costs and increase productivity and efficiency; however, a disengaged employee leads to an 18% lower productivity and 15% lower profitability rates (Borysenko, 2019). The results in this study can help employers and their leaders have an understanding on the effects of a disengaged employee and how better to create employee engagement within the company, which will benefit the company's business results. The study was conducted because there was an opportunity to add research exploring the relationship effects between leaders and employees to the service industry business world. The study results will help small businesses by providing answers that will benefit small businesses regarding how employees and leaders feel about commitment, trust, and mutual respect can impact the company's business results, image, and culture. The study results will also have a positive impact on leaders' effectiveness of creating a nurturing working environment.

Businesses operations include making profits or, for non-profits, to bring money in and create sustainability (Braun, Latham, & Cannatelli, 2019). To effectively produce a profit and create sustainability, business owners, leaders, and employees must work together strategically to create an environment that encourages everyone to optimally perform (Osborne & Hammoud,

2017). The findings of this study will help narrow the gap in literature that exists in the business field by reporting the effect of employee engagement from the perspective of employees of a service industry company that experienced changes over the past thirty years. The leaders and employees that analyze the study will learn successful and unsuccessful operations such as leadership styles and open-door policies. Also, the study's findings indicated that commitment must not come from the employer's leaders, but from commitment of the employee. When leaders and employees respect and value each other, engagement improves productivity, morale, and profits.

A lack of opportunity can be a symptom of disengagement in the workplace. Leaders can become disengaged or complacent when they feel they are not going to receive a promotion (Kramer, 2021); and employees can feel disengaged and meaningless in their work (Benner & Curl, 2018). With this research, my attempt was to narrow the literature gap to show that the opportunity lies within the leader and the employee. Engagement starts within and protrudes outward to those around to produce a positive and productive atmosphere or environment. Minimal research exists on how individuals perceive their role in the commitment on the engagement to cultivate a relationship between employer and employee for the betterment of all stakeholders in a company. The goal was to inform and allow business to review the engagement from a different perspective. This qualitative constructivism study involved reporting the perception of leader's and employee's engagement and commitment from an individual and personal level to produce professional outcomes in the workplace.

Change occurs every day. Social change is the change in human interactions that transforms cultures and organizations over time and has long-term effects on society (Harper & Kezar, 2021). The study contributes to positive social change by helping business leaders in the

service industry increase their productivity, company and individual morale, and customer service ratings (Lin et al., 2020). Understanding employee and employer engagement, as the engagement relates to the business results of a company, will add to the knowledge of the subject. The research is useful to leaders and employees in the service industries by using the perceptions of the participants in this study to gain a better understanding of employee engagement.

Reduction of the Gaps in Literature

Researchers conduct research to understand the relationship leaders have on the success of an organization and the employees (Marshall, 2019). This study included examining the perceptions of leaders and employees concerning their responsibility to cultivate a relationship between their leader and/or employee. In addition, this study included filling in the gap in academic literature regarding the affects this relationship has on the business results of a service industry company. The service industry depends on the collaboration between the leader and the employees to provide excellent customer service at every opportunity (Veile et al., 2019). This study included contributing to the understanding of leaders' perception of motivating employees to engage, excel, and serve in the workplace, customers, and in their personal accomplishments while enhancing business results. My goal was to contribute to the understanding of employees' perception of individual commitment to engage, develop, and thrive on the opportunity to advance in a multitude of directions while assisting the business in obtaining sustainability.

The research for this study resulted in literature that included dynamics of service companies primarily in the healthcare, hospitality, banking, and tourism industry (Min-Seong & Dong-Woo, 2017). While the literature provided a deep insight into the relationship between leaders, employees, and customers in those service industries, many more service companies

exist that become impacted by the intricate relationship between a company's leaders, employees, and their customers. According to Nilsson et al. (2020), advanced economies are experiencing a long-term shift where service industries are becoming a larger component of economic output compared to other industries such as manufacturing and agriculture. Businesses are not set up the same because of location, services offered, consumer demand, and start-up costs. The gap in information could assist management and leaders in creating a competitive edge and add a differentiation factor to set themselves apart to become not only that service company of choice, but also that employer of choice (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019).

Implications for Biblical Integration

A portion of the study include the commitment of an employee to establish a relationship with an employer. A significant amount of literature emerged during the research of this study that included the responsibilities of the employer engaging the employee in cultivating a relationship. God created man to interact with man, to have a relationship. In Genesis 2:18-22 (KJV), God made Adam a helper and states that *it is not good for man to be alone*. God is a relational being as he exists as the Trinity Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Reimer, 2019). Since God created humans in his image and he is relational, so are humans. As leaders and as employees, a relationship should receive cultivation to engage, inspire, and motivate to do his will and for his glory. According to Kanat-Maymon et al. (2017), leaders and employees that develop relationships have a stronger commitment that leads to less work related stress, higher retentions, and positive business results.

Lastly, the Bible tells Christians to work wholeheartedly. Proverbs 14:23 (KJV) states: *In all labour there is profit, but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury*. Words are just what they are, words. What matters are the actions behind the words. Huéscar Hernández et al. (2020)

defined work as the activity or behavior with the application of effort, to fulfill challenges or purposes with successful measures. Effort is mandatory from the leaders and from the employees to create a successful relationship for the betterment of the company, the employees, the leaders, the vendors, the suppliers, the customers, and the community (Vaishnavi et al., 2019). Followers should put an effort that motivates, encourages, and uplift for the betterment of everyone involved.

Benefit to Business Practice and Leadership

This qualitative study included the human perception of engagement and motivation. The significance of this research was to identify the leadership attitudes and behaviors that prevent or contribute to the failure to cultivate a relationship with employees that will produce positive business results (Charterina et al., 2018). The central idea of this study included the assumption that a leader presets the company culture and can enhance or stimulate these factors in a way that can depict the employee's outcome. The findings from this research can apply across several types of service companies to improve company culture, productivity, customer service ratings, employee engagement, and motivation. Understanding the leadership styles of the leader can motivate and engage employees (Amah, 2018). Leadership style influences job satisfaction, employee willingness to achieve company goals, and employee retainability (Al-Khaled & Chung, 2020).

The study results reflect the leader's impact on the employees' attitudes, behaviors, and level of commitment that contributes to the productivity and customer perceptions of the company. Gcaza et al. (2018), indicated that employees' level of commitment influences the positive effects of leadership styles and organizational culture. If the leadership style is motivational, the experience of the employee should appear positive and encouraging. Creating a

positive experience for the service customer creates a happy employee that performs to ensure the customer's expectations (Kodagoda & Deheragoda, 2021). As a business practice, customers are the reason most service companies exist, but employees are the reason for service, and leaders are the instrument to ensure the process is a smooth transition. The potential results of the study were for leaders to see a different perspective that developed a culture from leaders that had no formal training and still achieved success developing a culture that exemplifies motivation and encouragement.

Summary of the Significance of the Study

The researcher can apply the terms to define the components in the way they will appear in the study instead of the reader's context (Theofandis & Fountouki, 2019). Assumptions in a study are beyond the control of the researcher (Armstrong & Kepler, 2018). Justification for each assumption is just as important as stating the assumption. Delimitations are the opposite of limitation in the aspect of control; the researcher has control of the delimitations (Theofandis & Fountouki, 2019). Delimitations are those factors that the researcher chooses to investigate. Researchers will state delimitations so that the focus will remain on the study's objectives (Hodosi & Rusu, 2019). The research included the role of the leader, but the employee's role in the need to cultivate a relationship that will produce positive business results for the company. God created humans to work together for the betterment of everyone despite their differences of opinions, personalities, and leadership styles.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The following review of relevant literature included the concerns related to the internal relationships between leaders and their employees. Peer reviewed journal articles, working papers, and other publications relevant to the topic of engagement between leaders and their

employees received examination in the literature review. Salamon et al. (2021) concluded work engagement is a positive and fulfilling state of mind characterizes by three components: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Several research studies, just like Ma et al. (2021), determined that engagement is a psychological state. The purpose of this literature review is to gain an understanding of the effects that engagement has on business outcomes and a company's internal and external stakeholders. Extensive research for this study on the responsibility of the employee, the leader, and the impact each has on achieving optimal business results. Although a clear definition nonexistent on the level of expectation of engagement that is expected from a leader or an employee, work engagement at any level is an individual's complete investment into their work role (Lai et al., 2020). Engagement is an individual commitment (Uddin, et al., 2019). This literature review showed the relationship between the leaders' and the employees' level of commitment and the business implications of their commitments.

Business Practices

Mohamad-Radzi et al. (2017) asserted that companies with internal resources that were superior, not easily imitated, and not substitutable by the competition gained and sustained a competitive advantage. The internal resources of a company are tangible assets of human and technology resources and the intangible assets of knowledge, skills, reputation, and capabilities (Shen et al., 2020). The combination of these internal resources helped companies obtain growth and success through the creation of a strategic company culture that embraces internal relationships (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). Businesses prosper by embracing the employee redesigned organizational culture that focused on establishing core values, maintaining constructive workplace culture, and empowering employees and leaders to grow and develop their unique areas of organizational responsibility for workplace autonomy therefore,

empowering the employee (Blattner et al., 2021). Empowered employees thrive on the challenges that contribute to their growth and career development (Mohamad-Radzi et al., 2017). Allevalo (2020) concluded that the impact of the learning and growth culture developed by employees and their leaders contributed to the increased productivity of the employee and overall business performance.

Transparency and communication. Transparency and open communication are business practices that promote employee and leader relationships (Jiang & Shen, 2020).

Groysberg et al. (2018) indicated that a company expanded into new segments and geographies in just over a few years and gained a fair share of the market when leaders share values and norms with employees. When employees, and employees share values and norms with other employees, consistently throughout a company on every level the company expands.

. Growth is the result of teamwork and collaboration. Ladyshevsky and Taplin (2018) asserted that when business leaders and employees worked together, collaboration enhanced corporate performance and had positive effectives on company culture which, in effect, promoted teamwork. A sustainable, competitive edge gains when company leaders realize and promote leader and employee communication as the distinguishing factor in company culture. This process demonstrates social responsibility, protect the company's interest and achieve the company's optimal business results in addition this process engages, and motivate employees, drive innovation, and satisfy customers' needs (Nwabueze & Mileski, 2018).

Employer and employee relationships can strengthen therefore, regular communication can happen. The development of trust can help employers and employees make better decisions in achieving the company's goals and objectives through the implementation of an open communication environment (Khalid & Nawab, 2018).

A culture of open communication where employees feel encouraged to share their ideas or concerns feel valued leads to a sense of ownership in the company. Communication could mean the difference between an employee who works just for a paycheck or an employee that performs optimally to help company leaders achieve their goals and objectives (Hameed et al., 2019). (Hameed et al., 2019). Cui (2021) indicated that employees who feel their voice is heard at work are 4.6 times more likely empowered to do their best work. Leaders that can listen to employee's issues and concerns build loyalty, motivation, and improve productivity (Fazal & Siddiqui, 2020). An open communication and active listening team culture gives a competitive edge. Open communication eliminates unproductive tension, organizational instability, and job outcome delays.; However, an open communication and active listening team culture improves efficiency because collaboration addresses the problems that prevent the team from performing at optimal levels (Bradix, 2021). Open communication creates internal transparency, which unites activities to prepare employees to manage their customers with readiness and friendliness that could improve customer relationships, brand reputation, and customer and public confidence (Cui, 2021).

Communication is includes talking or saying the right things to motivate people. Effective communication includes emotions, nonverbal gestures, tones, and technical transmissions (Tandyonomanu, 2018). The issue with these types of communication is that perception of the communication that people can misconstrue if not managed correctly (Tandyonomanu, 2018). Cha et al. (2019) indicated that factors associated with leader and their emotions: a leader showing too much emotion shows instability and unreliability and a leader who is not afraid to show themselves or their emotions at work are truly authentic. Knoppers et al. (2021) indicated that emotions are what make people who they are and, when displayed

appropriately, can motivate, inspire, and direct others. However, bad emotions, such as anger, jealousy, and irritation, as Knopper et al. (2021) indicated, can create a hostile environment, which is counterproductive. Nonverbal communication, a smile or pat on the back for example, can have the good intent of portraying a job well done or a sense of encouragement (Venter, 2019). However, as Radovic Markovic and Salamzadeh (2018) concluded that, people can misread nonverbal communication and possibly viewed as flirting, sexual harassment, or against company policy. Technology is used daily in just about all aspects of life. Emails, texts, or memos can lead to assumptions because of a lack of tone, pitch, facial emotions (Ahearne et al., 2021). Without tone and facial expressions or emotions, the message can lose the sincerity or the urgency that needs communication (Christanti et al., 2022). Effective communication must be clear, precise, and transparent (Eldridge et al., 2020).

Training and professional development. Joo and Lee (2017) concluded that organizational success enhances with the implementation of training and developmental programs which led to a strong working environment, greater leader and employee engagement, and higher job satisfaction. The implementation of an award system that gears more toward employee engagement and extends beyond an employee's or leader's performance within and outside their roles will help to promote professional development. In addition, an award system increases productivity, morale, and creates a sense of commitment from the employee (Rai et al., 2019). As technology increases at a rapid rate, and for service companies to stay competitive, training, and professional development has become a necessity in the strategic role of success in supporting the company (Noe & Kodwani, 2018).

Sabouripour et al. (2021) noted that human beings possess many capacities like self-efficacy, hope, confidence, optimism, positive attitude, and resilience. While many of these

capacities are innate, people learn or cultivate these capacities. Bilal et al. (2020), recommended that to enhancing employee engagement requires organizational leaders to focus on employee training, compensation, and recognition. Leaders who use a proper appraisal process promotes employee confidence and success. Training can lead to employees having competence, commitment, and contributions, which, as indicated in the study by Bilal et al. (2020), are three key qualities of employees. In another study, opportunities for professional development, professional growth, and appreciation were the key motivators in employee engagement rather than monetary incentives (Abu Rumman et al., 2020).

Customer service focus strategy. Customer service in a service company rating depends on whether the satisfied and dissatisfied customers, In addition, the ratings depends on the level of customer expectation and favorable and unfavorable interaction with employees (Park, Lee, & Nicolau, 2020). Customers will judge a company based on a front-line employee's interaction, behavior, and the significant difference in the company's customer acquisition. Retention data makes a difference because an investment in customer service training can build customer loyalty, impress customers at every level, improve employee engagement through personal development and job satisfaction in addition, retention help employees resolve customer complaints faster and more efficiently (Mathias et al., 2021).

Wu and Wu (2019) indicated that when employees have close relationships to customers, they can understand customer's needs. Front-line employees are the direct contact with the customers and understand the needs of the customer., therefore, the employee's generation of ideas for service improvement (GISI) become invaluable in providing and creating solutions for excellent customer service. Company personnel should consider GISI during training development (Kim et al., 2020). A company has a competitive edge when the company can

transform the intangible asset of customer shared information experience feedback, improvement suggestion, and complaints-and turn the information into knowledge which will increase the customer perceived value (Itani et al., 2020). Kucharska and Bedford (2019) concluded that the willingness to internally share information influences the employee commitment, loyalty, and trust between leaders and employees necessary to achieve the company's goals.

The Problem

Constant disputes and strained relationships between employee and employers tend to spread negativity, create a disconnected company culture, increase absenteeism, and low productivity (Stouten et al., 2018). Annear (2020) quoted research that showed that between 60 and 80% conflict or workplace related stress in companies stem from strained relationships between employees. In addition, stress between employees and leaders, not from deficits in individual employee's skill or motivation. Workplace conflict or a disconnected culture can affect the motivation of employees. Employees feel that nothing can resolve the issues and they feel discrimination. Therefore, they do not disclose their worries which can lead to absenteeism and decreased productivity. (Samma et al., 2020). Workplace conflict creates negative results such as wasted resources, low employee motivation, strained relationships, individual well-being, and psychological stress. In addition, workplace conflict produces negative workplace interactions, and negative work-family interactions (Jha et al., 2019). Companies' leaders spend billions of dollars each year, collectively, related to claims of employee lost time, increased health care costs, decreased productivity that results from workplace related stress (Foy et al., 2019).

Leaders that show a disconnect in employee and employer connections often experience a high turnover rate, low morale, lack of productivity, unhappy employees, and unhappy customers

(Thiefels, 2019). Disengaged employees perform poorly in the workplace, cause conflict with colleagues and supervisors, have high absenteeism rates, and negatively affect customer service (Ismail et al., 2019). When disengaged employees are absent, they can cause disruptions in scheduling, loss of productivity, and increase costs. Adding costs for replacement or opportunity costs for employee task reassignment, causes extra burden on supervisors, and feelings of resentment from colleagues can occur (Cachazo, 2018). Juan et al. (2018) concluded that a disengaged employee will bring the morale of other engaged employees down, disrupt the workplace harmony, slow the innovation or productivity, and cause stagnation.

Sturt and Nordstrom (2018) concluded that 79% of employees leave good jobs because the employer failed to honor an intrinsic element of success and growth—the relationship between the employee and the employer. Nonis-Tramonte's (2021) revealed that 67% of disengaged employees were because of bad management or destructive leadership practices. Bicer (2020) quoted a study that found destructive leadership affected 13.6% of U.S. employees negatively, which, can lead to employee absenteeism, employee turnover, and lowered effectiveness. Reina et al. (2018) concluded that the tactics that leaders use to produce business results contributed to 75% of the key reasons why employees left a company. Employee productivity and performance deteriorate with the loss of profitability and sustainability because of the broken promises and unmet expectations of leaders that result in missed deadlines, unsatisfactory performance, and continual withholding of resources (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2020).

According to Osborne and Hammoud (2017), U.S. corporations lose approximately \$350 billion a year because of disengaged employees because management continues to limit the focus on the product and services and not the employee. Employees are the biggest brand advocates for a company. If employees are not happy, feel valued, respected, and heard, they will have low

morale and low productivity. In addition, employees, will tell their friends, colleagues, and loved ones about their negative work experience resulting in the potential loss of new customers and employees (Silva, 2019). Chamberlain and Zhao (2019) quoted a study by American Customer Satisfaction Index that revealed that for each 1% improvement in ACSI customer satisfaction scores for an employer was associated with a statistically significant 4.6% boost in its overall stock market value. By adapting an “employee first” system, Gordon Bethune transformed Continental Airlines from being last on the list in customer service ratings to winning more J.D. Powers & Associates awards. Bethune won the customer service award more than any other airline, which, took the company’s stock prices from \$2 per share to \$50 per share, and is now ranked as one of the top companies to work for by Fortune 100 (Whitley, 2019). Putting the employee first also means putting the employee’s family first. Moreo et al. (2020) concludes that leaders who empathized with employees’ need for work-life balance had employees that demonstrated higher levels of commitment, retention, productivity, and emotional intelligence.

To foresee a viable future, business leaders must find innovative ways to find the balance between employee relations and maximizing short-term and long-term profits (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Goedhart and Koller (2020) challenged companies to place value in the creation of value in by focusing on employee relations now through training and development, salaries, and motivation. Part of the process included focusing on employee relations later, through social and community impacts and creating ways to attract quality employees. Žnidaršič and Bernik (2021) concluded that organizations are increasing the engagement of their workers and attempting bridge the gap between work-family-life balance. However, this is just a short-term fix, a long-term remedy would be to redefine the demands of the workers and the working conditions may require legislation and the worker self-evaluation method. Haessler (2020)

recommended that leaders emphasize corporate sustainability as tangible, measured with key performance indicators on the financial records. In addition, leaders should emphasize corporate sustainability I the mindset of the management team and their employees to maximize short-term profits and long-term profits.

Concepts

Although, several other concepts exist included in this study, the major concepts in this study the essential need for leaders to cultivate an employee and employer relationship., In addition, commitment from the employee, and how the relationship between a leader and employee affects the business results. The service industry depends on a cultivated relationship between the leader and the employee because they are the “product” of the organization (Subramanian, 2018). The service process starts with the employees and the satisfaction they experience in the workplace. Employees and leaders want to feel as valued as the organization’s customers (Rogers, 2018).

Leaders are essential in cultivating an employer and employee relationship. Leaders are essentially the first connection an employee encounters, and this connection can define the company culture in just a matter of minutes (Madonko & April 2020). This first interaction between a leader and employee is an important motivational moment that a leader must take advantage of to cultivate an effective employee and employer relationship. A leader that can motivate through example, encouragement, and the understanding of the importance of human relationships are more prone to have employees that are willing to listen. In addition, provide critical solutions to make the company successful and customers happy (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Kouzes and Posner (2019) conveyed that despite the differences between the individual characteristics of leaders and employees, the universal characteristics of effective leaders are

instrumental in developing exemplary leaders. These leaders can motivate employees towards achieving their personal best, are modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. Leaders that place dynamics of the employer and employee relations at the center of management practices will increase performances. In addition, reduce conflicts, increase efficiency, satisfaction, engagement, retention, policy compliance, and overall commitment to the organization (Ansah et al., 2018).

Lu et al. (2022) concluded that a cautious approach to ethical leadership are leaders that attempt to engage employees by setting a good example. Lu et al.'s (2022) indicated that ethical leaders could become hypocritical, egotistical, or untrustworthy if everything they do assumed perfect or unwary of faults. This employee perspective of "too much of a good thing" can cause demotivation and a decrease in input and output productivity (Qin et al., 2019). A leader that tries too hard to engage employees or seems too ethical can hinder the creativity and decision-making process because employees will question what is right or what is enough (Peng et al., 2019). Engaged employees perceive their workplace as a place that supports their work, their interests, and recognizes their value even in the employees' failures (Bernardino, 2021).

An employer and employee relationship requires a commitment from the employee.

Engagement is not just the responsibility of the employer, or the leader, communication and results happen when the team or two people interact with a common goal (Lacerenza et al., 2018). An employer and employee relationship also requires a commitment from the employee. The Gallup poll in 2018 indicated that only 34% of U.S. employees engage in their jobs. Unless employees take responsibility for their roles in cultivating the relationship between employer and employee, the efforts of the company's managers and leaders, will have a limited effect on the leader's ability to meet their goals and objectives (Harter, 2018). Ebikeseye and Dickson (2018)

concluded that the employee and the leader are dependent factors of commitment and the level of motivation. The outcome of commitment, predicated by the degree of engagement by the individuals with the company and how the individuals align themselves with the company's objectives to achieve optimal performance. Employees' ethics and corporate social responsibility should align to optimize the potential for motivation for voluntary engagement and maximize business results and personal gains for the employee (Kunz, 2020).

Companies with highly engaged employee and employer relationships have a higher competitive advantage and organizational success through a factor of mutual trust (Kang & Sung, 2019). Mutual trust improves the quality and quantity of communication between the employer and employee. As communication improves, the information problem sharing strategies can increase profitability (Nazir et al., 2019). Fang et al. (2021) asserted that researchers found a direct correlation in the positive relationship between employee satisfaction and their service company's future profitability. Kuppelwieser et al. (2018) concluded that the relationship between management and employees, among other organizational factors, highly impacts the quality of services resulting in an impact of customer satisfaction and profitability. Madhani (2020) quoted the business results from the construction-equipment maker, Caterpillar, where the business results were extreme because of an effective employer and employee relationship. The business results included \$8.8 million in savings from decreased attrition, absenteeism, and overtime, 70% increase in output in four months, a \$2 million increase in profits, and a 34% increase in highly satisfied customers.

An employer and employee relationship affects business results. The relationship between employees and employers affects company morale. Hillary and Balu (2018) concluded that maintaining a healthy employee relationship is an organization's pre-requisite for success, a

requirement for high productivity and human satisfaction. Work is central to one's identity and satisfaction is essential in one's well-being, any disruption can affect the working environment and affect the productivity and effectiveness of the organization (Emre & De Spiegeleare, 2021). According to the study by Memon et al. (2020), employee morale does not predicate on higher pay or heavy incentives but is heightened by an employer and employee relationship. In addition, employee morale comes from encouraging growth, training satisfaction, and performance appraisal satisfaction. Iqbal et al. (2020) concluded that employees that maintained a respectable relationship with their employers saw the company's problems as their own. The employees try to find solutions to those problems as if they were their own. When employees and employers have a relationship based on mutual respect and trust, company morale is high, productivity is higher, absenteeism is lower, and profits are higher (Emre & De Spiegeleare, 2021).

When evaluating the internal factors that affect the customer service ratings, the company must look at two major components: the company's corporate social responsibility and the frontline employee (Chou et al., 2021). An employee that feels that the company serves the needs of the community and not just making a profit, will become more engaged and have greater commitment to provide customers with a superior service experience (Shin & Hur, 2020). This commitment classifies as prosocial behavior or the desire to exert effort to value other people (Arshad et al., 2021). Shin and Hur's (2020) concluded that service employees with elevated levels of prosocial motivation are more likely to demonstrate a customer orientation and invest their energy in forging an emotional connection with their customers with a humble attitude. Employees who engage and exhibit a humble, servant attitude through prosocial motivation have a greater commitment to quality and help their organizations improve customer relationships

(Gui et al., 2021). This greater employee commitment reveals by an increase of 10% in customer ratings and obtain growth with a 20% increase in sales (Harter, 2020).

Front-line employees are the centerpiece of the customer experience because they set the tone for a positive or negative customer experience (Kranzbühler et al., 2018). Many times, frontline employees are the first and only representation that customers may see (Stock et al., 2017). Frontline service employees require must active engage with customers during the expected flawless service encounter by listening to the customer's needs to complete the transaction precisely for the customer (Ghlichlee & Bayat, 2020). Fully engaged employees consistently are more innovative and motivated to provide customers with an exceptional service, resulting in increased customer loyalty, happiness, and reputation (Al-Hawari et al., 2020). An engaged employee can create customer loyalty, positive company image, branding, and increased financial performance for the company. . Disengaged employees express a lack of interest and enthusiasm for their work, which negatively impacts the quality of the service and customer expectations (Allam, 2017). An employee that feels valued will go beyond to make sure that the company's goals and objectives are met while taking care of the customer (Burmeister, n.d.). An employee that feels undervalued will exhibit counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) (González-Navarro et al., 2018). Ma and Liu (2019) found that CWBs take place on all levels of an organization and roughly 75% of all employees demonstrate a form of CWBs in their career. Common CWB are theft, aggression, spreading rumors, sabotage, fraud, absenteeism, tardiness, or workplace bullying (Hur et al., 2018). As indicated in the study by Ma and Liu (2019), CWBs contribute to productivity loss, low company morale, high job related stress, and could cost organizations billions.

Employee disengagement can result into conflict within the company or with the leader (Hejjas et al., 2019). Al-Hawari et al. (2020) indicated that employees who experience conflict with a leader are more likely to exhibit negative behaviors and become involved in low-quality exchanges with other employees and customers. The service industry is customer oriented, and companies must establish customer-oriented policies and procedures that create a customer oriented work environment (Ghlichlee & Bayat, 2020). A contradictory signal to employees can occur if the leader displays behaviors that are inconsistent with customer-oriented policies or procedures (Al-Hawari et al., 2020). Deitz et al. (2021) indicated that leaders who align their behaviors with the company's customer oriented work environment and policies, directly increase the employee's sense of commitment, which indirectly impact customer satisfaction, productivity, and increased revenue.

Leadership Theories

The study results reflected the human relationships and how they can affect an organization's leader's ability to achieve desired business results. The four main leadership theories relative to the study are below. The theories chosen for this study has a common factor of relationship. The relationship between leaders and employees reflects how relationships affect the organization's business performance.

Leader member exchange theory. The leader member exchange theory (LMX) includes the relationships between leaders and employees and how these relationships develop at varying levels of loyalty, trust, and professional respect (Gardner et al., 2019). De Roeck and Farooq (2018) indicated that three components to the relationship building process between leaders and employees exist. The components include leaders and employees coming together as strangers with a contractual exchange and leaders and employees progressing from strangers to

acquaintances through increased social exchanges that enhance the relationship. Finally, through a higher degree of exchange, the relationship matures and develops into a relationship of respect, trust, and mutual obligations to the company and team members. When leaders practice the LMX theory, the results could include leaders and employees cultivating a solid relationship built on trust and respect leading to the internal success of the business that will display results through profits and customer ratings (Omilion-Hodges & Ptacek, 2021).

Gardner et al. (2019) concluded that service company employees with a high quality LMX relationship experience beneficial work outcomes, such as productivity, reduced absenteeism, and higher customer service ratings. Leaders involved in high quality LMX relationships have confidence in delegating important work to employees and are prone to offer support and mentorship opportunities for employees (Zhang et al., 2017). Park, Lee, and Nicolau, (2020) revealed that the effects of the LMX theory enhanced the internal hierarchy of employability leverage. Employable leverage is an employee's capability to acquire the skills to accomplish the required work in a self-directed fashion for internal or external gains. An employee and the employer are the leverage that allows for advancement within the company.

The position of the employee framework of the LMX model plays a significant role in the success of the relationship between the employee, the leader, and the customer (Park, Lee, & Nicolau, 2020). The LMX theory includes human resources with the inner group or the outer group (Rüzgar, 2018). Arrasyid and Amaliyah (2019) concurred with Rüzgar that employees who feel when they are in the outer or outside group, they will barely perform their duties. Customer service will include low quality services; therefore, the employee will exhibit low performance or show disengagement. The LMX theory is beneficial for business outcomes and depict the behavior of the employee (Gardner et al., 2019). Wong et al. (2022) studied the

capabilities of the LMX theory on the service industry and frontline employees. Wong et al. (2022) concluded that the LMX theory helps employees to improve job performance and in the perceived marketing capabilities of the organization. Wolfson et al. (2018) described the perceived marketing capabilities of a firm as the ability to understand the customer's needs and to satisfy those needs effectively than the competition. If an employee feels they are part of the inner group in the LMX relationship, the employee will appear motivated and engaged in the processes to meet the customers' needs, therefore, benefiting the firm, the employee, and the customer (Gardner et al., 2019).

Social exchange theory. The social exchange theory (SET) is like the leader member exchange theory as a mutual level of exchange of trust and commitment between employees and leaders (Park, Lee, & Nicolau, 2020). The SET is dependent on the reaction of another person and are inter-reliant (Thomas & Gupta, 2021). The basic principle of the SET is that if a person supplies a benefit, then the receiving party of the benefit should respond in kind which creates a bridge of trust between the employee and the leader (Yang et al., 2019). Ohemeng et al. (2019) concluded that employees and leaders must work continuously on trust and the SET to obtain the benefits of employee engagement. Thomas and Gupta (2021) quoted a study from 1964 that found that SET helps organizational leaders to define employee responsibilities. The SET occur as a positive act by the leaders or the company to define how they should treat employees and the expectation is that the employees treatment will reciprocate (Gill, 2019). The continuous work of SET helps an individual to meet their own personal goals and objectives and gives the individual the motivation or drive to ensure that the company is exceeding their goals and objectives (Obuobisa-Darko, 2020). A crucial factor in the implementation of the SET is that

belief that employees can develop multiple successful relationships with their employer, coworkers, suppliers, customers, and leaders (Sungu et al., 2019).

Self-determination Theory. Self-determination theory (SDT) describes employee motivation as the desire to perform a task to meet their self-worth and to be congruent with the employee's individual values and belief systems (Schwatka, 2020). The self-determination theory (SDT) is the framework for the motivational quality that produces outcomes derived from employee and employer engagements: greater commitment, creativity, higher productivity, persistence, and overall positive organizational culture persona (Rigby & Ryan, 2018). The SDT includes the premise that three psychological needs attributes to high-quality motivation: autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The fulfillment of these basic psychological needs can lead to security, job satisfaction, positive job outlook, trust, a decline in absenteeism, and loyalty to the organization (Mira et al., 2019). Liu et al. (2021) concluded that autonomy occurs through freedom, independence, and employee's discretion to perform work. The psychological needs of relatedness and competence fulfills through the employee connections and leader feedback, which leads to effective job performance, knowledge sharing, competency, and meaningful job perceptions (Liu et al., 2021). Leaders can enhance self-determination by allowing employees to take an active role in the decision-making process, offering additional responsibilities, provide employees with meaningful feedback, and offer support and encouragement (Manganelli et al., 2018).

Servant leadership theory. Eva et al. (2019) defined servant leadership theory (SLT) as a trifold mechanism in engaging employees, creating a relationship between employees and leaders, and impacting leaders. The trifold definition provided by Eva et al. (2019) was that leader's personal agendas are not as important as the employee's agenda, emphasis is on the

employees needs to elevate each employee to be their best possible selves. Servant leaders seek to transform employees into servant leaders to empower them to contribute not only themselves, the company, but to the larger community outside of the company. Andersen (2018) indicated studies that have claimed that servant leadership is a way of life, instead of a management technique, which has the potential to influence and improve an organization's productivity, financial performance, employer and employee morale, and boost internal and external business relationships. Pawar et al. (2020) noted that the key variables of an effective servant-led organization, values people, develops people, builds community, and displays authenticity, support individual and corporate growth, boosts morale, and increases profit margins. Saleem et al. (2020), concluded that servant leadership theory did not have a direct or indirect impact on task performance. Instead, SLT did connect with followers by leading with a human touch rather than an economic model-trust, cognitive and affective translated into positive task and organizational citizenship behaviors (Saleem et al., 2020). Gašková (2020) concluded that servant leadership is not a cure all to a company's employee engagement issues. If a company is having problems with employee productivity or employee and leader relationships, more fundamental training programs are necessary. For example, programs include increasing leader's and employee's emotional intelligence or ethical behaviors (Erdurmazli, 2019).

Constructs

Two types of constructs were the basis of this study: independent and dependent. Both types of constructs surrounded the actors, employee, leaders, and customers, in the study. The primary or independent constructs were leadership style, service productivity results, and company culture persona. The dependent constructs in this study were customer loyalty and customer referrals. Service productivity results categorized as a dependent construct in this

study. Bhattacharjee (2020) explained the difference between dependent and independent constructs as dependent constructs as those constructs that explain or influence other constructs. Bhattacharjee (2020) suggested dependent constructs as those constructs that are impacted by the independent constructs.

Leadership style. Before discussing the aspects of leadership as a construct in this study, the difference between leaders and managers is necessary to define. Azad et al. (2017) indicated that the qualities that leaders and managers should possess does not limit to are optimism, decisiveness, integrity, and open communication. Azad et al. (2017) indicated that managers and leaders as one in the same. However, Valiga (2019) argued that managers and leaders serve two distinct roles and suggested the difference between managers and leaders is passion. Managers work with others to realize the goals of a company through employee performance data, organizational structure and policies, branding, big data, and strategic planning (Azad et al., 2017). Managers' primary focus is the health and future of the company. Leaders' focus on getting the goals of the company achieved by utilizing the strength and talents of employees through motivational techniques, knowledge, and passion (Valiga, 2019). Verburg et al. (2018) concluded managers enforce procedures and policies of the company. The focus includes performance standards, correcting deviant behavior, and knowledge sharing while leaders think critically to find ways to motivate and empower employees. The personality of a leader determines which leadership style incorporates (Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019). Ho and Astakhova (2020) concluded that a leader's characteristics, work attitudes and behaviors, psychological state, and their own passion are critical elements that are instrumental in shaping their leadership styles.

Al-Khaled and Chung (2020) concluded that a leadership style influences job satisfaction, employee willingness to achieve company goals, and employee retainability. An effective leadership style will guarantee that the employees are able to gain, share, and set policies and procedures in place that will allow an organization to reach its goals and objectives (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Leaders primarily have a unique style based on their personality, but their style and personality impact the company culture and the perception of the company via (Groysberg et al., 2018). In correspondence with the SLT, people-oriented leadership styles facilitate employees' knowledge and abilities. Song et al. (2021) suggested that a people-oriented leadership style's specific purpose is to fulfill employee's need to grow, develop, and prosper while fulfilling the company's goals and objectives.

In contrary to the research that leadership style has a direct impact on employee engagement and satisfaction, Rožman and Štrukelj (2021) concluded that no matter what the leadership style portrays, unless the leaders of the organization are authentic, employees will not trust the leaders and, therefore, will not follow a leader despite their leadership style. Rožman and Štrukelj (2021) recommended that the most influential impact on employee engagement is company culture. If the company culture does not depict an organization whose employees work in unity and cultivates a relationship built on trust, the leader or manager's leadership style will affect employees because the environment promotes an on edge feeling of uneasiness (Wahyono et al., 2021). The definition of leadership style plays a big role in the determination of the extent leadership style has on the organization's employee engagement to produce positive business results for the organization (Meiyani & Putra, 2019).

In drawing from the perspective of how leadership style affects the level of engagement between employees and their leaders, communication skills are a prominent factor in expressing

the company culture, the expectations, and the authenticity of the leader (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Leaders' communication skills can alter the psychological state of an employee and ultimately motivate their behaviors and relationship building capabilities (Zhang et al., 2021). Davis et al. (2019) indicated that 70-80% of a leaders' communication intends to foster an environment that is supportive and motivating for employees to achieve optimal job and personal performance goals while satisfying organizational objectives. Jiang and Luo (2020) concluded that all forms of communication, oral, memos, emails, announcements, corporate events, newsletters, or company social media sites, promoted employee engagement with the positive attitude, behavioral, and affective outcomes. Jiang and Luo (2020) indicated the key to effective communication is transparency. Zhang et al. (2021) concluded that the language and communication skills that a leader possesses can lead to employees benefiting from emotional benefits, pride and pleasure, and functional benefits, skills acquisition, which create job satisfaction and produce optimal business results.

Service productivity results. Quality service or high productivity in the service industry measures by maximizing efficiency by helping the greatest number of customers and keeping them satisfied at the same time ("Reasons that productivity is difficult," 2021). Blanchard et al. (2020) indicated that efficiency is better obtained by employees that exhibit work satisfaction that is gained through skills confidence and managerial support. Work satisfaction is a key indicator of an organization's health and can be a sign of success within an organization, which is a factor that customers are looking for in a service organization (Reece et al., 2021). Combining employee efficiency and customer satisfaction would seem to include a strategic plan to achieve optimal business results, however, as Harter and Mann (2017) have indicated, obtaining optimal business results through positive employee engagement is necessary. Highly

engaged employees are more likely to have high-quality and trusting relationships with their leaders and their customers; therefore, improving the employees' attitudes, intentions, and loyalty to the company (Knezovic & Dilovic, 2020).

The performance of a service provider depends on the perceived service quality by the customer and the service productivity (Scerri & Agarwal, 2018). The employee is the front-line indicator that factors play a role in the perception of quality to the customer (Alexiadou et al., 2017). However, Ozbekler and Ozturkoglu (2020) noted customer perceived value as three additional aspects: physical quality based on the physical aspects of the service, corporate quality or company's image, and interactive quality, which is the interaction of the company with the customers. All three of these additional aspects originates from internal relationship between employees and their leaders (Ozbekler & Ozturkoglu, 2020). Leaders must exemplify the service process by modeling quality behaviors, shaping employee work behaviors, and encouraging employees to provide high-quality service to customers (Binyamin, 2020). Leaders set an example of exceptional service through the communication of a commitment to a desirable service outcome (Alnuaimi et al., 2021). When leaders set this example, employees are more likely to meet the expectations of the company and the customers (Binyamin, 2020). Abdullah et al. (2020) concluded that customer perceptions of value are higher in organizations that have consistent communication, high internal engagement, and work strategically to place high priority on the customers' service experience.

Service work productivity, defined as doing the job right the first time, is highly influenced by achieving the achieving the maximal output of work with fewer resources than the input, meeting the set goals and achieving the objectives (Sujatha & Krishnaveni, 2018). Work engagement is a key factor in service work productivity (Tsaor et al., 2019). Highly engaged

employees were found to perform at optimal levels, contribute to the success of the company, and report fewer errors than disengaged employees (Okazaki et al., 2019). However, Moletsane et al. (2019), findings were different in the fact that highly engaged employees are more likely to experience burn-out, work and home balancing conflict, and depression. Finding a balancing level of engagement for employees and their leaders to achieve the optimal service work productivity is a strategic plan that companies should place a high level of priority to distinguish themselves from other service companies (Moletsane et al., 2019). Knezovic and Dilovic (2020), concluded that the engagement balance can also assist in the retention of highly productive employees.

Company culture persona. Begeny et al. (2021) indicated that leaders that can engage all members through the recognition and appreciation of everyone's relevant qualities, skills, and ideas are able to create a company culture that promotes sustainability, individual self-worth, and community belonging. Healthy organization leaders that engagement starts at the top and can be a competitive and strategic point of differentiation in the service industry market (Harter & Mann, 2017). Creating an engaged company culture requires dedication from not only the employee, but the leadership team (Bhutto et al., 2021). Winners of the Gallup Great Workplace Award typically have 70% employment engagement, which averages out being 14 engaged employees to every actively disengaged employee; this ratio is seven times the national average (Harter, 2020). In the same Gallup insight (2020), stated that organizations that are in the top half of employee and employer engagement more than double their odds of success compared to those in the bottom half.

The company culture also depicts what level the leaders and employees should provide services to customers, engages the relationship between the leader, the employee, and the

customer, and places value on the human aspect of the company (Metz et al., 2020). Zhou and Li (2018) posited that the fact that customer-contact employees are the front-line defense in creating a strategic plan that focuses on a company culture that is not only beneficial to the employees, but also benefits the customer. In most service industry organizations, frontline employees typically work without close supervision and are the first opportunity a customer must define the future endeavors with the organization (Engen & Magnusson, 2018). Friend et al. (2020) studied the effects of the company culture, the frontline employee, and the customer. Friend et al. (2020) indicated that a direct correlation between the positive relationship of the employee and management and how this relationship can impact the customers' decision to do business with the company short-term and their decision for future endeavors. In a similar study by Tuliao et al. (2020), researchers concluded that employee and employer engagement was a form of social integration and suggested that organizations with high social integration work collectively to achieve optimal business results. Hudcová, et al. (2018) concluded that successful social integration relies on the internal support of a cohesive relationship between employees and their employers. Internal support improves the quality of customer service and customer relationships by increasing the number of resources directed toward addressing customer service needs and increases the internal trust or ties; therefore, creating a company culture that benefits all stakeholders (Bradford et al., 2019).

According to Tsourvakas and Yfantidou (2018), money is no longer the factor in motivation; employees are more engaged with a company whose values and ethics align with their personal values and norms. At an increasing rate, employees are viewing their workplace as a place to advocate for their values and beliefs that they feel are significant in their personal lives (Mayer et al., 2019). Employees acquire the norms and the values of an organization, including

the ethical values, through the socialization process (Cadden et al., 2021). Employees want to work for a company that elevates their skills and creates or enhances personal value. A service company leader that can create engagement and align employees' values with the company values could create a unique strategic plan to improve business results and differentiate themselves from similar service industry companies (James et al., 2020).

A strategy of a dynamic company culture can lead to perfection and incorporate the most beneficial aspect to all stakeholders, however, if leaders, management, and employees do not understand the expectations or the implementation is poor, the strategic plan of company culture become ineffective (Hollister et al., 2021). Leijerholt et al. (2019) posited that understanding company culture starts with an internal or external connection between the employee and the company. Internally connections are made from managers, leaders, and other leaders, outside or external connections can include vendors, suppliers, customers, and the reputation of the company (Leijerholt et al., 2019). When this connection is vague, becomes broken, or not enhanced, employees are more than likely to become disengaged and undermine the company by not aligning their attitudes, behaviors, or performance to the expectations of the company (Carlini & Grace, 2021).

Customer loyalty. In a service industry, the service is the product, and the customer perceives the value of the service therefore, the service industry is dependent on customer satisfaction, referrals, and loyalty (Teeroovengadam, 2022). A motivated customer might tell others if a service exceeds their expectations or talk about their positive experience., If the service experience fails to meet their expectations, customers have a greater motivation to engage in negative word of mouth as a way to reduce their anxiety or to warn others(Viswanathan et al., 2018). A positive and engaging relationship between leaders and

employees promotes three distinct behaviors that impact the quality of the service encounter and the service delivery: investing effort, extra contributions, and servicing beyond the service (Liang et al., 2020). If cultivated, the three distinct employee or leader behaviors can consequently shape customer perceptions and lead to customer loyalty, referral opportunities, and short-term long term revenue (Zhao et al., 2018). Engaged employees could commit themselves fully to themselves and the company to achieve high customer perceived value and satisfaction (Chandni & Rahman, 2020).

Rioux (2020) noted that keeping a company's existing customers happy can increase a company's profits from 25 to 95% but new customer acquisitions costs have risen almost 50% over the past five years. Interaction with a front-line employee is the first opportunity a customer has with a customer to make a lasting impression (Gal et al., 2021). As Gal et al. (2021) pointed out, this interaction will determine whether the customer will continue with the delivery of the service. However, the exchange does not stop at this first interaction; customers must have confidence that the service company and the employees will deliver exceptional services each time there is a need for the service (Rather et al., 2019). Rather et al. (2019) suggested this confidence must relay by every encounter the customer has from the service company; in other words, customer satisfaction starts internally with the employees. Companies that have engaged employees have a greater degree of customer satisfaction and commitment, extra efficient, and profitable than those with less employee engagement (Oades et al., 2020). Chandni and Rahman (2020) asserted that higher financial performances with employee engagement occur because employee engagement has the potential to affect customer intentions to initially purchase, refer a potential new customer, and intentionally make a future purchase.

Customer referrals. Sahi et al. (2019) concluded that companies that focused on employee engagement to enhance the customer experience benefited from customer referrals and created a competitive advantage. The competitive advantage comes from the referral, positive image, growth, and future income potential. Referring customers are more effective in bringing in new customers than advertising (Soltani et al., 2018). Sustainability in the service industry is not about being the lowest price; sustainability is about the quality of service and the value perceived by the customer (Sahi et al., 2019). Services can be very similar in nature, but differentiation occurs in the procedures of the service from the initial call to the completion or delivery of the service (Tuomi et al., 2021). The differentiation in service procedures and how the employee communicates and interacts with the customer is the determination of future revenue generated through existing customer referrals (Itani et al., 2020). Service procedures are typically developed internally and require the engagement of the employee and leaders (Tuomi et al., 2021). Front-line employees are the best critiques that can determine if a procedure is meeting the customers' needs (Malhotra et al., 2020). Malhotra et al. (2020) explained that by engaging employees in the innovation of ideas and processes in the service delivery, leaders are creating solutions for the unmet needs of customers through crowdsourcing. However, for the sharing of knowledge to be successful, employees need motivation to share, feel comfortable that their voices will be heard, and be ready to receive criticism (Ely & Thomas, 2020). When leaders and employees can focus on the customer and the service process, the company will gain a competitive advantage through service process differentiation and customer referrals (Binyamin, 2020).

Mittal et al. (2018) indicated that the importance to review the potential of negative employee engagement affecting the customer negatively and the results has a long-term effect. A

customer may continuously sabotage or review negatively until they feel justified in the perspective. A company would need over 40 positive reviews to negate one bad review (Allard et al., 2020). Unengaged employees can detriment a company's image as an unsatisfied customer. Segalla and DeNisi (2019) indicated that unengaged employees can create a financial and psychological drain on the company that can affect other employees' performance and can affect the customers' perspective of the company. Hwang et al. (2021) noted that 85% of disengaged employees sabotage the customer experience purposefully for entertainment, to relieve stress, or to restore exhausted emotions. Employees can become torn between being an employee and being a professional worker when confronted with a stressful situation, for examples: dealing with customers and their expectations or dealing with other employees (Viererbl et al., 2021). Through training and the feeling of being valued as an employee and person, leaders can create a positive environment for the employees, and therefore, create a positive experience for the customer (Prilyana & Aseanty, 2020). Nerstad et al. (2019) noted that over engaged employees can become burned out, overworked, and overwhelmed. Leaders must work to find the balance of engagement.

Madhani (2020) indicated that a customer's emotional state can become aligned with employees. Approximately 72% of highly engaged employees believe they can positively impact the customer service and meet customers' expectations which ultimately leads to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and firm profitability (Rabbanee et al., 2019). Happy and dedicated employees provide better service and is productive, while a happy customer will purchase again and market the company through word-of-mouth advertising (Smriti, 2018). Toma and Catana (2021) indicated that a different perspective on the effect of the behavior of an employee on a customer. Customers are the primary reason service companies exist and

employees can see customers as a second boss Zhuang et al. (2019) concluded that disengaged employees can displace their dissatisfaction onto the customer. According to Zhuang et al. (2019), this displacement can cause employees to create service sabotage and influence the customers' behavior and decision for future business endeavors. Huang et al. (2021) studied the customers' state of mind when the customer witnesses the disengagement between the leader and their employees. Customers can begin to feel uneasy and unsure if the company leaders are able to meet their needs externally since the company leaders cannot work cohesively internally and will revisit their business intentions with the company (Huang et al., 2021). The customer will also consider deferring to other customers instead of referring customers (Yan et al., 2020).

Related Studies

Several studies exist on employee engagement. Turner (2020) wrote a book after completing 30 years of research. In Turner's (2020) book, the definition of employee engagement is different from the perspective of the employee and the employer. Geue (2018) wrote an article that coincided with Turner's effort in defining employee engagement. Geue (2018); and Turner (2020); concluded that to define employee engagement or to build a strategy based on employee engagement, the drivers and the expected outputs need satisfaction as fundamental points of the strategy Geue (2018) defined the drivers as those things that cause an action to happen, and the outputs are the results of those expected actions. The topic of employee engagement included in journals, scholarly writing, or other literature has a theme of relationships, internal and external, performance, value alignment, and motivation.

Internal business relationships. Kang and Sung (2019), indicated that the researchers concluded that companies need to foster employee communications behavior as information from employees and word-of-mouth. Reputation is thought as trustworthy to the external world

and can be an indicator of how the company treats people. Könsgen et al. (2018) asserted that customers are basing their buying decisions on how companies are treating their employees through employee complaints on company review sites or social media or any public platform. Parker, Marasi, and James et al. (2019) noted that evidence of the negative effects of a company's reputation, financial performance, and stock market performance because of employees posting negative remarks on their personal social accounts; this behavior classifies as counterproductive work behavior. Ivens et al. (2021) conducted a similar study on employee counterproductive work behavior and concluded that when managers were proactive by communicating roles, expectations, and company culture, employees were less likely to speak or feel negatively about the workplace. The employees engage in promoting a positive image about the company. Ivens et al. (2021), indicated that employees that were engaged were also more prone to ensure customers have a positive experience by going over and beyond to meet the customer needs. By creating this positive experience and optimally performing customers were more likely to be loyal and refer and employees had a feeling of self-worth and were prone to promote the company in a positive light, both would generate short-term and long-term revenue (Prilyana & Aseanty, 2020).

Corporation and individual value alignment. Joo and Lee (2017) studied the trend of employees aligning a company's corporate values with their own and the impact the alignment has on the engagement the employee has within the organization as far as customer service and profitability. Joo and Lee (2017) concluded that employees were more engaged and, therefore, performed higher when the organization's values aligned with the employee's values. Diz (2021) quoted Deloitte's 2021 Millennial and Gen Z survey that showed 49% of people aged 18-25 and 44% of people ages 26-38 said they picked their employers or who they applied jobs for based

on their personal ethics or values. Ewing et al. (2019) concluded that when an employee's values align with the organization's values, employees felt empowered and brought passion and energy to their jobs. The passion and energy of an empowered employee contributed to employee engagement, employee trust, commitment, and job satisfaction (Kim, 2021).

Carlini and Grace (2021) studied the corporate social responsibility (CSR) branding process and concluded that employees are the most overlooked and important stakeholders in the corporate brand. CSR requires employees, leaders, and the organization to become partners with shared values to help fulfill brand promises, enhance employee engagement, and implement any CSR strategy (Raza et al., 2021). Values are a sense of identity for a human being and determine their outlook on their relationships with others and motivate them to be successful (Batory-Ginda, 2021). Batory-Ginda (2021) concluded that values are an effective way strengthening the motivational satisfaction of self-concept and self-affirmation. The social cognitive theory suggests that self-concept and self-affirmation are facilitators of engagement (Opoku-Dakwa et al., 2018). Chaudhary (2019) concluded that humans who surround themselves with others that hold the same morals, values, and ethics are more likely to create an atmosphere of creativity, work cohesively with others, and encourage each other to meet objectives and goals, both personal and professional.

Anticipated Themes

When dealing with relationships and the effects those relationships can have on a person's well-being and an organization's profit, several themes can emerge. Holden and Sunindijo (2018) indicated that employees and leaders can spend more time at work than at home. The relationship between leaders and their employees can become a meaningful part of everyday life. Employees and leaders want this part of their lives to have purpose and meaning. The need for

relationships and those relationships to align with values and ideas can be the motivation that an employee or leader needs to positively engage together for a common goal or objective (Wiradendi Wolor, 2020).

Corporate branding. Rasool et al. (2021) concluded that the results of their study were coordinated with prior studies that suggested the customer experience does create a supporting relationship between the customer and the company. Facilitating customer loyalty occurs from the employee engagement that transpires during the service interaction. Two factors consider two sides of the same coin of success in organization in a study by Suomi et al. (2019) were employee engagement and internal branding. The internal branding and employee engagement in the study by Suomi et al. (2019) both consisted of the elements company culture, the working environment, reputation and values, communication, and HR practices.

Joseph et al. (2021) concluded that the stronger the corporate brand, the higher the chance of employees buying in emotionally and cognitively into the organization. Joseph et al. (2021) indicated times exist when internal rebranding is necessary to change the culture, the internal image for employees, and the external image to other stakeholders. Employees want and feel the need to work for an organization that makes them feel valued, holds similar values, supports the values of the community (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). Employees' self-identity can align with the corporate brand and employees that feel their self-identity is not positively associated with the organization, they will become disengaged and may eventually leave the organization (Carlini et al., 2019).

Human relational needs. Humans were made to interact and have relationships with each other. God made humans in his image, and he is relational, therefore, humans are relational (Reimer, 2019). Quinn et al. (2019) indicated that employees need to discuss successes and

failures with other employees and leaders through vicarious learning. Myers' (2020) concluded that learning from others is a critical component of learning and performance for individual and team relationships. Jeong et al. (2018) indicated that employees and leaders were more open to ideas and learning from the sharing of success and failures. In addition, motivation to change procedures benefits all stakeholders and increase business performance measures and customer service experiences. Emotional contagion, as discussed by Deng and Hu (2018), is a process where a person can acquire positive or negative emotions, such as happiness, sadness, or anger, from those around them.

Part of the human relationship is the need for respect or acknowledgement (Li et al., 2020). A survey by Georgetown University revealed that respect was one of the most important and desired leadership qualities; however, employees report more disrespectful behavior from leaders each year (Joosen & Bailey, 2018). Leaders are in an authoritative position and respect is felt daily and a leader may not realize that there is a disconnect with employees regarding respect (Blom et al., 2021). Another issue in the disconnection of employees that was in the study by Rogers (2018) was that leaders are unclear as to what constitutes respect in the workplace. Rogers (2018) noted those employees that feel respected are more loyal to the company, more resilient, perform better, and are more prone to follow the direction of the leader.

Satisfied employees are engaged employees. Motivation sometimes must inspire or encourage. Many theorists of motivational state to get employees motivated, leaders must fulfill the needs and desires of their employees and rewards and recognition can help facilitate in the fulfillment of those needs (Schilling, 2019). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs unifies an employee's needs all in one with wages, incentives, culture, and performance (Lussier, 2019). Stewart et al. (2018) indicated that how employees' needs can be met using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs includes wages satisfy that the physiological needs, job security and work roles satisfy the safety needs, positive work culture can embrace the love need In addition, positive management techniques and relationships can satisfy the esteem needs, and the self-actualization needs involve management developing training to challenge the employee to excel. Bridgman et al. (2019) asserted that, the influence of the hierarchy of needs into business practice is still a new concept, however, to engage an employee and achieve optimal results, organizations must find strategies to satisfy the physiological needs of their employees and their leaders.

Bhat and Bharel (2018) indicated in their study that retaining qualified people can become difficult and costly. Bhat and Bharel (2018) recommended that organizations must find ways to engage employees and their leaders to create job satisfaction, job security, and commitment. Organizations that can engage employees are more likely to retain employees (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019). Committed and engaged employees and leaders believe in the organization and will do what it takes plus more to help the organization accomplish tasks, objectives, and goals (Glazer et al., 2019). To create a committed and engaged relationship, researchers suggested organizations should invest in training and development (T&D) activities to enhance the skills of their most valuable assets-employees and their leaders. Fletcher et al.'s (2018) indicated y that T&D practices led to positive and negative work attitudes. The negatives to a T&D practice are emotional exhaustion and anxiety related to change; the positives from a T&D practice were job satisfaction and personal achievement satisfaction which will lead to employee/leader engagement (Fletcher et al., 2018). Negative work attitudes cause a decrease in commitment and engagement from the employees and leaders; while the positive work attitudes

increase the overall satisfaction, commitment, and engagement of employees with their leaders (Jung et al., 2021).

Discovered Themes

Limiting the scope of a study can prove to limit the possibilities; therefore, literature reviews are excellent sources to uncover underlying issues or concepts that may have otherwise seem unnoticed or unrelated to the problem projected in the study. The discovered themes in this study and literature review were the level of commitment from the leader, the employee, and the organization, the authenticity of the leader, and emotional intelligence in the workplace. The discovered themes surround the social emotional needs of humans to become productive, valued, and needed.

Leader and employee commitment. Nejati et al. (2020) indicated that ethical leaders were the most key factors in involving or engaging employees in the corporate social responsibility. Corporates social responsibility activities include, creating a better working environment, and creating a person-organization fit for individual and company success. In 2019, a Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation was issued by the Business Roundtable and 181 CEO members shared a commitment to stakeholders. The message included delivering exceptional value to customers, invest, and engage in employees with training and education, and deal ethically with suppliers. In addition, support the communities in which the organization resides, and generate long-term value for shareholders through transparency and effective engagement (Rock, 2021).

Bernardino (2021) quoted a 2012 survey from the Net Impact that showed 72% of students about to enter the workplace wanted to work for a company where they can make an impact and 15% would take a pay cut to work for a company that was socially responsible.

Farrukh et al. (2020) studied corporate social responsibility through the employees of Wal-Mart. Farrukh et al. indicated that Wal-Mart was noted as being an organization with poor working conditions and employees were very disengaged and disgruntled (Farrukh et al., 2020). Wal-Mart took on a personal sustainability plan initiative that allowed employees to formulate a personal and professional change. The initiative engaged over 500,000 employees and created over 35,000 new solutions helped the economy and improved the working environment (Ertem-Eray, 2021). Wal-Mart commits to changing the negative working environment into a positive by incorporating the ideas of the leaders and, more importantly, the employees. Barreiro and Treglown (2020) indicated that engagement from employees happened when leaders internalize moral standards and exhibit leadership that transforms through inspiration, self-awareness, and transparency.

Commitment should come from the leader and commitment includes the employee (Lanier, 2021). However, employee commitment does not just transpire. According to the study by Rai and Agarwal (2017), employee commitment comes from a sense of loyalty that is derived from employee engagement. Uddin et al. (2019) defined employee engagement as a psychological state where employees demonstrate three ideals' behaviors. Employee engagement includes speaking positively about the organization and the stakeholders, having a desire to be associated with the organization, and strive to achieve professional and organizational goals. When an employee feels as though they have the support of the organization, the commitment and engagement will be higher, and the employee will be more productive and have job satisfaction (Sahni, 2019).

Leader authenticity. According to Abunyewah et al. (2019), low managerial or leader credibility promotes a work environment filled with pessimism and distrust. In any organization,

a high level of credibility and morale generates from all members of the organization (Kubicek & Cockram, 2019). Lees and Dhanpat (2021) posited that leaders that are authentic, led by example, align their values with the organization, and are trustworthy, are more likely to motivate and engage employees to achieve optimal outcomes. Chen et al. (2021) indicated that employees that trust their leaders are more prone to have more positive outcomes, such as higher work engagement, affective commitment, job satisfaction, task performance, and organizational citizenship. Chen et al. (2021) concluded that employees will respect and engage with an authentic leader, and they will also imitate or behave authentically. Intrinsic motivation stems from an authentic leader through the demonstration of the strength of morals and character, awareness and true to themselves and the impact their behavior has on those around them., The creation of an environment that encourages the authenticity of employees; therefore, encourages the employee and leader engagement relationship (Ratliff, 2021).

If a leader has the appearance of authenticity but their behavior perceives as inconsistent or unreliable, employees are not going to follow what the leader is trying to convey or make happen (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Many leaders experience an authentic paradox because authenticity is a perception by employees who observe whether the external expressions of a leader are consistent with their internal values or beliefs (Lehman et al., 2019). The effects of false authenticity can detriment the organization, the employees, the customers, and other stakeholders; communication, trustworthiness, loyalty, commitment, and chance of a productive relationship is lost (Oginde, 2020). Verhaal and Dobrev (2022) asserted that leaders who consistently and overwhelmingly display continuous authenticity can trigger counterproductive behaviors in employees, such as cynicism. Employees under an excessive authentic leader can feel the leader is too moral and therefore, will hold back any suggestions or feedback out of fear

of wrongdoing or a feeling of unworthiness (Baykal, 2019). The feelings of wrongdoing or unworthiness can cause employees to become disengaged and exhibit work sabotage behaviors (Huang et al., 2021).

Emotional intelligence in the workplace. While most of the literature review for this study focused on the employee and leader responsibility to enhance the engagement relationship to obtain optimal results, a different perspective on the engagement or the relationship between the employee and leader emerged. The human experience can change a person's thought patterns, relationship building capabilities, and influence work ethics (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018). Attitudes, behaviors, and human interaction are the results of a person's emotions. Until recently, antithesis considered as antithesis to rationality and exclusive from the workplace.; However, as studies continue, researchers concluded that emotional intelligence (EI) is evident in occupational stress, job performance, leadership, teamwork, conflict management, and commitment (Rathore et al., 2017). Emotional intelligence defines as a set of self-perceived abilities that identify how individuals use, deal with, and process emotions (Alegre et al., 2019). Extremera et al. (2018), indicated that a positive correlation exists between employees' high EI and the employees' ability to cope with the job demands and produce positive business outcomes.

Avgoustaki and Bessa (2019) concluded that no correlation between offering flexible work hours and employee work engagement and commitment exist. These elements are inferior working conditions, counterproductive, manifest a lower work effort, and lower firm performing employees However, Barreiro and Treglown (2020) indicated that leaders and organizations that provided EI resources capitalized on employees need for internal achievement rather than external needs to extend engagement. Barreiro and Treglown (2020) concluded that using the job

demand resources framework, employees that are self-motivated and happy are resilient and satisfied with life; therefore, they can experience more flexible ways of thinking and increasingly become more engaged. Leaders and employees with high EI are also efficient with emotional management and self-regulation (Madrid et al., 2020). Emotional management and self-regulation reflect people with emotional traits that can manage emotions in others and, increase positive interactions in groups to boost morale and result in active engagement to achieve a common goal. (Caes et al., 2021).

Summary of the Literature Review

The business practices in the literature review relate to the study as employee engagement reflects company culture (Turner, 2020). The business practices in the literature review relate to the internal elements of a company that are necessary in achieving the goals and objectives. The objects include, (a) communication, (b) teamwork, (c) social responsibility, (d) engagement, (e) and motivation. The transparency and communication, training and development activities, and customer service are important in the strategy. In the service industry, work is not a guarantee. The economy, consumer demands, and peak season are some examples of factors that relate to the fluctuation regarding the availability of work in the service industry (Chepngetich et al., 2019). However, if a company strategist can develop training and development incentives, this can influence the leaders in developing a strategic and competitive plan to enhance the customer experience, and sustainability is obtainable (Turner, 2020).

The specific issue was leadership's inability to connect primary and secondary employees, which results in decreased efficiency, low employee morale, and lower customer ratings (Arimie, 2019). Low morale, absenteeism, the lack of productivity, and a high turnover rate contribute to workplace stress and feelings of disconnect between leaders and employees

(Lee et al., 2019). According to Davidescu et al. (2020), to maximize profits, promote longevity, and increase stock value, leaders must find ways to engage with employees and obtain a commitment work ethic from the employee. Communication is essential for leaders and employees to create a culture that is beneficial to the company and the customers.

Several theories emerged from this study. The theories are, (a) the leader member exchange theory (LMX), (b) social (c) exchange theory (SET), (d) self-determination theory (SDT), and (e) the servant leadership theory (SLT). The theories are stream with the employee and employer engagement needed for success of a company and the individual employee. Pan and Lin (2018) researched the LMX theory in the leader not engaged. The employee disengagement could lead to a misunderstanding as an abuse of power if not handled properly. Employees that feel competent, an attribute of the SDT theory, and satisfied at work, will go beyond requirements to meet both personal, professional, and organizational goals (Forner et al., 2020). An organization, whose culture, leaders, and employees, place the customers, vendors, and suppliers before the profit margin, risk their reputation and corporate image and sustainability (Iqbal et al., 2020).

During the initial literature research, the related study themes were internal relationships, corporate values the values that impact employee engagement, and employee work incentives. Internal relationships are as important as customer relationships when compared to company image and customer referrals. If an employee is happy, they will tell their friends, family, and anyone regarding a great experience they had with the company, which will increase the positive image of the company and create potential new customers (Puncheva-Michelotti et al., 2018). Aligning corporate values with employee values helps companies to integrate the intangible assets and engage and strengthen the corporate social responsibilities and the employer and

employee relationship (Shen et al., 2020). During the research, there were some studies that showed non-financial incentives as effective as financial incentives in motivating employees and creating employee engagement (Grant et al., 2018).

The anticipated themes during the initial research were corporate branding, human relational needs, and satisfied employees include engaged employees. As the study developed, the emerging or discovered themes were commitment from the leader and the employee, leader authenticity, and emotional intelligence in the workplace. In all aspects of success, the motivation and commitment begin with an individual perspective of success and determination (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). According to Suomi et al. (2019), the perception an employee has on a company is in direct correlation with the level of employee engagement. The perception also is mediated by the employee's personal and professional satisfaction and can be governed by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Five themes emerged during the research process of the participant interviews, follow-up interview used for triangulation, and financial records. The discovered themes from the research process and the literature review shared the common factors of communication and mutual respect. The participants of the study expressed the concern of being heard during times of problems, in communicating necessary improvements to the customer service process., In addition being understood as more than an employee was important. Participants became more productive when leaders expressed the company objectives or the goals in addition, when leader sincerely shared their values or beliefs . During the interview process, I discovered that the company culture of Company X supported not only employees and leaders, but also the community in which the company preside. The theme of company culture is an incentive for employee and leader engagement. The literature includes the emphasis that engagement is not

the sole responsibility of the employee or the leader. Engagement is a commitment for all stakeholders, but engagement enhances with a company culture that exemplifies the skills and abilities of leaders and employees to achieve the optimal customer service experience.

The second theme that emerged during the interview process was that open-door and open-communication policy helps bridge the gaps between employees and leaders. Employees need to know that their leaders support them outside of the concept of their job requirements. Engagement resonates through formal communication, such as weekly staff meetings, but inspired through informal conversations and activities. Theme three was lead by example. Lead by example exemplifies the want for an employee or a leader to engage in helping the company achieve their goals. Theme three supports the discovered theme of leadership authenticity. During the transcription of the data from the interview, employees made references to people in Company X that considers top employees. The participants viewed these top employees because of their commitment of ethical behavior instead of productivity measures.

Themes four and five support the discovered literature themes of emotional intelligence in the workplace and engagement as a group effort in an organization. Communicating the goals and objectives of the company is not enough to ensure the success of completing the goals. The study included the discovery the fourth theme of cross-departmental collaboration. Collaboration within and across departments is essential to promoting employee and leader engagement. Internal communication impacts how an employee feels about coming to work and is an indicator of how much effort the employee is going to become more productive. This indicator and level of employee satisfaction impacts the customer service experience as concluded in this study. Customer service starts from within the company. A service customer is dependent on the company's skills and abilities to meet their needs. However, a service customer depends on the

service experience as always exceptional. Theme five of the discovered themes from the study was internal communication impacts customer service and is a dynamic function of customer satisfaction.

Summary of Section 1 and Transition

In Section 1, a discussion of the of the specific problem of the failure of executive level leadership to cultivate the primary and secondary employee and employer relationships within a service industry organization that impacts the business results occurred., In addition, a discussion of the decline of productivity, low employee morale, and declining customer service ratings occurred. The purpose of the research along with research questions addressed during the process occurred. Theories and concepts that associates with the topic of employer and employee relationship impacts occurred. Cooke (2018) suggested that the theories and concepts of a research adds to the validity of the research and allows the researcher to address the problem in workable context and provide a relevant solution. An outline of the literature review was an indication of the exhaustive review that occurred during the research study.

In Section 2, a detailed discussion concerning the project occurred. A discussion of the role of the researcher r occurred. Clark and Vealé (2018) compared quantitative and qualitative researcher's roles; quantitative researchers' roles as more detached while qualitative researchers' roles are more participatory. Population and sampling are a topic for this study, a single case study included 20 participants. The primary source of data collection in qualitative studies includes interviews (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). The interviews received transcription for the data collection. Section 2 concludes with the reliability and validity discussion of the study.

Section 2: The Project

The next portion of this study outlines specific components of the project: the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, and the research methodology. The purpose of this project was to understand the need to cultivate relationships between employees and their leaders and how this need can impact an organization's business results. Company X chosen for this study included the organization's size, availability. In addition, the organization represents most of the businesses in the United States. My role in this study was to record and transcribe data from the interview and the observations and analyze data from the financial reports. However, my role does not limit to just recording, transcribing, and analyzing. A researcher also must be able to change the course of the study or be able to ask follow-up questions to obtain valid and reliable data (Amin et al., 2020). This study included a flexible, single-case study research design and interviews, financial reports, and observations as triangulation techniques.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the flexible design single case study was to examine the what, the how, and why leaders and employees behave in a way that restricts or enhances the employer and employee relationship and how this behavior reflects in the business results of a service industry organization. Teherani et al. (2018) stated that qualitative research is the systematic inquiry of how people experience certain aspects in their lives, how people behave, how organizations function, and how interactions shape relationships. In service industry, the intangible product of service is difficult to place value and measure in the customer's eyes that is reliant on the expertise of the organization's employees (Bradenberg, 2018). This research included understanding the factors that contribute to the failure of a successful relationship between

leadership and employees and how the failure of the internal relationship affects the customer relationship with the organization, which impacts the customer service ratings.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research answers the questions on the how or why of process-oriented topics and captures people's actual experiences to provide an in-depth and analytical understanding of people's behaviors, motivations, and interactions with others (Lemon & Hayes, 2020).

Researchers find publishing qualitative research hard because there may not be enough methodology detail and some readers do not understand the validity of qualitative methods (Amin et al., 2020). In this study, my role was to increase the foundation of the study with detailed methods and literature review to assist the reviewer in understanding the methodology and the research problem beforehand. Data collected through interviews, observations, and financial report analysis received analysis and transcription. Reid et al. (2018) indicated that procedural ethics play a vital role in the validity of qualitative research. Paradis and Varpio (2018) concluded, that researchers must think about the ethics of the study and think about the ethics in how the data transcribes, analysis, and presentation. Paradis and Varpio (2018) asserted that researchers have a direct benefit of research, participants may have a disadvantage because they rarely read or informed of the findings. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated that a researcher's primary role is a human research instrument which entails being flexible in observing and interviewing and diligent in transcribing the data collected from the interviews, observations, and financial reports. However, I viewed the study from the participants' view, and this helped the participants understand the focus of the study was to educate others in the importance of workplace relationships and how they impact the business results of the organization.

The ethical dilemma in qualitative research could arise when assumptions about the concepts of truthfulness, justice, integrity, and honesty exist. However, the participants may view these concepts in a different manner (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018). For this study, I was consciously aware of these different views and reported the findings as accurately and free from bias. To do this, the self-examination technique of bracketing occurred. According to Weatherford and Maitra (2019), bracketing involves opening a researcher's mind and changing their perspective by refraining from judgement. In addition, steering away from the commonplace way of seeing things through the conscious effort to separate their own experiences from what is being studied. Bracketing, or self-interviewing, allows a researcher to examine his/her background or experience with the research topic, their perception of the subject, how the role of social identity factors into the interpretation of the data, and how ethical or political issues impact the integrity of the research (Janak, 2018).

Research Methodology

This study included understanding the behaviors and actions of leaders and employees in cultivating relationships that affect the business results of an organization. Qualitative research is used to understand the actions and behaviors of others by seeking to answer what, how, when, and where questions of human behavior and the impact this behavior can have on the world (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). In this study, the question of "what" was the actions, behaviors, and procedures of an organization's leaders and employees and the question of "how" the impact of these actions, behaviors, and procedures have on the business results of Company X. A flexible qualitative research design was appropriate because the data for the research captured as the data provided or received and the processes changed as the study progressed (Apuke, 2017).

To ensure that this study gave an in-depth understanding of the commonalities in the workplace that can hinder or enhance the relationships between leaders and employees, I used a single-case study. Rashid et al. (2019) revealed in their study results that a single-case study can be an effective tool in creating analytical research results. To improve the quality, reliability, and validity of the research, Ahmad et al. (2019) suggested incorporating triangulation that involved multiple sources of data, such as open-ended questionnaires, interviews for in-depth research, and observation data. Moon (2019) concurred with the study by Ahmad et al. (2019) in the fact that triangulation improves the quality, validity, and reliability of the research.

Discussion of Flexible Design

An element of flexible research design is the evolution of data as the study progresses (Harrison et al., 2020). This element was important in this study because the research questions focused on the “how” and “why” leaders and employees behave or coexist and how this relationship between the two affects the business outcomes of the organization. A qualitative research design entails an investigation of how the human connection shapes behaviors and their decisions making skills and productivity (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018). The interviews were open-ended questions that allowed flexibility for follow-up questions if necessary. Since the interview questions did not have predetermined answer options, the questions may not have been able to uncover the information needed for the study and the flexibility research design allows for the research to change the course if necessary (Harrison et al., 2020).

Discussion of Case Study

In case study research methods, sampling is collecting data from a small group of people or places to draw conclusions of a specific research problem or issue (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This research study included a single case study on leaders and employees of a small

organization in the service industry. According to Aithal (2017), researcher use case studies to depict research from the confines of a particular setting or circumstance while answering the who, what, why, and how research questions (Atmowardoyo, 2018). According to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) (2020), small businesses make up 99.9% of all U.S. businesses. The SBA (2020) defines small businesses as an organization that has less than five hundred employees. Approximately thirty-eight million businesses (98.1%) with fewer than one hundred employees exist. Company X included in this study represents most of the businesses in the United States because it has fewer than one hundred employees. The proposed participants from Company X has worked in the company during the learning times, the high times, and the stagnant times of the company. Criteria sampling helped with choosing the participants. Criteria sampling involves the identification of a criterion and the articulation and review of case studies that meet the criterion (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The criteria for the employee participants were experience with relationships within Company X and the knowledge or experience with the highs and lows of the company over the past five years or more. Data saturation is vital to the quality and validity of the research (Alam, 2020). Alam (2020) concluded that study designs are not universal, no method to data saturation exist, therefore, data saturation will differ according to the study. Data saturation does not depend on sample size, but on the quantity of the data obtained and the quality of the data (Sim et al., 2018). Quality data is complex and detailed (Aksnes et al., 2019). Data saturation occurs when a researcher reaches a point of no new data or cannot uncover new themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Using a single case study research method for this study allowed me to focus on a Company X and the explicit parameters within the scope of the study and the research questions, therefore, data saturation occurred through observations, interviews, and financial reports.

Discussion of Methods for Triangulation

The methodological triangulation is one of the most important validation strategies in qualitative research (Dzwigol, 2020). Heesen et al. (2019) viewed methodological triangulation as a convergence of multiple methods to support a single hypothesis rather than one method; if multiple methods yield the same conclusion, quality, reliability, and validity of the research occurs. The methodological triangulation was the best option for this study because of time constraints and the availability of other professionals and researchers. The following triangulation methods for this study included interviews, business documentation, and observations.

I was the main data collector, data and financial analyzer, and observation transcriber. Company X is a service provider that has executive leadership, behind the scenes employees that typically do not interact with customers. These employees are an intricate part of the service interaction, and frontline employees that represent the company to their customers. Interviewing is the most common form of data collection in qualitative research (Summers, 2020). Interviewing participants from all levels of employment in Company X created a way to investigate the relationship between employees and leaders. In addition, this relationship affects productivity, morale, and customer service ratings. The interview questions included all participants; however, a rapport occurred with the participants, clear statement on why the study was necessary., Flexibility allowed for follow up questions if necessary (McGrath et al., 2019). Creating a rapport with the participants leading towards talking openly and creating a level of confidence so that the research represents all small service organizations (McGrath et al., 2019). The open-ended questions allowed participants to reflect on their knowledge and experiences. The interview questions uncovered details about the relationships between leaders and

employees from the view of the participant. Giger and Haddad (2020) recommended, that the key to successful interviewing is active in listening, responding, and transparency.

Another method of triangulation for this study was the analysis of business financial reports. The financial reports were critical indicators of the health of Company X in the peak and off-peak seasons. As a service industry, Company X experienced peak times during the different parts of the year when their services are in more demand than others. For example, air conditioning servicing in the summer and heating components in the winter are peak seasons for a heating, and ventilation. For an air conditioning (HVAC) companies fall, and spring are off-peak seasons and HVAC customers do not necessarily need to have air conditioning or heat (Cesena et al., 2018). Financial data, such as accounts receivable or cash flow reports, profit and loss statements, tax reporting, and income by customer, will see the health of an organization (Palepu et al., 2020). Fluctuations in any season could determine how the relationship between leaders and employees impacted the business results (Palepu et al., 2020). Other business documentation that helped indicate any correlation between the internal relationships and the impact these relationships have on business results were the productivity reports for individuals. In addition, absenteeism reports, customer feedback from a third part source and internal software, and other reports that are individual employee based (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018). Individual employee reports can determine an employee's or leader's overall satisfaction with the organization and customer service rating reports will indicate how customers feel about the organization (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018). A valued employee will have high productivity, low absenteeism, and high morale (Shobe, 2018).

Interviews allow for a one-on-one look from the perspective of the participant and the business documentation can determine the health of an organization (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Observing participants as they interact with other employees can uncover a unique perspective, an observational perspective, which was another form of triangulation (Chu & Ke, 2017). In an interview, participants may say what they think is the right answer, what the researcher is looking for, or what makes the participant more comfortable. In an observation, non-verbal cues can say more about the relationships between employees, their leaders, and customers (Chu & Ke, 2017). All the employees or leaders of Company X did not receive interviews., I observed many employees and I recorded in the transcription of the field notes from the observations as non-participants. According to Umar et al. (2018), two types of observations exist, structured and unstructured. Structured observations are typically included in positivistic research using taxonomies developed from known theories (Cypress, 2018). Unstructured observations are in interpretivist and constructivist paradigms and used to understand and interpret cultural behavior., Therefore, was a method of triangulation in this research study (Cypress, 2018). Unstructured observations provide insight into human interactions and how the physical environment influences these interactions (Fetters & Rubinstein, 2019). Unstructured observations in the service industry also capture the service delivery process and illustrates the whole picture of the relationship processes between leaders, employees, and customers (Korfiatis et al., 2019). The journaling and transcription of the observations was my sole responsibility and was as important as the interview in uncovering non-verbal indicators of how employees, leaders, and customers interact daily (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Observing and notating the informal language of the participants and observing both participants and non-participants in their natural surroundings will enhance the data collected from the interviews (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

Summary of Research Methodology

Humans behave and act in accordance with their experiences, their culture, and their environment (Bandura, 2018). This study included understanding this behavior with workplace relationships. In this research, the goal was to understand how these relationships impact the business results of the organization, productivity, company culture, and customer service ratings. The flexible research design allowed me to capture the data, interpret the data, and change the course of the methods as the research progresses if necessary (Apuke, 2017). The methods of triangulation in this single-case study were interviews, financial data, and observations. The triangulation methods supported a single hypothesis and support quality, reliability, and validity (Heesen et al., 2019). The service industry is dependent on the employees, leaders, and the customers (Feng et al., 2019). The connection between the employee and the leaders is essential in promoting trust and confidence with the customer. Interviews assist in obtaining data that is prevalent to answering the research questions, however, the researcher is aware of the instinct of many participants to want to say what they think is the right response (Dzwigol, 2020). Supportive questions will help uncover the truth (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). The observations will allow the researcher to observe the participants in their natural workplace environment, therefore, supporting the information obtained during the interview process (Cypress, 2018).

Participants

The participants of this study included executive leaders, department leaders, office staff, and front-line employees from Company X. The criteria, or eligibility requirements, included the participants age of 21 or older, length of time with Company X, accessibility, and their willingness to participate in the research. Four or more years of continuous employment was a

criterion for participants for the research. In a report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), the average that an employee stays with their current employer is 4.1 years; this statistic has only changed by 0.1 years since 2018. Krekel et al. (2019) indicated that small businesses in the U.S. experience 50% turnover every 3 years. Interviewing a leader or employee from Company X that has more than four years of employment helped me observe patterns in the productivity over the course of four years and the how participants viewed the effectiveness of the internal relationships between leaders and employees. Accessibility of participants depended on the time constraints of the research study, for any follow-up questions that may have been necessary, and for the observation data collection. Race, gender, and education were not necessary for the criteria in selecting participants. The human resource department (HRD) was beneficial in assisting in providing the names of willing participants that meet the criteria and the final selection was made upon the IRB approval for this research study. HRD ensured that the interview questions did not attempt to divulge any classified information and provided the researcher with access to the participants in a secured location. I interviewed the participants in a location at Company X. If Company X did not adhere to any COVID-19 restrictions, the form of interviewing did not change from face to face to videoconferencing or by telephone. This decision was communicated prior to the interview date and the observation dates.

Respect of others and confidentiality are ethical standards that I used with all participants in the interviews, during the observations, and when reviewing the financial statements of Company X. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated that researches that adhere to ethical standards, such as respect to participants, privacy, including not engaging in any attempt of deception, minimizing any harmful or negative risks to participants, and showing concern for the participants welfare, were reliable and valid. Every attempt was made to treat the participants

ethically. I did not use the names and descriptions of the participants because of anonymity. A number was assigned to each participant for identification purposes. Each participant had the ability to accept or decline participation in the research. Upon accepting to participate in the study, each participant signed a consent form before the research began.

Population and Sampling

This research included understanding the impact that leaders and employees' relationships have on the business results of an organization. The SBA (2020) determined that small businesses, those that employ less than 100 employees, make up 98.1% of all U.S. businesses. To represent this population, I chose Company X for this research. Company X employs less than 100 employees and, therefore, is sufficient in representing the population of small businesses in the U.S. The company has 98 employees and interviewing every employee would prove time consuming. A sample of the population for this research received interviews. The sample size for this case study included 20 participants. The sample size was 20% of Company X's employees. Pandey and Pandey (2021) defined sampling as a small group that represents the universe. Sampling saves energy, time, and cost to obtain accurate and reliable information (Bhardwaj, 2019). This case study research of Company X served as a sample of the population of small businesses and the internal issues that small businesses can face that affect their business results.

Discussion of Population

A population in research is a representation of the entire group that exhibits the same or similar characteristics (Allen, 2017). Nyabwinyo (2020) described population as the accumulation of elements that correlate with the study from which a sample was taken, observed and computed. Qualitative research does not focus on statistical outcomes, but more of an

understanding of the researched problem (Allen, 2017). This study's focus was the how and why leaders and employees behave in a way that restricts or enhances the employer/employee relationship. Company X is sample of the population of small businesses in the U.S. that employee less than 100 employees. Small businesses in the U.S. account for 98.1% of the number of organizations in the U.S. (SBA, 2020). According to the SBA's (2020) small business profile, small businesses are responsible for 65.1% of the net new job creation since 2000 and from 2000 to 2019 created 10.5 million net new jobs. When Company X started in the HVAC service industry over thirty years ago, the organization had only five employees, two of which were the owners of the organization. A small business that starts out as a family-owned business defines as a mom-and-pop organization (Kim, 2021). According to the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council (2022), one in five businesses are mom-and-pop or family-owned. Company X began as a husband-and-wife team. Over the years, the business has grown to employ and support 98 employees and their families. Company X has maintained at least 100 employees and created jobs during their peak seasons to accommodate the demand for their services and the average sales per year are \$2.4 million. Company X serves as a traditional example of many businesses that start out as a "mom and pop" organization that transitioned into an organization that not only supports their leaders, employees, and stakeholders, but also their community. As Company X is a small business that started out as a family-owned entity, employees less than 100 employees, has created a sustainability factor, and is locally accessible, Company X is an ideal representative of the population of small businesses in the U.S.

Discussion of Sampling

Aspers and Corte (2019) defined sampling in qualitative research using case studies as the selection of cases and the selection of data sources from a population that represents the

majority of what researcher study. Therefore, case studies can have two types of sampling: the case and the data sources (Aspers & Corte, 2019). There was an abundance of small businesses in the vicinity of the researcher. However, Company X was local, accessible, willing to participate in the study, and understood the time constraints of the research. The data sources, from which sampling occurred for this study, are participants and the financial reports. The population for this study was Company X's 98 employees. The sampling frame for this research study was Company X's complete database of leaders and employees and their contact information. The sampling size was 20 participants. This sampling frame was appropriate because the most accurate information on the individuals that meet the research criterion of 21 years or older, been with the organization for four years or more, and were willing to be a participant for interviewing was centralized in Company X's database and provided to the researcher by the HRD.

A qualitative researcher typically uses nonprobability sampling because the purpose is not to test a hypothesis but to gain a deeper understanding of an exploratory subject (Kyngäs, 2020). Yin (2018) suggested that probability sampling is not appropriate in case study research as the goal is to understand the problem without numerical statistics. There are many types of nonprobability samples used during qualitative research: purposive samples, quota samples, snowball samples, and convenience samples (Kyngäs, 2020). The two most popular types of sampling techniques when recruiting participants are purposeful and convenience sampling (Campbell et al., 2020). Purposeful sampling is a technique that involves a researcher recruiting participants that can provide in-depth information related to the research study (Klar & Leeper, 2019) Convenience sampling is a technique that allows a researcher to use participants that are convenient and easily accessible (Mellis & Bickel, 2020). According to Creswell and Poth

(2018), purposeful sampling does not involve probability and allows a researcher to use their intuition or judgement to intentionally choose individuals that will provide the information most suited for the study. Convenience sampling is cost effective and can save a researcher time, Mellis and Bickel (2020) indicated that convenience sampling could lose the rigor needed to make conclusions about the majority population. However, to produce reliable results, Walter et al. (2019) suggested using a larger sample size and data for small-scaled research projects. When a researcher relies on a participant to recruit other participants, the researcher is using snowball sampling (Parker, Scott & Geddes., 2019). Snowball sampling was not appropriate for this research because I needed to select the participants and get prior approval before the day of the interviews and observations. In addition, I did not have much time. Quota sampling involves the researcher selecting participants from a certain category and then creating subcategories or subgroups and then collecting data from each subgroup (Ramadass & Aruni, 2019). This research study's participants were employees and leaders of Company X, I interviewed diverse types of employees based on their position or level in the organization. Quota sampling was not appropriate because the basic interview questions did not vary based on the level of the employee or leader. Purposeful and convenient sampling was not necessary in this research study. The participants were local, and Company X agreed to adjust the working schedules to accommodate those individuals that participated in the study and to prevent the study from interfering with their job responsibilities.

Financial reports are key indicators of an organization's health (Ganyam & Ivungu, 2019). On average, a small business has at least nine financial reports, but the number of reports is dependent on the number of employees, number of sales, and accounting policies and procedures (Wibowo et al., 2018). The sampling from Company X's financial reports determined

trends in sales and productivity for the organization and individuals that were involved in the income that was generated for the organization. Three reports analyzed for this study included: the Weekly Sales Report (individually and for the organization), Accounts Payable Aging Report, and the Income Profit/Loss Statement. Although customer service rating reports are not financial reports, they are a good indicator of health and sustainability of an organization (Zhao et al., 2019). Customer service rating reports help an organization understand the needs and wants of their customer, but also how the customer perceives the organization and how the customer perceives that the organization is satisfying these needs and wants (Zhao et al., 2019). In the service industry, 90% of service customers will research an organization online or ask people they know before making that initial call to employ services (Moisander et al., 2020). The Customer Activity Report and the Customer Service Ratings report may show the correlation between internal relationships and productivity and how this relationship impacts customer retention and referrals.

Saturation is the driving force in determining sample size and the sample size's sufficiency in qualitative research (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, et al., 2019). Most qualitative research using case studies has a small sample size (Sim et al., 2018). Vasileiou et al. (2018) recommended a sample size for a qualitative research study using a single-case study should be between 15 and 30 interviews. Saturation occurs when the researcher is unable to retrieve any new data or data redundancy occurs (Aguboshim, 2021). I was consistently prepared to conduct more interviews if necessary or stop the interviews when data saturation occurred. I did not know this point until the data analysis process. For this study, the intended sample size was 20 interviews from the participants to ensure data saturation was met.

Summary

Quantitative research provides generalizations about a population. Qualitative research includes seeking an in-depth understanding of the researched topic (Schoch, 2020). The research for this case-study was not meant to generalize and used a single case study to represent the small businesses that employ less than a 100 people. Purposeful and convenient sampling was appropriate for this study, as the interviews and observations were scheduled at a time that was convenient for Company X and the researcher. Interviews, observations, and financial reports were the data sources for this research. The sample size for the interviews were 20 interviews and three financial reports. Data saturation was obtained with this sample size. The sample size was appropriate in gaining an understanding of the impact internal relationships have on the business results of a small organization.

Data Collection & Organization

Collecting data for qualitative research involves participant/non-participant observations, open-ended interviews, archived documents, and notes (Hameed, 2020). Transcription of collected data will occur verbatim and thematically analyzed. The research will occur in a familiar and comfortable setting for the participants located at Company X. Creswell and Poth (2018) asserted that participants are more likely to talk freely when they are comfortable with the interview setting and the interviewer. While data organization is an essential element of research and data collection, a flexible research design entails that the plan must be semi-structured, and the researcher must be able to change the course of the data collection to obtain new insight or information if necessary (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The data collected for this study will stem from the observations, interviews, archived financial records, and customer service ratings. Researchers use interviews to collect data and to gain an in-depth understanding of the subject

from the participants viewpoint (Roberts, 2020). Data collection must include protecting the identity of the participants, the interview responses, and protecting any sensitive information from the case study participants or organizations (Roberts, 2020).

Data Collection Plan

Interviews with 20 participants from Company X and three archived financial reports were the methods of obtaining data for this study. This study's research design is flexible and the open-ended interview questions allowed for me to ask more questions to retrieve additional information or allowed the participant to expound on the content they are providing (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The scheduling of the interviews occurred in advance with a designated time and location with respect to the workplace responsibilities of the participants. The in-depth interviews allowed me to elaborate on the participant's social, professional manners, and allowed me to notate any non-verbal cues. The 20 interviews occurred on the premises of Company X. Conducting the interviews on location allowed the participants to be comfortable during the interview in their workplace surroundings. The location of the interview rooms was isolated from the work area to ensure privacy and information confidentiality. Videoconferencing and phone interviews were available for any of the participants that could not meet face to face, but I did not have to use these resources.

Roberts (2020) indicated that the abilities of the researcher and the thoroughness of the interview questions create data value of the data. Moser and Korstjens (2018) concluded that strong interview questions allow a researcher to gain insight to the experiences of the participant through their responses and non-verbal language. An efficient interviewer allows participants to provide historical and personal background information while maintaining control of the

dialogue and encouraging open communication (Hawkins, 2018). The interviews conducted for this study were semi-structured but flexible with open communication and expressive exchange.

The open-ended questions and the flexibility of the research allows the researcher to ask clarifying questions to gain additional knowledge from the participants' perspective (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). However, gaining knowledge from the perspective of the participants can hinder the reliability of the study if the researcher allows the data to become bias (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Bias can happen from the participant by answering the questions with what they think the researcher is looking for or expecting, therefore the importance of follow-up questions and observations (Peterson, 2022). To eliminate bias, I practiced a level of tolerance of anxiety from the participants and had an open-ended posture that embraced an interest in the perceptions, feelings, and experiences of others (Peterson, 2022). By eliminating bias, flexible research became more reliable.

Upon IRB approval, I reached out to Company X to schedule a time to meet with the 20 participants as a group to go over the purpose of the research, the process of the study (interviews, observations, and review of financial data)., Develop a relationship with the participants before the interview process was necessary. Roberts (2020) concluded that developing a relationship with the participants creates an atmosphere in which the participant feels confident in the researcher's capabilities of maintaining confidentiality and causing the participant to speak more freely. After this initial meeting, I scheduled a 30–45-minute time slot for the formal interview. To prevent data loss or errors, I used two devices that recorded the interview and used later to transcribe the data. Each interview was conducted in the same manner regarding procedures and interview questions. The follow-up questions differed between participants because of the information received from the first set of interview questions, To

eliminate redundancy and disorder, the research used an interview guide to stay focused and to take any notes during the interview that pertain to the answers to the questions, non-verbal cues, and to capture anything of importance to the research study. Transcription of the notes and the interviews accomplished within 48 hours. The observation guide, interview guide, the audio recordings, or any notes remained with me. Each participant's identity protected as the data collection tools were kept confidential and on a device that requires specific security access.

Financial reports used in this research to capture data on the productivity of employees and Company X was necessary. The importance of the financial reports was to identify the trends that can help determine the relationship of success with internal relationships between employees and their leaders (Katsaros et al., 2020). The employees' and the leaders' perspectives of success may differ; however, the financial reports helped me uncover trends of when Company X was experiencing high productivity and high company morale based on the internal relationships (Barrios et al., 2019). The reports obtained by the financial manager for the company and received analysis for trends in the volume of sales during the peak and off-season times. Through the interview process, the participants provided an insight on how the company culture was during high sales volumes and during low sales volumes.

Productivity of a service industry organization is different than a product producing industry. A tangible product has an assigned value before the initial production; however, a service has a perceived value. The tangible product's value calculates by cost of goods sold and any markup that the organization needs to create a profit or based on the market value (Basu, 2019). A service's value is how the customer uses the service, which is not controlled by the organization (de Souza et al., 2020). The value of a service is also dependent on the relationship value (Benedettini & Neely, 2019). Relationships with customers begin even before the initial

call to the organization (Benedettini & Neely, 2019). Most customers will search online to learn about an organization through customer reviews or the customer service ratings (Filieri et al., 2018). Company X does a survey with the customer after the service delivery. The person hired to do the survey has no contact with customers. Their role in the company is to process the surveys and provide any issues to management. Reviewing this data provided me with the level of satisfaction that customers have with the organization. Online reviews help new customers determine how other customers perceived the organization (Filieri et al., 2018). I obtained Company X's online reviews and evaluated them for themes related to customer satisfaction. The verbatim review received coding software to develop themes.

Member Checking

Candela (2019) concluded that member checking is more than a method of adding validity to the research, but as a reflection experience. The researcher must reflect on the participants' experiences and the researcher's experiences during the study to create data that is free of bias and is transparent (Candela, 2019). Panadero and Jonsson (2020) described the validity of qualitative research as the trustworthiness of the data. Triangulation offers multiple ways to achieve validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Validity and credibility can obtain through member checking (Motulsky, 2021). Member checking is a technique that allows the participants to confirm or deny the accuracy and interpretations of the data (Motulsky, 2021). Researchers debated on whether the participants should check the accuracy of the transcripts or check the accuracy of the data analysis. Participants may feel the need to change their responses when they review the transcripts. If the participant feels compelled to change the responses, the researcher must redo the interview or transcriptions (Motulsky, 2021). The lengthy time for redoing transcripts or interviews requires many qualitative researchers to employ the participants to

review the data analysis instead of reviewing the transcripts (Read, 2018). Reviewing the data analysis will allow the participants to check the findings of the data that has been collected from a group perspective instead of an individual perspective (Read, 2018). For this research study, after the data collection, transcription, and analyzation, follow-up interviews were necessary with the 20 participants to review the data analysis and obtain the participants' approval or denial.

The follow-up interviews are an important part of the validity and accuracy of the data collected (McGannon et al., 2021). Member checking ensures that the researcher captured the themes accurately (Candela, 2019). If the participants do not agree with the captured themes, the research must go back and review the data collected and the transcriptions (McGannon et al., 2021). If the participants disagree with the emerged themes, I will review the data and schedule follow-up interviews, as necessary. If the participants do accept the captured themes, I will improve the validity of the study (Brear, 2019).

Follow-up Interviews

As the interview process progressed, the researcher was to determine the need for follow-up questions or revised questions based how the personal experience of the participant emerged (Hawkins, 2018). The interview guide did indicate if revisions or follow-up questions are necessary, modification to the original interview guide will include the new questions. I will request a follow-up interview with the participants. The participants will only answer the new interview questions during the follow-up interview. The participants can ask questions or comment on the data collection or the captured themes during the follow-up interviews (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). A request for a follow-up interview will occur in the initial interview and I will send an appreciation note to the participants (Hawkins, 2018). As the

interviews concluded, I found that neither follow-up questions nor the revision of questions was necessary.

Instruments

I maintained the data instruments used in the research to protect the identity of the participants and the organization. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research requires the researcher to collect data from the participants using instruments or protocols. Observations and interviews are the most common instruments used in qualitative research (Ciesielska et al., 2018). Observing participants in their natural habitat allows a researcher to view a participant's behavior and non-verbal communication (Del Giacco et al., 2019). The observation can uncover a participant's true attitude, beliefs, and behaviors (Maloney et al., 2020). The observation guide prompted me to look for behaviors and body language that may not occur during the interview process.

The interview guide was semi-structured and there was not a pre-determined answer or response to the questions. The open-ended questions uncovered the experiences and perspectives of the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Some questions had follow-up questions which were to obtain as much information from the participants. Moser and Korstjens (2018) concluded that interview questions that started with 'what', 'why', and 'how' created a conversation dialogue where the interviewer and the participant felt comfortable in answering. The researcher conducted a practice test in asking the interview questions to ensure that the allotted time of 30-45-minutes reached. Each instrument, observation, and interview guides were designed to keep the researcher on track during the activities. Respectful and courteous behavior displayed throughout the observation including interview questions by the researcher being an active listener.

Observation Guides

Observations serve two purposes in qualitative research: participant observation in their natural surroundings and the researcher can use observations to select participants for the interview (Whittle et al., 2020). Observation approaches can be behavioral or non-behavioral observations (Dalati & Marx Gómez, 2018). For this research study, I used observation as an instrument to view participants in the workplace. The documents for observations included actions, behaviors, and non-verbal communication of the participants. Observations are the visual documentation of the behaviors or actions of the participants from the viewpoint of the researcher versus communicating with people and obtaining information (Ferguson et al., 2018). According to Ciesielska et al. (2018), there are four types of observation techniques: participant, direct, indirect, and non-participant exist. Participant observation requires the researcher to observe as an active participant in an organization to gain insider knowledge (Hidalgo, 2019). Direct observation is an active immersion into the research field to observe and record behavior as an event unfolds (Ciesielska et al., 2018). Indirect observation requires observing through videos and written descriptions (Dalati & Marx Gómez, 2018). Non-participant allows the researcher to observe from an outsider's perspective without interacting with the participants (Rai, 2020). Customers do not enter the doors of Company X. However, I was able to hear the phone conversations and observed how employees interacted with the customers. For this research study, direct observation technique was necessary. The direct observation was appropriate as the purpose of this research was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the behaviors of the leaders and employees and how their behaviors impacted the internal relationships of Company X.

Appendix C contains the observation guide developed for this study. The flexible research design allotted for the research guide to change as the study progresses if necessary. The importance of each column related to the social interaction and unconscious behaviors of the participants and non-participants. The participants' appearance is an indicator of their social status, job satisfaction, and comfortability with their leaders and other employees (Younas et al., 2020). The dynamics of the interaction between leaders and employees received notation and placement under the verbal behavior and interactions column for each participant. Body language can speak more about a person's behaviors and thoughts than words (Hawkins, 2018). I carefully notated any body language that depicted or contradicted what the participant said in the interview or in the conversations heard with others during the observation. Another important aspect is body movement. People that feel comfortable and trust those around them will stand closer to them (Younas et al., 2020). I notated participants and non-participants that stood out above the others and notated how people interacted with them and the characteristics of these people. This interaction helped the researcher observe any trends in behavior that contributed to the building of internal relationships. Last on the observation guide was the observation of customer interactions. A service company depends on the customer's initial contact with the employee and leader (Fang et al., 2020). Successful interaction means continued business and referral business, which means new customers and income increase (Fang et al., 2020). Company X's front office is an open platform; therefore, I was able to observe not only the frontline employee interacting with the customer, but also the receptionist, accounts receivable, and other personnel that is pertinent to the delivery of the service. Documentation of the observations was in the form of journals and transcribed within 48 hours.

Interview Guides

The interview guide was semi-structured, and each question is designed to address the research questions. The guide enabled me to provide a background to the participant, helped me stay focused, and provided a professional format for the interview and the study. As the data collection progresses, Hawkins (2018) asserted that the interview guide will need revising during the data collection process and as the participants uncover more themes or experiences. Hawkins (2018) indicated that researchers should keep an open mind to the change and the need for revisions during the study.

The interview guide in Appendix D includes three sections. Section one is the background information of the participant and whether they signed the consent form. The consent form in Appendix A provided participants with the purpose of the study and the estimated time of 30-45-minutes for the interview. The second section of the interview guide contains semistructured questions for the participants. Each question is open-ended and addressed a specific research question indicated in parathesis. Each question encouraged the participant to answer with details pertinent to the study. Follow-up prompts for some of the interview questions were necessary. The interview structured into a conversation instead of a formal meeting. Notes taken during the interview served as notate verbiage, any non-verbal communication, and additional remarks including emerging themes. The last section of the interview guide consists of closing remarks, a thank you note to the participants, and reminders about confidentiality.

There are 22 questions in the interview guide. Questions 1 and 2 are background questions and were meant to be an ice breaker and helped establish a rapport with the participant. Questions 2 to 4 provided me with a view of how the participant viewed management and how

involved the participant was in the opportunities to associate with other employees and leaders of Company X. Question 5 searched for employee recognition and how this recognition was a factor in employee engagement. The definition of an ideal leader or employee may differ because of the ideal of the participants. How people define a subject can base on past experiences, education, interests, personal attitudes, and what they consider to be important attributes in a person (Elwell et al., 2018). Questions 6 and 7 provided the researcher with data of how people view in the organization. This insight can be a determining factor in the employees and leaders' actions and behaviors pertaining to engagement. Questions 8 to 12 were about the participants' job satisfaction perception and how this affected the participants' productivity. Excellent customer service is dependent on a successful relationship between an organization's leaders and employees (Balaji et al., 2020). The customers' experience from the participants' point of view was uncovered in their responses to Questions 13 and 14. Personal reflection on how the participant views the organization and themselves was depicted in their responses to Questions 15-21. The last question was a wrap-up question. This question allowed the participant to provide additional information or thoughts to the conversation or interview. The last question and the closing remarks were at the end of the interview.

Data Organization Plan

A large amount of data collected from the interviews and the observations were necessary. Moser and Korstjens (2018) concluded that data should organize into smaller and more manageable pieces. Each interview received transcription with notes that were taken during the interview and saved to my password protected computer. The file was uploaded into the NVivo software to assisted in the data analysis. In this transition to the NVivo software, the participant's name was excluded. The assigned participant number occurred. The file names

followed the format of “ParticipantXInterview.doc” or “ParticipantXObservationNotes.doc.”

The files used primarily during member checking included reviewed data. The only paper documents are the interview guide, and the observation guide was processed through Microsoft Word. The procession with Microsoft Word allowed for easy access and editing. I destroyed the hard copy was within 48 hours of uploading the notes and transcribing the interview. To protect the identity and maintain confidentiality of the participants and Company X, the computer files, transcripts, notes, and digital documents I will destroy or erase after three years of submitting the study. I used Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word, and NVivo software for data organization and data storage.

Summary of Data Collection & Organization

Presenting a qualitative research study requires a systematic, detailed, and organized process (Akinyode & Khan, 2018). The extensive amount of data collected during qualitative research should require organization for easy retrieval, analysis, and disposal (Moser and Korstjens, 2018). This research study included incorporating observation guides, interview guides, and journals with notes as tools for collecting the data. I used the direct observation mode to gather data of the participant in the workplace setting. The observation guide helped me look for non-verbal and verbal communication that geared towards answering the research questions. The semi-structured interviews were the primary instrument for data collection as the interviews provided an in-depth perspective from each participant (Hawkins, 2018). The interview guide helped me maintain the protocol for the interview and kept the conversation on task. After the observations and interviews, I transcribed the information into digital software that helped in the data analysis. I destroyed any paper notes or documents within 48 hours of transcription. The digital data will require destruction after three years.

Data Analysis

Data analysis started with the first interview or observation notes. With the amount of data collected, Moser and Korstjens (2018) recommended that data analysis occur in between interview or observations. Data analysis is an iterative process where the researcher is accumulating data and analyzing the data simultaneously (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I used a thematic analysis approach. The thematic analysis approach allows researchers to use the findings across a wide scope of disciplines, therefore creating theory or data-driven findings (Braun, Latham, & Cannatelli, 2019). Lester et al. (2020) reiterates that data analysis in qualitative research is not a step-by-step process, but an iterative process. The steps of data analysis will differ from researcher to researcher; however, Lester et al. (2020) did suggest seven steps for data analysis. The steps include (a) Preparing and organizing the data-Entails gathering all interview and observation guides, notes, and audio tapes and storing in one location for easy access.

Transcribing the data can be time consuming and there should be allotted time to complete these tasks. Becoming familiar with the data while collecting the data, researchers should review the data to identify any missing links or any limitation in the data (Peters et al., 2020). Memoing the data-Capturing the emergent themes as they arise creates an opportunity for further analysis (Lester et al., 2020). Coding the data using software will assist in assigning participant numbers to protect their identity, coding the important themes and notations, and making connections of the data to the research are suggestion from Lester et al. (2020). Moving codes to categories and categories to themes researchers must divide the data into categories and then transfer these categories into emerging themes. The themes must differentiate from the categories (Lester et al., 2020). Making the analytical process transparent by using software to

map the data analysis will create a trail of the connection of data sources, code, categories, and themes and ensure transparency (Lester et al., 2020). The above steps are the suggestions included in many literature journals and articles. However, as I begin the analytical process, I will need to adapt or adjust the steps as necessary for time management, data transparency, and theme emergent (Lester et al., 2020).

Emergent Ideas

Reading over the notes from the observation and interviews and transcriptions of the interviews, a researcher becomes familiar with the data and ensures their accuracy. Once I was familiar with the data, emerging themes emerged. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested memoing to capture emerging ideas and themes. Memoing is throughout the research until the presentation of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), memos may be a detailed account or reflection of a particular aspect of the study.

For this study, I captured memos during the observations and the transcription of the interviews. The memos printed in the margins of the observation and interview guides and captured electronically after the face-to-face interviews. Memos can assist in the credibility and accuracy of data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Coding is easier when the memos include detail, and emergent themes extract from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the study progressed, the process for reading and memoing emergent themes updated.

Coding Themes

According to Williams and Moser (2019), coding is a key data organizing structure and is most often a word or short phrase that sums up a portion of the data. Parameswaran et al. (2019) indicated that coding is not just about naming themes, but “connecting the themes back to the data and the data back to the themes. There is not a single method of coding as data analysis

varies for each researcher. The suggestion by Elliott (2018) is for the researcher to determine what data is useful and what data is redundant. After the transcriptions and memoing is complete, the researcher can assign descriptive words or phrases to portions of the text (Elliott, 2018). Coding is also a way for a qualitative researcher to break down the amount of data collected into manageable data that directly applies to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Incorporating a codebook and starting with 30-50 codes, I consolidated the list into 15-20 codes by placing similar codes together and then into six to eight themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each coding theme represented the findings of the research and is present in the narrative form using participant quotes as evidence (Elliott, 2018). Lester et al. (2020) recommended using data analysis software to assist with the coding process but warned not to rely on the software completely. The software used during the coding process was NVivo.

Interpretations

During the data analysis process, the researcher must interpret the participants responses and experiences (Ravindran, 2019). Interpretations require the researcher to find significant meaning in the data, themes, and categories, which assists the reader in transferring the data to other applications (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, I kept the interpretations as close to the participant's account as possible to not lose the voice of the participant and adding quality to the data. Adding quality to data involves checking for bias, employing triangulation methods, ensuring the sample represents the population and the data collected is a representation of the sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once the collection of the data concluded, this research included diagramming to test the patterns and explanations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Testing and examining the data quality and themes can occur through member checking by the participants reviewing the data for accuracy with a confirmation or denial (Candela, 2019).

Data Representation

Data representation is the last step in data analysis that involves creating a visual representation that summarizes the interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data visualization includes tables, diagrams, charts, and matrices (Li et al., 2020). According to Li et al. (2020), two types of data exist; visualization: informational and scientific visualization. Information visualization is the process of representing abstract data in a way that readers or users can understand the meaning of the data collected and analyzed (Dai et al., 2020). Kelleher and Braswell (2021) defined scientific visualization as a mechanism to communicate science and help readers make sense of complex information and interact with the data. For this research study, the data occurred through information visualization. Once data collected, the NVivo software included creating visuals for the study. The visuals are in the form of tables and charts. Boxed narratives accompany the visuals for further understanding of the data represented. I shared the tables and charts with participants during the member checking for validation and feedback.

Analysis for Triangulation

Collecting data from multiple sources, or triangulation, improves the validity and credibility of the research (Moon, 2019). Noble and Heale (2019) defined validity as the accurate reflection of the research concepts and credibility as the trustworthiness and believability of the study. The triangulation for this research was methodical, as the data collected using various methods. The triangulation techniques used in the study were interviews, observations, and historical data. Collecting data from multiple sources allowed me to analyze participants' experiences and collaborate those experiences into themes (Cypress, 2018). The themes and

interpretations developed in this study came from the data from multiple sources and participants and supported by evidence obtained from the coding process (Mohajan, 2020).

Summary of Data Analysis

The data analysis process can vary between researchers and research studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data analysis is an unremitting task that requires diligence, organization, and iterative processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data analysis does not have to occur after the collection of the data. Data analysis can begin at the collection process and occur as an iterative process where data collection and analysis occur simultaneously (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Emerging ideas can transform during memoing, journaling, and transcription (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Coding themes broke down the data into manageable parts and began broadly with 30-50 themes and then narrowed the themes down to 15-20 themes. I used a data analyzing software, NVivo, to assist with coding and data representation. Validity and credibility occurred through the methodical triangulation using interview, observation, memos, journals, and historical data (Cypress, 2018).

Reliability and Validity

Trustworthiness occurs through rigor, validity, and reliability (Roberts et al., 2019). According to Roberts et al. (2019), reliability refers to whether the findings from the study can duplicate or reproduce and still achieve the same results. Validity is the trustworthiness of the research results (Roberts et al., 2019). Sürücü and Maslakçı (2020) found that reliability does not mean validity, but validity means the study is reliable. Triangulation, member checking, bias free research, thorough research, presentation of positive and negative information, and the participant follow-up for accuracy are ways this research study achieved reliability and validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Reliability

Reliability refers to the dependability and consistency of the findings of a research study (Roberts et al., 2019). Coleman (2021) referred to reliability as dependable, confirmable, and consistent. Johnson et al. (2019) indicated that there is not one specific way to measure reliability in qualitative research. Coleman (2021) indicated that reliability can occur if the research is transparent, multiple coded, and replicable. Transparency generates through details. A reader should conduct an audit trail to view how the researcher conducted and how they arrived at their findings (Coleman, 2021). Carcary (2020) defined a qualitative audit trail as a record of how researchers conduct the study they arrived at their conclusions.

To create reliable research, I created an audit trail that contained the raw data (field notes, memos, journals), analytical notes, data reconstruction items (themes, findings, literature reviews, integration of concepts and interpretations, methodology notes, instruments for the research (observation and interview guides, audio recordings), and materials related to the expectations of the study (Carcary, 2020). Through this careful documentation, I created reliability for this study.

Documentation that contains thick, rich data, and has complete and detailed field notes, observations, and transcriptions that are accurate will help the study have reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Implementing the interview guide, observation guide, and two forms of recording improved the reliability of the research. Time constraints and availability required responsible for all the transcriptions and coding. I spent an extensive amount of time to transcribe the interview audio recordings, memos, and notes and used member checking to validate the results with the participants.

Validity

Plausible and accurate research findings are valid (Roberts et al., 2019). Qualitative researchers can create external and construct validity for their studies. Fusch et al. (2018) defined external validity as the ‘ability of the study’s conclusions to be transferable to other studies regardless of populations or times. Construct validity occurs when the ‘inferences that are made can tie to the conceptual framework of the study’ (Fusch et al., 2018). If the researcher uses multiple sources of data or triangulation, thorough documentation, and member checking, the study can occur constructively valid (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) provided eight strategies for creating validity and credibility in qualitative research: triangulation, thorough descriptions, member checking, bias free, present negative and positive findings, extended time in the field, peer evaluation, and an external auditor. I could not use an external auditor and peer evaluations because of the availability of an auditor and other professionals. This study’s credibility and validity was from using the other strategies provided by Creswell and Poth (2018).

Methodological triangulation for this research occurred using multiple methods. Noble and Heale (2019) concluded that validity is reached if different methods produce the same results. Observations, interviews, and financial data are the triangulation techniques that I used for this study. Participants play a vital role in validating the research through member checking. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated credibility and accuracy of the data improves through member checking. Participant feedback is a form of protection against researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researchers using the constructivist research paradigm can achieve validity by disconfirming the evidence, extended time in the field, and by producing rich data (FitzPatrick,

2019). In qualitative research, disconfirming the evidence happens at the end of the study and requires the researcher to identify conflicting data to further refine the themes and represent the theoretical ideas that emerged from the study (Janiszewski & van Osselaer, 2021). Downen et al. (2019) recommended disconfirming the evidence, which is presenting the opposing or contradictory data, to strengthen the validity of a study. Disconfirming the evidence will help the researcher eliminate bias. At the end of the study, the researcher presented opposing data. The observation data occurred over a period that was suitable for the researcher and Company X. Thorough and accurate transcription, memoing, and follow-up procedures produced rich data that assisted in creating validity.

Bracketing

Bracketing refers to putting aside beliefs about the subject of the study or what a person already knows about the subject before and during the study (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020). Weatherford and Maitra (2019) indicated that bracketing is opening a person's mind and changing their perspective. Prior experiences, culture, race, and gender may cause a researcher to report findings that support their beliefs or positions (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). Reviewing the data and carefully choosing how to present the findings of a study are ways to implement bracketing (Weatherford & Maitra, 2019). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that a researcher should document any past experiences with the research subject, the participant, or the case study that may cause bias. The documentation of the bias and experiences enables the reader to understand the researcher's position in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, I continuously self-reflected on the personal position of the research problem. I continued to notate any bias during the research progress.

Summary of Reliability and Validity

Fitzpatrick (2019) provided three suggestions for researchers to obtain validity in their studies: integrity of the data, reflexivity and subjectivity are equally balanced, and transparency in the presentation of the findings. Collecting data that is rich in content and maintaining complete field notes, memos, and accurate transcriptions assists in the reliability and validity of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I continuously implemented techniques to improve the reliability and the validity of the study. To improve the reliability of the research, I thoroughly documented research procedures, accurately transcribed the interviews and observations, and utilized the observation and interview guides. The validity of the study required me to use member checking for accuracy from the participant and data triangulation.

Summary of Section 2 and Transition

The purpose of this flexible design research study was to understand the behavior and actions of leaders and employees in creating an internal relationship and how these behaviors and actions affected the organization's business results. The flexible qualitative research design was relative to this study as the data collected included improving insight on how people's behavior shapes relationships (Teherani et al., 2018). I was responsible for providing bias free data and conclusions based on the data collected. Data collection was done by using the following instruments: observation and interview guides, financial statements, and customer service rating. Transcription of the interviews and the observations of each participant was done by me, because of time constraints and the availability of other professionals. The interview process, observation, and transcription must be done by the researcher in an ethical manner (Paradis & Varpio, 2018). The researcher must be diligent in being self-aware of assumed concepts of

truthfulness, justice, honesty, and integrity (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018). Bracketing is a self-reflection tool that was used by me to help eliminate bias.

This study was a case study. The participants were from Company X, a service company with 98 employees. The sample size from this population was 20 participants. Company X was chosen for this research because the organization falls under the SBA's definition of a small business, an organization that employs less than 500 employees (U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, 2021). Small businesses that employ less than 100 employees make up 98.1% of all U.S. businesses (SBA, 2022). For this reason, Company X was ideal to represent small businesses in the U.S. The sample was 20% of Company X's employees. Health and sustainability of an organization can determine by the financial reports and the customer service ratings (Zhao et al., 2019). The sample size of 20 participants was enough to reach data saturation. Vasileiou et al. (2018) recommended a sample size of 15 to 30 interviews for a single case study project.

Data collection involves observations and interviews of the participants and archived documents. The study was semi-structured that allowed me to change the course of data collection if new or more data is necessary. The interview and follow-up questions were open-ended, had no preset answers, and intended to gain insight on the participants' perspective or experiences with the internal relationships and the impact these relationships had on the business results of Company X. Advanced scheduling for the interviews and the observations was done to prevent the interruption of everyday tasks of the participants. Using audio recording devices and note taking techniques, the transcribed data was my responsibility. The participants' identities will remain confidential; I will store the files for three years and then destroy. Member checking and bracketing are ways I will obtain reliability and validity.

Moser and Korstjens (2018) recommended that data analysis begins after the first interview. I used the NVivo software program to assist in analyzing the data and capturing any themes. The triangulation methods were interviews, observations, and historical data. Using multiple sources of triangulation increased the trustworthiness and the believability of the study's findings (Noble & Heale, 2019). Reliability and validity are the key elements of trustworthiness (Roberts et al., 2019). Reliability is the consistency of the findings and the dependability of the findings (Coleman, 2021). I created a researcher's audit trail to assist in obtaining reliability. Validity can obtain through triangulation, thorough documentation, and member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Bracketing was an on-going instrument for me to prevent any bias. Accuracy and paying attention to detail were elements for me to present data that is credible, reliable, and valid. Section 3 presents the findings from the case study and how these findings apply to professional practice. Section 3 will also show how the research and the finding of the research helped me grow professionally, personally, and spiritually.

Section 3 Application to Professional Practice

In the service industry, as the world changes, so must the strategic plan of the business to stay current with trends and the needs of customers and employees (Agrawal et al., 2020).

Section 3 provides the overview of the study and how the case study can apply to professional practice. Section 3 of the case study assesses professional practice and the implementation of change to business practices. Themes discovered during the interview, observation, and the triangulation process occurs in Section 3. The themes compared to the results of the interviews and how the themes address the problem statement of the study. I previewed the relationship between the findings from the case study and the study's research questions, conceptual framework which occurs in Section 3. The reflections on my professional and personal growth and the biblical perspective concludes the section.

Overview of the Study

I conducted and collected the Interviews, observations, and financial data from Company X, a representative of the population of businesses in the United States. Small businesses represent 98.1% of all businesses in the United States (SBA, 2021). All analysis and coding occurred by using NVivo Software. As discussed in the proposal, 20 employees participated in the interview process and, while the observations primarily focused on the 20 employees, the observations were also of the employees of the company that were present during the time of observation. The financial data collected was provided by the financial manager for Company X.

Section three of the study also reveals how information collected from the interview process and the observations addressed the problem of the study, the three research questions, and the purpose of the study. To address the problem being examined in the study, the 20 interviews were with leaders and their employees working for the selected organization, Company X. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and the observations were over the course of three days. All participants received the same questions by the interview guide. The interview guide divided into three sections to cover the three research questions. Section one of the interview guide was developed to answer the first research questions, section two posed interview questions to answer the second research question, and section three interview questions developed to answer the third research question of the study.

Presentation of the Findings

This part of the presentation focused on the themes discovered and how these themes related to the literature on the effects of employee and employer engagement on the financial performance of an organization. This portion of the study also revealed how information collected from the interview process addressed the problem of the study, the three research questions, and the purpose of the study. The behaviors of the leaders and employees were evident during transcriptions of the interviews and observations and these behaviors contributed to the emergence of the themes.

I interviewed twenty participants to address the problem of the study. The participants were leaders, customer service representatives, front-line employees, and other essential employees. Table 3.1 shows the breakdown of the participants and their positions with Company X. Along with the participants and their roles, the amount of time each participant has worked for Company X is prevalent. A minimum of four years of employment required by the researcher

to show longevity and the change of policies that helped or hindered employee and leader engagement in achieving the goals of Company X. According to the Employee Tenure report by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), the average number of years an employee is with their employer is 4.1 years; this statistic has not changed since January 2020.

Table 3.1

Participants of the Study

Note: The highlighted participants are identified leaders through their job titles.

Participant #	Job Title	Years with Company X
P1	Service Technician (Employee)	14
P2	Install Manager (Leader)	8
P3	Service Technician (Employee)	7
P4	Install Technician (Employee)	5
P5	Office Manager (Leader)	18
P6	Install Crew Leader (Employee)	6
P7	General Manager (Leader)	16
P8	Accounts Payable (Employee)	4
P9	Owner (Leader)	20+
P10	Accounts Receivable (Employee)	5
P11	Service Manager (Leader)	12
P12	Purchasing Clerk (Employee)	6
P13	Accounts Receivable Asst (Employee)	4
P14	Customer Service Representative (Employee)	12
P15	Service Technician (Employee)	5
P16	Install Technician (Employee)	5

P17	Warranty Clerk Asst (Employee)	4
P18	Warranty Clerk (Employee)	5
P19	Co-Owner (Leader)	20+
P20	Payroll Clerk (Employee)	15

Themes Discovered

During the coding of the interviews and observations, several key terms emerged to help develop the themes. Figure 3.1 shows the most frequent terms produced from the data collected in the study. The key words in developing the themes were company culture, open-door communication, lead by example, collaboration, and customer service. Meetings and communication were throughout the observations. The outer lining words are as significant as the inner lining words. All the terms were interchangeably to develop themes that overlapped and added precedence to the study.

Figure 3.1

Reoccurring Terms in the Data Collection



From the interview process and observation, five themes emerged. As shown in Table 3.2, the themes identified in the interview transcripts and observations of multiple participants. The themes overlapped with each participant and were evident as the observation of participants occurred in their work environment.

Table 3.2

Identified Themes

Theme One	Company culture is a vital incentive to promote leader and employee engagement equally.
Theme Two	Open-door or an open-communication policy helps bridge the gap between employer and employee engagement.
Theme Three	Lead by example exemplifies the want for an employee to engage in helping the company achieve their goals.
Theme Four	Collaboration is essential when working across departments to promote employee and leader engagement.
Theme Five	A company's internal communication is a dynamic function of customer

satisfaction.

The interview results listed in Table 3.3 show the identified themes and the statements from the participants that led to the discovery of each theme. The verbatim responses occurred directly from the transcripts of the interview. Transcription allows a researcher to capture the original, nuanced responses from the participants by using their own words and not a summary of a researcher's notes (Parameswaran et al., 2020). The responses were categorized and then analyzed for reoccurring themes or as identified in the table as the identified theme.

Table 3.3

Interview Results

Identified Theme	Verbatim Participant Responses
Company Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I enjoy coming to work. • Everyone is encouraging. • I feel as though we are all related. • We help each other no matter what department we work in. • I feel I am respected and valued. • My opinion matters. • We are treated as professionals of our fields. • Our customers feel as though they are a part of the business. • My boss asks about my family every day, and this makes me feel as though they are just as important as I am.
Open-door Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can talk to my boss or my supervisor with little to no fear of losing my job. • I feel as though my voice is always heard.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My thoughts have value. • The owners care about how I feel. • All the managers are open to suggestions. • I am always looking forward to our weekly staff meetings. • We rarely have internal conflicts, but when we do, they are settled in on open discussion with all parties involved. • I am supported in my ideas for new and more efficient ways of doing something. • My opinion is always considered in decisions that affect how I do my job. • I think my boss knows me way to well.
Lead by Example	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My manager does not do anything that she would not do herself. • The owner is here before anyone else and this makes me want to be on time, if not early. • The employee goes over and beyond, so I want to make sure she knows that she is as asset to this company. • A customer can tell if an employee is happy by the effort, they put into their service call. • Communicating an appreciation of a job well done makes other employees want to do a better job. • I have seen my install technicians leave one job to help another team even though they were not getting paid for it. • Our company does a community service project every season (summer and winter). I am proud to work for a company that takes care of its community.
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One department is not more important than another. • Our weekly staff meetings energize me to want to do more because of the role playing. Role playing allows us to see the job from all perspectives from all departments. • Our CSR is beneficial in solving problems for me out in the field through the communication of the customer's needs. • Customer satisfaction starts with the CSR and ends with the technician, so I am glad that we can all be on the same page with

	<p>just about every service call.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I cannot do my job without someone else doing their job. • My job as an installer depends on the office doing their job and the service department relaying all the pertinent information. • If the CSR and technicians do not communicate openly with the customer on pricing, I cannot honestly expect them to pay.
Customer Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically, a customer complaint can be handled by the CSR because of her professional attitude and willingness to listen before responding. • Our vision is about providing customers with exceptional services. • The customer may not always be right, but their voice still needs to be heard. • My customers know about my children, and this adds to their service experience. • Not every service or installation is going to go perfectly but being honest in what happened provides customers with a sense of trust. • Some of our customers have been with us since the company started. • I had to write a check for a customer for over \$1600 in one month because of his referrals. (<i>Referrals were \$100 per</i>)

Interpretation of the Themes

Once the themes identified, the interpretation of the themes developed. The interpretation of the themes reflects a broader understanding of the data collected through the examination of the themes and codes (Xu & Zammit, 2020). As shown in the previous Table 3.3, the identified themes are company culture, open-door communication, lead by example, collaboration, and customer service. Each identified themes were evaluated using the exact words of the participants.

Theme One: Company Culture

A major theme that developed during the interviews and the observations was the impact of the company culture on employees and leadership engagement. During the interpretation of the components of the study, the discovery was that 95% of the 20 participants inspired by Company X's company culture and felt the culture played a major part in their growth professionally and personally. From the data collected, Company X's company culture consists of respect for diversity, skill level, and expertise with an emphasis on open communication across departments and being ethical to each other and to the customers. Kanna and Srimathi (2020) concluded in their study that a diverse workforce improves cohesiveness and teamwork within an organization. The employees spoke highly of how leaders in the company made them feel that their voices matter, value, appreciated, and implement in the customer service processes value.

P14 portrayed a changing moment in how they felt about their career with Company X that happened during one of the weekly staff meetings. During the first part of the meeting, the platform is open to anyone with any concerns or suggestions. P14 is a customer service representative (CSR) that is responsible for setting the appointments as the call comes in from the customer. P14 is the first person that the customer will encounter when dealing with the company. An issue that kept arising that the CSR felt was a vital part of keeping the customer satisfied was the failure to uphold the Preventative Maintenance Care Program (PMCP) for customers. The PMCP allotted for a customer to have two services per year that would entail getting their heating and air conditioning system ready for the heating and cooling seasons. The heating and cooling seasons are peak seasons that happen during the summer and winter months. I added every new contract in a customer folder and added the contract to a spreadsheet. The

spreadsheet is what the CSR used to make the appointments and keep up with the month of renewal. The issue was that appointments were made manually at the beginning of every month for each customer whose service was due for that month. This was a tedious process for the CSR and time consuming. There were times that the CSR missed making the service appointment because of the fact a file had not been created immediately upon the sale of a PMCP. Follow-up appointment calls were not able to make to customers that they could not reach because of CSR time constraints. The purpose of having a PMCP in place was that the customer would not have to worry about when the next service was due; the company would or should contact the customer automatically to set the seasonal service. The customer would not have to call every season to make the appointment, only to have a reminder appointment call from the CSR. If the customer had to call in to make the appointment, then this does not promote good customer service, or at least in the thought process of Company X and the CSR.

The CSR's wanted to free up time by allowing the computer software to set the appointment automatically when the technician sold the PMCP. P14 researched the appointment setting software that the company was already using and found a capability that would save the company time and money. The capability would cause the company to update the software, but P14 felt that the cost of upsetting a customer was riskier. The idea was brought up in the weekly staff meeting. Some employees and leaders had concerns that this would work because they thought the old system was working just fine. Once the idea was brought up, field service technicians and installation technicians began talking about how the customers complained about missed appointments and feeling they were sold something the company could not handle. Customers complaining about not getting what they paid promoted a sense of disagreement between the technicians and the customers and a rift with the technicians and the CSR, as the

CSR was responsible for setting the appointment. The agreement came to make the change and the CSR oversaw implementing the change and commended for a job well done by the leaders and owners.

Per the interview, P14 stated how they became more engaged in their job and listened more intently to the needs of the customers and the service technicians because they felt as though their voice matters and they should be more attentive in their job and customers. P14 felt valued as an employee and began to feel as though what they did daily made a difference across the departments, for the customers, and other employees. P14 stated that after this event, the outlook on being a CSR was positive even through the stressful days. Company X's culture consists of respect for skill level, collaboration, and communication to provide excellent customer service. Without this type of company culture, P14 stated nothing would have been said to make a change that proved to be valuable in customer retention and referrals. P14's words were: "Change does not happen because people are fearful about losing their jobs if they do go against something that has been working for years. I know my ideas have value, even if they do not work out every time."

In the observations, respect for diversity occurred in the words that were spoken and in the non-verbal communication that transpired in the interview and observations. All the participants, except P19, smiled when talking about how they felt about working for the company and how the company valued them. P19 is the Chief Executive Officer and displayed an upright posture physically and linguistically during the interview. However, in the observation, P19 showed respect to each employee and leader by listening intently and offered suggestions that satisfied the situation or problem and provided constructive feedback. The tone that was in the offices and shops during observation was respectful, down to business, but

casually comfortable. The conversation mimicked in each department was concern for each other, the task at hand, and the business of customer service. Respect gained for individual space and expertise through conversation and small gestures. Coffee, snacks, and drinks were made available to everyone. An interesting notation was that everyone was working and there was not much idle conversation. There were moments of celebration in small accomplishments: technicians selling units or PMCPs, customer referrals or praises, hitting daily key performance indicators (KPIs), or just surviving a day in the life of customer service.

Summary of Theme One

While small accomplishments and gestures are typically overlooked in the process of daily business activities, Company X looks at these items as small steps that are necessary to achieve the bigger picture of personal and professional success. Kucharska and Kowalczyk (2019) indicated that employee engagement has a direct correlation with the employee's perception of the company culture. Employees that feel the culture is a replication of themselves and who they strive to be, engagement will be high (Kucharska & Kowalczyk, 2019). Respect for diversity and skill level are high components that contribute to Company X's culture. Chaudhary and Akhouri (2019) concluded that companies that have engaged employees have a company culture that provides the employees with a high level of confidence and a strategic edge for the company. Engaged employees will strive to achieve optimal customer service.

Theme Two: Open Communication

Open communication can be a double-edged sword if the allowance for open communication is not respectful. Furawo and Scheepers (2018) indicated that an open-door policy plays a vital role in establishing a relationship between leaders and employees and in the sustainability of innovation within a firm. Sustainable innovation derives from a business that

promotes informal and formal learning (Furawo & Scheepers, 2018). Negi and Turano (2022) defined an open-door policy as a policy that enables employees to voice their concerns, ideas, and feedback. Although the study by Negi and Turano (2022) conclude that an open-door policy can reduce tension and workplace conflict, an open-door policy can also determent an organization by allowing an employee to become too dependent on the advice of a leader and, therefore, undermining the employee's decision-making ability.

Of the 20 participants, 6 were leaders or executive members for Company X. Eleven of the 14 remaining employee participants made comments during the interview about being able to talk freely to leaders, managers, and owners. The 11 participants felt they were able to voice concerns, make recommendations for improvements, or speak about personal matters that affected their job performance. P18 did state that their day started and ended in their manager's office. When asked about how satisfied they were with their job (Interview Q12), P18 was unsatisfied in the aspect of not being able to move up in the company. P18 has been with the company for five years in the same position as a warranty clerk. The position next to the warranty clerk was accounts payable. With this thought, P18 is quoted as saying "I come to do my job and that is it." During the observations, the researcher found that all office personnel start out as a CSR and transition into other jobs, except P14. P14 is the primary CSR and is on the frontline with all customers calls for service appointments, complaints, or basic questions. P14 has had other CSRs that worked with them as a CSR, but this position is usually a temporary position during peak seasons. Company X hires eleventh and twelfth graders from the local high school for two summer positions that help the company meet the high demand for service calls. While nothing can derive from whether P18 has not moved up because of the dependence on the manager to start and finish the day with a verbal conversation, Liu et al. (2020) indicated that an

employee who is consistently concerned about what their supervisor or leader thinks about them can disengage with the slightest conversation or statement from a supervisor or leader.

While most of the participants that were employees enjoyed having an open-door policy, of the six leaders, four spoke about communication with the employees and the impact the open-door policy has had on productivity. The install manager, P2, and the service manager, P11, specifically talked about their departments and the communication aspect of their employees. Both stated that the communication from employee to leader comes from the technicians in the field and during the weekly staff meetings. In the HVAC industry, many customers are unaware of the equipment they have in their home and what they need in their home to satisfy their heating and air conditioning needs. The service technician and the installation crew have one time to get the job right the first time, to retain a customer, and obtain a customer referral. Service and installation technicians cannot go into the field not being able to trust their own expertise or the expertise of their leaders. There are times when confidence can lessen by the stress of customer service and the technicians need advice or just a boost of reassurance. The open-door policy allows technicians to feel free to talk to their leaders and others to gain knowledge or reassurance so they can provide excellent customer service. Without the opportunity for the field technicians to talk to their leaders without the fear of being demeaned or questioned about their skill level. P14 and P5 are also instruments in the open-door policy. All the interviewed technicians agreed (P1, P3, P4, P6, P15, and P16), P5 and P14 can troubleshoot as much as the leaders of the install and service teams.

Summary of Theme Two

An open-door communication policy can differ for each company. Company X sees an open-door communication policy that has a chance to boost confidence levels, enhance expertise

levels, and educate employees. In addition, conflict resolution, and one-on-one collaboration time, which will increase engagement and productivity results. Employees feel they can come to their leaders with whatever is on their minds and their voices will represent. The value that Company X placed in an open-door policy promoted engagement from all departments. Alyammahi et al. (2020) asserted that professionally treated employees with respect are more likely to go over and beyond their job descriptions to meet goals and objectives. Engaged employees place value in their job and the company (Al-dalahmeh et al., 2018). However, a professionally satisfied employee in the service industry will engage others and strive to engage the customer in their own customer experience (Robinson et al., 2020).

Theme Three: Engage Through Being an Example

Interview question seven included asking the participants specifically to define an ideal employee and if anyone in the company exemplified these qualities. The qualities that came up the most during the interviews were: trustworthy, respectful, open-minded, communicating clearly, helpful, and genuine in character. Eight major leaders in Company X and over 90 employees exist. Twenty participants represented 20% of the population of Company X. Company X represents the 98.1% of small businesses in the United States that employ less than 100 employees (SBA, 2020). Of the 20 participants, all were able to identify someone within the company that exemplified an ideal employee or leader. Four of the participants, or 20% of the participants, identified the same person as an ideal employee. The employee was the office manager that worked across the departments to help facilitate a superior service for the customer and for the employee. The office manager was also a participant in the study (P5). The participants stated that the office manager strived to find innovative ways to strengthen the teams and the processes that enhanced the service delivery for the customer. All participants agreed

that the office manager would not ask anything of anyone that they would not do themselves, treated everyone with respect, and listened to customers and employees with the intention of resolving any issues or praising even the smallest accomplishments. The employees agreed that the office manager understands that people have lives outside of the company, but also keeps everyone informed that the business is seasonal, and that people must earn money while the demand is there because, in the service industry, work for tomorrow is not a promise. As a team player and leader, the office manager trains and cross train employees so that if they must change to another department or job, there is not a loss of productivity. According to the four participants, they strive to do what they can to help the company meet the goals and objectives because the office manager is going over and beyond to ensure they have a job tomorrow, but they are enjoying the job they are doing today.

In the same aspect of an ideal employee, P5, the office manager, responded to the questions by stating that an ideal employee would be defined by “their willingness to grow personally, professionally, and spiritually, through constructive criticism, learning through failure, being humble in their accomplishments, and lead through example.” The second part of question seven was “is there anyone at Company X that exemplifies the ideal employee.” P5 did not state a leader or owner, but a frontline employee, P14. According to P5, P14 can switch between departments and handle situations in a professional manner, learn from their mistakes and is willing to do what is necessary to meet the company’s goals and objectives. P14 is the first person that the customer encounters when calling for services. P14 is also the connection from the customer to the service and installation technicians. According to P5, P14’s positive attitude and dedication to customer service exhilarates the company. Companies depend on employees

that can generate energy and promote other employees to engage in communication and improve productivity.

Summary of Theme Three

Self-determination is a theory presented during the interview with several of the participants. The participants in the study found inspiration in leaders or employees of the company that communicated what needed to occur, but also were doing what needed to be done for the vision of creating an exceptional customer experience. Bakker and Oerlemans (2019) indicated that employee motivation is engagement by leaders who participate. Leaders receive motivation from employees that engage, and customers engage when employees/leaders engage. Lewis (2020) concluded that true inspiration to be great comes from watching an ordinary person doing something great.

Theme Four: Collaboration

Collaboration comes in many forms. Team, contextual, cross functional, community, and social collaboration are the most common forms of collaboration in the workplace (Adobor, 2019). Team collaboration happens when everyone knows everyone else's skill sets and their collective contributions meets deadlines, achieves goals, and produces high productivity rates (van den Hout et al., 2018). According to Park, Lee, and Nicolau, (2020), contextual collaboration occurs when there is one single digital workspace or platform that the entire team can access to produce high quality results without having to switch between applications or wait on information from another person or department. Contextual collaboration helps with the success of cross-functional collaboration as departments work together to achieve an organizational goal (Park, Lee, & Nicolau, 2020). Community and social collaboration can become partners in a productive organization. Community collaboration is the knowledge

sharing of information, experiences, and expertise within departments and the entire organization with limited or no hierarchy (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Social collaboration is a form of collaboration where departments can reach a resolution to a problem quickly by using the department or organization's collective expertise instead of an individual's skillset (Sun et al., 2019).

In the interview questions, several questions requested information from the participants about how each department communicates with each other, the type of culture that exists at Company X, description of the best work experience, and how is a conflict resolved. During the transcription of these questions, the term collaboration occurred 52 times from the various 20 participants. The five types of collaboration, team, contextual, cross functional, community, and social, are present in the responses from the participants. P3, P6, and P17 stated the best experience they have had at Company X happens once a year when the owners, leaders, and employees come together to do something for the community in which they serve. The collaboration of helping others "promoted a sense of team" (P3), "a sense of value" (P6), and "humble accomplishment" (P17). All three participants felt each person's skills, knowledge, and expertise were of value from the community and from the company; a time when the team felt like family as everyone, including the owners, working side by side for the common goal of not making money, not prestige, but of just doing the something nice and right for someone that is less fortunate. P6 spoke of a time when the entire team, service, installation, and office departments, worked together and donated their time and expertise to a family that was in desperate need of a new heating, air conditioning, and ventilation system. Every department from Company X was present during the installation of the system. The family of eight was so very grateful and appreciative. As P6 stated: "I felt good about working for a company that does for others and knows how to bring a team together and do good in the community in which we

serve.” Collaboration and communication help eliminate conflict, according to Dania et al. (2018). Collaboration was listed as a component of the company’s culture in at least 14 of the participant’s response to interview question nine. Weekly department meetings and collective business meetings facilitated the collaboration in and between departments. The software that the company utilizes allows each member to see notes, equipment, and the service history of the company. This information was listed by several participants in what the company is doing right (interview question 10) along with the development of team activities (interview question 4).

Summary of Theme Four

Collaboration is the “mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve a problem” or achieve a common goal or objective together (Veltman et al., 2019). Nigri and Del Baldo (2018) concluded that businesses that integrate corporate accountability through social and internal responsibility to the customers, employees, and community are creating sustainability. Companies that focus on the social and internal factors over the profit margin are more likely to increase revenue by attracting customers with the same values and ethics (Myšková & Hájek, 2019). The goals of an organization can change depending on the situation and the intent of the organization. Trust is an important part of customer service and loyalty in the service industry (Rather et al., 2019). The employees of Company X feel that the company does promote external corporate social responsibility for the customers and the area in which the company services and holds themselves accountable for internal corporate responsibility to the employees.

Theme Five: Communication Equals Customer Satisfaction

Throughout the interview and observations, I noted that the employees and leaders focused on communicating respectfully with each other and the customers. The processes that were happening during the observation showed that the customer comes first in Company X, but

customer service cannot service customers without the frontline employees. Frontline employees must feel valued, appreciated, and acknowledged to produce optimal results and offer the customer excellent experience in the service industry (Billings et al., 2021). In the weekly company meeting, the owner of the company started out with a prayer and with the vision statement for the company. The vision statement of Company X: “We must work together to provide superior customer service experiences by communicating with each other, treating each other with respect, and by exhibiting ethical behaviors in all that we do.” In the service industry, customer service is the key to revenue (Gil-Gomez et al., 2020). Customers are depending on the knowledge of others to provide and satisfy a need in their lives (Gil-Gomez et al., 2020). For Company X, the interpretation of the collected data from the interviews and the observations show that the employees, leaders, and owners know that without their customers, they would not have a job. Peak season can bring new customers, but an authentic and valued customer service experience retains new and existing customers (Siebert et al., 2020). The employees also feel the job can be stressful because of the customers and trying to attain excellent customer service (Siebert et al., 2020). In response to question 15 of the interview, several participants provided customer experiences as some of the worst experiences while working at Company X. P14, the CSR, stated that “customer service means you leave your personal or professional problems at the door to handle someone else’s problems. When that customer calls, life is all about their needs.”

Interview questions 16 and 17 asked specifically what the participants thought the typical customer service experience looked like and how are customer complaints handled within the company. All the participants agreed together, not knowingly, that the typical customer service starts with the CSR in the communication of the needs of the customer and communicating these

needs to the service or installation technician. The service or installation technician required to express or communicate the recommended solutions and the cost of the solution to the customer is necessary. Upon completion of the recommendation, the CSR follows up with the customer to ensure the technicians have met or satisfied their needs. All throughout the process, these frontline employees meet the customer's needs. The warranty clerk, the purchasing clerk, accounts payable, and the accounts receivable are all working behind the scenes to get parts and equipment. In addition, register the warranty information for the customer for the new equipment, pay the vendors, or to receive payments so that the cash flow can allow customer service to purchase whatever necessary supplies to get the system up and running and satisfy the customer's heating and air conditioning needs. For even the smallest to the biggest transaction to run smoothly and efficiently, everyone needs to work together across departments to communicate what is necessary and what they need to provide a customer experience where the customer feels the value and the expertise in what is necessary (Leonardi & Contractor, 2018).

During the observation, I listened to a phone conversation that the CSR was having with a customer. The customer was complaining about her unit being too cold at night. The CSR, although not technically trained to work on the units, was walking the customer through a few steps to correct the issue that was the programming in the thermostat. The customer was happy by the end of the conversation because the CSR saved them a service call. I asked the owner of the company during the follow up interview about this incident. The owner applauds the CSR for their ability to troubleshoot over the phone to save a customer money because doing so means the CSR is living up to the vision statement of the company. The owner also notated that the communication between the service and installation technicians and the CSR is what led to the CSR's ability to troubleshoot over the phone. Many times, the owner points out, customers just

have questions and need reassurance. Communication, confidence, and knowledge can save a customer money, but also turn into revenue for the company later through customer loyalty and referrals (Ngoma & Ntale, 2019).

Summary of Theme Five

Errors will happen and not every customer can be satisfied. The responsibility of admitting when something does not happen correctly that will affect the customer's confidence in the company's ability to meet or satisfy their needs lies with the employees of the company and their supervisors (Zaumane & Leščevica, 2021). Communication builds value, trust, and loyalty with employees and customers (Kalogiannidis, 2021). Figure 3.2 shows the company has an increase in sales every year of approximately 5.8%. The increase is based on the three categories in the company: new customers, existing or returning customers, and income received from customer referrals. The number of customers continues to increase each year by at least 5% as shown in Figure 3.3. While I did not contact any customers to evaluate the level of customer service from Company X, through observation and the financial records, trends show that the company is continuing to grow and the goal of Company X of supplying an excellent customer experience receives communication within departments and across departments.

Figure 3.2

Customer Reporting

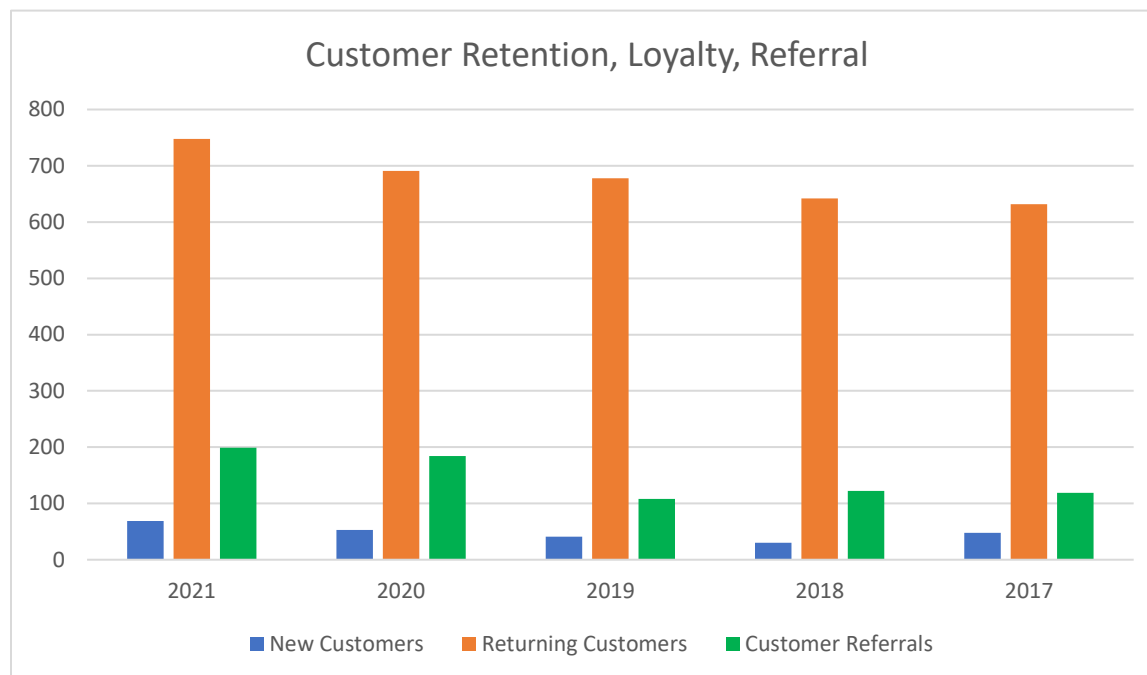
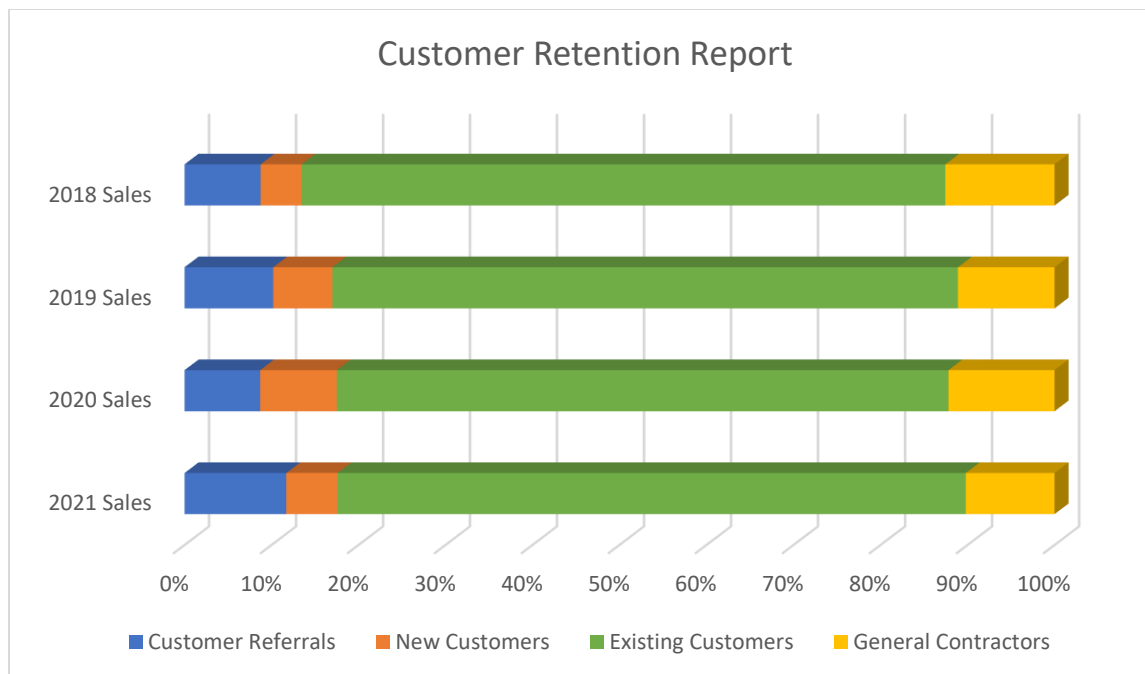


Figure 3.3

Customer Report by Percentages of Sales



Representation and Visualization of the Data

The interpretation of the data identified reoccurring themes, and as expected, revealed similarities in the participants answers and feelings about the relationship between the employee and leaders of Company X. This section will interpret the results from this case study by using the transcripts from the interview and the data collected from the observation. The analysis of the interview transcripts, and the prominent themes and verbatim phrases occurred, which lead to data saturation.

Relationship of the Findings

This section will depict the relationship between the findings from the case study's interviews, observations, and financial data and the study's research questions, the conceptual framework, the anticipated themes, the literature, and the problem. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated that the research connections occur through research questions and the conceptual framework. Similar problems dealing with employee engagement based on other studies and anticipated themes occurred throughout the course of this study's research. A recommended

solution to the problem of employee engagement's impact on the productivity of a company can occur in the relationship of each component.

Research Questions

Research question 1 and the sub questions, addresses the actions of employees and their leaders that restricted or enhanced the internal relationship. The interview consisted of 22 questions and 82% of these questions focused on the actions and behaviors of the employees, leaders, and the company as a whole. The questions included uncovering the thoughts of each participant and how they felt about their own engagement incentives and how other people affect their engagement occurred. Approximately 91% of the participants found engagement motivation through collaboration and from people that led by example. Interviewed participants spoke about individuals in the company that went the extra mile to achieve optimal internal communication that assisted them and others in achieving personal and professional goals. During the interview, several participants spoke about employees that just came to work just to receive a paycheck did not stay with the company very long. The participants felt the reasoning for these short-term employees was the accountability factor that each long-term employee held for themselves and for others. The employees and leaders spoke about collaboration and communication as the biggest contributors to Company X's culture.

The effect of an engaged employer and employee relationship has on the business results of a service company, productivity, and company morale was the focus of research question two. A service company depends on the customers for revenue and all employees need to remember that work in a service company is not necessary to them tomorrow (Tuomi et al., 2021). A happy employee is a productive employee; a happy employee is an employee that feels valued and respected; a happy employee will go over and beyond to make sure the customer experience is

outstanding (Peiró et al., 2019). An outstanding customer service experience will bring in three distinct types of revenue for a company: immediate, referral, and future revenues (Shokouhyar et al., 2020). The overall findings from the data collected from the interviews and the observations show that the employees that engage and feel valued and respected by the customers, other employees, and the owners of the company.

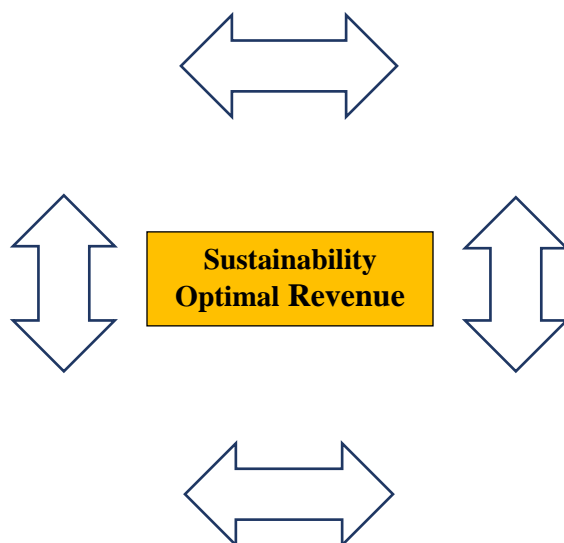
Research Q3's included uncovering data on how the internal relationship in a company affects the customer's loyalty, referral engagement, and customer ratings. The data collected from the financial reports show an increase in customer retention and referrals. Even amid COVID19 in the year 2020, Company X was still able to maintain the current customers and obtain referrals. The ability to gain customers at an approximate 5% growth rate over the past few years shows that Company X is creating stability by utilizing the skills and talents of the employees, leaders, and customer experience (Kurdi & Alshurideh, 2020).

The Conceptual Framework

Varpio et al. (2020) illustrated the conceptual framework consists of theories and concepts discovered during research and describes the state of general knowledge while outlining the methodological goal of the research project. In section one of the research project, the conceptual framework was with the actors being Company X, leaders, employees, and the customers. The primary constructs are leadership style, service productivity results, and company persona; while the dependent constructs in this case study are productivity results, customer loyalty, and customer referrals. As indicated in Figure 3.4, the data collection revealed that each actor is dependent on the engagement of other actors to produce optimal business results and obtain sustainability.

Figure 3.4

Conceptual Framework Relationship



The discovery of communication and collaboration with an organization is not a new concept. The need for communication across departments within any organization is a widely researched topic. However, to what extent does the behaviors and actions of people within an organization have on engagement is the focus of this study. The theory of self-determination (SDT) is in the illustration in Figure 3.4. In Company X, the task at hand is not about receiving a monetary reward. With many of the participants' responses during the interview and in observing the company during day-to-day operations, the reward comes from within each employee or each customer. The reward is knowing that a job is optimal and measured by customer loyalty, referrals, and ratings. The company does have an increase in profits each year, but I noted that the first concept of each day was how to make the customer experience better than yesterday. About 97% of the interviewees felt that the responsibility of engagement and delivering a better customer experience begins with themselves but needed encouragement from the company's leaders. Shoaib et al. (2019) indicated that recognition was a primary factor of increasing

productivity over a monetary reward. A service employee that feels valued will deliver exceptional service more than an employee that goes unrecognized (Lu et al., 2020). Settles et al. (2019) indicated that receive recognition for doing something great, a person must engage to do something great.

Anticipated Themes

The anticipated themes of this study were internal corporate branding, human relational needs, and satisfied employees are engaged employees. All three anticipated themes appeared during this study to be relevant to the engagement of employees and leaders and the effect this engagement has on the company's performance. The most prominent theme present was the satisfied employees are engaged employees. The open-door policy that Company X has allowed employees and leaders to communicate without fear of retaliation or repercussions. Employees value the ability to voice their opinions, share ideas to increase business and enhance customer service experiences, and to work interdepartmentally to gain knowledge and ability (Faciane et al., 2021). An example of working interdepartmental came from P5's interview response when questioned about why they are proud to say they are an employee at Company X. The response was that P5 can talk to the three departments and learn about what each of the employees do and this helps P5 with their job. P5 finds the information extremely helpful because they can answer some customer questions without placing the call on hold. In their opinion, P5 stated that the ability to answer questions quickly provides the customer with a sense of trust that the company hired individuals that can meet their needs. This ability provides P5 with confidence to offer an exceptional customer experience and provide the company with current and future revenue.

Corporate branding was an expected theme that became prominent in this study. Suomi et al. (2019) indicated that a direct correlation between employee engagement and internal branding

which included the elements of the company culture, the work environment, and company reputation. Internal corporate branding was prevalent during several of the interviews with the install employees and their leaders with interview question 20 about what makes you proud to be a Company X employee. These employees felt proud to be a part of a company that takes care of the customers but also the community in which they service. According to P2 and P11, of whom are leaders in the company, the company takes every initiative to reach out and help the community by helping install a heating or air conditioning unit to someone in need, repair a unit for someone who cannot afford the repairs, food drives, and adopting families during the holidays. Employees appreciate being a part of the company that cares and is not just about revenue (Henisz et al., 2019). Edmans (2021) defined value funding as the process of a business that focuses on what matters over revenue, practices environmental, social, and governance (ESG) in creating higher value and employee engagement. During the interview process, the employees respected the owners and the leaders for promoting community wellbeing and fostering people over profits.

Human relationships are prevalent in most companies and all that occur in the world. During the observation, human relationships were one of the key factors in Company X that promoted employee and leader communication and engagement. I noted that each employee received respect and was courteous to the customers and each other. Li et al. (2020) indicated that part of the human relationship need is to receive respect or recognition. Rogers (2018) asserted that employee loyalty and increased productivity comes from the respect given by leaders to the employees. Rogers (2018) also notated that respected employees are more prone to follow the direction of a leader because respect stimulates trust. Humans are meant to relate to one another and designed to interact and learn from each other (Reimer, 2019). In 1 John 1:3 of

the KJV Bible (Bible Gateway, n.d.), Christians are told that God desires a relationship with us and that He is “relational in his very essence.” Genesis 1:27 tell Christians that humans are made in God’s image, which in turns makes humans relational also (Bible Gateway, n.d.). The conceptual framework shows that Company X is dependent on all the actors to work together to provide a cohesive plan of operation to ensure a satisfied customer service experience. This study of Company X shows that the company culture exists to benefit the employees’ sense of motivation to be engaged with each other and the customers.

The Literature

Concerning the results of this case study, the behaviors and actions of employees and leaders affect the level of engagement and the business results of a company. The literature is extensive on employee engagement affects the productivity of the employee and affects the company culture and business results for a company. The theories discovered in the literature relevant to this study were the leader-member exchange theory (LMX), social exchange theory (SET), self-determination theory (SDT), and the servant leadership theory (SLT). All four are evident in the findings of the study.

The most prominent theory in this study is the self-determination theory. Forner et al. (2020) stated that employees that receive recognition as being competent in their jobs will overachieve personal, professional, and organizational goals. The SDT had widely focused on intrinsic motivation but now encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Fishbach and Woolley (2022) defined intrinsic motivation as the means to an end. Employees that are intrinsically motivated have an increased interest and enjoyment in their work activities (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). Although the employee is also extrinsically motivated because they will receive a paycheck, the overall employee is self-determined to do a

good job because they are internally invested. A completely extrinsic worker cannot wait to clock out and has no desire to do more than what is necessary (Ryan & Deci, 2019). In the service industry, working or earning revenue tomorrow is not a guarantee, especially in certain industries. At Company X, the peak seasons are Summer and the early start of Winter. When asked about the company's goals and objectives and what the typical customer service experience looks like, the employees quoted several instances where during the busiest of times, the employees essentially know and implement collaboration and communication to ensure that they are maximizing profits by using all tangible and intangible assets, focus on all the employees' capabilities, and ensuring that the company is making every effort to provide a customer experience that will create future revenue and retain the current customers (Gaytan-Cortes et al., 2018).

The customer service focus strategy from the literature is relevant to the study as the findings show that customer satisfaction is dependent on the interaction with the frontline employee of a company. Mathias et al. (2021) asserted that customers judge a company based on the frontline employee's interaction, behavior, and expertise with the customer and this judgement can make a difference in the company's customer retention and acquisition. As Kim et al. (2020) indicated that an invaluable asset to a service company in creating excellent customer service is the training development through the generation of ideas from frontline employees who are in direct contact with customers and understand the needs of the customer more than leaders. As the observation for this study and some of the interview responses have shown, Company X finds employees' ideas and contributions to the processes invaluable and welcome employees to communicate their ideas through their open-door policy and weekly company staff meetings.

The literature revealed a connection between the level of commitment from the employee and leaders. Nejati et al. (2020) asserted that ethical leaders were the most key factors in involving or engaging employees in the corporate social responsibility activities, creating a better working environment, and creating a person-organization fit for individual and company success. During the interview process, key employees recalled several instances of where the owners and leaders of Company X did more than just set out to make a profit. The company, according to 98% of the participants, is about making a difference in the community in which they serve and in the lives of their employees. Bernardino (2021) quoted a study showing that 72% of employees want to work for a company that makes an impact on society and where they, as an employee, will be effective. Approximately 15% of those in the study by Bernardino (2021) would take a pay cut to work for a company that showed social responsibility. When I asked the participants what they love about working for Company X, social responsibility and employee recognition were the top answers for all the participants. Sahni (2019) asserted that employees and leaders are more productive, engaged, exhibit commitment, and have high job satisfaction when they feel as though they receive support in their work ethics and beliefs.

The Problem

As stated in Section 1, the specific problem to be addressed was the effectiveness of company policies or procedures on an executive-leadership level to cultivate the primary and secondary employee and employer relationships within a service industry organization. Company X, a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) servicing organization, resulted in a decline in productivity, low employee morale, and declining customer service ratings. Relationships does not occur by just one person; a relationship takes two or more people. Duck (1991) defines a relationship as the way two or more people or groups regard and behave toward

each other. In the Bible, Genesis tells Christians that humans were not made to be alone. God made humans to help one another, and communication happens when information sharing occurs between two people (Petronio et al., 2021). This study included examining the behaviors and attitudes of the participants that contribute to the engagement of Company X's employees and leaders in producing optimal business results. The study also included analyzing how the interaction of the employees and leaders affected customers in the way of loyalty and customer referrals.

The findings from the study included that engagement is not solely a leader's responsibility nor is engagement solely an employee responsibility. In Company X, which is a representation of the small business in the United States, behaviors found during the interviews and observations that contribute to an employee and leader relationship and engagement are self-determination, leading by example, and corporate responsibility. The owners and leaders have an open-door policy that seems to help the participants of this study feel as though their voice matters, their ideas contribute to the success of the customer service process and encourage collaboration throughout the departments. Disconnected employees contribute to many of the obstacles that small businesses face in achieving optimal business results of the business: absenteeism, low morale, high turnover ratios, and a lack of productivity (Oruh et al., 2021). Absenteeism, high turnovers, and low productivity exist when a company's morale is low (Obiekwe & Obibhunun, 2019).

As Utami and Harini (2019) suggested, high company morale contributes to employees being punctual, absenteeism is low, turnover is low, and employees are consistently looking for ways to improve themselves professionally and personally; employees support each other through successes and failures; employee and customer complaints are resolved quickly or non-

existent; employees are comfortable offering improvement suggestions; and, there is a visible and positive interaction among employees in the workplace. Interview question 21 asked the participants what they would change about Company X. Seventeen of the participants, or 85%, could not show anything they thought needed to change. The remainder 15% felt as though the atmosphere or culture could be a little more professional. The researcher did notate that these three individuals have been with the company the least amount of time, four or five years, compared to the other participants. During the observation, the employees and leaders were respectable to each other and encouraging even during the most difficult situations, such as a demanding customer. I noticed that cooperation, communication, and collaboration exhibited during the normal workday and the weekly staff meeting. Employees and leaders seemed to know what to do and how each job in the company affects other jobs. Chauhan et al. (2019) found in their study that leaders and employees that do not feel stressed on or with their job are more likely to motivate and influence engagement with other employees.

Summary of the Findings

Discovering the themes in the interviews and the observations, overlapping themes were apparent from different participants' responses and perspectives. Communication, respect, and collaboration were the key elements in the successes or failures of Company X and were factors in the employee engagement that enunciated excellent customer service. The research questions included addressing the failure of the cultivation of the internal business relationships of company employees and their leaders and the impact of how this relationship affects the business results of the service industry. The scope of the research questions included attempting to understand the actions of employees and their leaders in the engagement in the workplace and the impact this engagement has on the service industry.

Moala (2021) defined socialization as involving or being a part of other people, enjoying being with people, initialing trust and confidence, and working together to achieve a shared or common goal. Organizational socialization happens when individuals become a part of the organization (Comin & Pauli, 2018). Comin and Pauli (2018) defined work as more than an economic dimension or means of providing people with the basic needs of life. Work provides individuals with satisfaction, relationships, direction, and purpose. Individuals can define work based on the work's usefulness which influences the motivation, satisfaction, and productivity of the individual (Pang & Ruch, 2019). Paais and Pattiruhu (2020) Indicted that motivation influence job satisfaction by 57.4%. In addition, motivation creates engagement. This study concluded that respect, collaboration, and communication promoted engagement, job satisfaction. In addition, optimal business results through the interviews, financial records, and observations of the employees, leaders, and owners of Company X.

Application to Professional Practice

The small business service industry depends on people for stability and longevity, whether they are customers, owners, front-line employees, behind the scenes employees, vendors, or service technicians (Rashid & Ratten, 2021). This part of the study clarifies the importance of the research and the discovered business applications. The implications of the business applications can apply to the small businesses in respect to bringing a cohesive engagement relationship between leaders and employees to produce optimal business results. The applications can apply to all service companies that have different branches at various locations.

Improving General Business Practice

As part of the strategic plan, most service companies put the customer first in all aspects of the business (Rachinger et al., 2019). In the service industry, if customers did not demand services, there would not be a need for the service company to exist (Lee & Lee, 2020). Next in line for what companies place in the strategic plan is revenue generation (Geissdoerfer et al., 2018). All companies, even non-profit organizations, are in business to make a profit. Non-profits need money to apply to their purpose or need. Sometimes employees are the most asset a company has to offer. The service industry needs employees more than ever. Employees are the face of a service company. Customers are not buying a tangible product, they are buying the expertise of representatives of a company and relying on the expertise of employees to produce tangible results that satisfy all their needs (Chaithanapat & Rakthin, 2021). A strong relation needs to occur between employees and leaders. The relationship needs trust more so than the external relationship between employees and the customers. Service employees need to know that their leaders trust them to make on demand decisions that is necessary to satisfy a customer or to resolve a problem. Leaders need to feel confident in their employees and their capabilities to serve all customers and the company. Front-line employees are the first and last person a customer sees when they contact a company to conduct a service. A service company should place value in creating a substantial relationship with the employees; therefore, this investment will show in the process of customer service and satisfaction through customer retention and sales volume. Results from the case study show how the internal relationships between employees and their leaders impact the financial results of the business. The emerging theme from the study includes communication between people, employees, leaders, and customers. The identified themes are company culture, open-door communication, lead by example,

collaboration, and customer service. Each of these themes were evident in the interview and survey process for triangulation.

To achieve optimal business and customer results, service companies must focus on more than just the customer. The focus needs to be on the primary factor in the delivery of the service, the employees. Employees need to equip themselves with the training and the cross-departmental communication and functionality capabilities, and the independence to make decisions to deliver a confident service experience that exceeds the expectations of the customer (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2021). This independence comes from the internal relationship that should cultivate to promote teamwork, confidence, and creativity in delivering an exceptional customer service experience. Exceeding the expectations of the customer ensures a service company will retain the customer and obtain referrals for new customers (Basari & Shamsudin, 2020).

Labor infused companies are different from tangible product companies. The value of a tangible product is to determine the product's function, demand, and manufacturing costs, and by the promise or cluster of value expectations from the buyer's perspective (Priskila & Darma, 2020). Although products are tangible, can be touched, smelled, tasted, or tested, tangible products also have a sense of intangibility. Customers or consumers are relying on the promise that the product will produce the desired results based on the intended function (Vidyanata et al., 2022). In the service industry, the value determines by the quality of service. The quality service experience affects the customer's perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty (Kusumawati & Rahayu, 2020).

During the interviews, employees and leaders from Company X expressed the desire to achieve the goals of the company through positive business results. The interview results revealed that the key element in achieving positive business results began with a level of

engagement between employees and their leaders. The perceived customer value starts with the confidence the customer has in the frontline employee and that this employee will deliver results that satisfy the customer's needs. While the front-line employee may not deliver the service specifically, the customer is relying on this employee to send the right service technician to perform the work. Communication and each customer's expectations should specifically clear between the departments for the service at optimal levels.

Hastings and Meyer (2020) noted Netflix rose above Blockbuster through their company culture. During 2002, when Netflix went public, Netflix was worth \$50 million while Blockbuster was worth \$5 billion (Hastings, 2020). When Meyer asked Hastings in the interview what differentiated Netflix from Blockbuster, the response was company culture (Hastings & Meyer, 2020). According to Hastings, the company culture of Netflix that helped them surpass Blockbuster by 2010, was a culture where people were the value over processes (Hastings & Meyer, 2020). Hastings went on to state that the culture of Netflix was to lead employees with "context does not control," which allowed them to continuously grow with the world, technology, and the needs of their members (Floegel, 2020). Hewagama et al. (2019) asserted that context of not control leadership style is an employee empowerment strategy. The context of not control leadership style enables leaders to focus on the decisions that are best within the company and for the company; while allowing employees to make more decisions to achieve customer satisfaction more instantaneously (Wirtz, 2019). In the interviews, employees and leaders were consistently speaking about the confidence in themselves and their capabilities to deliver an exceptional customer service was because of the respect, communication, and employee engagement in each department and across departments.

Potential Application Strategies

Application strategies are strategies that can integrate to improve processes for future business practices. These strategies can help businesses gain a competitive edge, gain market share, and create efficiency. If the strategy happens successfully, the service business will see an increase in productivity, customer loyalty, and employee engagement. The research case study presents potential application strategies for cultivating relationships between employees and leaders that promote engagement that brings positive business results. Three steps are present to execute the actions for the strategic application to promote internal relationships that can help improve a company's business results.

Employees and leaders must understand that one person or department does not create current or future profits for a company. One person or department does not create a company brand or reputation. A service company's longevity depends on their reputation of satisfying customer needs through customer retention, customer loyalty, and customer referrals (Basari & Shamsudin, 2020). Through the interviews and the observations, data from this study included a need for consistency in promoting a company culture that significantly defines the objectives and goals of the company. The goals are obtainable by achieving the internal success of the company of cultivating relationships that build confidence, encourage collaboration, and internally acknowledge the accomplishments of cross-departmental functionality. The company culture can be a vital element in cultivating relationships and enhancing business results. Implementation of a company culture is not something that is said or stated. Company culture occurs through the actions of all stakeholders and leaders who leading by example.

Employees that are confident in their abilities to perform their duties are confident that the leaders of the company support the employees' ability to make decisions to ensure customer

satisfaction will strive to go over and beyond their job descriptions to meet the company's goals and objectives. Confidence can be obtained through continuous training inside and outside of the company. Cross-departmental training can help employees understand the significance of other positions in the company and create mutual respect across the company. External training allows employees and leaders to collaborate with other companies in the same industries. This collaboration can lead to ideas on the improvement of internal processes, but also can show an employee or leader the processes that are working, which can lead to confidence. The service customer experience and first impressions begin with the frontline employees; the service technicians deliver the customer service experience; and the behind-the-scenes employees involve themselves in all aspects of customer service completion. Based on the research case study interview responses, confidence was also achieved through recognition of innovative ideas and the acknowledgement of successes.

The importance of communication in a company is discussed in the current literature. The participant interviews, observations, and triangulation interviews found similar results in identifying that communication is vital to a company's success (Rios et al., 2020). The final step of the application strategy is to develop and enhance open communication opportunities. Weekly department and staff meetings will encourage collaboration within and across departments. Meetings will also be an opportunity to resolve any issues within the company or any concerns or suggestions while providing excellent customer service. Communication is not just about verbal skills. Communication is about listening and non-verbal skills. People spend an average of 60% of their time listening, however they do not know how to listen very well. On average, people only retain 25% of what they hear (Emmett et al., 2020). These are soft skills that need encouragement and cultivation. Training can occur to help leaders learn to

communicate effectively with employees and other leaders. Sharing successes and failures, even from upper management or leadership, will help employees feel confident in asking questions, sharing ideas, and in the recognition of themselves or others. Setting goals that each department can achieve along with company goals can create a purpose of expectations. These goals can occur in everyday activities or in weekly meetings. The data collected from the participants' interview responses revealed that employees that felt they could speak to their leaders strived to meet objectives and ensured the customer experience was excellent.

Summary of Application to Professional Practice

The implementation of a company culture that exuberates employee and leader confidence through training, recognition, and communication will be critical in the development of relationships and enhance business results. The action plan involves this research case study's findings to include current literature on the impact of internal relationships in achieving optimal business results. The results from this case study strengthened the need for internal communication for small businesses. The three-step implementation plan of creating and communicating a company culture that includes the focusing on the talents and skills of the employees and leaders and open-communication addresses the problem identified in the interview process. The three-step process can help small businesses become more effective in meeting optimal business results and become strategic partners in putting people above profits.

Recommendations for Further Study

Several participants were open in the discussion of what the items that contributed to their feelings of success and the growth of the company, even during a pandemic the company grew in customer retention and referrals. Based on the findings of the study, communication training and development that involves how leaders and employees interact with one another

would benefit further research opportunities. Some participants spoke of cross-training within departments and across departments would benefit the company through mutual respect and learning about customer service from another employee's point of view. Further research has opportunities to further this study in indicating how cross-training can impact employee engagement, improve communication, and enhance team collaboration.

Reflections

Throughout my working life, engagement has not been a topic of discussion. The expectation of going to work was to do required job duties. However, as the world has evolved, so have the expectations on what is necessary. Engagement cannot happen if there is not a relationship. Vyas (2023) defined engagement as the result of a two-way relationship between employer and employee that is a strong predictor of positive organizational performance. During the research, this definition was evident from the results of the participants interviews and in the scholarly research. Organizations are searching for innovative ways to retain skilled employees and employees want to work for companies that support their ideas and knowledge. Research showed that the lack of communication can prevent this relationship from existing, therefore, engagement can be low.

Personal and Professional Growth

As a business manager for over 20 years, I found myself reflecting on what my expectations for employees were and how I may have misaligned my thoughts. I expected employees to come to work and already have the passion that I did for whoever I was working for and whomever the company was doing business with. Researchers has shown that employees do not get invested into a company until the company shows they are invested into the employee (Shabbir & Wisdom, 2020). As time has progressed, the level of investment does not necessarily

mean a monetary investment. As society becomes more conscious of the world around them, employees are looking for employers that have the same values and beliefs or are emotionally attuned to the world around them, which, to the employees, is an investment in them.

As I was conducting the research for this case study, I have grown professionally in terms of the importance of relationships and communication. The idea of leadership and employees working collaboratively in a business setting is necessary in doing business. However, the idea of collaboration does not necessarily mean that employees and leaders engage. In my experience, some leaders set themselves apart from employees in the aspect of responsibility and a level of supremacy. Sometimes leaders feel they must set boundaries to keep the working relationships completely professional (Waltz et al., 2020). The responsibility of engagement has been an ethical dilemma that employers and employees often debated. Through the data collected from the interviews and observations, I learned that open communication creates a more professional working environment. An open-communication environment enhances communication, respect, and creativity (Cui, 2021). As humans, we work on our personal relationships more than our professional relationships because of the ease of talking with those we love or fear of being social at the workplace. A person spends more of their awake time at the workplace than at home. Our professional relationships should cultivate as much as our personal relationships.

Working for a company is a team commitment that employers and employees should acknowledge during the hiring process. During the study, most participants spoke of each other as if they were family working for a common goal. When I asked the participants about what an ideal employer looks like, the answer can be summarized as a person that treats everyone fairly and goes beyond the scope of their job description. In my personal life, I am learning to apply the concept of team commitment. This commitment is not just about my husband and the

relationship with my children, but those that I interact with daily, weekly, or even every now and then. I reflected on the level of engagement that I have in cultivating my personal relationships.

As I continue to learn and grow, I have found my passion in research and in this study. My focus on what I learned from the participants and how relationships need more than ever today where emotional intelligence is becoming an attribute that employers are looking for in their employees and vice versa. This study has brought me back to my passion of bringing people together for a common goal. When working as a manager for so long, a person can forget about being on the other side as an employee. Employees may never know the responsibility that leaders have in the business unless the creation of internal relationships exists.

I discovered in the literature research for this study that leadership is more than just telling people how to perform. Leadership is motivating others to use their skills and knowledge in combination with other people's skills and knowledge to achieve a common goal or objective. Leadership is about motivating others to be the best human they can possibly be through communication and setting an example. I will use this knowledge in my personal and my professional life.

Biblical Perspective

The Bible is the guiding light in all that Christians do. The Bible is the principle for how we are to conduct ourselves with each other personally and in business. The study revealed that the idea of engagement was neither the responsibility of the employee or the employer, but a combined responsibility through the idea of cultivation relationships promote engagement to obtain optimal business results. Relationships started with the Trinity, and this is evident in Genesis 1:26: "Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...". This verse shows that God is a relational God and since we are made in His image,

hence, we are inherently relational. However, relationships in business are more than just treating people right. Working relationships are made to help achieve a common goal or objective.

Relationships are meant to bring about confidence through having faith in people and in ourselves. Proverbs 27:17 (ESV) states: “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.”

This verse is telling Christians to build each other through good works and working together; people should engage with one another to achieve success. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (ESV) also states that man should not work alone: “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.”

James 3:2 (ESV) states: “For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.” This verse is saying that no one is perfect, we will stumble and fall during some point of our lives. In work, we must be diligent with our communication and ensure that we are encouraging others work together in all that we do for the Glory of God. The bridle is made up of a tiny piece of metal but controls the entire body of a horse. The tongue is a very small part of the body but influences what we say and do, how we are perceived by others, and the world around us. The tongue is a very powerful tool in showing God’s love through words that build confidence in ourselves and in others. When we build up others and ourselves, we are building up the Kingdom of God. Since we are made in God’s image, our tongues should show honor to God and love to others just as He loved us. A company culture that exemplifies employees through their skills, knowledge, and recognizes their successes radiates success through optimal business results. A company culture that creates an open communication platform also is building up the Kingdom of God by treating leaders and employees with respect.

In the service industry, the customer experience expectations will vary for each customer based on needs, preferences, and perspective. To generalize the customer service experience, companies can adopt a servant company culture. Leaders and employees of a service company can show a servant attitude by realizing that the customers are the reason the company is in business. Servant leaders can ensure that employees are dealing with customers with respect and honesty and show employees support in all aspects of their jobs and personal lives. Employees can show servant leadership by being proud in their job, who they work for, what they are doing, and doing everything ethically. Cahyono et al. (2020) quoted servant leadership qualities as: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Although many scriptures that explain the servant leader and how Jesus came to serve and not to be served, the most prominent scripture about servant leadership is shown in Philippians 2:3-8 (ESV):

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The passage is telling individuals what a servant leader should do, which is be humble, put others before us, and to not only look at our own interests, but also the interest of others. An employer that can motivate leaders and employees to treat each other with grace, dignity, and respect while

being humble is creating an atmosphere or culture where good ethical behavior is necessary, strived for, and achieved.

Summary of Reflections

Reflections in this case study cover the impact internal relationships have on the leader, the employee, and the business results of a company. Essentially, there is a need to focus on the company culture and the source of communication to cultivate an internal relationship that positively affects the business results of the company and the stakeholders. The study revealed that a company culture can affect the level of engagement from leaders and employees based on the level of trust and respect within the organization. There is an opportunity for companies to create a company culture and open communication that puts the employee/leader first while keeping the goal of achieving a superior customer service experience a priority. Creating internal relationships that exemplifies employees/leaders' success, inputs, and confidence through training and recognition will ensure that employees and leaders will go over a beyond to ensure exceptional customer service.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Company X represents 98.1% of all businesses in the United States (SBA, 2021). Section 3 focused on the findings of the study, the implications of the findings in business, and the reflections of the findings and applications. The participants from Company X were leaders, customer service representatives, front-line employees, and other essential employees. Five themes occurred during the transcription of the interviews, observations, and follow-up interviews. The key terms in the themes are company culture, open communication, leading by example, collaboration, and customer satisfaction. From the data collected, communication was where customer service started and ended.

The relationship between the findings from the case study's interviews, observations, and the financial data and the study's research questions, the conceptual framework, the anticipated themes, the literature, and the problem were also depicted in Section 3. The research questions were to address the actions and behaviors of leaders and employees that engaged or restricted the internal relationships within small businesses. The research questions were also developed to show how the internal relationships affected the business results of the company and customer perception of customer satisfaction.

Section 3 addressed the anticipated themes of internal corporate branding, human relational needs, and satisfied employees are engaged employees and how these themes are relevant to the engagement of employees and leaders. Employees are more prone to engage if the company where they work focuses on the employee first and then the profits. Relationships started with the Trinity, the essence of essence (Oripova, 2021). Engagement is not the responsibility of just one person, leader, or employee. Engagement is the responsibility of all stakeholders of a company. Self-determination, leading by example, and corporate responsibility are behaviors that were found in the case study that contributed to the employee and leader relationship and engagement.

In the application to professional practice and improving business practice, service companies must look beyond profits and look closer to the people that can create the profits for the company, employee, leaders, and customers. In Section 3, the recommendations were to improve internal relationships through the development of strategies that helped businesses gain a competitive edge, gain market share, and create efficacy. These strategies consisted of creating a company culture that is consistent with building relationships that build confidence, encourage collaboration, and acknowledge cross-departmental successes.

Section 3 concluded with personal and Biblical perspectives. As a Christian, our focus should act following his will and in his image. Humans relate with each other and help one another. Relationships are made and cultivated. Relationships require all stakeholders to perform out of respect for diversity, knowledge, and skills. Relationships require a level of communication that is beneficial to creating confidence, grace, and dignity.

This single case study revealed the need for small businesses to find methods of cultivating the internal relationships between leaders and employees. Cultivating internal relationships is beneficial to the emotional intelligence and growth of the individual and reflects positively on the business results for the business. The service industry is a need-based industry that depends on keeping customers and employees. The first recommendation for a service company was to create a company culture that exemplifies open-communication, trust, and respect. The culture of a company that transmits to all stakeholder's success is dependent on collaboration in each department but also across departments will strategically position the service company above the competition. Service company leaders are dependent on the reputation of satisfying customer needs and treating employees fairly. An employee that is confident in their job and feels leaders value them will speak highly of the company and the services. The employees will optimally perform their job description to make sure the customer service experience is memorable enough to create exceptional value for the customer. The second recommendation was communication training for leaders and employees. Communication is more than speaking and writing. Communication includes the soft skills of listening and reading non-verbal communication gestures. These soft skills should cultivate to enhance the communication skills among all employees and leaders. The last recommendation was for small businesses to implement cross-departmental training. Cross-departmental training

can increase collaboration, confidence, and engagement. Skilled, valued employees praised for their expertise are more prone to engage and help the company produce optimal business results.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO BE PART OF A RESEARCH STUDY

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS AND THIS STUDY

Study title: The Need for Cultivating Employee Relationships

Principal Investigator: Kimberly England, Doctoral Candidate

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kimberly Anthony, School of Business, Liberty University

You are invited to take part in a research study. This form contains information that will help you decide whether to join the study. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT AND WHY IS THE STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of the study is to explore what factors contribute to the failure of a successful relationship between leadership and employees, and how the failure of the internal relationship affects the customer relationship with the organization which impacts the customer service ratings and the business results for the company.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY?

Who can take part in this study? To participate, the participant must be at least 21 years of age, have been employed full-time at Company X for at least four years as an employee or employed full-time in a leadership role, and have effectively developed internal relationships with employees and leaders.

How many people are expected to take part in this study? There will be two owner/operators, five leaders, and twenty employees that will take place this study.

INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY PARTICIPATION

What will happen to me in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Initial Interview - Complete phone, web-conference, or face-to-face interview. During the initial interview, audio-recording will be utilized to help ensure accuracy. The initial interview process should take approximately 20-30 minutes.
2. Follow-up Interview – A follow-up interview may be needed for clarification of initial interview questions. The follow-up interview will place via phone, web-conference, or face-to-face. During the follow-up interview, audio-recording will be utilized to help ensure accuracy. The follow-up interview process should take approximately 10-20 minutes.

INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY RISKS AND BENEFITS

What risks will I face by taking part in the study? The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

How could I benefit if I take part in this study? How could others benefit?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include organizations within the manufacturing industry may gain better awareness as to how specific leadership styles directly impact employee retention.

ENDING THE STUDY**If I want to stop participating in the study, what should I do?**

You are free to leave the study at any time. If you leave the study before the study is finished, there will be no penalty to you. If you decide to leave the study before the study is finished, please tell one of the persons listed in the “Contact Information” section. If you choose to tell the researchers why you are leaving the study, your reasons may be kept as part of the study record. The researchers will keep the information collected about you for the research unless you ask us to delete the information from our records. If the researchers have already used your information in a research analysis, then the researchers will not be able to remove your information.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Will I be paid or given anything for taking part in this study? Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PROTECTING AND SHARING RESEARCH INFORMATION**How will the researchers protect my information?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that could possibly identify a subject or organization. Researcher data will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the data.

- The name of the organization will not be stated at any time during the research or after. Participant names will be kept confidential using pseudonyms/codes (numbering system of P1, P2, etc.). Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. Individual files will also be password-protected and only the researcher will know the password. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recording will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

CONTACT INFORMATION**Who can I contact about this study?**

Please contact the researchers listed below to:

- Obtain more information about the study
- Ask a question about the study procedures
- Report an illness, injury, or other problem (you may also need to tell your regular doctors)
- Leave the study before the study is finished
- Express a concern about the study

Principal Investigator: Kimberly England

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kimberly Anthony

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

Institutional Review Board
1971 University Blvd. Green Hall Ste. 2845
Lynchburg, VA 24515 or
email at irb@liberty.edu

YOUR CONSENT

Consent/Assent to Participate in the Research Study

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. I/We will give you a copy of this document for your records and I/we will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

Consent to use audio recordings for purposes of this research

This study involves audio recordings. If you do not agree to be audio recorded, you can still take part in the study.

_____ Yes, I agree to be audio recorded.

_____ No, I do not agree to be audio recorded.

Print Legal Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date of Signature (mm/dd/yy): _____

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear Employee,

As a graduate student in the School of Business at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of the study is to explore what factors contribute to the failure of a successful relationship between leadership and employees, and how the failure of the internal relationship affects the customer relationship with the organization which impacts the customer service ratings and the business results for the companies in the service industry, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are at least 21 years of age, employed as a leader or employee for at least 4 years full-time at Company X, and have effectively developed internal relationships with employees and leaders, and are willing to participate, you will be asked several questions pertaining to your responsibilities in supporting employee retention in a phone, web-conference, or face-to-face interview. The interview should take approximately 20-30 minutes for you to complete the procedures listed. A second contact may be needed via phone, web-conference, or face-to-face to clarify any information from the initial interview. This process should take approximately 10-20 minutes to complete. Your name and other identifying information will be collected as part of your participation, but this information will remain confidential. By participating in this research, you could potentially help organizations determine which leadership behaviors are most important when trying to improve employee/employer relationships.

If you are interested in participating, please email me at kengland7@liberty.edu to schedule your interview or ask any questions you may have.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you are selected to participate, you will be asked to sign the consent document and return the document to me via email prior to your scheduled interview.

I thank you in advance for your consideration and the potential impact you could have on future organizations, leaders, and employees as the impact pertains to employee/employer relationships.

Sincerely,

Kimberly England
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Section 1:

Date:

Location and interview mode (in-person or videoconference):

Name: (omitted from the final write-ups)

Participant #: (used for reference within the research paper)

Company Position: (leader, employee)

Consent form signed: Yes or No

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in the study. Again, my name is Kimberly England, and I am pursuing a doctoral degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Christian Leadership at Liberty University. This research project seeks to understand the actions and behaviors of leaders and their employees to cultivate an internal relationship that impacts the business results of Company X.

You were selected to participate in this study because you have been employed with the company for four or more years and have seen the company through many changes. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can opt out any time. If, during the interview, I ask any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, you can choose not to respond or end the interview at any time. I am using a tablet and a phone to record the interview to ensure that I capture the responses accurately. I will keep the audio files and the transcription of the files on a password protected device for three years. After the three years, I will destroy the files. Your name will not be used in the research paper, instead I will use your participant number for anything in reference to your responses. I respect your time and will keep this interview to 30-45 minutes.

Section 2:

Questions:

1. How long have you worked for Company X? (**ice breaker**)
 - 1a. In what capacity have you worked for Company X? (**background**)
2. How would you characterize Company X's overall management style? (RQ1a,RQ3)
3. What programs does Company X have to help develop Team activities? (RQ1, RQ2)
 - 4a. Why do you participate or not participate in the team development activities?
 - 4b. (If Company X does not have Team development activities) What kind of team development activities would you suggest should be offered and why?
4. Have you been offered career development opportunities? Have you taken advantage of them? (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3)

5. How are employees/leaders recognized for your/their efforts? (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2, RQ2b)
 - 5a. Incentive plans?
 - 5b. How do these incentives or lack of incentives affect your attitude towards work?
6. What does your ideal leader look like? Do you have anyone at Company X that exemplifies these qualifications? (RQ1, RQ2)
7. What does your ideal employee look like? Do you have anyone at Company X that exemplifies these qualifications? (RQ1, RQ2)
8. How does each department communicate with each other? (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2, RQ2a, RQ2b)
9. What type of company culture do you feel exists at Company X? (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2, RQ2b)
10. Do you feel like there could be improvements in the company culture? If so, what? If not, what is Company X doing right? (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2, RQ2b)
11. What the balance between work and home like while working here at Company X? How does this balance affect your productivity? (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2, RQ2b)
12. What is your definition of job satisfaction? How satisfied are you with your job? (RQ2)
13. What does the typical customer service experience look like? (RQ3)
14. How does the Company handle customer complaints? Praises? Referrals? (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2, RQ3)
15. How does the Company respond to and overcome failures? Successes? (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2, RQ2b)
16. When does a conflict typically occur? How was the conflict resolved? (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2, RQ2b)
17. What is Company X's vision statement? Goals and objectives? (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b)
18. Describe your best/worst experience working here. (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2, RQ2b)
19. How is your voice heard at Company X? (RQ2b)
20. What makes you proud to say you are an employee/leader at Company X? (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b)
21. If you could change one thing about Company X, what would the change be and why? (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3)
22. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience working for Company X?

Section 3:

Closing:

Again, thank you for participating in this interview. The information you have provided has been a great insight for this research. Remember, your responses and your name will remain confidential. The information provided here today will help me understand the actions and behaviors of leaders and employees in internal relationships and how these relationships impact the business results of an organization. If you have any questions about this project or would like more information, please feel free to contact me. Would you be available for follow-up questions? Would you be interested in viewing the analysis before I submit the project?