FIRE DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP: UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCE OF

POSITIVE LEADERSHIP ON THE INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC

MOTIVATORS OF ENTRY-LEVEL FIREFIGHTERS

by

Michael DeStefano

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Applied Doctoral Research Project – Capstone Project

(Single Case Study)

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Strategic Leadership

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Liberty University, School of Business

May 2025

The Applied Doctoral Research Project (ADRP) is the capstone project for the School of Business Applied Doctoral Degree (DSL or DBA). As a capstone project, it is intended for educational purposes to allow the doctoral candidate to demonstrate the ability to conduct and present meaningful doctoral-level research. The ADRP is limited to a Single Case Study design focusing on a leadership (DSL) or business (DBA) problem found in the literature within a single organization, related to the candidate's cognate. The ADRP is not intended for publication, and the results are not intended to be relatable or generalizable to a larger population.

Abstract

Leadership in the fire service has been an often-discussed topic, regarding how management can increase motivation and morale and decrease attrition. The discussion has stemmed from previous literary research typically conducted in industries outside of the fire department, yielding mixed results. Brevard County Fire Rescue resides on the east coast of Central Florida and, at the time of this study, was experiencing high numbers of turnover; thus, it was selected for this qualitative-design, single-case study. A total of 21 firefighters and 17 lieutenants (i.e., leadership) were selected as respondents for this research using qualitative interviews and focus groups. The findings of the study revealed that positive leadership attributes, described as leading by example, had a significant impact on the morale and motivation of firefighters, while micromanaging was the number one noted negative leadership attribute. Additionally, decreased morale led to increased turnover intent; however, increased morale only led to decreased turnover intent when lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs were first met. The application of the research findings created suggested implementation strategies for Brevard County Fire Rescue, ranging from leadership training and mentoring programs to matching the extrinsic needs of the employee. The research conducted within this study has increased the academic knowledge base of improving leadership within the fire service industry.

Key words: firefighter, leadership, motivation, attrition

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The focus of the study was the impact that leadership had on the motivation and morale of firefighters, potentially affecting turnover and leading to inadequate staffing in emergency services. Understanding what motivates firefighters and how leadership can implement specific leadership styles to match those motivations provided a strategic plan for improving morale and potentially decreasing attrition. The actions of leaders in an organization have a direct correlation with not only team performance but also with the morale of the team and the individual employees (Shoukat et al., 2023). Exploring the individual motivations of firefighters and the desired leadership style of their supervisors through a qualitative, single-case study helped to build a better understanding of the phenomenon of morale.

The findings of this study helped to create knowledge of the relationship between leadership and morale, as well as the impacts of morale and turnover in the fire department. The application of the results will provide organizations with beneficial training for leadership to decrease turnover in the department. Additionally, the findings provided a basis for future studies to create a definitive correlation between leadership style and morale of firefighters and fire department leadership. While the study remained a qualitative, single-case study using a constructivist paradigm, the exploration and findings provided essential information to fill the academic knowledge gap, referring to leadership's impact on morale specific to firefighters.

This study built upon the background of the problem, which presented the reason for the research through the problem statement. Research questions were then utilized to focus and guide the qualitative research conducted through interviews and focus groups, while remaining open to allow for exploration of the respondents' thoughts and opinions specific to the study. The nature of the study allowed the researcher to expand upon notions of research paradigms, design,

methods, and triangulation strategies to select the correct application that aligned with the

qualitative study to meet the goals established in the research questions. This study utilized a

constructivist paradigm applied to a qualitative, single-case study design. Focus on the concepts,

theories, actors, and constructs in the research framework section helped to understand the

relationship that each portion had with each other throughout the research (Odima, 2022). A

review of the academic literature that existed from previous studies allowed the researcher to

create an understanding of the concepts and theories, as they applied to the specific research

topic, as well as exposing the gaps in current literature that needed to be explored (Tur et al.,

2022). The significance of the study clarified the implications that the findings sought to have on

the area of study, which, in this case, was the improvement of leadership practice. Additionally,

the significance of the study integrated Biblical influence and integration to ensure that a

Christian worldview was not only present in the findings, but also utilized throughout the process

from the selection of research questions to the interviews. Through the definition and outline

created by the foundation of the study, the researcher had a solid base to perform the qualitative

analysis and present the findings of the research.

Background of the Problem

Adequate staffing of emergency services, such as the fire and police departments, is

critical to keeping the public safe in their time of need (Fleming & Brown, 2021). Burakova et al.

(2022) noted that the proper staffing of firefighters to fulfill the community's needs is of the

utmost importance to the organization. Improper staffing of firefighters, due to turnover, can lead

to increased burnout and decreased mental health, which increases the attrition rate and reduces

the performance of firefighters on emergency calls (Lentz et al., 2022). The need for certified

firefighters has increased significantly, due to changes in shift schedules, increased population needs, and decreased interest in the profession (Egdell et al., 2023).

Exploration of the factors that lead to attrition in the fire service through literary research provided mixed findings. Bootle (2022) found that the primary reason for attrition in Spartanburg, South Carolina, was linked to extrinsic factors, such as wages. The author noted that firefighters left one organization for another to receive higher pay (Bootle, 2022). de Carvalho et al. (2021) found that many stressors on firefighters leading to burnout were due to intrinsic issues, such as low social support and lack of recognition for efforts. Both authors found a possible link between extrinsic and intrinsic motivators and the propensity for increased attrition. Llorens et al. (2022) noted similar findings of the root causes of burnout; however, the combination of the factors has been generalized under the umbrella of decreased morale.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a multitude of research studying the causes of burnout and the corresponding effects on turnover. Turato et al. (2022) linked high-stress positions with increased perceived burnout rates. The authors further noted that the increase in burnout appeared to be aligned with an increase in attrition for organizations that did attempt to reduce mental stress on employees (Turato et al., 2022). Walker and Hodder (2024) substantiated the notion of burnout leading to attrition by researching the adjustment of work hours on employees. The authors found that when employees' work hours were decreased, there was a perceived increase in morale. The increase in morale was found to correlate with a decrease in organizational attrition rates (Walker & Hodder, 2024).

Morale can be influenced by leadership styles and actions, particularly in high-danger careers, such as firefighting (Marques-Quinteiro et al., 2022). However, the degree to which positive leadership affects morale and, consequently, how positive leadership can improve the

motivation of firefighters, resulting in increased morale and decreased attrition, appeared to be lacking in literary research. Maddrey-Lashley (2022) found that positive leadership attributes increase employees' morale in an academic or business setting. Ruiz Moreno et al. (2021) noted that in military and paramilitary organizations, such as the fire department, there has been a style of leadership expected at non-emergency times and a different style during engagement periods. One can infer that the perception of a positive leadership style in the fire service would be different than that of a less-dangerous profession (Ruiz Moreno et al., 2021). Exploration of the influence of perceived positive leadership in the fire service was currently lacking in the literature.

Problem Statement

The general problem that was addressed was the challenge that leaders face in motivating firefighters, which results in decreased morale and increased turnover. Lim and Moon (2023) noted that turnover rates among fire rescue and other public safety departments have become a critical issue globally. The authors noted that mental and emotional stress from the job has been one key component leading to attrition (Lim & Moon, 2023). Bauer (2022) indicated that less-motivated employees, particularly in the fire service, were likelier to leave a department for a more desirable career. Job satisfaction was also linked to the increase in firefighter turnover (Bauer, 2022). Nguyen et al. (2023) explained that public servants display increased intrinsic motivation, such as a desire to serve and work in innovative settings, that, when fostered by management, leads to higher job satisfaction and decreased turnover.

Conversely, Nguyen et al. (2023) related that lower job satisfaction increases motivation to leave an organization. Rosca et al. (2021) explained that a firefighter's ability to understand their meaning through leadership's motivation led to a decrease in job exhaustion. The authors

noted that reduced job exhaustion also led to decreased employee turnover (Rosca et al., 2021).

The specific problem that was addressed was the challenges that leaders face in the intrinsic and

extrinsic motivation of firefighters within Brevard County, Florida, possibly resulting in

decreased morale and increased turnover.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this flexible-design, single-case study was to explore the influence of

positive leadership on firefighters' morale through intrinsic and extrinsic means, leading to

decreased organizational turnover. By understanding the challenges that senior fire department

leadership faces in motivating firefighters, the researcher explored the influence of leadership on

morale and how to improve intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Pattnaik and Jena (2021) related

that the engagement and motivation of employees can be improved through leadership actions.

A constructivist approach was utilized for this research study, in which social interaction

was a factor in constructing the problem. Craig (2022) noted that constructivist paradigms

attempt to research the person's perception of the phenomenon to understand the existing

problem. Exploring fire service leaders' challenges and perceptions and firefighters' views on

leadership provided a well-rounded qualitative analysis of the problem. A single-case study

design allowed the researcher to investigate the specific phenomenon occurring within an

isolated location with the understanding that the case study results sought to understand that

singular phenomenon (Pierre, 2024). The research project sought to fill the gaps in the literature

on how positive leadership impacts Brevard County firefighters specifically.

Research Question and Sub-Questions

Research questions help to formulate the entire path of the research project. The selected

questions became a guide to base the entirety of the study by focusing on what information was

being sought while remaining open-ended to allow for the research to move in an organic

direction from the respondents (Olumide, 2024). To what extent do leaders face challenges in

motivating firefighters, and how does leadership style influence firefighter morale and

motivation? These were necessary for understanding the effects that leaders will have on

firefighters' morale. Exploring the extent to which morale impacts firefighter turnover within an

organization shed light on the implications that coincided with high or low morale.

RQ: How can the problem of motivating firefighters by their leadership be improved?

> **RQa.** How does leadership style influence firefighter morale and motivation?

> **RQb.** To what extent does the morale of a firefighter impact the turnover of the
> organization?

The research question selected was vital for understanding leadership's specific

challenges in motivating firefighters. Thompson and Jones (2022) noted that during the COVID-

19 crisis, many of the existing employment issues were intensified, due to shutdowns and

corresponding logistics problems. The authors pointed out that some employers faced challenges

motivating their employees extrinsically with pay and benefits. In contrast, others faced intrinsic

motivation challenges, like creating positive workplace environments and creative collaboration

from work teams (Thompson & Jones, 2022). Next, RQa built upon the findings of the RQ,

primarily that of intrinsic motivation challenges. Huntsman et al. (2022) noted that firefighters

are unique in the leadership styles that they perceive as positive. The leadership style desired on

the emergency scene differs from the preferred style at the fire station. Examining not only the

different leadership styles on and off the fire scene that were portrayed by fire service leaders but

also the impacts each style had on the firefighters' morale and motivation helped to understand

the influence of specific styles utilized by Brevard County fire officers. The last question

continued to build upon the two previous research questions; RQb sought to investigate the impact of morale on the attrition and turnover of a firefighter. Mourtgos et al. (2021) noted that internal and external factors that impact morale have been found to increase the turnover of public safety employees, specifically police officers. However, further research into the impacts of negative and positive morale on Brevard County firefighters' attrition rates provided an expanded understanding of the single-case study.

Nature of Study

This study utilized a single-case study design that was qualitative in nature. Defining the nature of the study required research and the selection of various components to select the appropriate procedures to align and flow together (Lowe, 2024). Fixed, mixed-method, and flexible research designs were evaluated at length to determine the appropriateness of the selection for this study. Methods of research, in particular, narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study, were reviewed to support the selection of a single-case study. Triangulation of the research was discussed, referring to the data sources and methodology to increase the accuracy and validity of the study.

Discussion of Design

Fixed Design. Fixed design, also known as quantitative design, relies heavily upon observable data that is quantified for the purpose of creating causation and comparative analysis (Vinson, 2024). Adley et al. (2023) noted that in addition to observable data, surveys have been frequently utilized for fixed-design studies, as they allow a quantifiable data source to explain a phenomenon. However, the direct questioning and observation of fixed-design research studies severely limits the ability of the researcher to understand the motives of respondents. Pradhan (2021) suggested that quantitative surveys can be created to better understand individual bias

associated with respondent replies. However, the lack of open-ended questioning restricts the ability to explore beyond the survey questions. The limitations on analyzing a single event and the desire to create specific causation through comparative analysis prevented quantitative or fixed designs from being optimal for use in this research study.

  Mixed-Method Design. Mixed-method design is a hybrid research approach that uses qualitative and quantitative means to obtain data (Chali et al., 2022). Chali et al. (2022) further noted that the research questions utilized should be created with the intent to be integrated to provide different perspectives on the same general problem. Battista and Torre (2023) suggested that a mixed-method approach can be used to build off each other to explore a phenomenon further. The authors noted that a qualitative approach can be used to investigate the phenomenon with open-ended interviews. A quantitative approach through surveys can then be utilized to expand the study and create a comparative analysis that leads to causation. The mixed-method approach applies a qualitative approach that is beneficial to social behavior studies with a quantitative approach of comparative analysis, which is ideal for events or phenomena that involve multiple case studies. The mixed-method design was not ideal because this research study was a single-case study exploring an individual phenomenon in one singular location (Battista & Torre, 2023).

  Flexible Design. Lowe (2024) related that a flexible or qualitative design relies upon the personal perception of the respondent. The author further noted that the experiences and biases of the respondent can be recorded and coded as part of the data analysis within qualitative design, due to the desire to understand an event or phenomenon (Lowe, 2024). Castell et al. (2022) suggested that studies seeking to explore the why behind a specific behavior, such as social or psychological studies, utilize a qualitative approach to obtaining data. The authors

related that the exploratory nature of a flexible design better aligns with studies that seek to understand the motive, perspective, experience, and opinions of respondents rather than the causation of events that future studies can replicate (Castell et al., 2022). Due to the nature of the research study that sought to understand the challenges that leaders perceive and the motivations of firefighters, the flexible or qualitative design was ideal for this research project.

Discussion of Method

Narrative. The narrative method involves accumulating stories, primarily of the research subjects' lives (Maples, 2024). Maples (2024) noted that narrative methods focus on the individual rather than a specific event. They typically involve a small group of people with a commonality that relates them to each other for the study. The narratives can be obtained through interviews or from previously obtained biographies or stories that the research subject tells. Lowe (2024) noted that obtaining narrative research requires forming a relationship between the subject and researcher, which may take extended periods, making the method less than ideal for a study of a specific phenomenon rather than a general behavior.

Phenomenology. Phenomenology focuses on the phenomenon to explain what and why it occurred (Eddings, 2024). The research method focuses on the singular event but does not consider the motivations and biases of the individuals involved to understand the behaviors leading to future actions. Pham (2022) explained that the philosophy of phenomenology is to explore the experiences of the individuals involved that led to a specific event that has already occurred to create an understanding of why it occurred. The method has been helpful in researching what causes turnover but has not appealed to research that sought to understand what motivated firefighters, which this research achieved. Additionally, the experiences that the

firefighters have lived provided greater insight into the problem rather than focusing solely on the phenomenon.

Grounded Theory. Eddings (2024) noted that the grounded theory method focuses on creating a new idea or theory through the causation of the phenomenon and the individuals involved. Russen et al. (2023) posited that a grounded theory method utilizes the data that is interpreted to create a new theory, which aligns with the notion if "Y" occurs, then "X" will be the response. While grounded theory has been beneficial in building theories that can be tested from information gathered in this study, it was not the goal. The research aimed to explore the challenges and motivations of firefighters that resulted in decreased morale.

Ethnography. Lowe (2024) noted that ethnography relies upon observations and the study of a group of people and their culture within their unique group setting. Ethnography could be a beneficial method of research regarding the motivation of firefighters within a specific location, due to their unique culture; however, ethnography focuses on the subjects' interaction rather than the firefighters' individual motivations (Lowe, 2024). Eddings (2024) suggested that the time required to study a group or culture to understand the intricacies makes the method less than ideal. Additionally, the subject of the study has usually been the people and their behavior rather than a specific event or phenomenon.

Case Study. A case study focuses on a specific incident or phenomenon to understand how or why the phenomenon occurred or is occurring (Eddings, 2024). Olumide (2024) noted that the case study method seeks to research a real-life event through the individuals who have experienced and are involved in it. Olumide (2024) further indicated that there are two distinct methods of case study research: multiple-case studies and single-case studies. Chua et al. (2023) related that a multiple-case study method is ideal for researching a phenomenon occurring in

various locations and at different times. On the other hand, a single-case study is beneficial for
analyzing an event or phenomenon within a specific location or to a particular group of people or
individual person (Ghetti et al., 2024). Ghetti et al. (2024) further noted that an advantage of the
single-case study has been the ability to create a deeper understanding, due to the study's smaller
and more-focused nature.

   Appropriateness of Single-Case Study. A single-case study was selected as the research
method for this project, due to the event occurring in a specific location and to a particular group
of people. The single-case study approach allowed for a more in-depth view of the phenomenon
while focusing on the "why" through the individuals' perspectives (Ghetti et al., 2024). The case-
study method, particularly a single-case study, is ideal for processes and occurrences within a
business or occupational setting, due to the specific nature of the company or organization in
which the phenomenon is occurring (Pierre, 2024). While other methods may yield beneficial
results for select aspects of the research study goals, the single-case study aligned more
appropriately with a qualitative study utilizing a constructivist paradigm.

Discussion of Triangulation

   Triangulation is a process to help increase the validity of the data obtained and the
findings of a research study (Kumar et al., 2023). Kumar et al. noted that there are many means
of triangulation to interpret and express the findings of a study more accurately through the
research using multiple approaches. Data triangulation involves obtaining data from various
sources, such as past literature, Big Data mining, and social media (Kumar et al., 2023). Theory
triangulation involves applying multiple theories to a study (Duprez et al., 2024). Duprez et al.
(2024) related that viewing research through differing perspectives of theories can help to
identify and triangulate the findings when they align. Lowe (2024) suggested that another form

of triangulation exists in the form of methodological, which utilizes multiple methods of obtaining data to ensure that gaps do not exist from only one method. Investigator triangulation ensures that limited bias is involved in obtaining data and interpretation using multiple researchers or investigators (Mannstadt et al., 2024).

Methodological triangulation was selected for this qualitative research study, due to the ability to obtain respondent feedback through various methods, such as one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Additionally, data triangulation was implemented through multiple sources, relying upon the diversity of respondents, according to the research questions. For example, RQa utilized interviews and focus groups of leaders within the selected organization to explore the challenges faced. Then, RQb focused primarily on firefighters and how the leadership styles that they experience influence morale and motivation. Various data sources provided a greater understanding of the phenomenon being researched with increased validity of the findings (Pierre, 2024).

Summary

Through the review and selection process of paradigms, a constructivist paradigm was utilized for the view in which this study was researched. This specific study aligned best with a qualitative or flexible design, which allowed for greater exploration of the why behind motives and behaviors (Castell et al., 2022). The single-case study method allowed for an increasingly in-depth analysis of a singular event occurring within a specific location and group of people—in this case, Brevard County, Florida. Finally, using a methodological and data triangulation method allowed for increased perspective and greater validity of the study's findings. Each component of the nature of the study was critical for the reading and interpretation of the study's findings to ensure that the information was well received and filled gaps within the literature.

Research Framework

The research framework develops the integral parts of the research study that will interact with each other to build an understanding of the explored phenomenon (Odima, 2022). The defined concepts created a basis on which the theories helped to investigate what was occurring among the actors. The theoretical diagram (see Figure 1) provides a visual explanation of how all components of the research framework interact and work together (Odima, 2022). Hesselbarth et al. (2023) explained that the framework helps create a systematic research approach by focusing the researcher on the selected components. Each component is explicitly chosen to build off and interact with each other to guide the research study (Hesselbarth et al., 2023).

Figure 1

Research Framework Diagram
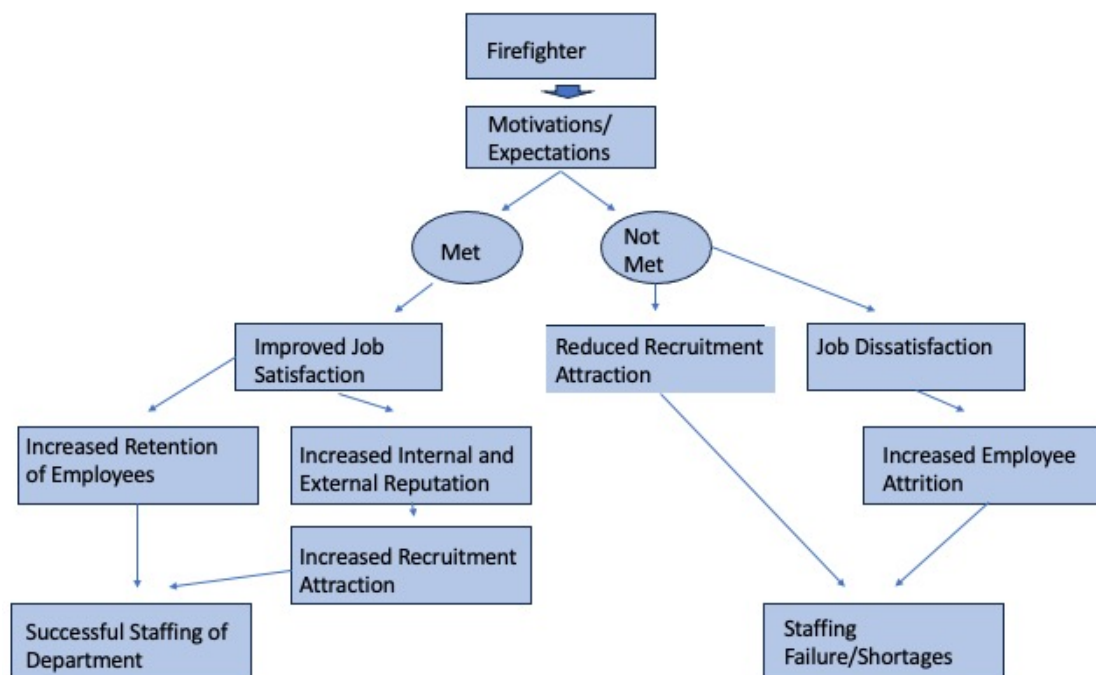
Concepts

Fulfillment of Expectations Leads to Job Satisfaction. Failure to meet employees'

expectations leads to increased job dissatisfaction (Schnaufer et al., 2022). Schnaufer et al. found

that when organizations are transparent about the pay of employees, the differential creates envy

and jealousy. The authors noted that the transparency of pay developed a level of expectations

that members felt that they should have. When the organization did not meet those expectations,

job satisfaction decreased. The study offered an example of an extrinsic expectation or motivator

not being met and the corresponding impact on the employees' job satisfaction (Schnaufer et al.,

2022).

In a study focusing on new nurses working in the hospital setting, Kaldal et al. (2023)

revealed that intrinsic expectations and motivators are developed through education and training

for some careers. The authors found that when the nurses began working in the hospital setting,

there was a decrease in job satisfaction compared to what was perceived before graduating nurse

training. The authors suggested that the decline in satisfaction was due to a lack of training in

handling specific events and emotional support. The training that was overlooked or not taught in

school led to only a partially realistic expectation of what the career entailed (Kaldal et al.,

2023).

Huynh et al. (2024) suggested that firefighters are no different than other career fields

when meeting expectations. The authors found that within volunteer fire organizations, the

propensity for a firefighter to have decreased satisfaction was related to the ability of the

organization to engage the firefighter with training and support that met the needs of the

volunteer firefighter (Huynh et al., 2024). By studying firefighter motivation, this research led to

a better understanding of the specific expectations of employed and unemployed firefighters in

Brevard County. The information led to the application of meeting the expectations to increase job satisfaction, decrease attrition, and increase attraction.

Job Satisfaction Reduces Employee Turnover. Job satisfaction impacts the potential for an employee to leave an organization if other needs are satisfied (Falatah et al., 2021). In a study regarding the impacts of job satisfaction on nursing staff's intent to resign when basic employee needs are met, Falatah et al. suggested that increased job satisfaction decreases turnover. However, the authors noted that even with elevated job satisfaction, if the needs of job security and compensation minimums are not met, the increased satisfaction does not influence turnover rates. One can infer that understanding and meeting the necessities of employee needs is required for job satisfaction to impact organizational attrition rates (Falatah et al., 2021).

Mustafa et al. (2023) found a different correlation than the previous study regarding job satisfaction's influence on turnover. The authors noted that non-family employees reported higher job satisfaction, increased autonomy, and passion in family businesses. The study's findings did not support that job satisfaction alone was linked to decreased turnover but that pro-organizational attitudes affected turnover intentions. The authors did note within the study that all employees who displayed pro-organizational behavior reported increased job satisfaction; however, not all employees who reported high job satisfaction displayed pro-organizational behavior. The study provided a catalyst for the need to research the importance of job satisfaction in the fire service (Mustafa et al., 2023). Job satisfaction may correlate with reduced employee turnover in Brevard County firefighters. Research into what leadership expectations led to firefighter job satisfaction provided a basis for understanding what may improve job satisfaction.

Employees are Attracted to Organizations That Fit Their Interests. Cao et al. (2023) suggested that organizational attraction not only creates a desire for new employees to work for an organization but also retains employees. The authors studied the effects of professional development on interns regarding the attraction level of the company. The findings revealed that the investment into the employee to increase the skill and value of the employee was reciprocated, in that the employee reported higher attraction to the company (Cao et al.). Chowdhury et al. (2021) found similar findings to those of Cao et al. (2023), suggesting that orientation or the beginning stages of employment are critical for establishing a person-organization fit. Chowdhury et al. (2021) noted that the new employee is seeking to understand whether the organization will meet the interests and expectations of the employee and whether the perception of fit will stay with that employee throughout their career.

Rafique et al. (2023) found a correlation between psychological empowerment and organizational fit. The authors suggested that when an employee, particularly in the public sector, found an organization or career that fit their interests directly, there was an increased level of psychological empowerment that led to what can be described as organizational citizenship behavior, or the desire to treat the organization as a community rather than a job. Rafique et al. (2023) provided an example of the interest in serving the public and self-sacrifice being met in a position as a public servant in government. Researching characteristics and interests that attract firefighters to the organization was vital to understanding how to increase engagement.

Theories

Maslow's Needs Theory. Maslow (1943) explained that his research into the motivation of humans was based on many theories that existed on motivational research of animals to

explain why people behaved a particular way. Maslow noted that using animal motivations to describe that of humans was not ideal and desired to create a holistic theory of motivation pertaining to humans. Maslow found that there are five distinct levels of motivation that a human seeks to affirm. Physiological needs include that of nutrition, oxygen to breathe, and sexual desires, all of which will take precedence over other needs until they are met. Safety needs are the next level and include things, like physical safety from animals and other predators, as well as housing to protect the person. Love and belonging follow safety as the third level of needs, with a human being described as desiring companionship among others. Maslow related that humans were not meant to live a life solitary from others. The fourth level is esteem or the desire of prestige and reputation. Finally, the fifth and final level of the human need theory is self-actualization. Maslow described self-actualization as the desire of a person to fulfill the calling on their life. Maslow used the example of a musician that must make music. Even if all other needs are met with a different lifestyle or career, the musician is still compelled to make music and will feel empty without completing this calling. Maslow (1943) noted that each level must be satisfied before the next level can be attempted, as they operate like a pyramid and will absorb the focus of the person at the lowest need that is not met.

Motivation is what drives a person to perform an act or do something (Ihensekien & Joel, 2023). Ihensekien and Joel suggested that two comprehensive motivational theories view a person's behavior: Maslow's needs theory and Herzberg's two-factor theory. The authors defined Maslow's theory as one used to explain the motivations of employees based on five levels of needs: physiological needs, safety and security needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Each motivational need must be met before proceeding to the next level. Therefore, people could not jump straight to social motivation, unless they had already met their

physiological and security needs. Herzberg's two-factor theory placed motivation into two categories: hygiene factor or external and motivator or internal. Ihensekien and Joel explained that the hygiene factor covered the first two or three levels of Maslow's hierarchy, and the motivator factor included the highest two or three levels. While the two-factor theory helped explain intrinsic versus extrinsic motivators, the lack of use in the emergency response industry compared to Maslow's theory made it less ideal to apply to this study (Ihensekien & Joel, 2023).

Liu et al. (2022) suggested that Maslow's needs theory has been a comprehensive theory successfully applied to help understand and increase the motivation of students and employees in the medical industry for decades. The authors related that applying the various levels of motivators to a strategic employee benefit plan can help build a package to attract and retain nurses and doctors. Liu et al. posited that the needs theory could also provide a basis for observational feedback on where an educator or employer is lacking in motivating their employees. Through surveys, they can understand the frustrations and input them into Maslow's model to focus on where specific changes need to be made. Because Maslow's needs theory provides a ladder that elevates based on the motivations and needs of the employee, it was the best fit to investigate the behavior and motivation of the respondents in this study (Liu et al., 2022). Applying the theory to firefighter expectations helped to substantiate the level of each motivation or expectation to prioritize specific motivations of each employee.

Social Exchange Theory. Homans (1958) introduced the social exchange theory in an article titled "Social Behavior as Exchange." Through his research of small groups, Homans suggested that participants require mutual exchange between relationships, whether it be material or non-material. The behavior and interaction of pigeons has been compared to that of human-to-human interaction to explain that there is a social exchange that occurs between human-to-

human behaviors. Homans posited that for a behavior or action to occur in a relationship, there must be an exchange that takes place regarding motivation of the acting person. One can infer that this takes place even in the case of philanthropy or volunteering, in which the volunteer performs a task that is exchanged with satisfaction of their own intrinsic motivators. Homans (1958) suggested that every action has a cost associated with it, and therefore, the debt must be paid for the interaction through the satisfaction of a motivation or need.

Smith et al. (2022) posited that social exchange theory involves the risk-to-reward assessment used by a person to determine whether to engage in a relationship with others. The authors suggested that social exchange theory helps to describe a transactional relationship between an employee and an employer. When the employer seeks to meet the needs, it will attempt to recruit an employee who meets the qualifications to fit those needs. Conversely, the employee will have similar needs that will have to be met for the employee to accept employment at the organization. Smith et al. related that the social exchange theory helps to explain the decision-making process that an employee uses when seeking employment with a company. Through risk-to-reward assessment, the prospective employee will weigh how many motivations must be met to engage in employment or the relationship. When the employer meets the employee's intrinsic or extrinsic expectations, the employee will react by meeting the employer's needs (Smith et al., 2022). The social exchange theory was selected for this study, due to the understanding and acceptance that not all motivators or desires must be met by the employer for a firefighter to seek continued employment. Understanding and exploring what needs influence morale and motivation helped to create a sense of importance and priority for Brevard County firefighters.

Actors

Organization. Brevard County Fire Rescue was the selected organization, which consisted of over 500 firefighters and 140 officers in leadership positions. Poor attraction, increased attrition, and lack of motivation among firefighters have led to the research question and the organization to be used for the study. Ketonen-Oksi (2022) suggested that by using a single-case study to focus on a specific phenomenon, it is essential to select an organization that not only exemplifies the problem being researched but is willing to allow transparency and honesty of respondents. Earl (2022) suggested that selecting an organization and the respondents is critical to the success of the research study. Earl (2022) noted that gatekeepers of the data can either smooth the data accumulation process or become a roadblock to prevent information from being obtained. One roadblock initially considered that could affect the gathering of data within this research study was the honesty and willingness of employees to provide unbiased responses for fear of employer retaliation; this did not appear to transpire, though. The selection of Brevard County Fire Rescue included the assurance from the organization leaders that there was a desire to understand the research findings and that honest and accurate responses would not face any adverse reaction, regardless of the response.

Respondent-Firefighter. Certified entry-level firefighters were selected, due to their qualifications matching what is desired from departments throughout the state for potential employment. Firefighters were the most abundant position in the organization and the one with the highest attrition rates. For this research study, the position of firefighter was classified as the follower role. Hare et al. (2024) described the rank of firefighter as the entry-level position in a professional fire department. The authors related that as an entry-level position, this was the primary focus of recruitment efforts nationwide. Firefighters provided responses related

primarily to the research on how leadership style influences the morale and motivation of the firefighter, or follower, in addition to their individual motivators (Hare et al., 2024).

Respondent-Fire Officer. Fire officers were defined as supervisors that held leadership positions in the organization and had firefighters as direct reports to the leader. This respondent was imperative in the establishment of leadership styles and attributes. Hare et al. (2024) described the rank of a fire officer as one that has a supervisory role within the organization. Hassan and Berkovich (2024) suggested that leadership can directly affect the morale of employees within an organization. The authors posited that the results of leadership decisions and styles can positively or negatively impact their followers (Hassan & Berkovich, 2024). Utilizing the fire officer as a leader position in this study helped to explore the challenges that leaders face in motivating firefighters and the leadership's perspectives on leadership influence on morale. Additionally, the leaders were critical in understanding the impact of firefighter morale on the turnover within the organization.

Constructs

Intrinsic Motivation. Cuadrado et al. (2021) noted that intrinsic motivation is critical for reducing burnout in high-stress employees. The authors suggested that individuals in high-stress careers tend to have a "Type-D" personality, or one who is direct and seeks to solve problems rapidly. Consequently, the Type-D employee focuses on self-reliance to solve problems as they occur. The authors posited that this self-reliance creates an intrinsic motivation that aligns with innovative behavior and the utilization of problem-solving skills. Maintaining motivation and engagement of this type of employee can be influenced by the leadership that is applied to them, as well as the tasks assigned. Fire department leadership's ability to understand the intrinsic or internal motivators and expectations of the firefighters is critical to meeting those needs

(Cuadrado et al., 2021). Adapting different leadership styles, policies, and organizational alignment can positively affect employees, increasing job satisfaction and decreasing turnover.

Extrinsic Motivation. Bae (2023) noted that extrinsic motivators play an essential role in employee attitudes, as they present the level of investment that the organization has in their workforce, as perceived by the employee. Zhou et al. (2024) noted that intrinsic motivation was found to have a more significant predictive nature toward organizational commitment. However, an organization's ability to meet employees' extrinsic motivational needs did play a role, although smaller than intrinsic, in the retention of employees. Senior leadership's understanding of extrinsic motivators for firefighters established priorities that can be implemented based on available funds. Research to discover what extrinsic compensation and expectations that firefighters seek will lead to the efficient use of taxpayer funds to increase job satisfaction (Zhou et al., 2024).

Positive Leadership. Schermuly et al. (2022) found that leadership style directly affected the psychological well-being of employees. Leadership style and influence can have a more significant impact than initially considered when observing the effects on job satisfaction and the corresponding attrition rates. Cheng et al. (2023) found that one style of positive leadership—in particular, transformational leadership—had a significant influence on the ability of the leader to meet the intrinsically motivated needs of their followers. The authors related that a positive leadership style can adapt to seek and satisfy the needs of the follower rather than try to force the followers' needs to adapt to what is being provided by the leader. The research into leadership influence has had considerable implications for understanding how fire department leadership could motivate firefighters.

Relationships Between Concepts, Theories, Actors, and Constructs

Diene (2023) suggested that concepts, theories, actors, and constructs work together to create the conceptual framework of a research study, with each section playing an integral part of the overall study. The author noted that when each framework portion aligns, the product is a clear and concise study that accurately depicts the problem and the findings (Diene, 2023). Kristof-Brown et al. (2023) noted that the research and selection of an appropriate theory is critical to the study's success, as it connects the constructs to the concepts. Lukka et al. (2022) described actors as anything that produces an effect and suggested that in a social behavior study, actors and their interaction with each other is an essential component of applying theory to constructs and the ability to demonstrate the established concepts. The actors utilize the constructs to play out the theory and demonstrate the concepts noted (Lukka et al., 2022).

Summary of the Research Framework

Each portion of the research framework was critical to establishing the study's parameters and explaining what was to be explored within the qualitative research. The framework diagram provided a visual reference of each key component of the framework and how they interacted. While constructs, concepts, and theories are typically established through previous research studies, the integration of the framework made the new study unique in what was being investigated (Diene, 2023). The concepts of the framework established the behaviors that were taking place that were like those occurring within the phenomenon being studied (Eddings, 2024). Theories explained the why behind similar instances and helped to create a path of exploration of the social behavior or leadership problem. Actors were the individuals or things that were either acting or being acted upon, which helped to establish the study's variables (Lukka, 2022). Finally, the constructs helped to explain individual portions of the phenomena

that had occurred and can be described as a building block of the theories and concepts

(Compeau et al., 2022). When all the portions of the conceptual framework align and work

together, there is a synergistic effect on the understanding of the research when compared to only

investigating individual portions of a behavior or event.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this flexible-design, single-case study was to explore the influence of

positive leadership on firefighters' morale through intrinsic and extrinsic means, leading to

decreased organizational turnover. By understanding the challenges that senior fire department

leadership faced in motivating firefighters, the research explored the influence of leadership on

morale and how to improve intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Exploration of current academic

literature aided the researcher in creating an understanding of the components of the

phenomenon being researched that were currently understood. Additionally, the review of

academic literature provided a basis for gaps in the literature that related specifically to the

problem being researched in order to build a roadmap of how the qualitative study should

proceed. The literature review began with current leadership practices, revealing the effects of

leadership on the morale of employees and building a foundation of the notion of positive

leadership, particularly in the business and work setting. Academic literature reviewed the

problem and dug into the knowledge of the phenomenon of turnover in organizations, as well as

challenges in motivating firefighters. This built into a review of literature specific to the concepts

of the research study, particularly fulfillment of expectations and its impact on job satisfaction,

job satisfaction and the reduction in turnover, and the attraction of employees to an employer

based on organizations that fit their interests. Applicable theories to help understand the behavior

associated with the problem were investigated. The two primary theories reviewed were

Maslow's needs theory and the social exchange theory. Each theory provided a substantial view

of social behavior and why the behavior existed. The constructs of intrinsic motivation and

extrinsic motivation provided a delineation of the motivational factors that impact a person's

decision-making. Related studies in academic literature provided the basis for gaps in the current

literature, as it pertained to the specific problem being researched. The insight provided from

related studies helped to build a strong understanding of the information pertaining to the

specific phenomenon and exposed what further research needed to be completed. Finally,

anticipated and discovered themes presented a destination of where the literary research landed.

Literary studies were obtained through EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Business Source Complete,

JSTOR, and Liberty University's Scholars Crossing. Each portion of the literary research built

upon the previous section to provide a full 360-degree view of the problem that was being

studied.

Leadership Practices

Effect of Leadership on Morale. Whiteoak (2021) explored the impacts of burnout on

the morale of teachers in Australia and posited that regardless of leadership style, there is an

effect on the morale of the employee. The author noted that leadership styles described as

positive leadership styles, or one in which the leader empowered their followers, showed a

significant decrease in burnout and an increase in morale. Conversely, negative or authoritative

leadership styles produced the opposite impact, increasing burnout and decreasing morale.

Furthermore, the perceived morale of the organization was impacted by the consensus of the

team's job satisfaction on an individual level (Whiteoak, 2021). Jiang et al. (2023) confirmed that

there was a significant impact on an organization's perceived morale through the collaboration of

individual employees' perceptions. However, the morale of the team also impacts the perception

of the individual. Jiang et al. noted that when an employee felt that they were part of an organization that promoted spiritual and interpersonal growth, the employee's morale increased. The holistic approach to the growth of the employee was found to be impacted the greatest by their immediate leadership through the creation of more-inclusive team environments (Jiang et al., 2023).

In addition to empowerment, ethics and trust play a major role in the morale and performance of employees (Kawiana et al., 2023). Ethical leadership practices, or ones that place ethical decision-making at the forefront, lead to an increased level of trust from the employees in the leader's command. Kawiana et al. related that there is a trickle-down effect that occurs when an employee sees that honesty is a leading characteristic of their employer. The authors related that increased trust leads to increased performance, as well as loyalty from the employee regarding the organization (Kawiana et al., 2023). The principles that the leader expresses or that are perceived by the follower are critical in the follower's emotional response to the leader (Grant, 2023). Grant related that when a leader adopts a leadership style that places the performance of the employee as the highest focus, employees reach burnout quicker and do not feel appreciated. However, when the leader seeks to invest and grow the employee as the focus of their leadership style, the employee feels appreciated and desires to work harder for the organization and their supervisor. One can infer that honesty and investment in the growth of the employee have a significant impact on the rate of burnout and the morale of the person (Grant, 2023).

Leadership is found to have greater influence over the individual the closer that they are to the subordinate (Huntsman et al., 2022). Huntsman et al. found that in emergency services, such as fire departments, the senior leadership tends to express leadership from a strategic level,

providing an overall mission for the organization. Company officers, or those who directly oversee the firefighters, exemplified a tactical leadership position of carrying out specific assignments and tasks on the day-to-day level. Huntsman et al. posited that there was a perception of bureaucratic oversight from senior leadership and decreased trust when compared to their direct supervisors. While the leadership style of the senior officers was important as an example to lower-level officers, the leadership style that the direct supervisor conveyed had a greater impact on morale and, in most cases, made up for deficiencies and mistakes made at the senior leadership level (Huntsman et al., 2022).

Positive Leadership Styles. Positive leadership style can be defined as a style in which the leader seeks to improve the well-being of the follower through empowerment (Shelton et al., 2022). Shelton et al. related that there are many styles that fall into the category of positive leadership that meet the criteria that was previously noted. Implementation of a specific positive leadership style is not only about the leader and their attitude, attributes, and education but also about the follower and what they need to be motivated (Shelton et al., 2022). Dong et al. (2024) suggested that the psychological maturity of the follower played an important role in determining which style was most effective for the individual. Additionally, the authors found that the specific style and how a follower adjusted to the leadership style impacted their psychological maturity, specifically as a youth. One can infer that in the realm of the fire department, much of the psychological maturity growth will have already occurred from adolescence, and exposing the general maturity level will help to select a leadership style to utilize (Dong et al., 2024).

Transformational leadership is a positive leadership style that is in direct contrast to a transactional relationship (Bakker et al., 2023). The authors noted that a transactional leadership style utilized social exchange theory through the notion of task-reward relationships. If the

employee completes an assignment, they are provided a reward, whether intrinsic or extrinsic. Bakker et al. (2023) suggested that transformational leadership seeks to empower and transform the follower through investment into the person proactively rather than rewarding the person afterward. Peng et al. (2021) related that when an organization is implementing change, such as leadership or supervisory roles, transformational leadership helps with the change management process. Peng et al. noted that there is a higher level of buy-in from the employees at all levels when they are consulted and empowered through the change process. The buy-in created through transformational leadership can leave a lasting impression on the employee and alter their perspective on the company long-term in a positive way, leading to long-term increases in morale (Peng et al., 2021).

Positive leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership, have been shown to positively impact morale in high-stress career fields, such as nursing and emergency medicine (Boamah, 2022). The author related that these high-stress career fields had high levels of burnout among employees, which has been thought to be a precursor to increased turnover in the organization. Boamah noted that when transformational leadership was selected and utilized as the primary style of supervisors, the perceived morale of the organization increased, while concurrently, the turnover of nurses decreased. The study conducted by Boamah (2022) focused on nurses who operated in the emergency setting during the pandemic. However, Nordquist and Kouvonen (2023) found that paramedics and emergency medical technicians (EMTs), which are requirements for firefighters, indicated the same level of stressors from critical incident experiences that nurses cope with. One can infer that while the positions are different, the exposure to stressors is similar and carries similar effects on burnout and morale (Nordquist & Kouvonen, 2023).

Marques-Quinteiro et al. (2022) discovered that the volume or call load for firefighters did not have an impact on the well-being and morale of firefighters as one would expect. Rather, the type of calls and incidents that the firefighter was exposed to depicted their reaction to their well-being over time. The authors found that complex incidents that required multiple skill sets to be utilized or calls that exposed the firefighters to multiple emotional stressors played a larger role in the morale of the firefighter than just the number of calls responded to in a single shift. Furthermore, Marques-Quinteiro suggested that the application of positive leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, led to an increase in the firefighters' ability to cope with emotional stressors. The empowerment and investment in the firefighters led to a perception of caring and belonging among the crew and from their supervisor, particularly after stressful incidents, which allowed the firefighters to accept the stressors and overcome their negative impacts (Marques-Quinteiro et al., 2022).

Charismatic leadership can be described as a style of leadership style that is based on the charisma of the leader (Antonakis et al., 2022). Antonakis et al. suggested that the charisma portrayed is what occurs in the public setting, such as through speeches and group meetings, in which the leader exemplifies a cheerleader of sorts, seeking to motivate the team or group to perform a task. Antonakis et al. (2022) warned that many politicians fall into this category, as they utilize emotions of their followers to guide their thinking and actions. However, charismatic leadership is another leadership style that is considered positive because of the empowerment of employees through the motivating techniques of the leader (Luu, 2023). Luu explained that through a study of sales personnel, charismatic leaders engaged the sales team through a process known as job crafting. The team collaborated to create and implement job tasks related to the goals of the organization and create a group-approved strategy for meeting the goals that were

facilitated by the leadership of the company. Luu related that the charismatic leader played a direct role in the process but empowered the team to come up with ideas and strategies. The study further revealed that there is a negative relation to the use of job crafting by individual team members who sought to isolate themselves and work alone. Luu found that the charismatic leadership style helped to overcome those challenges and bring the team together as a unit. The resulting collaboration and increased buy-in from the employees led to increased job satisfaction and morale of all members involved in the process (Luu, 2023).

Antonakis et al. (2022) found that charismatic leadership helped to increase the influence of the leader-follower relationship. The authors noted that charismatic leaders can motivate and empower followers to act or behave in a certain way. The example of presidential candidates at a rally has often been used to express this notion. However, Antonakis et al. found that empowerment and motivation are short-lived if there are no monetary or supportive resources to accompany charismatic leadership. The authors related that the speeches and behavior can become negative regarding the leader-follower relationship if there is no action to back it up (Antonakis et al., 2022). Increasing motivation of employees should be backed with the provision of resources and support from the organization to meet the needs of the employee, or motivation and morale will quickly fade, leading to a long-term decrease in morale (Froehlich et al., 2023).

Can a positive leadership style have negative impacts? Zhu and Wu (2023) argued that charismatic leadership's ability to inspire creativity can be positive or negative based on the intent behind the charisma. The authors suggested that there is a promotive and prohibitive charismatic voice that can impact the follower differently. Charisma expressed by the leader empowers the followers to behave a certain way, but this is not necessarily a positive for a

company or the organizational goal. Zhu and Wu (2023) suggested that while charismatic

leadership works in building a loyal followership, how the leader uses the obtained power

decides if the leadership is positive or negative. Many of history's dictators came to power

through charismatic leadership to build influence and popularity among the nation that they

desired to govern (Subedi & Scott, 2021).

Servant leadership is characterized by the desire to serve your followers (Suggs, 2023).

Suggs noted that the premise behind serving one's followers is a desire to provide the resources

and support for the individual to accomplish the tasks assigned by the leader. Suggs related that

when a servant-leader approach is followed, it can be difficult to delineate between the team

members and the leaders, as they are all working together to complete a task. However, Suggs

suggested that when a servant leader fails, many times, they accept the responsibility of the

failure rather than passing blame onto the team. One can infer that servant leaders assign a task,

provide resources, and then get out of the way so that team members can efficiently apply their

skills and knowledge to complete the tasks rather than directing the team along each step of the

way (Suggs, 2023).

Servant leadership is another positive leadership style that focuses on empowering the

follower to build self-growth (Khan et al., 2022a). The authors related that when a leader utilizes

a servant-leadership style, employees develop psychological empowerment and aim to not only

achieve the goals and tasks of the organization but also strive to help other employees. Khan et

al. (2022a) suggested that through the act of a leader serving his or her followers, a sense of

organizational citizenship behavior will be exemplified by the followers. Organizational

citizenship behavior can be described as a desire for employees to treat an organization as a

community in which they seek to help others succeed and complete assignments with the overall

goal of the community succeeding (Cho & Song, 2021). Cho and Song (2021) further noted that individuals who are more motivated by intrinsic motivations to help others, such as public servants, may exhibit higher levels of organizational citizenship behaviors, as well as servant-leadership characteristics.

Rasheed et al. (2023) suggested that servant leadership is critical in the reduction of occupational stress, as well as the increase in organizational citizenship behavior. The authors found that occupational stress was elevated in individuals that required making fast decisions and those that required highly specific skills to complete tasks. The perception of leadership caring for the employee led to a greater desire to build a community environment within the workplace, reducing stress on the individual employees. Rasheed et al. (2023) explained that when the employees perceived the leadership to be looking out for their best interest and seeking to support the employees, they felt supported in their decision-making. Yan et al. (2023) suggested that there is a correlation between servant leadership and the perceived emotional support of employees that leads to greater sustainability of employee engagement in the company.

Servant leadership was found to increase innovative behavior among employees through the notion of employee empowerment (Khan et al., 2022b). Khan et al. noted that much like transformational leadership, servant leadership seeks to inspire followers to think outside of the box and solve problems using innovation and creativity. The nature of servant leadership is to empower the person to complete a task or assignment independently of the leader, with the supervisor providing the resources and support needed by the employee (Khan et al., 2022b). Kimakwa et al. (2023) suggested that servant leaders seek to build and develop the employee rather than striving to only complete the task. The authors posited that when a leader develops

the employee's skills to work independently, the return on investment is much higher than when they simply manage employees for the completion of tasks (Kimakwa et al., 2023).

Krumrei-Mancuso and Rowatt (2023) found that trust is critical in the establishment of a leader-follower relationship to ensure long-term success. The authors noted that leaders who exemplified a servant-leader style accompanied by humility were more likely to gain the respect of followers when compared to other leadership styles. The ability of an employee to confront a leader with problems, solutions, and needs is essential to an employee feeling empowered to complete tasks independently. Krumrei-Mancuso and Rowatt (2023) suggested that the respect built led to a greater propensity to follow the leader's advice and direction. Krogh and Lo (2023) related that trust is required on both sides of the leader-follower relationship, particularly in dangerous situations, such as firefighting. The authors noted that a leader must trust their subordinates to complete a task assigned in a timely and efficient manner for the success of the incident. The trust built in the relationship is developed over time and through interactions both on and off the emergency scene (Krogh & Lo, 2023).

The Problem

Turnover. Turnover rates among fire rescue and other public safety departments have become a critical issue globally (Lim & Moon, 2023). The dangers of the job and the emotional stress caused by traumatic incidents that firefighters are exposed to have been key factors that were found to lead to the high rates of turnover. Lim and Moon (2023) noted that previously, a considerable amount of research was completed to discover the link between emotional stressors and psychological well-being, as well as job satisfaction. Lim and Moon suggested that while there is a connection between job satisfaction and turnover intent, there is also a connection between emotional stress and turnover intent as well. The authors posited that an employee may

display or express job satisfaction with a high-stress career while undertaking significant

emotional stressors. However, that same employee may indeed leave the company or career field

while still maintaining job satisfaction, due to the increased emotional strain (Lim & Moon,

2023). Xue et al. (2022) noted that many ex-employees revealed that an inability to deal with

workplace stressors is why they left an organization or career field. The authors also found that

workplace emotional stressors were a strong predictor of intent to resign from a company (Xue et

al., 2022).

Bauer (2022) noted that less-motivated employees, particularly in the fire service, were

more likely to leave a department for a more desirable career. Bauer noted that during the Great

Resignation of 2020, which occurred during and just after the COVID-19 pandemic, many

employees opted to move into freelance roles. Firefighters have a wide array of skills related to

the job, ranging from construction knowledge to emergency medical care and supervisory skills.

Bauer related that many firefighters have been quick to seek freelance employment opportunities

if there is low job satisfaction, due to their sought-after skillsets. Reduction of job satisfaction

was found to be caused by low pay, decreased promotional opportunities, and red tape involved

with making the organization more productive. Bauer noted that these same negative factors

exist in both private industry and the fire department. However, operating with a tax-based

budget limits the ability to make the changes needed to meet the motivations of the firefighters

(Bauer, 2022).

Sainju et al. (2021) studied turnover determinates in the private sector using Fortune 500

companies. The authors found that employee satisfaction positively correlated with the

prediction of employee turnover rates. Additionally, it was noted that both intrinsic and extrinsic

motivators played a significant role in employee satisfaction. This notion argued against the

premise that salary and position were the key factors of job satisfaction and interjected that the work environment, as well as organizational leadership, also played a part in the satisfaction and engagement of the employee (Sainju et al., 2021). Yasin et al. (2023) suggested that an inclusive leadership style may be able to offset some of the turnover intentions of employees who were purely extrinsically motivated. The authors noted that it is important not to focus on actual turnover behavior or quitting but rather focus on the turnover intent of employees as a way of preventing the behavior before it reaches the stage of quitting (Yasin et al., 2023).

Could turnover intent be contagious? Oh and Chhinzer (2021) found that similar to most emotional behaviors, turnover intent is also contagious. The authors suggested that when one or more employees in an organization become vocal about their lack of job satisfaction and desire to leave a company, other employees in the company will begin to feel this way as well. Additionally, as attrition rates increase in an organization, the turnover intent of remaining employees increases. The authors found that applying transformational leadership practices can help to reduce the turnover intent but not stop it completely. One can infer that groupthink is applicable to negative job satisfaction and increased attrition (Oh & Chhinzer, 2021). Sheather and Slattery (2021) suggested that the phenomenon of the Great Resignation, in which a mass exodus of employees left the job market within a short span of time, was, in fact, due to groupthink. The authors posited that employees, who were stretched thin and overworked, took notice of other coworkers inside their organizations and throughout other industries resigning and followed suit (Sheather & Slattery, 2021).

Challenges Motivating Firefighters. Public servants tend to display increased intrinsic motivation, such as a desire to serve and work in innovative settings, that, when fostered by management, leads to higher job satisfaction and decreased turnover (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Nguyen et al. suggested that motivating public servants is essential to fostering their desire to serve. Servant leadership was explained as one such method that helped to not only engage public servants but also create an environment conducive to innovation and increasing job satisfaction. Conversely, the authors related that lower job satisfaction increases the motivation to leave an organization. Nguyen et al. (2023) suggested that public servants rely heavily on intrinsic motivators to build job satisfaction, and when those motivators are not met, turnover intent grows.

Rosca et al. (2021) found that job exhaustion was linked to employee turnover in fire departments. The authors suggested that when a firefighter faces high job demands, such as increased call volume or complexity of emergency incidents, the employee becomes exhausted. Work meaning was noted to combat these negative effects of job exhaustion. Rosca et al. explained that a firefighter's ability to understand their work meaning through leadership motivation led to a decrease in job exhaustion. One can infer that increased communication regarding the department's vision could help to establish the meaning of the work for the firefighter (Rosca et al., 2021). Fan et al. (2021) found that clear communication of the leadership vision aligns the work team to move from individual goals to a collective goal while maintaining the innovation of the employee. Additionally, the authors posited that when there is a clear vision, work meaning is displayed in the objectives built throughout the hierarchy to align with the organizational mission (Fan et al., 2021).

Satisfied and motivated employees are essential to the success of the workforce in the public sector (Nukpezah et al., 2024). Nukpezah et al. found that public service motivation coupled with public safety work can increase firefighter motivation. However, the authors noted that public safety workers did not necessarily seek employment in the public sector because of

public service motivation, with most seeking adrenaline-inducing careers. The perceived

excitement of the job in public safety was a significant attracter into the career field. However,

the employee selected an organization to work for and whether they stayed at said organization

was based on intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, such as leadership, environment, pay, and

benefits (Nukpezah et al., 2024). Hartnell et al. (2023) suggested that servant leadership can

improve the attitude and work environment of the employees, leading to motivation that

increases job satisfaction and is isolated from extrinsic motivators, such as pay. When the

employee was supported in their actions and assignments, there was an increase in the

motivation to seek efficiency in the tasks assigned, creating momentum throughout the work

team. The increase in motivation led to an increase in performance, as well as job satisfaction

among employees (Hartnell et al., 2023).

Competition creates a level of motivation and engagement that is useful in improving

performance (Felkey et al., 2023). A competitive environment built a sense of purpose and

motivation to improve their performance in the academic and job setting. Felkey et al. suggested

that one of the largest determining factors in the success of competition for the use of motivating

employees or students is the gender of those involved. Males were found to have a much higher

reaction to a competitive environment than their female counterparts (Felkey et al., 2023). While

public service does not tend to be gender-specific, public safety has historically remained a male-

dominated industry (Dinhof & Willems, 2024). One can infer that the use of peer competition

may be a beneficial practice in the fire service to increase performance and job satisfaction,

potentially leading to an improvement in morale.

Jenssen and Dillern (2023) related that motivating firefighters to maintain a level of

physical fitness is enhanced when leaders can increase the intrinsic motivations of the

firefighters. Leadership was found to have a significant impact on the motivation and competitive nature of the firefighters that they supervised. The authors noted that the competitive nature of the job can help foster motivation for exercise, as well as other tasks related to the career (Jenssen & Dillern, 2023). van Rensburg and Kanayo (2022) found that individuals who excelled in sports at some point in their lives had increased work ethic and motivation to succeed in their careers. The authors suggested that the building of successful daily habits accompanied by the competitive nature of sports led to an increase in positive work habits that improved job satisfaction within their chosen industry (van Rensburg & Kanayo, 2022).

Concepts

Fulfillment of Expectations Leads to Job Satisfaction. Lee (2024) noted that meeting job expectations is critical to retaining employees. Lee found that societal norms and glamourizing of specific careers have led to expectations that may be financially impossible for companies to meet. When industry traditions, even those that may not be legal or accepted, exist within a career field, the results may be a reduction of the ability of the career to meet the employees' expectations. An example that Lee provided is a male-dominated industry in which a woman seeks to work. The woman may have expectations of what the job is, pay, benefits, acceptance, etc.; however, when she enters the field, the industry traditions are not what she had expected. Lee (2024) noted that this example leads to a sharp decrease in employee job satisfaction and an immediate increase in the intent to leave the industry. Sun and Kim (2022) found that the current job market was filled with overeducated workers, due to societal pressure to obtain college degrees. The authors posited that degrees exist for almost any interest that one may have, which may lead to an expectation that a job will exist for someone who has successfully obtained said degree. One can infer that expectations that are depicted from an

education facility may be different than the actual career or industry that the potential employee is seeking to enter (Sun & Kim, 2022).

Yeşilkaya and Yıldız (2023) found a correlation between job crafting and the optimistic perception of an organization that leads to increased job satisfaction. When a potential or current employee has a positive perception of the organization, their satisfaction with their unique career is improved. The authors suggested that job crafting can be used to create a job that meets the employee's expectations. Allowing the design of a job to be crafted by the employee created buy-in regarding tasks assigned to said employee. The authors related that one way in which an organization can increase job satisfaction through job crafting is to give the employee the goals associated with the position and empower the employee to design the functions of the job to meet those goals (Yeşilkaya & Yıldız, 2023). Harju et al. (2021) argued that job crafting to support satisfaction can also backfire on the organization. The authors posited that some employees would job craft to take on significantly higher workloads either out of a desire for promotion or to meet their intrinsic motivations, which may lead to increased burnout. Conversely, other employees might craft their jobs to decrease the workload. The employee who under-crafts their job may initially increase job satisfaction; however, the lack of purpose could decrease the satisfaction in the long run. Additionally, the job will not meet the needs of the organization, leading to the potential to remove the employee for lack of performance (Harju et al., 2021).

Sandrin et al. (2021) noted that the perception of burnout among firefighters was linked primarily to supervisor recognition and job satisfaction. The firefighters had a significantly higher rate of burnout when they felt that they were not recognized for their work ethics. The authors noted that the impact of negative job satisfaction became exponentially worse if the problem was not corrected. Firefighters who felt unappreciated began to display mental

exhaustion and decreased their engagement with the department. The decreased engagement with the department led to less recognition, exponentiating the effects of the lack of recognition of burnout. The authors suggested that means of recognition referred to supervisors' investment in the employee and showing appreciation through satisfaction of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Sandrin et al., 2021). Agarwal et al. (2023) agreed with the notion that recognition was perceived as an investment in the person and further related that the investment was reciprocated with the employee investing in the company. The authors suggested that recognition early and often in the relationship will pay off dividends in the long term for the organization (Agarwal et al., 2023).

Molwitz et al. (2023) posited that the successful fulfillment of job expectations is critical to increasing job satisfaction and reducing emotional burnout among high-stress professions. The authors found that high-stress careers present individual expectations that do not always translate to all high-stress career fields. In the healthcare industry, radiologists, in particular, desired structured training cycles so that they could build their schedule around the cycle. Additionally, the radiologists desired to be empowered by management in the decision-making process for high-impact decisions and changes in both their sector and the organization. The authors suggested that inquiring directly to the work team is the best approach to understanding the expectations (Molwitz et al., 2023). Mathew and Nair (2022) suggested that psychological empowerment strengthens the relationship between the two parties involved and can be a useful tool in building a leader-follower relationship. Additionally, empowerment builds loyalty to the person and the organization by increasing job satisfaction through meeting the expectations and motivations of the employee (Mathew & Nair, 2022).

Job Satisfaction Reduces Employee Turnover. Job satisfaction is explained as when the employee has a positive outlook regarding their career (Dewanti et al., 2023). Dewanti et al. noted that the higher the level of job satisfaction, particularly in high-stress jobs, the lower the turnover intent of the employee. Job security, workload, negative mindset, and negative environment were all factors that were found to have affected the respondents' job satisfaction. Job security, or lack thereof, presented an increased level of worry about being laid off and what the future may hold for the employee. The workload was related to creating a feeling of being overworked and guilt for lower quality workmanship in an effort to keep up with demand. The authors suggested that a negative or toxic environment led to an increase in a negative mindset, which was exponentiated as a negative work environment (Dewanti et al., 2023). Reyhanoglu and Akin (2022) suggested that a toxic work environment is directly correlated with toxic or negative leadership. The authors posited that leadership training can help to decrease a toxic environment, leading to improved job satisfaction and attrition rates (Reyhanoglu & Akin, 2022).

The work environment, whether toxic or positive, may not always lead to increased turnover. Blaese et al. (2021) argued against the notion that many entrepreneurs start their businesses due to dissatisfaction with their previous work environment. The authors suggested that the career that led to job dissatisfaction was due to motivations and expectations not being met for someone with an entrepreneurial mentality (Blaese et al., 2021). Abun et al. (2022) related that employees with an entrepreneurial mindset can be empowered to embrace their mentality rather than stifle it. The authors suggested that building leadership that meets the expectations and motivations of the employee, even ones that possess an entrepreneurial mind, will decrease the employee's desire to leave the organization (Abun et al., 2022). Kuratko et al. (2021) argued that the entrepreneurial employee exemplified many attributes and behaviors that

are positive to the success of a company, such as innovation. One can infer that fostering and investing in the employee leads to increased job satisfaction and decreased turnover (Kuratko et al., 2021).

Anxiety, mental health, and supervisor support are all critical factors that play a role in turnover intent among high-stress medical staff (Modaresnezhad et al., 2021). Modaresnezhad et al. (2021) related that supervisor support played an impactful role in reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction, both of which were found to align with the intent to leave the career field entirely. Chang et al. (2022) suggested that the psychological ownership of the employee regarding their career and organization was fostered by the leadership of the individual. The authors posited that leadership could increase the buy-in of the employees by involving them in the decision-making process at all levels of the organization. The psychological ownership created led to an increase in job satisfaction and a decrease in turnover intent of the employee. Chang et al. (2022) related that there was an increase in the perception from the employees that it was their organization rather than the organization that they worked for.

Rubaca and Khan (2021) noted that firefighters' job satisfaction is related to the turnover intent of the employee. The authors found that organizational support significantly impacted firefighter's job satisfaction. High-stress careers that involve frequent emotional injury from incidents that they have responded to require leadership that understands those effects and supports the employee. Rubaca and Khan (2021) suggested that when the firefighter is supported through training, resources, and caring leaders, the firefighter's job satisfaction is increased. Additionally, as the satisfaction increases, the turnover intent in the firefighter decreases, leading to improved organizational engagement from the firefighter. Zhu et al. (2023) suggested that job engagement had a significant impact on the attitude and behavior of employees. When the

employee was engaged in the organization, their perceived job satisfaction increased.

Additionally, the increase in job satisfaction was found to have a direct correlation to the

decrease in employee turnover intent. The authors posited that leadership has a direct influence

on the engagement of the employee and, thereby, the level of job satisfaction (Zhu et al., 2023).

   Employees are Attracted to Organizations That Fit Their Interests. Schmidt et al.

(2023) suggested that those seeking employment attempt to find jobs at organizations that meet

and align with their values and beliefs. The emergence of the popularity of gig workers who do

not work full-time jobs and instead work multiple part-time or contract-style jobs is an example

of workers taking it upon themselves to meet their motivations and interests. Workers were

found to have the flexibility to drop one gig and move on to the next when the organization no

longer fit their values. The authors found that there was a greater employee-employer fit when

there was value alignment (Schmidt et al., 2023). Byrne and Eddy (2023) found that work teams

that possess shared mental models or shared cognition performed at a much higher level than

those that did not. The authors posited that when a team understands each person's role on the

team and that everyone's vision, values, and goals align with each other, there is a greater

synergy of ideas and solutions. Conversely, when the values, vision, and goals are different

among team members, time is wasted, as people operate against each other or in opposite

directions. One can infer that a potential employee will seek an organization that aligns with their

values so that there is a higher chance of shared cognition when placed into a work team by the

employer (Byrne & Eddy, 2023).

   How does a potential employee know the values of the company? Misra and Dubey

(2022) noted that organizational branding is a means of marketing the company to express that it

is a desirable place to be employed. The authors noted that there is a level of strategy involved in

researching what specific positions are looking for and then branding the recruitment particular

to that position to attract talent. The use of organizational branding is a technique in which the

employer advertises the company to potential employees based on what they may be looking for

in a company to work for (Misra & Dubey, 2022). Sull and Sull (2024) noted that there is a

staffing crisis across all industries seeking skilled employees. The authors related that employers

are required to compete against each other to meet the staffing demands of the company and are

constantly seeking new and innovative ways to attract employees. Organizational branding is one

way of advertising what the company offers (Sull & Sull, 2024).

Hue et al. (2021) found that it is essential to advertise honestly to attract the correct

people for the job, primarily in the public sector. The authors related that person-organization fit

is critical for the continued employment of talent. If an organization markets itself incorrectly to

gain higher recruitment numbers, it can backfire, leading to elevated attrition rates when the

employees' interests do not fit the organization (Hue et al., 2021). Kim et al. (2022) found that

when applying social exchange theory inside the business environment, there is a desire for

reciprocation of the behaviors and rewards of the relationship. When one side misleads the other

to gain an advantage and does not reciprocate, the relationship deteriorates. The authors noted

that the same relationship exists between the leader and follower; if the leader built the

relationship under false pretenses, the follower would leave when it is exposed. One can infer

that if a company is not honest in advertising the job to the candidate, the employee will seek to

resign as soon as they discover the deceit (Kim et al., 2022).

Glavas et al. (2024) noted that as companies outwardly displayed their desire to

participate in corporate social responsibility campaigns, the employees seeking employment fit

better with the organization. Instead of branding or advertising, the values and goals of the

organization are seen through the actions of the company in the community. The authors found

that job seekers who exemplified prosocial behavior sought companies that appeared to be active

in corporate social responsibility (Glavas et al., 2024). Ali and Satpathy (2023) suggested that

companies utilize corporate social responsibility strategically not only to gain customers but also

to attract talent. The authors related that in a business where social responsibility is deemed

important, it is critical to display the values of the organization to attract employees who will

align with the social projects taking place. The sense of community and social improvement

through corporate social responsibility projects will ensure that the intrinsic motivations of the

employee are met by providing a sense of purpose for the employee's work (Ali & Satpathy,

2023).

Theories

      Maslow's Needs Theory. Mauluddiyah (2021) found that Maslow's needs theory could

be incorporated into meeting the needs of prospective teachers. The author related the

importance of meeting each level in Maslow's theory before moving on to the next to ensure that

each step in the hierarchy is achieved for long-term employment success. It was suggested that

through the work-reward program, many of the levels of the needs theory could be accomplished

by the organization, leading to an increased attractiveness of individuals seeking out those

careers (Mauluddiyah, 2021). Vithayaporn et al. (2022) agreed with the notion of building

attractiveness in an organization and suggested that applying Maslow's theory could be used as a

strategy for increasing organizational learning. The authors related that improving the physical,

psychological, social, and technical climates of the organization helps to achieve the different

levels of Maslow's theory to create a successful working and learning environment (Vithayaporn

et al., 2022).

King et al. (2022) suggested that applying Maslow's needs theory led to improving nurse well-being. Part of Maslow's theory suggested that each level of the need theory leads to increased satisfaction of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of the individual. The authors found that using the theory as a strategic approach to enhancing nurses' compensation and job assignments led to increased job satisfaction and reduced callouts of nursing staff (King et al., 2022). Regan (2023) suggested that research has shown that Maslow relied heavily on theories, such as Theory X and Theory Y, to continue his work on management. Regan related that Maslow suggested that the needs theory can be applied to other management theories to create strategic implementation of employee development strategies to improve job satisfaction and performance in all industries. While the notion of the hierarchy of needs applies to the motivational behavior of humans, the information was designed to be applied to management techniques (Regan, 2023).

McConnell and Metz (2024) noted that after the COVID-19 pandemic, the workforce rapidly changed with the desire for hybrid or remote occupations. In addition to the increase in remote occupations, a dramatic increase in resignations occurred, dubbed the "Great Resignation," in which employees' motivations and goals changed through the impact of the pandemic. The authors suggested that Maslow's needs theory can be used to understand why the changes occurred and how to better align job descriptions and tasks in the future to meet the workforce's desires. One can infer that in an ever-changing job market, an organization must keep up with compensation, benefits, and leadership trends to match the desires of the employee (McConnell & Metz, 2024). Serenko (2023) related that the Great Resignation has created a significant loss of knowledge and experience throughout all industries globally. The author suggested that companies utilize this phenomenon as an opportunity to restructure and reinvest in

their personnel to continue their tenure with the organization. Serenko (2023) related that through the application of a strategic development plan, a company can empower their employees to craft jobs and build applicable knowledge specific to the industry in which they work.

Maslow (1943) suggested that safety is one of the lower levels of critical needs that the individual must meet to advance to higher motivations in the pursuit of satisfaction. Ismail et al. (2022) found that a firefighter's happiness and satisfaction rating heavily depended on the employee's safety. Ismail et al. applied Maslow's needs theory to explain that until the lower levels of the hierarchy of needs are met, the higher levels of self-actualization will not play a factor in job satisfaction. If a lower level is not met, because of the increased importance of the survival of the lower levels, the employee will change their focus solely to meeting the lowest level of the hierarchy that has not been satisfied. Ismail et al. suggested that satisfaction hinged upon the successful implementation of policy that improved the safety of the firefighters. However, for long-term employment satisfaction, all levels should be met (Ismail et al., 2022).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is the basis of an employee's motivation and needs to be successful and satisfied in a position (Liu et al., 2022). Applying the theory to firefighter expectations helped substantiate the level of each motivation or expectation to prioritize specific motivations based on a new versus a tenured employee. Liu et al. suggested that the advertisement and application of the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy, particularly physiological and safety, are fundamental in the attraction of a new hire candidate to the organization. The satisfaction of social, esteem, and self-actualization are imperative to the growth and promotion of the employee, leading to long-term tenure with the organization (Liu et al., 2022). Harjanto et al. (2023) found that trust is critical in the employee-employer

relationship, particularly when there is little direct oversight of the employee. The authors suggested that trust in the organization is built through fair compensation and treatment of employees. These two aspects can relate to Maslow's hierarchy of physiological and safety needs. The authors further noted that through collaboration and acceptance, the employees will develop trust among their team members, satisfying their need to be accepted by their peers in the social setting. One can infer that through employee development, trust will be extended to their leadership and to themselves, satisfying the esteem and self-actualization levels of Maslow's hierarchy (Harjanto et al., 2023).

Social Exchange Theory. Smith et al. (2022) posited that social exchange theory involves the risk-to-reward assessment used by a person to determine whether to engage in a relationship with others. When the employer meets the employee's intrinsic or extrinsic expectations, the employee will react by meeting the employer's needs. The authors suggested that almost all current studies have viewed the motivations of employees who are already working for an organization rather than contingent employees. Smith et al. posited that the onboarding process, usually completed by human resources at the beginning of one's career, is the ideal place to instill the level of investment that the company seeks to provide to the new employee. Conversely, when hiring temporary employees to fill a position or task in the short term, investment in their development should be less than that of a permanent, long-term employee. One can infer that a company using the social exchange theory would invest greater resources in the employer-employee relationship, which desires a longer investment from the employee into the company (Smith et al., 2022).

Lin and Lu (2021) applied social exchange theory to describe the performance outcomes of employees based on cultural differences and their perception of the company's engagement of

employees. The authors noted that cultural differences played a role, and the use of

transformational leadership helped to alleviate the adverse effects described through social

exchange theory regarding the employee-employer relationship. Cultural differences yielded

different motivations from employees that could deem a lack of interest in the development of

the employee as a negative, even if compensation was elevated, or vice versa. The authors

suggested that a transformational leader could empower the employees through the

understanding of their unique motivations rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach (Lin

& Lu, 2021). Nwachukwu et al. (2021) posited that social exchange theory provided a

foundation for the study of motivations and outcomes of employees. The authors found that the

empowerment of the employee is directly related to the engagement of the employee in the

company. Thus, the risk-to-reward or input-to-output idea of social exchange is defined

(Nwachukwu et al., 2021).

Duan et al. (2022) posited that social exchange theory is the basis of self-cultivation or

the growth of oneself through selflessness. The authors suggested that when an organization

invests in the development of the employee, the employee will, in turn, invest in the

organization's success. Additionally, when the employee reaches a level of self-confidence and

establishes their unique work identity, the employee will begin to initiate selfless behavior,

seeking to grow others. Duan et al. (2022) noted that social exchange describes the relationship

that is fostered between two parties that benefit mutually, while self-cultivation theory focuses

on self-growth that leads to benefits for all parties that the person is engaged in, regardless of

whether the benefit is mutual. Shang et al. (2021) noted that employee growth within an

organization leads to organizational citizenship behavior, or the desire to treat the company as a

community and help other employees achieve their tasks, regardless of recognition. Social

exchange theory can be used to describe the investment in the employee that the company or leader must make, which leads to the desired organizational citizenship behavior from the employee (Shang et al., 2021).

Flinchbaugh et al. (2024) found a direct impact on firefighters' perceived trust regarding their organization's ability to provide safety, training, and honest behavior and their engagement in the department. The authors related that social exchange theory describes the firefighter's relationship with the organization through their willingness to perform and continue employment at the department. When the organization expresses investment in the employee through resources or training, the employee reinvests in the department through elevated service and performance to the citizens (Flinchbaugh et al., 2024). MacDermid et al. (2021) agreed with the notion of investment in firefighters, leading to the investment of firefighters in the department. The authors noted that when the fire department prioritized mental health training and injury reduction methods, the firefighters perceived that they were cared about and sought to go above and beyond for the organization. Conversely, departments that were not perceived to care about their employees' health and wellness led to a decrease in engagement and performance of the firefighters (MacDermid et al., 2021).

Constructs and Variables

Intrinsic Motivation. Alabood and Manakkattil (2023) noted that intrinsic motivation and innovative behavior led to an increase in job performance and customer service quality. When organizations empowered employees by matching their intrinsic motivations through job tasks, an increase in job satisfaction and improved customer service were noted. The authors suggested that creativity is a standard intrinsic motivator that companies can accommodate to increase job performance. Empowerment of the employee by increasing the creative nature of a

job task satisfied the desire to express innovation in assignments that the employee was tasked with (Alabood & Manakkattil, 2023). Karimi et al. (2021) noted that creativity is one of the highest intrinsic motivations of employees, as it satisfies the desire for self-efficacy. The authors related that self-efficacy is the belief that a person can perform a task or assignment at a high level. One can infer that the increase in self-efficacy can satisfy the self-esteem level within Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Karimi et al., 2021).

Santoro (2022) found that many employees express goal achievement as another critical intrinsic motivation. The author noted that when orientation goals are assigned to employees, there is a desire to achieve these goals, which leads to meeting the employee's intrinsic motivations. Santoro suggested that clear communication of a goal, as well as providing periodic benchmarks, helps the employee to measure their status and performance. The employee who is particularly intrinsically motivated will strive to meet and exceed the benchmarks to build their own self-esteem and confidence. Santoro (2022) related that meeting the intrinsic needs of the employee leads to increased job satisfaction. Weissman and Elliot (2023) suggested that setting small achievable goals throughout a complex task can build the perception of mastery achieved by the employee. The authors related that the perception of achievement creates momentum that can push to motivate the employee to perform at higher levels as they move through the task, increasing engagement and job satisfaction throughout (Weissman & Elliot, 2023).

Iqbal et al. (2024) noted that work-family conflict negatively impacts intrinsic motivation and leads to the depersonalization of employees in high-stress careers. The authors related that work life and home life are in a constant struggle against each other, with both fighting for the limited time and cognitive resources of the employee. Iqbal et al. found that when work-life homeostasis was disrupted, the effects impacted the employee's ability to perform on the job and

increased the propensity for burnout. Conversely, assisting in meeting these intrinsic motivations improved performance (Iqbal et al., 2024). Yu (2022) suggested that one way to improve the work-life balance of employees is through either schedule modification or additional leave. Yu found that there was an increase in engagement and motivation from the employee when the employer invested in the person to ensure that their home life was supported as much as their work life. Yu studied the effects of parental leave when a child is born or adopted and found that the perceived investment in the employee's family increased job satisfaction, even if it was not utilized. One can infer that the idea of an employer supporting their employees' home lives and mental health was enough to increase the reputation and perception of the company (Yu, 2022).

      Extrinsic Motivation. Bae (2023) noted that extrinsic motivators play an essential role in employee attitudes, as they present the level of investment the organization has in their workforce as perceived by the employee. The author suggested that one of the extrinsic motivators with the highest impact on increasing employee performance is pay. The author suggested that the role of extrinsic motivation matches the lower levels of Maslow's needs theory. Having the lower levels of Maslow's theory, such as physiological and safety needs, met will allow the employee to focus on higher-level needs. Physiological needs, such as food and housing, as well as safety needs, such as financial security, are both met with pay (Bae, 2023). Lee et al. (2022) noted that with the increase in job portals, particularly online, the employee has access to a range of similar jobs, as well as the corresponding pay grades that accompany them. The authors suggested that the increase in quantitative recruitment information, such as pay for comparable jobs, has led to the companies attempting to out-pay each other to attract talent. Lee et al. (2022) noted that while there is also information on intrinsic motivators through company reviews, most job sites focus primarily on pay ranges of positions.

Kotera et al. (2022) noted that extrinsic motivators for job performance involve compensation or fame. The authors suggested that extrinsic motivation is a positive predictor for initial job performance but is not successful in predicting turnover intent, due to the desire of the person to seek more compensation rather than intrinsically being satisfied with the job itself. Kotera et al. related that an employee who is primarily extrinsically motivated will seek out an organization based on the pay rate; however, they will be quick to leave the same organization for a higher-paying job. The prediction factor for applying only higher pay leads to increased attraction of applicants but does not improve attrition rates (Kotera et al., 2022). Hopkins and Dowell (2022) suggested that a recruitment and retention strategy should focus on a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. The authors related that within not-for-profit organizations, the employees tend to seek elevated intrinsic motivators; however, extrinsic motivations, such as pay, must be met first. Hopkins and Dowell (2022) suggested a tailored approach for each desired position that the organization seeks to fill rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Tei-tominaga and Nakanishi (2021) concluded with a similar finding as Hopkins and Dowell (2022), in that a tailored approach to recruitment and retention was needed. However, Tei-tominaga and Nakanishi suggested that the approach varied by the gender of the employee. The authors found that within medical care facilities, women tended to desire intrinsic motivation in the form of ethical leadership over extrinsic motivators relating to increased job satisfaction. Conversely, men related job satisfaction to extrinsic motivation for higher wages (Tei-tominaga & Nakanishi, 2021). Kaileh et al. (2022) noted that men who worked in a historically female career, such as nursing, tended to desire extrinsic motivations over intrinsic ones, as they felt that they were isolated from their female coworkers. The authors related that this was exponentiated when there was conflict at home among the male nurses, as it increased

the desire to isolate from team members (Kaileh et al., 2022). Firefighting and public safety, in

general, have been male-dominated industries (Dinhof & Willems, 2024). One can infer that

within the fire service industry, females may seek extrinsic values as a higher motivation than

intrinsic ones (Dinhof & Willems, 2024).

Related Studies

Llorens et al. (2022) conducted a study on the drivers of burnout among Portuguese

firefighters. The study found that firefighters are frequently confronted with situations and

incidents that negatively impact their mental health and overall well-being. The authors noted

that an overload of stressors led to increased burnout indicators, including decreased motivation

for the job and work engagement. Llorens et al. revealed that social support from fellow

firefighters did not impact the burnout rate either positively or negatively. However,

organizational policy specific to coping strategies and the reduction of organizational demands

did affect the level of burnout that the firefighters faced. The leadership and organizational

commitment to proactive mental health support was critical to reducing the effects of stressors on

the burnout rate of firefighters (Llorens et al., 2022).

Freise and Walter (2024) studied the motivations and expectations of volunteer

firefighters in Germany. The research concluded that intrinsic motivations, such as camaraderie,

social status, and desire to serve, were imperative to the satisfaction of firefighters and their

engagement in the department. However, due to the nature of the study being conducted in a

volunteer organization, the level of extrinsic motivators evaluated was low, and the expectation

of receiving extrinsic motivations, such as pay, did not exist. One can infer that the basic or

lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs were being met by the firefighters' full-time

employment, with the satisfaction of the upper levels of Maslow's hierarchy playing a part in

volunteering at the fire department. The article provided substantial information on the challenge of motivating firefighters through intrinsic motivations, and when coupled with specific extrinsic motivational support, it can supplement the overall improvement of professional or career fire departments' employee development strategies (Freise & Walter, 2024).

Curral et al. (2023) researched the effects of two leadership styles on firefighters during emergency incidents. The authors simulated the use of an empowering leadership style and a directive or authoritarian style. It was noted that while directive styles are not typically categorized with positive leadership, due to the lack of employee empowerment, the style decreased anxiety and stress on the fire ground. Conversely, the empowering leadership style did not affect stress. The authors found that in a para-military style organization, where high-stress incidents are regularly faced, firefighters seek a leader who is decisive and confident, rapidly applying orders to create action to accomplish fire ground tasks. Curral et al. suggested that there is still an empowerment component related to the authoritarian style utilized on the fire ground in the assignment of tasks to individual firefighters. The authors related that firefighters can be empowered, even in stressful situations in which they are being given assignments from a central command. The leader in charge builds confidence and empowers the firefighters through the trust that is bestowed upon them with the level of task assigned. However, much of the basis for assigning a critical task is created prior to the incident through training and the relationship between the supervisor and their subordinate. The study focused solely on emergency incident leadership effects and not a holistic approach to fire service leadership, where other leadership styles may be more beneficial to the growth and development of the firefighter and more impactful regarding the improvement of job satisfaction (Curral et al., 2023).

Anticipated and Discovered Themes

   Anticipated Themes. The challenge of leadership to motivate firefighters has changed, due to generational experiences that generationally diverse leadership is unfamiliar with and unable to adjust to (Hans et al., 2023). Hans et al. suggested that traditionally, leaders will rely upon their own desires to build a working relationship, focusing on what they would like to see from their boss. When leadership seeks to treat their subordinates how they would like to be treated or have the desires and needs that they would want to be met by the organization, there is a propensity for failure. Hans et al. noted that cognitive diversity, as well as generational diversity, is common in all organizations; however, the ability of leadership within the organization to understand the different challenges of motivating each generation is rare. The authors suggested that leaders undergo training specific to engaging and building relationships with their subordinates, as well as delegating research and decision-making functions to team members who are closer in age and position to the employees who are attempting to be motivated (Hans et al., 2023).

   Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be applied to demonstrate that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are required to effectively engage and motivate employees in all industries (Zhang & Liu, 2022). Zhang and Liu suggested that it is a balancing act of ensuring that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are met and that they do not overpower each other. When an employee relies too heavily upon intrinsic motivators, there is a likelihood that they will be highly innovative and creative without producing or meeting the assignments that the organization needs to complete to remain profitable. Conversely, when the employee is focused primarily on extrinsic motivators, they will only complete assignments to the minimum standard to receive the reward offered (Zhang & Liu, 2022). Bae (2023) suggested that when pay-for-performance

strategies are applied to employees who are intrinsically motivated, it can cause a negative return on investment, as the employee's desire to complete tasks changes to only be satisfied when there is a financial reward attached to the completion. Bae (2023) noted that this extrinsic motivational strategy leads to the employee reviewing each assignment, based on the reward that accompanies the task to decide whether it is worth their time, frequently leading to a decrease in job satisfaction if their financial reward expectations are not met.

Positive leadership, such as servant or transformational leadership, directly affects the motivation and morale of employees (Sun et al., 2023). The authors related that the positive impacts of servant leadership extend beyond the job and are noted within the employee's home life. The empowerment of the employee, which is a foundational facet of positive leadership, helps the person meet the needs noted in the upper levels of Maslow's hierarchy. Sun et al. suggested that the overwhelming desire to support the subordinates who report to the leader also increases the potential for lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy to be met as well, such as job security, compensation, and work-life balance. The authors related that when the employee is supported and provided the resources that they need to complete the tasks assigned to them in a creative and innovative manner through supervisor empowerment, job satisfaction is impacted substantially in a positive outcome (Sun et al., 2023).

Discovered Themes. Leadership styles in the fire service vary between the emergency scene and employees' professional development (Curral et al., 2023; Flinchbaugh et al., 2024). Curral et al. found that when placed in stressful situations where time and strategy are literal life-and-death variables, firefighters desire a leader who is competent and decisive. Curral et al. posited that while empowerment and other facets of positive leadership can still occur at the emergency scene, the time that it takes to engage and seek feedback about a decision or task

could result in negative outcomes, which may lead to injury or death of firefighters and the civilians that they are there to serve. Flinchbaugh et al. suggested that proactive resource allocation for firefighters and police officers is critical to the success of public servants in completing their assigned tasks. Flinchbaugh et al. noted that resources were not only material but also involved training, which impacted their ability to provide services at the highest level. While Flinchbaugh et al. (2024) suggested that a positive or servant leadership style was ideal in a controlled setting for employee development, Curral et al. (2023) posited that an authoritative leadership style is beneficial at a stressful and dangerous emergency scene.

Morale plays a significant role in turnover intent, particularly in highly skilled professions (Modaresnezhad et al., 2021). Additionally, turnover intent is contagious, leading to a reduction in the morale of other employees when organizational attrition increases (Bonert et al., 2022; Oh & Chhinzer, 2021). Bonert et al. found that there is a physical impact on turnover intent that leads to a contagious effect on employees. When employees exhibit decreased morale and increased turnover intent, there is a higher propensity for staffing shortages to occur in the work schedule. Bonert et al. noted that in emergency care settings, such as nursing, reduced staffing does not mean that they are able to shut the doors or limit the number of customers for the day. Rather, the nurses who are left to work become overwhelmed and unable to manage the workload, leading to an increase in turnover among employees who remain at the organization (Bonert et al., 2022). Oh and Chhizner suggested that there is a psychological factor leading to contagious turnover. When there is an increase in the number of employees seeking employment elsewhere, particularly due to low morale, the conversations between the employees will quickly lead to negativity and toxicity toward the organization. Oh and Chhizner related that regardless of the organizational impacts, whether negative or positive, on the individual employee, their

perception of the company will be built upon the opinions of their coworkers. When coworkers exhibit decreased morale and increased turnover intent, the other employees will follow this behavior and display the same attitudes (Oh & Chhinzer, 2021).

The work environment and leadership style of an employee's direct supervisor significantly impact the job satisfaction and morale of the employee (Handoko, 2023). Handoko suggested that the work environment is essential to the job satisfaction of the employee, as it can depict the investment that the company has toward its human resources. A well-thought-out and engaging work environment involves aspects, such as temperature, lighting, access to material resources, and employee comforts. Handoko also suggested that the leadership style of the direct supervisor is more important than that of senior leadership. The author posited that the direct supervisor has substantially more day-to-day engagement with the employee than anyone else in the organization and can impact their morale, whether positive or negative (Handoko, 2023). Yue et al. (2024) found that a negative or aggressive direct supervisor can rapidly decrease the morale of their subordinates, regardless of how positive the senior leadership or the work environment may be. Galardo and Trottier (2022) agreed with the notion that direct supervisors are the most impactful person regarding employee morale. The authors found that when there is support from the direct supervisor in addition to coworkers and family, there is a much higher likelihood of increased job satisfaction. Garaldo and Trottier (2022) further suggested that when a direct supervisor exemplifies a positive leadership style, they may be able to filter out negative influences from senior management.

Summary of the Literature Review

The academic literature provided a basis for the information that is significant to the study through previous research. Applying an exhaustive literary review helped to find peer-reviewed literature to define and focus the nature of the study through the academic research of others. The investigation of the effects of leadership style and specific positive leadership styles revealed the importance of the relationship between firefighters and their superior officers and the perceptions of empowerment and investment from senior leadership. Exploration of the challenges motivating firefighters, as well as the impacts of turnover on an organization and what led to them, helped to build and understand the research questions that were explored through the qualitative research process and focused the selection of interview questions from previous study results.

Applying academic literature relating to the concepts of the research study provided anticipated themes and results for the qualitative research. The concepts reviewed through literary research were the fulfillment of expectations leading to job satisfaction, job satisfaction reducing turnover, and employee attraction to organizations that fit their interest. Applying Maslow's needs theory and the social exchange theory helped the researcher understand social behavior as it impacts employees' motivation and desire to engage in a working relationship with an organization. Constructs provided the individual notions applied within the theories to explore the social behavior of the respondents and previous academic research. Related studies provided critical information that can be applied directly to the research; however, they exposed gaps in the scholarly literature that the research sought to fill. Finally, the anticipated and discovered themes revealed the path that previous research had taken and the thematic findings of the

literature, as compared to this study's findings. The themes helped to build a jumping-off point for applying literature to qualitative research.

Definition of Terms

Attrition. The separation of employment or participation in an organization, whether voluntarily or mandated (Nally et al., 2022).

Fire Officer. A supervisor-level firefighter assigned to leading a group of firefighters (Rouco et al., 2024). The fire officer can range in rank and level of command from a first-line supervisor to senior leadership positions.

Firefighter. Firefighting is a highly specialized public safety position that involves 20 weeks of training prior to beginning with a fire department and has an increased risk of injury and illness, such as cancer (Lan et al., 2022). Firefighters typically work for local governments that are taxpayer-funded.

Job Satisfaction. The fulfillment or feeling of joy and excitement that one receives by completing their jobs or tasks within an organization (Gross et al., 2021).

Morale. The feeling of enthusiasm or outlook that a person has regarding a situation or assignment, either negative or positive (Glusker et al., 2022).

Motivation. The underlying reason that a person behaves a particular way or completes tasks assigned (Hemed et al., 2022).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Every researcher brings unique experiences and knowledge to a qualitative research study that allows assumptions to be infiltrated into the findings (Diene, 2023). The exposition of the assumptions of a study allows the research to build upon truths that may not be directly defined within the study. The limitation of the study provides weaknesses that may reduce the

generalization or ability to apply the findings to other areas or groups (Kleebayoon &

Wiwanitkit, 2024). Exploring the limitations of the study and selecting viable means of reducing

or mitigating the limitations was critical to the validity of the study. Defining the boundaries of

the study is known as delimitation. It focuses on what the study is designed to be restricted to,

such as geographic location and specific respondent groups (Coker, 2022). The assumptions,

limitations, and delimitations created the study's scope and helped narrow the focus of the

research to meet the goals of exploring the problem statement.

Assumptions

The research assumed that the study's respondents would be truthful in their responses

during interviews and focus groups. Hameleers and Minihold (2022) related that untruthful news,

behavior, and responses have led to a state of confusion in society regarding what is legitimate

information and what is a lie. It is critical that the responses received in a qualitative study are

accurate and truthful. Holter (2022) suggested that it is assumed that during surveys and

qualitative interviews, respondents are truthful in their responses, as there is little, if any, reason

to question their truthfulness. Holter related that using multiple respondents is one strategy to

reduce any perception of potential honesty bias. Holter suggested that the potential for all

respondents to be dishonest in their responses and align in a specific way is far lower than that of

a single person. Additionally, when studying a single-case study with limited respondents,

reviewing the story and responses for factual data helps rule out what may be dishonest

information and could be deemed an outlier in the data (Holter, 2022). Motulsky (2021)

suggested that another strategy for increasing the validity of the responses is through a process

known as member checking. Motulsky (2021) noted that member checking is a form of

validating the respondents prior to interviewing them to ensure that they meet the desired criteria

of a respondent for the research study being conducted.

A qualification assumption is one in which the respondents are assumed to be equally

qualified for their position and for other potential positions with outside agencies. An example of

a qualification assumption that could skew data is a firefighter working for Brevard County with

a criminal record that may disqualify them from obtaining employment elsewhere. Motulsky

(2021) noted that member checking can reduce the number of non-qualified respondents in the

interview pool. However, member checking for this study was limited to the certifications

required to be a firefighter in the state of Florida, with the assumption that all employees of

Brevard County are also qualified to work for other competing organizations.

The values and ethics of the respondents were assumed to match societal norms of what

was deemed acceptable within a civilized society. Knechel and Mintchik (2022) suggested that

cultural differences of respondents can affect the values and ethics of their responses, particularly

concerning ethical behavior in the workplace. The authors related that a geographically and

culturally diverse respondent pool leads to a decrease in ethical norms. Through the utilization of

a single-case study in a specific geographic location, the societal norms of the respondents were

assumed to be aligned, reducing outliers that might exist from a more culturally diverse

respondent group (Knechel & Mintchik, 2022).

Limitations

The sample size of the study was a limitation that might affect the ability to generalize

the study to geographic locations outside of the research group. Mthuli et al. (2022) noted that

when selecting a sample size for a study, it is critical to ensure that the sample group meets all

the qualifications required to be a respondent. In the single-case study, which limits the

geographical location to one that experiences a single phenomenon, the sample group would be required to be within said location (Mthuli et al., 2022). Hennink and Kaiser (2022) related that sample saturation can occur quickly in homogenous sample groups. The authors suggested that for a qualitative research study using a homogenous group of similarly qualified individuals, the sample size should range between 9–17 respondents for interviews and 4–8 respondents for focus groups (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Utilizing these suggestions helped to reduce the potential for sample saturation while maintaining a degree of generalization of the findings.

The diversity of the respondents limits the ability to research participants from different upbringings and backgrounds (Diene, 2023). A single-case study limits the respondents to a particular organization or phenomenon, which may reduce the ability to sample a cognitively diverse respondent pool. Nowak (2022) related that cognitive diversity applies not just to education and degrees but also to the life experiences that someone may have in a particular career field. In the fire department, age is a predictable factor in life experience and what a candidate brings. Brevard County commonly hires young firefighters who go straight from high school to the fire academy. By using the practice of member checking, the limitation of lack of cognitive diversity was reduced by placing emphasis on creating an age-diverse respondent group that maintained the necessary qualifications of the research study (Motulsky, 2022).

Maccaro et al. (2024) explained that gatekeepers are responsible for protecting information that may be personal or negatively impact an organization. The role of a gatekeeper is essential to the organization but can present a limitation to qualitative research. Shim et al. (2023) suggested that public perception of an organization can be swayed based on the public's emotional response to the information that they obtain. In the case of qualitative research studies taking place within a select organization, one can infer that there is resistance to negative

information being released. To overcome the gatekeepers of an organization and allow for honest

and open feedback from all respondents, the organization must be aware of all aspects of the

study and have a vested interest in the goal of the study. Kristensen (2023) suggested that when a

company or organization is a part of the research design, there is an increased buy-in to

implement the findings of the research and a decrease in limitations from the gatekeepers of the

human and data resources.

Delimitations

Delimitations help define a research study's scope and boundaries by expressing where

the study ends and what it can cover (Diene, 2023). The single-case study design creates a

boundary between the overall size of the respondent group and the phenomenon that was

researched. Brevard County was selected as the geographical boundary, due to the phenomenon

of study occurring within the organization and the openness of the organization to allow

employees to be honest and open about their perspectives. Hubbart (2023) noted that leadership

buy-in and desire for organizational change are critical for opening the doors to the exploration

of a problem and potential solutions. Respondent selection of firefighters specifically, as well as

their supervisors, reduced potential bias from respondents in the organization who did not

directly supervise or fall into the firefighter category, such as support staff, mechanics, or office

staff. The limitation of the selection process ensured that criteria were met for being either a

certified firefighter with like qualifications or a supervisor of firefighters to address leadership

issues. While the other ranks and positions in the organization may have opinions and

perspectives on the phenomenon, it was critical that the study focused only on the selected

sample group to keep bias at a minimum. Reducing the study questions to focus primarily on

leadership challenges, motivations, and the impact of morale helped guide responses in a path that achieved the study's goal.

Significance of the Study

Through the evaluation of the significance of the study, the author exhibited and explained how the findings of the study were deemed helpful to the reader, specifically addressing the challenge that leaders face in motivating firefighters, which results in decreased morale and increased turnover. Improvement of leadership practices provides a generalized approach to why the study was significant to leadership growth, particularly in the fire department setting. Biblical integration offered a Christian worldview for the research study, as the guiding tenants of Christian leadership studies come from Scripture as the source of truth applied to all aspects of a Christian's life. The benefits and relationship to the leadership practice explained how the exploration of the single-case study aligned with the notion of strategic leadership, benefiting the leader and the organization. Through the systematic guide of the significance of the study, the importance of the study in filling gaps in the literature, and how the leader can apply the findings has been described.

Improving Leadership Practice

Leadership's ability to motivate and empower employees is crucial to the success of a work team (Atapattu & Huybers, 2021). Research of the challenges that fire department leaders face in the motivation and engagement of the firefighters that they supervise on their crews is imperative to the crew's performance. Leitão et al. (2022) explained that leadership's ability to motivate and match or achieve employees' expectations led to increased job satisfaction and morale. One can infer that a leader's ability to understand intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can help the leader select a leadership style that engages the employee and thereby, increases the job

satisfaction and morale of the firefighter. Ellahi et al. (2022) found that positive leadership is the key to the success of the organization. It is critical that the leader investigates, reviews, and aligns their leadership style with the needs of the employee and organization to achieve a positive leadership style that can be effective for the company mission and empower the employees' growth.

Xue et al. (2022) noted that job satisfaction and morale had a direct impact on the turnover intent of employees. The authors related that emotional and psychological factors had the highest predictability of an employee's desire to leave an organization (Xue et al., 2022). O'Callaghan (2024) found that there are significant impacts on an organization when attrition rates increase. O'Callaghan related that in organizations that rely upon a highly skilled workforce, turnover causes a reduction in performance and organizational growth, as it takes significant time to train a new employee to be successful and productive. A fire department leader's role in organizational success and employee satisfaction may be linked (O'Callaghan, 2024). Through the study of firefighter motivators, leadership impacts, and morale's influence on turnover, leaders can better develop techniques to match the workforce that they lead. The study's findings directly impacted the improvement of leadership practice in the fire service.

Implications for Biblical Integration

Marshall (2022) noted that throughout history, church leaders have been found to place socially acceptable and popular practices above what is specified in Scripture. Marshall (2022) related that church leaders attempted to meet what they thought were the needs of their congregation but did not research if what they were doing was approved by Scripture or what the people desired. For example, 2 Timothy 3:16 stated, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (*New International Bible [NIV]*,

1978/2011). The Bible was meant to be an instructional doctrine for life and leaders regarding how to teach and develop others. In verse 3:17, 2 Timothy continued, stating, "So that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (*NIV*, 1978/2011). As servants of God, it is the leader's obligation to equip themselves with the knowledge and wisdom of God's word to lead those in their command.

Scripture provided multiple accounts of leaders who have been successful, as well as those who have failed. One such story was that of King Rehoboam, who, when crisis struck, sought the counsel of the elders but instead rejected their knowledge and listened to that of his friends' opinions (*NIV*, 1978/2011, 1 Kings 12:6–8). The Bible told us to learn all that one can do to live and lead better. Proverbs 18:15 stated, "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out" (*NIV*, 1978/2011). Research and study should be sought to build knowledge and wisdom, particularly by those seeking to lead and counsel others.

Ijeudo and Unachukwu (2022) suggested that the description of servant leadership was portrayed no better than by Jesus Christ. The authors focused on the impact of leading with humility and a desire to serve those in your command, displaying their positive effects in public service positions. Mark 10:45 stated, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*NIV*, 1978/2011). Scripture presented and reinforced the notion that leadership seeks to serve others rather than be served. The implications of Biblical integration of leadership were summed up by the teaching and example of leadership, as depicted by Jesus Christ. Fire service leaders must strive to motivate and engage their firefighters to increase morale and job satisfaction through service to them.

Benefits and Relationship to the Leadership Practice

Strategic leadership is critical for the organization's success and involves those in leadership positions to learn, anticipate, and adapt to changes within their organization (Quansah et al., 2022). Quansah et al. (2022) noted that one significant factor of strategic leadership is understanding what changes occur inside and outside of the company to align decision-making patterns to meet those changes. Takawira et al. (2023) found that the development and sustainability of human resources was an essential aspect of strategic leadership that is often overlooked. The authors posited that when reviewing changes within a market, it is also imperative to view internal changes that are occurring, as well to meet those needs. Understanding the motivations and expectations of firefighters has provided a strategy for leadership to align the organization's internal needs through adaptation to its human resources (Takawira et al., 2023).

Al-Dhaafri and Alosani (2022) noted that strategic planning and succession planning go hand in hand for the continued performance of an organization. The authors related that alignment of all organizational stakeholders through a concise strategic plan focuses the company's efforts on the goals and vision rather than everyone going their own way. Part of the alignment with a strategic plan is the succession planning of employees to move into higher levels of leadership (Al-Dhaafri & Alosani, 2022). Osiichuk (2022) found that employee morale correlated with the desire to perform at high levels and be promoted within a company. One can infer that if the morale of the employees is low, there will not be qualified applicants interested in promotion to a leadership position within the organization, potentially leading to a complete failure of the department (Osiichuk, 2022).

It is imperative to an organization's success, growth, and performance that leadership is efficient in empowering and building their personnel (Singh & Berad, 2022). Strategic leadership may be about strategic vision and decision-making for company advancement. However, leading and developing human resources is critical to achieving the goals and vision of the organization (Singh & Berad, 2022). Malik et al. (2022) noted that the strategic leadership of human resources, specifically servant leadership, positively impacted job satisfaction. The authors suggested that the more a leader invests in their employees and seeks to understand their motivations, the higher the return on investment from a leadership perspective through reduced turnover and increased performance of work teams. One can infer that the success of a strategic leader is hinged upon the success of the employees that they oversee (Malik et al., 2022).

Summary of the Significance of the Study

The significance of the study helped to define the importance of the findings to the already-existing academic literature and how the leader will be able to utilize the information within the research. The improvement of leadership practice provided factual assertions about the importance of understanding employees' motivations to empower them to improve job satisfaction. Additionally, job satisfaction may lead to improved attrition numbers for the organization. Biblical integration of the research specified what Scripture noted regarding leadership, serving others, and the successful use of seeking wise counsel and study. The benefits and relationship to the leadership practice presented a case for the importance of investing in personnel growth for the success of the organization's strategic plan and succession plan. Each section of the significance of the study built upon one another to describe the importance of the research for strategic leadership. While the literature regarding strategic leadership in the corporate setting has been expansive, gaps still existed in academic research involving public

safety and the fire department, specifically. The exploration within this research has helped to

bridge those gaps, creating a better understanding of how strategic leadership notions can be

applied to the fire service.

Summary of Section 1 and Transition

By defining the problem of the study, whereby it explored the impacts that leadership has

on the motivation and morale of firefighters, potentially affecting turnover, which may lead to

inadequate staffing in emergency services, Section 1 provided the outline of the research. The

purpose statement and research question, as well as two research sub-questions, helped to focus

the qualitative analysis of the topic to ensure that the problem was reviewed from a social

behavior standpoint while gathering information to be coded and presented. The research

framework, definitions of terms, and the significance of the study provided the background of the

research study and illuminated the information that may be industry specific. Finally, the review

of academic literature established the basis of preconceived information that existed in academia,

as it related to the individual portions of the study. Each portion of Section 1 helped to build a

greater understanding of how previous academic research has explored and defined individual

notions of the problem in order to create a qualitative, single-case study that explored a singular

phenomenon that was unique to previous literature. Section 1 created a foundation upon which to

build using the selected constructivist paradigm. Through a thorough understanding of the

specific problem and how the phenomenon has occurred, as characterized by the academic

literature review, the research study was able to then build upon those ideas. The qualitative

study was designed to explore and add knowledge to what already existed within previous

academic research; therefore, understanding and presenting the previous research was necessary

not only to focus the research but also to identify and expose gaps in the current literature.

Section 1 has met these qualifications of the foundation of the research project and allowed the researcher to conduct a thorough exploration of the problem to fill the gaps in the literature while building an understanding of the impacts on morale that leadership has in order to improve leadership practice.

      Section 2 will define the specific research project and present the why behind the selections of each portion of the project. Through the explanation of the role of the researcher and the research methodology specific to the project, the researcher will present how the research was conducted. Discussion of the participants and data collection will provide a breakdown of who participated as a respondent, as well as how the data was obtained in order to explore the specific problem of the study. Data analysis of the research applied the theories and constructs of the study from Section 1 to the data that was obtained to understand the findings of qualitative research. Validity and reliability will be discussed to remove as much bias as possible and ensure that the research data was dependable, credible, and transferable. Finally, Section 2 will present ethical assurances to confirm that the research was conducted using ethical and moral means, as required when human participants are involved. Section 2 will provide the guidelines for the qualitative research conducted.

Section 2: The Project

The current research aimed to build a better understanding of motivational challenges and the impact of leadership on firefighters. The researcher sought to fill the research gaps that existed in current literary studies through the selection of a single-case study. The research of this flexible-design, single-case study utilized interviews and focus groups to explore individual and group thinking regarding the phenomenon. The participants were employees who met the standard of a professional firefighter for Brevard County Fire Rescue. The selection of a single organization isolated the single-case study phenomenon being researched. Stratified sampling techniques were utilized to ensure that diversity among the participants was achieved regarding gender and age. In an effort to ensure the reduction of bias and increase the comfort of participants, all interviews and focus groups were conducted off-site, off-duty, and in private.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this flexible-design, single-case study was to explore the influence of positive leadership on firefighters' morale through intrinsic and extrinsic means, leading to decreased organizational turnover. By understanding the challenges that senior fire department leadership faces in motivating firefighters, the researcher explored the influence of leadership on morale and how to improve intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Pattnaik and Jena (2021) related that the engagement and motivation of employees can be improved through leadership actions.

A constructivist approach was utilized for this research study, in which social interaction was a factor in constructing the problem. Craig (2022) noted that constructivist paradigms attempt to research the person's perception of the phenomenon to understand the existing problem. Exploring fire service leaders' challenges and perceptions and firefighter's views on leadership provided a well-rounded qualitative analysis of the problem. A single-case study

design allowed the researcher to investigate a specific phenomenon occurring within an isolated

location with the understanding that the case study results will seek to understand that singular

phenomenon (Pierre, 2024). The research project sought to fill the current gaps in the literature

on how positive leadership specifically impacts Brevard County firefighters.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was tasked with conducting literary research of past studies that were

related to the single-case study being researched. Elmersjö and Rosqvist (2022) related that a

researcher who has a place attachment to the community or the phenomenon being researched

could be a positive attribute, as there is direct investment in the research taking place. However,

the authors noted that the potential for bias would exist, due to the possibility of preconceived

opinions on the outcome of the research (Elmersjö & Rosqvist, 2022). Regarding this research

study, while each employee had knowledge of this researcher, care was taken to ensure that no

personal relationship existed between the participant and the researcher.

Lustick et al. (2024) suggested that the role of a researcher in qualitative studies is to

observe responses made by participants that are explored through investigative interviewing. The

authors noted that emotions play a significant role in the research, as well as the analysis and

coding. The ability of a researcher to remain indifferent is essential to ensuring the validity of the

findings (Lustick et al., 2024). The researcher, in this case study, sought to limit any potential

emotional biases through the identification of potential emotional factors. Collins and Stockton

(2022) suggested that the researcher plays a role while conducting interviews. The authors noted

that a researcher is there to facilitate the interview process through the exploration of the

participants' responses. However, to remain indifferent to the results or what is revealed during

the interview, the researcher must play a role similar to an actor to limit the guiding or

progression of responses in favor of research bias (Collins & Stockton, 2022).

Roald et al. (2024) suggested that focus groups are beneficial in qualitative research, as a

means of obtaining a group consensus that builds off of each participant's response. The authors

related that body language and behavior are observable indicators of a participant's apprehension

or agreement with a topic or response. Roald et al. (2024) noted that it is important that there are

set rules and expectations that are known by all participants prior to the beginning of the focus

group. The researcher of this single-case study had set ground rules, including the privacy of

responses that took place during the focus group, as well as the desire for a holding environment-

type atmosphere. Strunk and Strich (2023) described a holding environment as one in which

cognitive diversity, rank, experience, and tenure do not have an impact on discussions. The

authors suggested that using a holding environment allows all participants to have a voice and

discuss their ideas (Strunk & Strich, 2023). The researcher of this single-case study used the

holding environment to ensure that all participants could freely voice their opinions on the

subject to ensure unbiased discussion and exploration of the topic.

Bracketing

Woodberry et al. (2024) suggested that bracketing or reflexive bracketing, in particular,

aids the researcher in removing potential bias from not only the interviewing process but also the

analysis stage of qualitative research. The authors related that through a process of self-reflection

and documentation of potential biases that each researcher may have regarding the phenomenon

or the potential responses, they created known areas to intentionally be careful of during the

study (Woodberry et al., 2024). This researcher used bracketing to identify and isolate areas of

the interview and analysis that may already have preconceived notions of what probable

responses may be, based on personal experiences or views of the phenomenon. By identifying

these potential areas of bias, the interviews progressed organically without influence or steering

responses in any direction. Additionally, the analysis of data remained unbiased, increasing the

validity of the findings and their usefulness in improving the leader's ability to motivate

firefighters in their command.

Summary of Role of the Researcher

Defining the role of the researcher was essential to understanding how the researcher

engaged with participants. The researcher of this single-case study reduced potential bias from

participant knowledge of the researcher through the elimination of any potential participant that

had a personal relationship with the researcher. Additionally, through self-reflection and the

direct knowledge of emotions that may have been present within the interview or analysis of

participant responses, the researcher remained indifferent to ensure validity. Finally, through the

clear definition of expectations of focus group participants and the creation of a holding

environment, the researcher established a positive and inclusive environment for the participants

to interact within. Utilizing methods to reduce bias while facilitating the interviews and research,

the researcher was able to ensure a valid and accurate investigation of the single-case study.

Research Methodology

The selection of a proper methodology that matches the goals of the research was

essential to building and executing a successful study (Phillips et al., 2024). Russ et al. (2024)

suggested that research that focuses on people and desires to integrate with people rather than

about people is the desired approach for qualitative or flexible research designs. Flexibl- design

research studies are particularly useful in the exploration of social behaviors, such as leadership

and its effects (Anteneh & Gebremeskel, 2024). Thus, this researcher selected a flexible or

qualitative design for this single-case study, due to the exploration of social behaviors and their impacts on motivation. The methodological triangulation methods of the study, through participant selection and interview strategies, helped to increase the validity and confidence of the research findings.

Appropriateness of Flexible Design and a Single-Case Study

Chen et al. (2023) suggested that a study of a behavioral phenomenon that seeks to explore the opinions or thoughts behind the behavior best aligns with a flexible or qualitative design study. The authors related that while some behavior is observable, the intent or psychological impact of the behavior requires a subjective response from the participant through research means, such as interviews or focus groups. The current researcher selected a flexible or qualitative study that aligned with the goal of improving leaders' ability to motivate firefighters that they oversaw in the fire department, which may lead to improved morale and decreased turnover intent. Chen et al. (2023) noted that the findings of the flexible-design study must be interpreted by the researcher and presented in a manner that aligns with the goals of the study. This researcher conducted and interpreted the data obtained through individual interviews and focus groups.

The single-case study methodology of research allows for an in-depth review of a specific phenomenon occurring in a certain location that affects an isolated group of people (Ghetti et al., 2024). The single-case study explored in this research was the challenges that leaders face in motivating firefighters. Additionally, the impact of the leadership styles of direct supervisors on the morale of the firefighters and how that morale translates to turnover intent was discussed. In this study, the researcher used interviews and focus groups to obtain qualitative data from participants, who were selected through a stratified sampling of firefighters employed

by Brevard County Fire Rescue. Additionally, participants were selected using the same stratified sampling of company officers or direct supervisors of firefighters to ensure that leadership perspectives were included in the findings to build out a full 360-degree view of the phenomenon.

Appropriateness of Chosen Methods for Methodological Triangulation

Triangulation has been critical to increase the trustworthiness and validity of qualitative research studies (Mosch et al., 2024). To preserve the qualitative value of open-ended interview questions while increasing validity, this researcher implemented a methodological triangulation strategy to include data triangulation. The interviews consisted of one-on-one individual interviews with firefighters, as well as focus groups of multiple firefighters at once. The strategy sought to encourage individual thought and to expose the possibility of altered responses from participants within group settings when peer pressure and group thinking may occur. Additionally, data triangulation through the purposeful selection of sample groups added a well-rounded approach to the exploration of the phenomenon. In addition to firefighters taking part in the interview and focus group process, first-line leaders were also selected as respondents. The selection of a sample of both parties involved in the phenomenon created a holistic view of the challenges of motivation, leadership impacts, and effects of morale on turnover intent. Stoll (2010) noted that data triangulation is essential to view a social phenomenon from multiple perceptions to gain an understanding of what and why it has happened.

Summary of Research Methodology

Selection of the methodology of research for a particular study is critical for the success of the research and the validity of the findings. The design of the study should match the phenomenon that is to be researched, such as a qualitative study for a situation involving social

behaviors, like leadership (Anteneh & Gebremeskel, 2024). The specific approach should also

align with the goals of the research, which in the case of this study, was a single-case study

approach (Ghetti et al., 2024). Triangulation is critical for increasing the validity of the findings

and providing a greater view of the phenomenon being explored (Stoll, 2010). Through the

identification and selection of the proper research methodology, the researcher established

guidelines in the facilitation and analysis of the data pertaining to challenges motivating

firefighters, the impact of leadership style on firefighter morale, and the effects of morale on the

turnover intent of the firefighter.

Participants

In this study, the participants were employees of Brevard County Fire Rescue, who fell

into two distinct categories: firefighters and leadership. Firefighters were those that currently

held the state of Florida minimum standards certification, as well as Florida emergency medical

technician (EMT) basic certification. The qualifications noted were the minimum accepted to

work as a firefighter in the state of Florida and had been adopted across all local fire

departments, ensuring that they were not only eligible to work for Brevard County but also able

to seek employment elsewhere if they so chose. Leadership consisted of direct supervisors of the

firefighters that held the rank of lieutenant, also employed by Brevard County Fire Rescue at the

time of the study. The qualifications included those of a firefighter with the addition of state of

Florida Fire Officer I certification and Florida paramedic certification. These were the minimum

qualifications for the position of lieutenant and ensured equal training and engagement with the

firefighters that each officer oversees. The department consisted of the following ranks of field

personnel: firefighter, lieutenant, and district chief. The district chief was a middle management

position that does not oversee any firefighters directly; therefore, it was excluded from the

population group for this study. A total of 21 firefighters and 17 lieutenants were chosen as participants in both interviews and focus groups to ensure a wide range of exposure across the organization while maintaining the isolation of a single-case study (see Appendices A–C for the respondent information sheet, permission request letter, and permission response letter).

Population

The participants selected represented various cognitive, cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Qi et al. (2022) suggested that tapping into multiple cultures and a wide range of cognitive diversity can help an organization increase its innovation and creative output. This study ensured that a wide representation of diversity existed among the participants while remaining a single-case study that focused on a singular geographic location and organization. Ridho et al. (2024) suggested that a population is an entire group impacted by a single-case study and that sampling is the selection of participants from the group. It is essential to select a population that meets the criteria selected by the researcher to provide a diverse group that has been impacted by the phenomenon being studied. Additionally, the sample group should portray a cognitively and culturally diverse spread of participants matching the labor force, which was achieved through a stratified sampling strategy (Ridho et al., 2024).

Discussion of Population

The population of participants that are impacted by the phenomenon being studied all worked for Brevard County Fire Rescue. The geographic location was on the east coast of Central Florida. Each participant either met the position and qualifications of a firefighter or of a lieutenant to ensure that the population portrayed both follower and leader positions. The population of firefighters was approximately 350 within the organization, while the population of lieutenants was 115. The organization was selected not only because of the phenomenon

occurring but also because of the large population pool from which to select respondents, ensuring a diverse sample. Maksutova et al. (2023) suggested using confidentiality when selecting respondents from a population that works together and may influence each other. In a single-case study, the population will inevitably know and work with each other, requiring selection and the research itself to be conducted quickly to reduce potential influence from other respondents.

The primary population was the leadership group or lieutenants. They were interviewed and placed into small focus groups of three to five participants to ensure a holistic view of the challenges that leaders faced motivating firefighters. The firefighter group was also interviewed and broken into small focus groups of three to five participants as a secondary population to further explore the impacts of leadership style on morale, as well as the effects of morale on turnover intent of the entry-level firefighter position in order to achieve methodological triangulation. Malarski and Berte (2023) related that a single-case study should research all populations that are involved in the phenomenon to ensure a multi-faceted view of the behavior and impact occurring to build a better understanding of the findings.

Summary of Population

Utilizing a single organization as the population increased the efficiency of the study, as it pertained to individuals directly impacted by the phenomenon or single case being studied. Brevard County Fire Rescue supervisors were the primary population of respondents selected to gather information on challenges being faced in motivating firefighters. The supervisors' direct reports, firefighters, were selected as the secondary population for methodological triangulation purposes to provide their input on the impacts of leadership styles on morale and turnover intent.

The use of only the impacted population led to findings that directly impacted the ability of the organization to improve firefighter motivation.

Data Collection

Defining the procedures for collecting data is critical for the foundation of qualitative research. Klem et al. (2022) suggested that within a qualitative research design, data collection is typically through interviews and focus groups as the collection instruments. The authors noted that while there is a structure to the discussion, having a conversation-like atmosphere can yield the greatest exploratory results for the topic being researched. The organization of the data follows the collection and prepares the information for analysis by the researcher (Klem et al., 2022). de Loyola González-Salgado et al. (2024) related that member checking and follow-up interviews provide validity to the research findings, as they present the data collected back to the respondents to ensure that what the researcher heard was indeed what the participant was attempting to say.

Data Collection Plan

This qualitative-design, single-case study utilized both interviews and focus groups to obtain the data and was analyzed to support the goal of improving the motivation of firefighters through their leadership. Interviews were the primary data collection source and involved both firefighters and their leadership to provide a holistic view of the problem being studied with a focus on leadership styles, as well as the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of the firefighters. The secondary data collection source was through the use of focus groups of firefighters and their leadership segregated by rank. The process of creating a focused discussion in a group setting provided the ability to observe the influence that other peers have on the responses of the participants.

Instruments

Interview Guides. Cheron et al. (2022) suggested that within a qualitative-design study utilizing interviews, the formation of the interview guide will allow some researcher bias in the study. The authors noted that just the basis of creating an interview guide assumes that some of the direction that the conversation will take aligns with the hypothesis or preconceived ideas of how the outcome will present itself by the researcher. Additionally, the interview guide must present as objective or consistent from one participant to the next while allowing subjective responses from the respondent, which may take the conversation in different directions based on the respondents' desire (Cheron et al., 2022). This researcher ensured that each question remained the same for the initiation of the response from the participant while allowing open-ended responses to explore the phenomenon as the respondents viewed it. There were two interview guides utilized to ensure that all questions were presented to the respondents if they so chose to answer them. One interview guide was specific to the firefighter respondents and focused on their personal motivations, impacts of leadership styles and characteristics, morale, and turnover intent (see Appendix D). The second interview guide was specific to the leadership, or lieutenant, of the firefighters and focused on their experiences of how firefighters responded to leadership styles, the challenges motivating firefighters, what they think firefighters are motivated by, impacts on morale, and turnover intent (see Appendix E).

The firefighter interview guide began with a group of four questions that were general to their career and not necessarily intended to be specific to Brevard County Fire Rescue. The general career questions sought to build an understanding of what led the firefighter to this career field, what motivates the firefighter to continue working in the fire industry, and if they were satisfied with the job of being a firefighter. The second group of questions aimed to explore the

specific research question of how the problem of motivating firefighters by their leadership can be improved. Questions 6–11 explored RQa of how leadership style influences firefighter morale and motivation through the exploration of perceived positive and negative leadership attributes and the impact that they have on the motivation of the firefighter. Questions 12 and 13 sought to answer RQb, to what extent firefighter morale impacts turnover intent, by focusing on the turnover intent of the individual firefighter and what factors led to the decision to either stay or leave Brevard County Fire Rescue. Finally, Question 14 allowed the respondents to discuss anything that they felt had an impact on morale or motivation that was not specifically asked.

The supervisor or lieutenant interview guide began with the same baseline questions, as presented to the firefighter group to establish intentions of working in the fire industry and whether they were satisfied with their career choice, with the addition of one question defining the formal leadership training that they may or may not have received. The initial five questions were not specific to Brevard County Fire Rescue. The second set of questions sought to answer the primary research question of how to improve the problem of motivating firefighters through their leadership. Questions 6–10 focused on RQa through the exploration of the supervisor's self-perceived leadership style and their experiences as to the impacts that it has had on the motivation of the firefighters that they have commanded. Additionally, the questions sought to explore the challenges that the leaders had faced in motivating firefighters and the supervisors' perception of what internal and external motivators firefighters desire to satisfy. Questions 11 and 12 continued to explore RQa through their view of the impacts of leadership on morale. Question 13 sought to explore RQb by seeking input on their thoughts on the impacts of morale on the turnover intent of firefighters in their command. Finally, Question 14 allowed the supervisor respondents to add anything to the interview that they felt might be important

regarding morale and motivation that was not asked or discussed through the interview questions.

Focus Groups. Focus groups allow for the exploration of a behavior or phenomenon among multiple people through a semi-structured approach, leading to interpersonal conversation (Miller et al., 2023). This research study utilized focus groups of three to five people per population group: three groups for firefighters, and three groups for supervisors. Both groups utilized the same focus group guide questions (see Appendix F) to establish interpersonal conversation among the group, leading to a discussion that sought to answer the primary research question of how leadership can improve the motivation of firefighters at Brevard County Fire Rescue. Questions 1–3 aimed to explore the perceptions of positive and negative leadership qualities and their impacts on the station and crew. Questions 4 and 5 sought to establish the perceived motivators of firefighters and explore how leadership can improve their ability to satisfy these motivations. Questions 6 and 7 discussed the morale, as impacted by leadership and the possible effect on the turnover intent of the firefighters. Finally, Question 8 allowed the groups to have an open-ended discussion of the factors that may not have been covered and that related to morale, motivation, and turnover. The goal of using a focus group in addition to individual interviews was to allow peer-to-peer conversation to develop and potentially introduce topics outside of the semi-structured guide questions, as well as peer collaboration of possible solutions.

Data Organization

Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, or CAQDAS for short, is software that aids the researcher in organizing the data obtained through qualitative means and allows for customized coding of the data (Vignato et al., 2022). Vignato et al. (2022) suggested that using

CAQDAS for the purpose of organizing and coding data for analysis allows for the removal of

researcher bias while efficiently keeping all data in one location. The data was organized into

audio files, transcriptions of the audio files, and computer-aided coding and analysis of the

transcripts. This researcher selected NVivo as the CAQDAS, as well as transcription services for

audio files. Using NVivo, this researcher was able to compile the data, add notes, and code

specific portions of the data for analytical findings to support the goal of improving leadership

ability to motivate firefighters.

Member Checking

Member checking is the process of seeking feedback from the participant on the analyzed

findings to ensure that what is recorded is what the participant intended by their responses

(Motulsky, 2021). Motulsky related that member checking has become a gold standard among

qualitative interviews to increase the validity of the findings and help to remove researcher bias

in the analyzing phase of the data. de Loyola González-Salgado et al. (2024) suggested that there

are multiple strategies for implementing member checking, including using other members of the

population group who were not interviewed to validate the findings. Another strategy that de

Loyola Gonzalez-Salgado et al. (2024) noted was using the same respondents to review the

findings to ensure that what the respondent intended was exemplified in the findings. The

research conducted within this study utilized member checking as a strategy to increase the

validity of the data obtained by seeking input from the respondents selected to validate that their

responses were accurately noted within the findings. Each respondent had the opportunity to

review the individual findings and coding related to the responses that the participant gave to

ensure that the intent of the responses was understood.

Follow-Up Interviews

DellaCrosse et al. (2022) suggested that follow-up interviews allow the researcher to further explore trends that were noted during the original interviews obtained. DellaCrosse et al. (2022) noted the follow-up interview can create a greater understanding of the single-case study phenomenon, particularly when the goal of the study is to improve an outcome or solve a problem. This research study utilized the follow-up interview process to discuss additional topics at the desire of the participants after member checking had occurred. This researcher utilized a strategy of presenting the findings through member checking and presenting potential trends in the data, followed by a voluntary opportunity for respondents to provide a non-structured, open-ended approach to adding thoughts and opinions as related to the findings. The goal of the follow-up interview process was to clarify responses and further explore the information provided by the initial interviews and focus groups if they were deemed different by the respondent.

Summary of Data Collection

Defining and utilizing a strategy for data collection helped the researcher stay on track while conducting the study. The data collection plan and corresponding interview and focus group guides ensured that the semi-structured approach of questioning remained consistent while allowing for the open-ended questions to take the conversation in any direction that the respondent wished it to go. Data organization is arguably one of the most-vital portions of the data collection phase of the study to keep all data obtained in one easy-to-access location, which allows for easy analysis of the information and efficient presentation of the raw and interpreted data. Member checking and follow-up interviews ensured that the data obtained aligned with the intent of the participant. It is important to understand that the respondent does not necessarily

understand the nuances of academic studies and may respond with an answer that does not necessarily reflect the participant's meaning. Through adherence to the data collection plan and process, the researcher obtained quality and sufficient data to analyze and interpret with the goal of exploring the phenomenon being studied.

Data Analysis

Following the gathering of raw data through individual interviews and focus groups, the researcher analyzed the data through the coding process to develop emergent and coding themes, as well as provide an interpretation of the data obtained. Rosen et al. (2023) posited that thematic analysis allows for a flexible approach to the interpretation of qualitative data to explore what themes are developed from the information rather than applying specific preconceived notions to the data to justify a theme. Methodological triangulation of the data helped to increase the validity of the information obtained and analyzed (Liu et al., 2021). The methodological triangulation strategy employed involved using individual interviews, as well as focus groups, to explore the same phenomenon. Additionally, data triangulation accompanied the triangulation strategy by interviewing leadership, as well as the followers, of the single-case study analyzed.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative research involves the study of real-world situations, events, and behaviors that seek to explore perceptions, opinions, and beliefs (Saunders et al., 2023). Because the exploration of thoughts requires interviews and firsthand telling of information rather than observable data, analysis of qualitative research requires interpretation from the researcher. Saunders et al. suggested that analysis for the intent of thematic analysis involves three steps: data interpretation, coding, and thematic recognition. The authors noted that utilizing this process

as a circular approach to viewing and reviewing the data can expose additional findings that may not be readily apparent from the first interpretation of the qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2023).

The research conducted was interpreted using common responses grouped into leadership characteristics, as provided by the responses of the participants. The data obtained was coded based on similar findings through subjective interpretation of the data and then analyzed for coding themes. The information was then reanalyzed using the exposed coding themes to dissect and explore if additional themes were revealed through the review of data using the adopted coding. Hamilton et al. (2022) related that feedback on thematic analysis and coding procedures is important to ensure that member checking is adhered to for the purpose of increasing the validity of the data. Additionally, the follow-up interview was conducted following the viewing and reviewing of the data through the three-step process of interpretation, coding, and theme recognition, as suggested by Saunders et al. (2023).

Interpretation of the thematic coding was utilized to answer the question of how leadership can improve the problem of motivating firefighters. Additionally, thematic coding was used to explore the impact of leadership style on firefighter morale and the corresponding influence that morale has on the turnover intent of firefighters. Grigoropoulou and Small (2022) suggested that analysis of the data through thematic coding only presents common trends and themes; however, it does not reflect the findings of the study. The authors related that the interpretation phase is the application of the raw data themes to the real-life problem being explored and must take place to present findings and suggestions for improvement (Grigoropoulou & Small, 2022).

Analysis for Triangulation

The two methods for triangulation that were utilized within this qualitative-design, single-case study were methodological and data triangulation. Schlunegger et al. (2024) suggested that the use of methodological triangulation is common among qualitative or flexible design studies, due to the ability to increase validity with minimal respondents needed that are involved in the phenomenon being studied. The authors noted that methodological triangulation involves using different methods of obtaining data, which may be a mix of qualitative and quantitative data, to explore the same phenomenon. Schlunegger et al. (2024) noted that data triangulation involves using the same method; however, data can be obtained from different sources, such as conflict groups of people within an event or situation being studied.

Valencia (2022) suggested that methodological triangulation can be utilized as a primary triangulation strategy and be accompanied by other types of triangulation methods to increase the validity of the findings. The author related that this should be adopted into the research and data collection plan to ensure that each method of triangulation is met adequately. This research study utilized methodological triangulation through the strategy of obtaining qualitative data through semi-structured individual interviews, as well as focus groups. Both methods obtained data from the same population and sample group through similar means, allowing for free thought and natural conversation to occur from guided questions in both collections means (Valencia, 2022).

Data triangulation involves the procurement of data from different sources related to the same single-case study (Collins & O'Riordan, 2022). Data triangulation was used to supplement the triangulation strategy used in this research through the obtaining of data from not only leadership positions related to the phenomenon but also the employees or firefighters. The data triangulation strategy ensured that both sides of the event of leadership's ability to motivate

firefighters were represented to further understand each group of the population's perceptions regarding the research question and sub-questions. Agreement between the two populations increased the validity of the findings, while disagreement created an opportunity for additional research through the follow-up interview process.

Summary of Data Analysis

Analysis of the data obtained was vital for the interpretation and exploration of the phenomenon that was researched. A thorough coding and analysis of the data through a three-step approach of interpretation, coding, and thematic analysis clearly defined what themes were discovered and what, if any, needed to be further investigated through follow-up interviews. A strategic triangulation method using methodological and data triangulation increased the validity of the information and helped present a holistic approach to data gathering that led to improved ability to create suggestions for the research question and sub-questions. Each aspect of analysis and triangulation was critical to the outcome of the qualitative design of a single-case research study.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative design studies require a high level of reliability and validity, due to the subjective nature of coding and analysis (Declercq & van Poppel, 2023). The authors noted that one strategy that has been consistent with all research to increase the reliability and validity of the findings is simply transparency of the raw data. Incorporating a strategy of presenting the raw data along with the interpretations, coding, and analysis provides a trail of how the researcher ended up with the results presented (Declercq & van Poppel, 2023). Removing bias is another critical aspect of increasing the validity of findings (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021). Dörfler and Stierand (2021) related that bracketing is one technique that can be successfully utilized to

reduce the perception of bias in the findings and analysis of qualitative research. Exploration of reliability, validity, and bracketing ensured that proper measures were taken to reduce biases in the data that was obtained and analyzed.

Reliability

Researchers have agreed that a strategy for increasing the reliability of research findings requires transparency of the coding processes, as well as a systematic and documented approach to sample selection of respondents (Coleman, 2021; Declercq & van Poppel, 2023). Coleman suggested that sample selection is the initial process of increasing reliability to ensure that the correct participants are selected to research the single-case study. The author related that if a population and sample group are not intently chosen, the entire study may be invalidated, due to a lack of reliable sources (Coleman, 2021).

Kwarto et al. (2023) suggested that the reliability of the study must be focused on the accuracy and trustworthiness of the responses given by the participants of the study. The authors related that researchers should utilize a well-thought-out interview guide to elicit responses that accurately and completely tell the story of what is being researched. Keeping the focus of the respondent on the interview questions that relate to and answer the primary research question and sub-questions was vital for the reliability of the data (Kwarto et al., 2023). Deluca (2023) related that there is a fine line between sticking to the script and allowing for open-ended questioning to allow a participant to explore life experiences, attitudes, and opinions on the phenomenon being researched. The expansion of questions for follow-up interviews can be impacted in part by the open-ended responses from participants, particularly if multiple participants respond in similar ways. Utilization of the semi-structured interview approach improved reliability in the manner of

answering research questions while remaining open to all aspects of the perception of the phenomenon (Deluca, 2023).

The review of previous literature related to the research study was imperative to the reliability of the findings (Diene, 2023). The author suggested that all avenues of research must be aligned with the research questions, as well as trends and themes that are found through the research process. The literature review complements the findings of the qualitative research, including the interviews and focus groups. However, the findings in previous research may not agree with the findings of qualitative research, as a single-case study is designed to explore a specific phenomenon occurring in an isolated location or organization. Diene (2023) related that a systematic approach to researching academic literature would help a reliable study by exploring all avenues of data with a focus on the single-case being studied.

Validity

Diene (2023) noted that validity in qualitative research assumes a structured approach to the research process that may not be feasible, due to the semi-structured nature of interviews and open-ended questioning. One interview may go in a different direction than the next, exploring areas of the phenomenon that not all participants had a chance to provide opinions on. Holter (2022) suggested that utilizing a strategy of having enough participants to achieve data saturation helps to increase the credibility of the interview process by ensuring that enough candidates provide information about the phenomenon to create data trends. Holter noted that one way of increasing the validity of the data obtained through qualitative means is by questioning the truthfulness and confirmability of some of the participants' responses through ethical means to ensure that the information being obtained is real. The author related that even if the story is not

completely verified as accurate, the use of data saturation will help to set inaccurate findings as an outlier for interpretation and analysis (Holter, 2022).

The pre-understanding or preconceived biases of a researcher are another potential threat to the validity of the findings of qualitative research (Palmer et al., 2022). The authors related that when a researcher has intimate knowledge of a problem or phenomenon that is being researched, there may be preconceived ideas of why the problem is occurring or personal opinions of how to fix the problem. The bias may lead to the researcher focusing on questioning and analysis in a manner that simply agrees with the researcher's opinions, thereby invalidating the researcher's analysis and findings. Palmer et al. suggested that through the process of self-reflection by the researcher, the researcher should isolate any opinions of the problem or solution and stick to the guide created for interviews, allowing the participant to take it in any direction that they deem fit. Additionally, while interpreting and analyzing data, the researcher should bring to light possible biases so that they are actively removed from the analysis portion of the research project, similar to the process of bracketing to ensure the transferability of the analysis findings (Palmer et al., 2022).

Bracketing

Dörfler and Stierand (2021) suggested that bracketing is not the removal of bias but rather a presentation of potential biases that may exist from the specific researcher. The authors related that bringing these potential biases to the forefront of the analysis and interpretation of data will help to alleviate the perception of hidden biases that may sway the subjective interpretation of data. Full transparency will allow the reader of the study to understand the paradigm in which the researcher viewed the data by building an increase in perceived transparency and, therefore, increased validity of the findings (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021).

Aguas (2022) suggested that bracketing should occur in two distinct areas of the research study: the interview phase and the analysis phase. Aguas related that utilizing bracketing techniques in the interview phase is imperative, allowing a natural flow of the interview to explore participants' opinions, experiences, and attitudes regarding the research questions. The analysis phase of the study requires the researcher to openly note any ideas or opinions on the subject or findings that may sway interpretation in one direction or another. Aguas (2022) suggested that the researcher list any opinions that they may have on the topic prior to beginning the interview or analysis to reflect upon and intentionally avoid during those phases of the research study.

Summary of Reliability and Validity

Ensuring that there are strategic and intended methods of conducting qualitative research, interpreting the data, and analyzing the findings increased the reliability and validity of the research project. Processes, such as bracketing, were used to expose and remove potential researcher bias in the interview and analysis phases of the single-case study. Additionally, understanding that the selection of both respondents and literature for review must be done through intentional means ensured the trustworthiness of the raw data. Credibility and confirmability highlighted the strategy for increasing validity throughout the research project. Each aspect of the reliability and validation strategy helped to ensure that suggestions for improving the leadership capabilities of Brevard County Fire Rescue were logical and successful.

Ethical Assurances

Qualitative research requires studying the thoughts and behaviors of human subjects and must adhere to strict ethical practices for the protection of human subjects while maintaining

trustworthiness to ensure the reliability of the data (Ratti et al., 2024). Ratti et al. (2024) noted

that through the processes of informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, each human

subject is treated ethically and with the highest levels of respect. Moe et al. (2025) suggested that

ethical research relies upon standards and norms that are accepted in academia, as well as by the

institution having oversight regarding the research study. Moe et al. related that education and

training on the topic of ethics should precede the research study process to ensure that the

researcher has an understanding of how to apply ethical and moral standards to the process of

obtaining qualitative data. Application of the individual processes will look different based on

each unique qualitative research study; however, the overall academically accepted ethical

practices were adhered to (Moe et al., 2025).

Ethical Assurances

Informed consent is the process of ensuring that the human participant in the study is

aware of what type of study is occurring, how it will be researched, and what will be done with

the information collected (R & Dongre, 2023). R and Dongre noted that, depending on the

parameters of the study, it can be difficult to fully inform the participant of the study procedures.

Basukala et al. (2023) suggested that many participants are not truly informed, even when ethical

standards of informed consent are practiced. The authors related that there are aspects of studies

and procedures that the participants may not understand, due to the complexity of the

information that is presented to them (Basukala et al., 2023). R and Dongre (2023) suggested that

the researcher attempt to inform the participants using descriptions and language that they can

understand to ensure that the highest level of informed consent can be achieved. In the case of

this qualitative-design, single-case study, the participants received full transparency of what the

research topic was, the goals of the interview, and specifically, how the information provided was to be utilized.

Confidentiality of the information obtained was critical to the reliability and trustworthiness of the responses (Leon et al. 2021). Leon et al. (2021) noted that when the participants of a study understand that there is a level of confidentiality regarding the information that they provide and the findings of the study to ensure that they are not linked to responses, there is a higher potential of comfort to answer sensitive questions. While this research study regarding opinions and experiences of motivation of firefighters and leadership styles was not necessarily personal or sensitive, the fact remained that the research was related to the subjects' job, which may have created apprehension about providing honest feedback. Assurances of confidentiality regarding the information helped to alleviate potential apprehensions of respondents.

Anonymity, like confidentiality, allowed the participant to speak freely with responses without fear of retaliation or exposure (Itzik & Walsh, 2023). Itzik and Walsh suggested that providing participants with pseudonyms can help to identify a candidate while maintaining the person's anonymity for protection. The current researcher utilized a process of removing names from the participants and replacing them with candidate numbers. It was important to note that in a single-case study of an isolated organization, focus groups group candidates together who do, in fact, know each other. The focus group responses may differ from individual responses, due to a lack of anonymity among the group and are utilized for methodological triangulation of the information, as a secondary means of data retrieval. However, at the presentation of the findings, all respondents were referred to strictly by their assigned number only. Itzik and Walsh (2023) suggested that it is important to record unidentifiable factors, such as race, gender, and highest

formal education, as related to the phenomenon being researched. For this purpose, this researcher utilized a participant questionnaire to record unidentifiable factors and each respondent's assigned candidate number (see Appendix D).

Summary of Ethical Assurances

Ethical assurances were imperative for the protection and truthfulness of participants and their responses (Leon et al., 2021). Through the practice of informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, this researcher adhered to established ethical standards that have been applied throughout academic research studies. Each aspect of the ethical assurance procedures ensured that the participants understood their role, as well as the application of the data obtained. Additionally, confidentiality and anonymity helped to build confidence among the participants to respond truthfully without fear of retaliation or exposure of identifiable characteristics that may link them to their responses. While the interview and focus group questions did not lead into any sensitive areas of questioning, such as legal or medical, the responses still maintained the highest levels of confidentiality, as the research was related to the participants' job satisfaction and opinions of their direct supervisors and direct reports.

Summary of Section 2 and Transition

Section 2 provided the outline of the project that was researched to provide insights and answers to the primary question of how the problem of motivating firefighters through their leadership can be improved. Additionally, the project explored and sought answers to the following sub-questions: How does leadership style influence firefighter morale and motivation, and to what extent does the morale of a firefighter impact the turnover of the organization? The role of the researcher defined what specific role was played, as well as the biases of the researcher, in an effort to expose and reduce those biases for greater validity of the study. The

research methodology provided the rationale of the selected qualitative methodology, utilizing a single-case study, as well as methodological triangulation to ensure the accuracy of the data obtained. Participants and population clearly established who were selected as the respondents in the study to provide the highest level of information from those closest to the phenomenon being researched. The data collection plan included both interviews and focus groups as the instrumentation utilized to obtain the data for the study. The data collection portion of Section 2 also defined the organization of the data obtained, as well as member checking and follow-up interviews to ensure that the information obtained matched the respondents' intent, removing the possibility of misunderstanding of the data. The next step of the research project was data analysis, in which thematic analysis was utilized to build an understanding of the data and generate themes that have been developed. Data analysis further required analysis triangulation to increase the validity of the information analyzed. This led to the reliability and validity section, which described the inclusion of trustworthiness, creditability, confirmability, transferability, and bracketing. Finally, Section 2 was completed with a discussion of the ethical assurances that provided the strategy to ensure that there was fair and ethical treatment of the respondents selected for the study, as well as the personal information obtained from each participant. Strict adherence to the ethical assurances helped to build trust with the participants, as well as ensure that a level of anonymity existed to allow for free and open conversation and discussion of the interview and focus group questions. Each of these unique portions of Section 2 came together to define the qualitative research project portion of the study, which yielded results directly related to the single-case study phenomenon.

Section 3 will present the findings of the qualitative research study, which has been discussed and defined in Section 2. Within the presentation of findings, an overview of themes

that were discovered will be discussed in detail. Additionally, the relationship between the

findings and the application to professional practice will be discussed to provide answers to the

primary research question of how the problem of motivating firefighters by their leadership can

be improved. Next, Section 3 will provide recommendations for further study based on the

themes discovered through the qualitative research project. The provided recommendations for

further study are additional questions that may be presented outside of the scope of the study, as

well as potential paths discovered to answer the primary and sub-questions of the study from

different angles that were not utilized in this research project. Finally, reflection on the study will

provide the professional growth experienced by this researcher, as well as a biblical perspective,

to ensure the alignment of the research study and findings with a Christian worldview.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The applied doctoral research project sought to evaluate and research a problem that existed within an organization, in which the application of leadership suggestions may solve said problem. The case study of Brevard County Fire Rescue regarding the challenges that leaders face in the motivation of firefighters revealed multiple areas in which suggestions for improvement may be implemented. The findings of the study revealed thematic trends that were analyzed to create an understanding of what problems exist within the organization. The trends developed were then used to bridge the gap of application to professional practice and improving business practices through the creation of potential implementation strategies. Liou and Liou (2024) found that the implementation of organizational change strategies was most effective using a top-down approach, primarily when involving cultural change.

The research conducted discovered thematic trends through the process of thematic coding of the data. Additionally, the data revealed areas for further study that may help to increase the knowledge and interpretation of the phenomenon that was studied, as well as expand the single-case study to a broader region not limited to a single organization. Section 3 will conclude with the reflections noted by this researcher, as well as the integration of biblical scripture to ensure the alignment of the study and findings with a Christian worldview. Each aspect of the findings, application, further study, reflections, and biblical integration were essential for the holistic evaluation of the problem and provide a well-rounded understanding of the impacts of the study to organization researched.

Presentation of the Findings

Thirty-eight qualitative interviews were conducted within Brevard County Fire Rescue, and the participants included 21 firefighters and 17 supervisors holding the rank of lieutenant.

Additionally, six focus groups were conducted, three consisting of only firefighters and three consisting of only supervisors. Each focus group contained between four and five participants per group. The qualitative data obtained focused on questions that aligned with challenges that leaders face motivating firefighters, leading to decreased morale. While the questions presented during the interview were open-ended in nature, many responses were similar to each other, developing significant trends. The population and sample group selected allowed for successful data saturation to ensure the validity of the research.

Overview of Themes Discovered

The themes discovered were noted to be similar among firefighters and supervisors, primarily in leadership qualities and impacts on morale. The leadership characteristics of both perceived positive and negative impacts that were consistent between the two interview groups. Motivators of the firefighter, as confirmed through the interview of the firefighters and perceived through the view of the supervisor, also aligned with an intrinsic and extrinsic theme discovered. The impact of leadership on morale was discovered in two critical categories: overall department and individual station. This discovery led to the greatest understanding of morale at Brevard County Fire Rescue. Finally, the themes discovered related to how leadership can improve the motivation of firefighters were revealed and validated through methodological triangulation. Each theme discovered interrelated with one another to present a picture of the subjective perceptions of Brevard County firefighters and supervisors, as well as built a consensus of suggestions to improve leadership's ability to motivate firefighters, possibly increasing morale.

Discussion of Themes. Each theme presented was discovered through open-ended interviews and focus group responses, which led to an organic trend of similar responses. Through the use of thematic coding utilizing third-party qualitative coding software, NVivo, the

themes were exposed and linked back to previously obtained peer-reviewed literature to develop

the findings of the qualitative research study. It was important to note that while the trends were

apparent and may have appeared generalizable, the research conducted was based on a single-

case study specific to Brevard County Fire Rescue. Additionally, each theme presented was not

necessarily unique to a specific question asked and was pulled from the entirety of the interview

to allow for a better understanding of how each theme impacted the overall impression of the

respondent.

     Leadership Characteristics. Leadership characteristic themes were very apparent, both

on a positive and negative plane with multiple similar, if not the same, responses. The term

"micromanager," or the description of a micromanager, was mentioned in nine out of the 21

firefighter interviews and was unanimously described as a negative leadership style among every

respondents' usage of the term. Ryan and Cross (2024) noted that micromanagement had become

a prevailing negatively perceived leadership style post-COVID-19. The authors suggested that

the desire for managers to grasp a level of control, primarily in the hybrid and remote work

environment, has trickled down to in-person environments as well (Ryan & Cross, 2024).

Firefighter 38 in the qualitative interviews of this research study noted that there was a

perception of mistrust from the employee when micromanaging techniques were utilized:

> The thing I hated the most was micromanaging. First of all, it's annoying and frustrating
>
> to the individual that's trying to do whatever task. It also displays a mistrust of that leader
>
> in that individual as if someone's coming over and micromanaging a task I'm doing, and
>
> no matter what it is, then you're displaying to me that you don't trust me to do this task.

Kamarudin et al. (2023) agreed that micromanagement leads to a decrease in trust between a

subordinate and a supervisor. The authors further noted that the perception of lost trust in the

supervisor leads to the employee no longer trusting the supervisor, resulting in a decrease in job satisfaction (Kamarudin et al., 2023).

Supervisors or lieutenants who were interviewed also noted micromanagement as the number one negative leadership characteristic. Nine out of 17 of the lieutenants interviewed mentioned micromanagement as a characteristic that had negative impacts on the motivation and morale of firefighters that they have spoken with or been in their command. When describing the negative effects of micromanagement, Lieutenant 7 noted, "You know, you don't empower your people to maybe make some mistakes and learn from those mistakes or, you know, find their own way and things." Trust was another characteristic of leadership that was noted multiple times in the responses. Lieutenant 6 stated, "Like I need to trust you to be able to do this, just like you need to trust me." Le and Nguyen (2023) related that empowerment that is given to employees by leadership helps to establish trust in the relationship, building an increased level of confidence and production. See Figure 2 for the noted attributes of negative leaders.

Figure 2

Noted Attributes of Negative Leaders
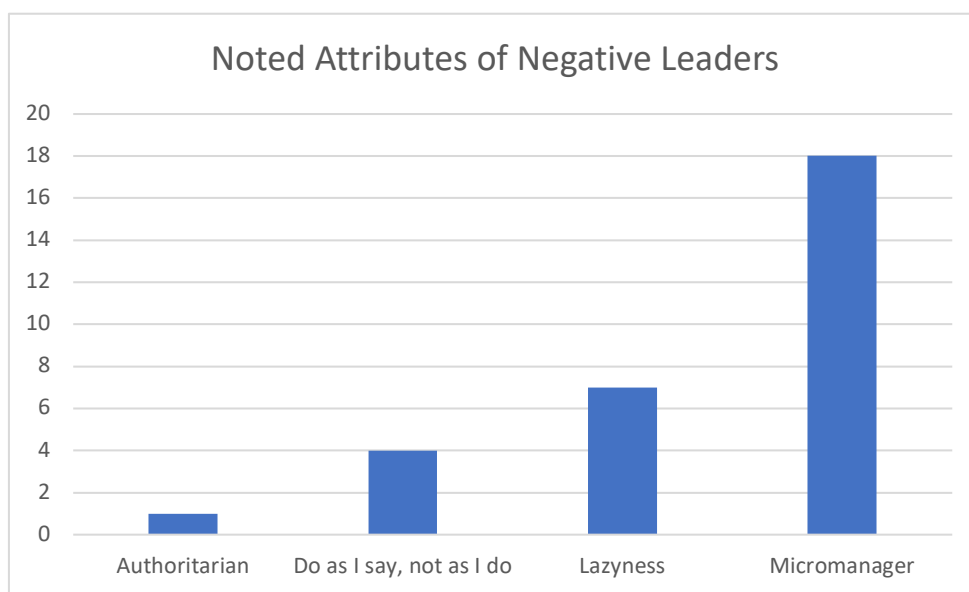
Positive characteristics were noted in both the respondent groups of firefighters and lieutenants. Both groups described servant leadership as a positive leadership style that helps to build and grow employees through empowerment and support. However, the overwhelmingly common response was that the highest level of motivation in increasing leadership was through lead-by-example leadership. Firefighter 17 described lead-by-example leadership as: "Lead by example, not tell you how to do something, but will tell you, show you and actively do it." This notion was expanded upon by multiple firefighter respondents, relating that when their supervisor actively participated in a task that was being assigned, such as training, their trust in leadership increased, building an elevated desire to complete the task.

The positive perception of lead-by-example style leadership was also noted in eight of the 17 lieutenant respondents. Lieutenant 6 stated, "I don't like telling people what to do unless I'm willing to do it myself. Most of the time, I start doing it. I'm trying to lead by example." It was related by supervisor respondents that they desired to be flexible in their leadership while maintaining a desire to be a part of the team, rather than just leading the team. While supervisors had differing approaches to how they led, leading by example was the most common and, apparently, beneficial style according to the firefighters in their command. Xu et al. (2023) related that lead-by-example leadership is a characteristic of servant leadership, as the style promotes empowering the subordinate through a desire to provide them with all resources that they would need to be successful while actively engaging as a member of the team in the process. See Figure 3 for noted attributes of positive leaders.

Figure 3

Noted Attributes of Positive Leaders
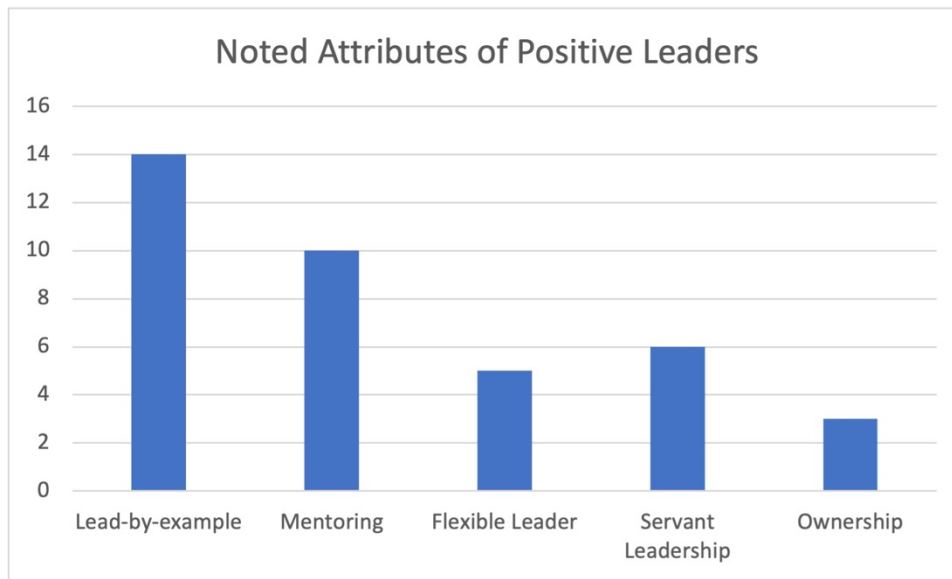
     Motivators of Firefighters. The motivators specific to firefighters were explored through the perceptions of their supervisors, as well as the direct responses of firefighters themselves. There were two distinct types of motivators noted within the responses: extrinsic and intrinsic. Each motivator carried varying levels of importance to each respondent, with an apparent disagreement between where the motivators lay within the priority hierarchy, as perceived by supervisors. The primary extrinsic motivator noted was compensation, while the primary noted intrinsic motivators were growth and the desire to be the best.

     Supervisors noted that they believed that the number one motivator of firefighters in their command was pay. For example, 58% of supervisors related that negative morale was directly related to the lack of competitive compensation for the firefighters working for Brevard County Fire Rescue. Lieutenant 30 stated, "I think the driver behind the low morale with wanting with people wanting to move to other departments is pay right now." This statement was further

exposed by Lieutenant 24, who noted, "I mean, first and foremost, everybody's concerned about pay, knowing that there are other high-paying departments that they can leave for."

The pay was also mentioned frequently by firefighter respondents but as a subsidiary motivator and not the primary extrinsic motivation. The data of the firefighter respondents showed that pay was a necessity to continue working for Brevard County Fire Rescue, but it was not necessarily what motivated them to continue working in the industry or organization. The number one extrinsic motivator noted by firefighters was work-life balance or the benefits of the schedule. Firefighter 22 exemplified this notion when they stated, "Yeah, I'd say more time off really is probably the driving factor. Financials is more of a secondary for me in fire service." Additionally, scheduling was mentioned multiple times by both firefighters and lieutenants as a negative aspect of mandatory overtime or being away from their families for multiple days at a time. For reference, the schedule for firefighters and lieutenants assigned to operations at Brevard County Fire Rescue was 24 hours on followed by 48 hours off. However, when an employee is assigned mandatory overtime to fill a vacant position, the employee is required to work 48 continuous hours followed by 24 hours off before arriving to their normally scheduled shift assignment. Lieutenant 26 noted:

> Well, just as much as the scheduling is a positive thing. It could be a negative thing if you have to work more often than you anticipated. So, more time forced to work would push me away from the career.

Intrinsically, the lieutenants' perceptions of motivators for their firefighters did agree with the stated motivations from the firefighters themselves. The number one response, as found in 48% of the responses of both firefighters and lieutenants, was comradery. The respondents noted that living with their brothers and sisters in the fire service for a third of their lives in a

positive atmosphere motivated them to continue working in the organization. Firefighter 19 stated:

> The guys I work with, for sure, the crew that I work with, allows me to come to work and enjoy coming to work. And I do know that it's fairly rare to have a whole crew that you really enjoy working with. But that makes me not want to really go anywhere for the most part.

Firefighter 20 also exemplified this notion when they stated, "I am looking for more of a brotherhood. Playing sports growing up that was big with me." The perceived family aspect of the fire service appears to be a motivator for individuals to remain in the fire service. However, this may not be a motivator to perform at a higher level.

Another intrinsic motivator that correlated with increased performance was the idea that firefighters do not want their boss to look bad while at the same time being the best at their job. For example, 71% of firefighter respondents mentioned the desire for growth, to be the best, or to not disappoint their direct supervisor. While the desire for comradery was noted as a reason for staying in the fire service and an increase in perceived morale at the station level, there was also a correlation between the respondents, who noted comradery, as well as mentioning the desire to be the best. One can infer that the family aspect of the crew creates a perception or desire to be an asset to the other team members. Arthachinda and Charoensukmongkol (2024) found that when a work team expresses inclusivity, the team members have a higher desire to perform their tasks efficiently for overall team success rather than personal success. The notion of team success appeared to be exemplified in the findings of this study, which stated that comradery leads to an increase in the desire to be the best.

Conversely, there was a distinction in the morale and perception of comradery, based on where a respondent was stationed within the organization. This researcher noted that respondents belonging to a permanent station or crew had an elevated outlook on localized morale and comradery. Respondents who were self-described as floaters and temporarily assigned to a different station each day to fill open positions offered a much more negative outlook on morale for not only the department but also within the stations that they were floated to. This finding appeared to express that comradery itself may, in fact, increase the positive attitudes of firefighters, which in turn, helps to build comradery. Briody et al. (2024) found that there was a specific timeframe established for when team members perceived the positive effects of collaboration and team belonging. The researchers noted that in a study of clinicians and researchers, in the first 7–9 months after the team was established, there was a downward trend in collaborative positivity. However, after 2 years, the team collaboration was positive and thriving. The study may explain the findings of this research, in which teams that work together regularly for extended periods of time express a higher level of morale within their unique team versus those that have worked together for a very short period—sometimes, only a singular shift.

Impacts of Leadership on Morale. The impact of leadership on the morale of the firefighters within Brevard County Fire Rescue was a theme that was predicted to occur. However, the separation of findings into two distinct categories was not expected. The categories discovered were micro or the station and macro or the entire department. This micro-macro culture of morale became very apparent through the qualitative coding process, with 18 of 38 respondents describing the differences in morale through this paradigm. Lieutenant 7 stated:

> I think the morale at my station is actually really good in our little bubble. When you get
>
> people on overtime or people that are mandatory, and I think they can definitely, I think,

they feed off of us. And you can also definitely see the difference within their attitude

towards the department or towards the day.

The description of bubbles was mentioned multiple times, as a way to define what the individual

respondent considered their environment that they could control.

Micro-culture or station morale described the direct team morale of day-to-day

operations. All but two responses noted that station morale was positive, with the two negative

responses being those that were assigned as floaters or ones that did not have a consistent crew

that they were assigned to, as noted previously. All positive responses regarding station morale

also noted that comradery was high on their intrinsic motivation list and that their direct

leadership was positive and exemplified characteristics that they sought, such as leading by

example and servant leadership. Lieutenants appeared to depict that their unique station morale

was something that they could control, and that was why they were able to maintain a positive

morale. Lieutenant 24 stated, "Well, so I look at it two ways. I look at it internally and externally,

internally, as far as crew atmosphere goes and getting along, we're fine."

Macro-culture, or the morale of the organization, was distinctly different from the

perceived micro-culture that existed within the stations. Lieutenant 24, as noted previously,

continued to say, "External motivators from outside our station, whether it's other chefs or um

certain avenues of information that they receive on Facebook, causes them to become bitter and

hateful." The notion that external factors lead to a decrease in morale was related multiple times

by both firefighters and supervisors. Social media, in particular, was noted as an external cause

of negativity, which led to a decrease in the overall morale of the organization. Lieutenant 16, in

regard to negativity among firefighters, noted, "When they start looking at social media when

they are in places that other people are talking, that leaks in, and when that leaks in, my job is to stop it."

Social morale, or the morale of a group of people, was described throughout the responses from both firefighters and supervisors. Lieutenant 5, in regard to social morale, stated:

I think most people are influenced by the people that are around. So, you have positive people that they're around. They're going to be positive to do, you know, above and beyond. If you have, you know, people that are not motivated to do that thing if they just want to come chill, I think everybody's going to kind of be that same thing. So, I think the social influence is what's going to motivate a lot of people.

The idea of social morale was exemplified in the focus groups, in which all three firefighter focus groups and all three lieutenant focus groups quickly dissolved into discontent about pay and benefits. While the individual responses from both categories of respondents were generally positive, the overall impression from focus groups was negative.

The focus groups allowed a group-think aspect to occur to explore whether the social influence of the group had the impact of changing perspectives of the responses. The focus group for each of the categories supported the findings that when social interaction occurred, a negative mindset was exemplified. One lieutenant in the focus group stated:

There's nothing to motivate you here. We have everything bad. We have old trucks. We have old stations. It's far, far behind. There's nothing like, why are we motivated to stay here? I say they pay us to show up. They don't pay us to care.

The statement made by the lieutenant was then unanimously agreed upon by the remainder of the group and then further built upon the fact that morale was so low in Brevard County Fire Rescue. Similar sentiments were related by firefighter focus groups as well.

Improvement of Leadership. The final theme of the research noted was how leadership can be improved within the organization. Two categories that became common trends in coding were communication and mentoring. Communication, or lack thereof, was described as having a substantial impact on morale and the desire to stay with the organization. Mentoring was found to have a high impact on the morale and growth of the employee through leadership support.

Lack of communication or transparency was noted by 33% of the firefighter respondents, which led to an expressed decrease in employee morale. Firefighter 18 stated:

I think lack of transparency, not being forward with the field on what's happening on a constant basis, and letting rumors just fly and spiral out of control. Where there was more communication from the top down and more direction on where we're heading, why we're doing this, why we're doing that.

The perception that an increase in communication from a higher level of leadership would increase the overall morale of the department was a common theme that was also expressed in two out of three of the firefighter focus groups and all of the lieutenant focus groups. Chan and Fabbi (2023) found that increasing intentional and deliberate communication within an organization from leadership had a direct positive impact on the morale of employees at every level of the organization. Firefighter 2 described the impacts of miscommunication within Brevard County Fire Rescue: "Miscommunication between leadership and the field. When actions are made like that, it causes a big impact on morale and distrust and distrust in the senior officers of the department, the leadership of the department."

Another subset of communication was deliberate, one-on-one communication that occurred between a mentor and mentee. The desire for growth was a noticeable trend in responses from both firefighters and lieutenants. Additionally, the intrinsic motivation to be the

best at the skills related to each employee's job further supported the positive perception of

mentoring expressed by the respondents. Lieutenant 37 discussed a suggestion for improvement

of the department: "Service not only to the citizens and the people that we protect on a day-to-

day basis but service to the youth coming into the fire service." Ard and Beasley (2022) related

that mentoring is critical for the succession planning of an organization. The authors noted that in

order for there to be consistency within the leadership of the organization, intentional mentoring

must occur (Ard & Beasley, 2022).

Another aspect of mentoring was discovered, in which 55% of the overall respondents

related that a friend or family member was the one who introduced them to the fire service. This

information was essential to understand that negative or low morale from current firefighters

may lead to a decrease in individuals entering the industry, due to a lack of introduction to the

career field of potential candidates. Coker (2022) found that within the professional driver

industry, the most-effective form of recruitment came from social media and peer introductions

to the industry. The fire service appeared to align with this aspect, requiring positive

introductions to occur for the continued success of the industry moving forward.

Relationship of Findings

Aligning the findings of the study with the various aspects of the project outline created

relationships that allowed for application. Puth (2022) noted that the most-difficult aspect of the

application of research involved the communication of the information learned. Puth (2022)

related that bias was created before the information was sent to the receiver through

communication. However, the process of linking the research to specific areas of interest allowed

the receiver to focus on aspects that may break through preconceived biases. Relating the

research findings to the specific areas of this study allowed for better application of the
discovered themes.

      Relationship of Findings to Research Question and Sub-Questions. The research
question of how can the problem of motivating firefighters by their leadership be improved
created the general focus of the research study. The theme of improvement of leadership isolated
the findings, as they related to the research question. Primarily, the trends of communication and
mentoring elaborated on the research questions. However, an additional finding was the lack of
formal leadership training for supervisor or lieutenant positions.

      Of the 17 supervisor respondents who held the rank of lieutenant at Brevard County Fire
Rescue, all but one had not participated in any form of leadership training above and beyond the
minimum requirement to be promoted, which was Fire Officer I certification. The Fire Officer I
series created by the state of Florida Bureau of Fire Standards and Training includes four
college-level courses: Company Officer, Building Construction, Firefighting Tactics and
Strategies, and Fire Service Course Delivery (Florida State Fire Marshal, 2015). The only course
within the series that touches on leadership is the Company Officer course. However, the Bureau
of Fire Standards and Training noted that the course is 45 hours in length and includes a
curriculum to review fire department organization, administration, management theory,
communications, and leadership. The focus of the course is a broad overview of fire service
leadership at the lowest level, which is the company officer (Florida State Fire Marshal, 2015).

      The one lieutenant respondent who had formal leadership training obtained the
coursework through their experiences in the military that occurred prior to their career in the fire
service. Sleeth et al. (2022) noted that military leadership training has applications that
generalize far into the private sector. The authors related that the techniques, theories, and

leadership experiences obtained through military training establish a basis for all supervisory

positions in all industries. However, the training aligns closely with paramilitary industries, such

as the fire service (Sleeth et al., 2022).

Communication challenges were noted as trending themes in the research conducted.

Communication, or lack of it, was noted among firefighters and supervisors as being one aspect

that had a strong impact on the morale of the organization. Firefighter 18 stated, "I think lack of

transparency, not being forward with the field on what's happening on a constant basis." Many of

the complaints regarding communication were mentioned as being caused by top-down

leadership or miscommunication from senior leadership of the organization. The research

revealed that poor communication and transparency from senior leadership led to the creation

and growth of rumors in the field, which may have led to the negative macro-culture morale of

the organization.

Mentoring was another trending theme that discovered an area of opportunity for the

organization to improve the motivation of firefighters through their leadership. Many of the

respondents noted that a positive leadership characteristic was the desire to teach others and help

the firefighters in their command to grow within their careers. Mentoring provides an

opportunity to not only teach and guide the team members but to also effectively communicate

the ideas and challenges occurring in the organization from senior leadership down to the crew

level. Núñez-Cacho Utrilla et al. (2023) found that the mentoring process helps to advance the

skills of the mentee while establishing a defined succession plan to ensure the long-lasting

success of the organization's values and mission. Implementing mentoring at all levels of the

organization may increase the motivation of the firefighters, as well as ensure the success of the

department.

The first sub-question, RQa, sought to explore how leadership style influenced firefighter morale and motivation. The trending themes revealed the importance of positive leadership characteristics, such as servant leadership and leading by example. The findings of the research further noted that micromanagement was the number-one-described style of leadership that was perceived negatively, with many relating that this style of leadership decreased trust in the relationship and impacted the desire to complete tasks assigned to the firefighter. All respondents affirmatively noted that leadership had a direct impact on the morale of the crews in which they lead. Lieutenant 26 noted, "I think that leadership has a lot of impact on morale because if the people that are in charge aren't making ethical decisions and they're not transparent with their decisions, it's hard to follow those people." There was a direct correlation between lack of trust and followership and the negative impact on morale (Whiteoak et al., 2023).

The second sub-question, RQb, explored the impact that morale had on the turnover intent of firefighters in Brevard County Fire Rescue. Many of the respondents noted that morale had a direct impact on turnover intent, especially when added to a lack of resources from the organization, such as pay and benefits. Extrinsic motivators appeared to be a necessity that must be met in order for morale to have an impact on turnover intent. If the compensation and benefit needs are not met, the employer appears to have an elevated desire to seek employment elsewhere, regardless of morale. However, if compensation needs are met, the influence of negative morale can still increase the desire to leave the organization. Lieutenant 16 exemplified the impacts of morale on turnover intent:

> You can only hang out with Eeyore for so long. Even Winnie the Pooh will tell you. And I know this thanks to my children. Even Winnie the Pooh will tell you that sometimes it's okay to have a rainy day. But she much would rather enjoy the sun. And I say that

because everybody is allowed to have a bad day. But when it's consistently bad, it doesn't make it worth waking up for.

Relationship of Findings to Research Framework. The research framework built out the necessary components to complete and review the research completed. Each section of the framework played a pivotal role in the formation and research of the study; however, two distinct portions of the framework related directly to the findings of the study. The two sections that created a relationship to the research were the concepts and theories, in which the findings were viewed and evaluated. The concepts related to job satisfaction and the impacts of the satisfaction towards turnover intent and organizational attraction. The theories of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and social exchange theory developed a basis for what the firefighters might be searching for regarding employment needs and motivation.

The first concept that was explored was the notion that a fulfillment of expectations improves job satisfaction. The findings supported the concept, with multiple respondents noting that they entered the fire service career to help others and for comradery. Respondents of both the firefighter and lieutenant groups related that the functions of the job and their work team are what keep them in the career field. Firefighter 20 stated, "So the fulfillment of having the brotherhood, being able to come in every third day like what I'm doing, love what I'm doing, and do it with my brothers, it really is what drives me to keep going." Conversely, the overwhelming negative responses regarding pay implied that extrinsic expectations must also be met to satisfy job satisfaction. Company officer leadership can directly impact the meeting of intrinsic expectations, while senior leadership impacts the extrinsic organizational level expectations being met.

The second concept explored was that job satisfaction reduced employee turnover. This concept was also supported by the research conducted. Firefighter 25 exemplified the notion that job satisfaction reduced turnover from a positive viewpoint when they stated, "I just know that because of the way we are, that's created the morale that is created. I love coming to work." The statement displayed that this firefighter was content based on intrinsic motivators, such as morale. Conversely, the research found that when job expectations are not met, and satisfaction suffers, the impact is increased turnover intent. Lieutenant 30 provided experiential insight regarding the impact of morale on turnover intent by stating:

> I think that's pretty significant. And I think the driver behind the low morale with people wanting to move to other departments is pay right now. Maybe some of that work-life balance is part of it as well. I'll bring it to my back to my station. We have a really good culture, and both of my young guys they don't want to leave. One of them left because he had to financially leave. But I've got another guy that is waiting to see what the next contract is before he makes that decision to leave.

The statement made by the lieutenant respondent provided an example of extrinsic motivators not being met, leading to resignation and another firefighter waiting to see the results of the union contract being negotiated—most likely regarding pay and benefits.

The third concept explored was that firefighters were attracted to organizations that fit their interests. This concept was supported; however, the findings produced insight into the theories utilized, particularly Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The intrinsic desires that are sought by firefighters, such as helping others and building comradery, are included in most fire department organizations. Extrinsic desires, such as pay and time off, were not represented and

provided by all departments, leading to greater attraction of firefighters who meet both intrinsic

and extrinsic interests.

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory was used not only to build the basis of

interview questions but also to evaluate and interpret the findings of the qualitative research.

Maslow related that the needs of humans can be broken down into five categories that are listed

in hierarchal order, meaning each one needs to be met prior to moving on to the next. The first

level of the hierarchy was physiological needs, which included food, water, shelter, etc. The

second need was safety, which was described as health, employment, and security. The third was

love and belonging, which included friendships, relationships, and personal connections. Fourth

was esteem, which included self-esteem, recognition, and respect. Finally, the fifth level was

self-actualization, or the desire to become the best that one can be (Maslow, 1943). These levels

were depicted by Hopper (2024), and can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The qualitative research found that Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory was well represented by the responses, regarding internal and external motivators of the firefighters. The overwhelming extrinsic motivator noted by both firefighters and lieutenants was pay. Pay can be placed into the first level of Maslow's hierarchy, as money is required for the basic necessities in life, such as food and shelter. The second-most-common extrinsic-related response was work-life balance or time off. Many respondents described the desire for time off as being directly related to health, whether physical or mental. In regard to extrinsic motivations to increase morale, Firefighter 15 stated, "Um, unfortunately, money and probably more time off, for mental health, I guess there are other departments that are doing 24/72, 48/96 is um, less mandatory overtime." When asked to clarify, the respondent noted that Brevard County was currently working a 24 hours on and 48 hours off schedule with excessive mandatory overtime, requiring firefighters to frequently work 48 hours straight. The 24/72 schedule noted changes in the work schedule to 24 hours on and 72 hours off, reducing the average hours scheduled per week from 56 hours down to 42 hours.

Comradery, or the belonging that occurred in the fire station, which was noted as one of the top intrinsic motivators, fell into the third category of belonging. This level was represented not only as a motivation for firefighters to enter the career but also as one that reduces the turnover intent. The feeling of empowerment and respect that was created through positive leadership covered level four, or the esteem category. Although the direct response of respect or strengthening was not utilized, the coding of the findings described the positive impact of leaders who empowered their crews and led by example, which one can infer provides a level of respect. Additionally, the negative perception of micromanagement further supported the notion that the lack of trust displayed by a micromanager was directly related to a feeling of disrespect.

Self-actualization, or the desire to be the best person one can be, was the final level that was supported by the findings of the qualitative interviews. However, interestingly, this was noted as a primary intrinsic motivator, regardless of the levels of the hierarchy being achieved. Even the most negative respondents, regarding the morale of the department and their individual station, still expressed the desire to be the best at their jobs. Lieutenant 35 related that the majority of the negative morale was based upon low pay and lack of communication and support from senior leadership: "And I hate to say it, but the pay is huge, and that pay is a show of morale and leadership." However, the same respondent also noted in the interview that, despite the low morale, their firefighters remained intrinsically motivated to be the best:

> My guys and their level of motivation is their personal level of motivation is pretty high. Like, I mean, we don't. It's, sorry to say, like, we do our job. We do our job, and we do our job, and we go home.

The notion that, despite the previous levels of the hierarchy not being met, the firefighters still maintain an elevated sense of self-actualization was interesting and potentially unique to the common personality that enters into the fire service; however, further research should be conducted to explore this phenomenon.

Social exchange theory was also utilized to evaluate the findings of the qualitative research interviews. Smith et al. (2022) posited that the social exchange theory is utilized by people to decide whether to engage in a relationship, based on the ability to meet the needs of each individual. The research supported the theory, primarily through the described positive and negative leadership responses. Firefighters chose to engage in mentoring relationships and leader/follower relationships with their supervisors when they displayed positive attributes, such as servant leadership and leading by example. Conversely, the firefighters did not want to engage

in relationships with leaders that exemplified negative attributes, like micromanaging or authoritarian leadership.

Reverting to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory, levels three and four were intrinsic in nature and directly impacted by leadership. One can infer that through social exchange theory, the needs of levels three and four are the desired outcomes of relationships that firefighters seek to have met. When the leader meets the desired outcomes of levels three and four, the firefighters will meet the needs of the supervisor to provide high levels of work production. Lieutenant 4, when describing experiences working as a firefighter for a positive lieutenant in the past, stated, "My number one goal is don't embarrass Dad, you know?" This statement exemplified the desire of the respondent to meet the needs of the supervisor when their needs were met by the supervisor.

Relationship of Findings to Anticipated Themes. Initially, through peer-reviewed literature research, it was anticipated that generational differences would be a factor in the findings, particularly in relation to extrinsic motivation. The anticipated theme was that younger generations would seek work-life balance more than compensation as an extrinsic motivator. However, the qualitative interviews and focus groups found that compensation was the primary extrinsic motivator, regardless of the age of the respondent. It was important to note that when applying the findings to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, pay was aligned with level one. Maslow (1943) related that each level must be met prior to moving to the next level as a motivator. There was a possibility that generational differences would play a role in the extrinsic motivations of firefighters if the pay disparity or level one of Maslow's hierarchies were satisfied.

The anticipated theme that Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory would play a pivotal role in the findings and interpretation of the qualitative research interviews was supported. Maslow's hierarchy of needs appeared to be supported almost entirely by the research findings. However, as noted previously, the only distinct difference between the findings and Maslow's theory was regarding level five. Maslow (1943) noted that each level should be met prior to the needs of the next level being of substantial interest. However, the research findings provided insight into the fact that all respondents pursued level five of the hierarchy, regardless of where they existed within the preceding four levels of Maslow's hierarchy.

The last anticipated theme involved the impact of positive leadership on the morale of firefighters—particularly, servant leadership. The anticipated theory was supported and aligned with the findings of the research. Positive leadership attributes were unanimously noted as having a positive impact on the morale of firefighters. Conversely, negative leadership styles, such as micromanagement, had a negative impact on the majority of respondents. It was important to note that while all respondents related positive impacts of positive leadership, some related that they were not affected by negative leadership styles regarding morale. Firefighter 12 was one of those who related that they were not impacted by negative leadership: "I'd say that I don't think anyone really, like, affects my motivation at all. I'm kind of just, I feel like I'm very levelheaded, and I just do whatever I think is right to do." While it was anticipated that servant leadership would be the primary positive style, the overwhelming response was a lead-by-example style.

Relationship of Findings to the Problem. The specific problem to be addressed was the potential challenge that leaders faced in the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of firefighters within Brevard County, Florida, possibly resulting in decreased morale and increased turnover.

The problem was discovered along with the correlation between the impact on morale and turnover intent. The qualitative research interviews depicted a finding of extrinsic motivation challenges of pay and time off. The findings further found intrinsic challenges to be occurring much less in Brevard County Fire Rescue. However, the discovery of ways to improve the intrinsic motivation of firefighters allowed for application to current and future leaders of the organization. The most-prominent improvement that could be applied was the creation of a leadership training program that focuses on mentoring and communication while using a lead-by-example style of leadership. Additionally, the notion that the negatively impacted morale would increase turnover intent was supported, with many respondents noting that they were either in the process of or considering leaving the organization, primarily due to lack of pay. However, they had not yet left because of the high morale at the local station level of the organization, despite the perceived negative morale of the organization as a whole.

Relationship of Findings to the Literature. The findings of the qualitative research supported the findings of peer-reviewed literature on most of the research obtained. Whiteoak (2021) noted that there was a direct correlation between leadership and the perceived morale of teachers. This notion was supported by the respondents, who related a direct relationship between positive leadership attributes and their impact on morale within their localized crew. Additionally, the negative responses of those who identified as floaters or ones with no permanent station exemplified that the lack of direct, consistent leadership may have led to a decrease in morale. Future research should be conducted to confirm this notion, as it was not a primary or sub-question being explored by this study.

Positive leadership styles had a greater impact on morale than negative leadership styles. Bakker et al. (2023) found that transformational leadership had a greater impact than

transactional leadership on the morale and job satisfaction of employees. The findings of the qualitative research interviews related to a similar discovery; however, it was only on the direct supervisor role of leadership. The impact of pay and benefits from senior-level leadership appeared to portray a desire for transactional style leadership from the organization and transformational style from their direct supervisor. This may relate to the necessity of meeting lower levels of needs prior to higher intrinsic levels, per Maslow's (1943) needs theory.

Turnover was found within the literature to be directly impacted by the morale of the employee in a negative correlation. Oh and Chhinzer (2021) found that turnover within an organization can be contagious, and the intent can spread to others when resignations begin to occur. The notion of contagious turnover intent and, more importantly, negativity was confirmed by the research interviews. Focus groups discovered that negative responses, primarily regarding pay, increased when respondents participated in a group. Lieutenant 5 stated, "They start to sort of rub off on you, especially when your mind is kind of low, and it's pretty easy to jump ship when you see other people do it."

Public service employees exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation than private sector employees (Nguyen et al., 2023). This literature was supported by the research interviews. The respondents demonstrated a high level of intrinsic motivation to enter the career field, with many respondents relating that it was based on a desire to help others. Additionally, the impacts of comradery and the desire to be the best at their job further exemplified the notion of high intrinsic motivations. It was important to note that extrinsic motivators were frequently mentioned as well; however, they were frequently noted with the caveat that they needed to support their families. The extrinsic motivation of pay appeared to fall in line with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of requiring a certain level of needs to be met before other motivators or needs

played a significant role in job satisfaction. One can infer that if pay and benefits met the minimum expectations of the firefighters, intrinsic motivators of esteem and self-actualization would be the primary motivations that firefighters would seek to have met.

Summary of the Findings

The findings that were discovered through the process of coding the research interviews and triangulated using focus group participation revealed results that aligned with anticipated themes, theories, and literary research. The discovery of the distinct separation of crew morale versus department morale, or micro-macro morale, was significant in understanding the impact of the direct supervisor on the job satisfaction of firefighters. The primary challenges in motivating firefighters appeared to be extrinsic in nature from the macro or department level while intrinsic regarding the micro or crew level. Finally, the insight presented through interviews revealed multiple suggestions for the improvement of motivating and leading firefighters at Brevard County Fire Rescue, such as mentoring, leadership training, and improved communication.

Overview of the Study

The research conducted sought to explore the specific problem of the potential challenges that leaders face in the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of firefighters within Brevard County, Florida, possibly resulting in decreased morale and increased turnover. The primary research question developed was how the problem of motivating firefighters through their leadership can be improved. Secondary questions developed included: How does leadership style influence firefighter morale and motivation, and to what extent does the morale of a firefighter impact turnover of the organization? These research questions provided guidance on how the study was formulated and conducted.

The research framework provided the paradigms that were utilized to create the study and review the findings to answer the research questions selected. Concepts and theories provided a basic prediction and paradigm. The concepts selected provided an emphasis on the impacts of leadership on job satisfaction and morale. Fulfillment of job expectations led to increased job satisfaction, which was the first concept identified. The second concept identified was that increased job satisfaction reduced employee turnover intent. The final concept was that employees were attracted to organizations that fit their interests and needs. The two theories that were selected were Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and the social exchange theory. Both theories were applicable to the study conducted and revealed positive insight into the motivations of firefighters, as well as the desire to enter a working interpersonal relationship with supervisors.

Literary research conducted provided discovery of employee motivations specific to private industry and similar organizations, such as police departments, military, and other fire departments. The information found confirmed the constructs through generalized research findings. The literary research provided significant insight for potential responses that would be obtained from the qualitative research interviews. However, the data was collected in various research settings and was not directly related to this single-case study, specifically to Brevard County Fire Rescue firefighters and leadership.

Qualitative research interviews and focus groups were the primary sources of data for this study to ensure that the single-case study obtained data specific to the singular organization being studied. The research interviews consisted of 38 total respondents, broken into a group of 17 lieutenants and 21 firefighters. Three focus groups of four to five individuals of the same rank, either all firefighters or all lieutenants, were conducted as a means of methodological

triangulation. The focus groups provided beneficial insight into the respondent differences in responses in a group setting versus an individual, one-on-one setting, as exemplified in the interviews.

Evaluation and coding of the qualitative data revealed themes, such as the positive or negative impact that leadership has on the morale and motivation of firefighters on both the crew or station level and the overall organizational level. The revealed themes mostly aligned with the anticipated themes. However, some findings were discovered that were not anticipated and did not align completely with the theories utilized. The research findings helped to create not only answers to the primary and secondary research questions but also to establish suggestions for potential applications for the organization. The themes and trends discovered built a consensus of the motivations and leadership impacts on morale specific to Brevard County Fire Rescue.

Application to Professional Practice

The purpose of applied research is to create an understanding of a problem that exists and create practical suggestions to solve the problem (Santos et al., 2022). The findings of this study have created discovery through the exploration of firefighters and leadership regarding challenges in motivating firefighters, which may impact morale and lead to turnover intent. Applying the suggestions to the organization could provide a positive impact on the problem and lead to successful outcomes. Applications for professional practice can be subdivided into two categories: improving general business practice and potential implementation strategies. The improving general business practice section discusses the findings for the organization studied that can be generalized across all industries. The potential implementation strategies reveal the application of the findings through suggestions of how Brevard County Fire Rescue can improve the challenge of motivating firefighters in the organization.

Improving General Business Practice

The findings of this study found that leadership has a direct impact on the morale and motivation of the firefighters who are led by their respective lieutenants. Khassawneh et al. (2022) found that leadership impacts the creativity of employees, leading to increased job satisfaction within the private sector. While the study conducted was a single-case study focusing on the public safety industry of firefighting at Brevard County Fire Rescue, the results can be applied to businesses in any industry as a basis for formulating specific research questions related to their respective organization. Coleman et al. (2022) related that an important part of asking and guiding interview questions is using a basis of research from other similar experiences and research that may relate to the situation being investigated.

Positive leadership, specifically leading by example, was found to be the number one positive leadership style among both firefighters and supervisors. The notion that the employee desires a supervisor who not only empowers and directs but also sets the example by completing their task themselves is essential for building success in the role of the company officer. The company officer role can be related to a direct supervisor in the private business industry. Lee et al. (2022) noted that the direct supervisor has the greatest impact on the motivation and trust of the employees that they oversee. The authors suggested that decreased trust of the supervisor from employees leads to higher turnover intent (Lee et al., 2022). The current study discovered similar findings, in that decreased trust led to decreased morale and increased turnover intent; however, the lack of trust was noted in upper-level management, with direct supervisors being trusted by the majority of firefighters interviewed. Improving the trust in the leader-follower relationship through leading by example can improve the motivation and morale of the employees, regardless of industry.

This study revealed that the number one negative style of leadership was micromanagement. Both firefighters and supervisors noted that micromanaging had a negative impact on motivation and morale. Firefighters noted that decreased trust through the process of removing empowerment and creativity was perceived, as supervisors would direct the employee exactly how to complete a task. Amara (2024) noted that micromanagement is a toxic leadership style that leads to future leadership imitating what they experienced. Amara related that micromanagement, primarily in the private sector, also often involves the belittling of subordinates, creating hostile work environments. Decreasing micromanaging tendencies in supervisors could have a substantial improvement in employee morale and job satisfaction (Amara, 2024).

A significant finding of this study involved the discovery of the micro-cultures that existed within the individual fire stations of the organization. The majority of respondents noted that while the morale of the organization, or macro-culture, was very low, the morale of their crew and station, or micro-culture, was high. The notion that there was a difference between organizational morale and work team morale was not unique to the fire service industry. Lenhard et al. (2024) found that the COVID-19 pandemic isolated many employees in the private business sector through the process of remote working. The authors suggested that teams that used frequent team meetings, even in the remote format, had higher morale and job satisfaction as compared to ones that used individual meetings or isolated communication resources, such as email or memos (Lenhard et al., 2024). One can infer that in both the private industry, as well as the fire service, frequent team communication leads to improved morale, as noted in the description of the micro-culture by firefighters and supervisors. Conversely, respondents noted

that the lack of communication from upper management of Brevard County Fire Rescue led to an increase in rumors and a decrease in the macro-culture morale of the organization as a whole.

Qualitative research interviews and focus groups conducted by this study concluded that despite higher morale from the micro-culture level of individual crews, the ability to meet the lower-level needs of the employee, per Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, had the largest impact on turnover intent. Maslow (1943) noted that physiological and security needs must be met before other needs can influence the person. Respondents of this study noted that pay and benefits ultimately influenced turnover intent as a necessity of providing for their family. Firefighters and supervisors both responded that morale plays a substantial influence on the desire to stay or leave for another department, but only when pay and benefits were comparable. Sharma and Xu (2022) discovered similar findings in the private sector, in which it was noted that increased wages for nursing home staff decreased turnover intent. It was important to note that remaining within the industry's comparable wage range was noted by Sharma and Xu (2022), as well as by the respondents of this research study.

Potential Implementation Strategies

All but one supervisor respondent that was interviewed related that they had no formal leadership training outside of company officer, which was a required course for the Fire Officer I certification. The Fire Officer I certification is a prerequisite to be eligible to be promoted to the position of lieutenant or the direct supervisor position at Brevard County Fire Rescue. The Company Officer course is 45 hours long and briefly touches on leadership, administration, and ethics (Florida State Fire Marshal, 2015). The implementation of a formal leadership training program for company officers and prospective company officers may yield significantly positive results, improving the leadership skills of supervisors. Mayowski et al. (2022) found that

leadership training programs should be ongoing to have the highest impact on the skills of leaders. The authors suggested that consistent and persistent leadership training should implement behavioral training for organizational impact (Mayowski et al., 2022).

Implementation of a communication strategy may be successful in improving the macro or organizational level of morale. The respondents related multiple times that the lack of communication from upper-level management impacted their morale and motivation in a negative manner. Providing clear and consistent communication from upper management that was echoed throughout the leadership rank levels down to the firefighter level may lead to improvement in the knowledge of the employees related to the strategic plan of the department. Hagemann et al. (2023) found that improvement in team communications led to an improvement in team performance. The majority of respondents in this study related that they had a high intrinsic motivation to be the best at their respective positions. Through the improvement of team communications, which leads to increased performance, the department can help employees meet their intrinsic desires, leading to improved individual morale. Increased communications in Brevard County Fire Rescue may blend the morale of the micro and macro-cultures to improve the motivations of all ranks within the organization. Naji et al. (2022) found that when an entire organization is on the same page through efficient communication, morale and safety are increased substantially.

The implementation of strategies to meet the extrinsic motivators of the employees is necessary to allow leadership to have the highest impact possible. Maslow (1943) noted that each level of the hierarchy of needs theory should be met in order to progress to the next level. The first two levels of the theory involved extrinsic motivators. The first level was the physiological level, at which survival was the key motivator. In relation to Brevard County Fire Rescue, the

physiologic level was met through financial compensation to provide for their families. Ensuring that pay was comparable to other organizations in the fire service industry was vital to meeting the needs of employees on the first level of Maslow's hierarchy. Maslow (1943) noted that level two involved the security needs of the person. In relation to firefighters, this would include work-life balance, such as time off and work schedules. It was suggested that Brevard County Fire Rescue ensured that work schedules and paid time off were comparable to other organizations in surrounding areas that provide the same services and in the same industry.

Successful implementation of strategies to improve the challenges of motivating firefighters at Brevard County Fire Rescue should approach both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. The highest level of impact, based on responses from both firefighters and lieutenants, appeared to be due to extrinsic factors, such as schedule and compensation. However, intrinsic motivation improvement through communication and leadership training will provide significant positive impacts on morale and reduction of turnover intent once the extrinsic factors are comparable to other similar departments. It was important to note that the two-pronged approach of strategic implementation can occur at the same time to improve the success of the strategy.

Summary of Application to Professional Practice

Applying the principles of the findings of this study through strategic implementation can lead to an increase in the morale and motivation of Brevard County Fire Rescue firefighters. Businesses across all industries can learn positive leadership attributes, such as leading by example, as well as potentially negative characteristics found in this study, like micromanaging. Additionally, the discovery of micro and macro-cultures, as well as the impacts that leadership has on these cultures, was fundamental in the approach to improving morale. Implementation of

a two-pronged strategy to include extrinsic and intrinsic improvements allowed the organization

to meet all needs within Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory for the highest level of

potential success in motivating Brevard County Fire Rescue firefighters.

Recommendations for Further Study

The qualitative research strategy of interviews and focus groups, in conjunction with

peer-reviewed literary research, provided an expansive list of opportunities through conclusive

findings, regarding the challenges of motivating firefighters within Brevard County Fire Rescue.

However, themes and trends discovered through qualitative coding revealed areas for further

future study. The findings revealed a significant correlation between pay as the primary extrinsic

factor and turnover intent. The responses that related to the extrinsic motivator of pay noted the

idea of meeting comparable wages. However, comparable was subjective and should be further

studied to decipher what comparable would mean to the organization. For example, comparable

may be found to be the mean industry standard, or it may be the top 75th percentile of the wage

spread of similar organizations. This information could be utilized to ensure an efficient and

cost-effective implementation of an improved wage strategy.

Another trend that was discovered through the qualitative interview process was the lack

of morale on both micro and macro-levels of employees, who were described as floaters. The

respondents noted that floaters were individuals who did not have a permanent station and were

assigned to fill in on crews when someone is absent on leave. The temporary assignment status

of the floater position did not allow a consistent crew dynamic to be developed and may be the

cause of the decreased overall morale of the employee. Further study should be completed to

discover if this is the finding across all those assigned to the floater position, as well as potential

strategies to improve morale within this position if a positive correlation is discovered.

Reflections

This applied doctoral research project conducted a qualitative, single-case study on Brevard County Fire Rescue to explore the challenges that leaders face in motivating firefighters and the impact that it had on morale of the firefighter. The study discovered thematic trends that led to greater understanding of the problem researched but also led to increased professional and personal growth of the researcher. Growth of knowledge regarding a subject being researched is critical to the progression of the field of leadership. Growth of the individual researcher conducting the study is equally critical for the progression of one's academic career. Additionally, the integration of a biblical perspective allowed for internal reflection of the researcher, as well as a paradigm evaluation of how the findings were viewed. As Christians, it is critical that the influence of scripture be utilized as a foundation of all aspects of one's academic and professional career and decisions made within it.

Personal and Professional Growth

Toyama (2022) noted that personal growth is essential for psychological wellbeing. The author related that as a person grows within their career, academia, faith, or person, there is an increase in the feeling of positivity and joy that is felt (Toyama ,2022). Through the growth experienced from overcoming challenges of this research study, this researcher has experienced tremendous increases in psychological wellbeing through the notion of accomplishment. Additionally, the experience of conducting doctoral level research has interjected into all aspects of this researcher's life. The qualitative, single-case study template utilized within this study has been duplicated in multiple areas of this researcher's public safety career for the purposes of exploring behavioral patterns, developing change strategies, and implementing action plans.

Research and data-based decision-making processes have increased the efficiency and accuracy of decisions made by this researcher.

Burrell et al. (2024) suggested that as public safety organizations continue to grow in complexity along with a greater calling efficiency in taxpayer funded projects, there will be a need for advanced degrees for public safety leaders. The authors further suggested that conducting research studies within those advanced degree programs that are relevant to the organization and problems that one leads will be essential for personal and career growth (Burrell et al., 2024). This current researcher selected a topic that was specific to one organization; however, it highlighted a problem that may be realized in other organizations as well. The research conducted on firefighters' behavior and subjective opinions provided detailed insight into the thinking patterns used by a large group of firefighters, which may be generalized to others within the same demographics and geographical locations as the ones that participated in this study. Understanding these behavioral and thinking patterns allowed this researcher to apply the suggested implementation strategies within one's own organization for improved motivating of firefighters and ideally, the improvement of morale among the department. Chu et al. (2024) found that researchers who held leadership roles within an organization experienced greater leadership growth than those that merely studied leadership without conducting research. The current researcher's opinion aligned with this finding, in which the leadership skills obtained through the qualitative interview process of this study far exceeded the growth obtained through didactic leadership review or literary review exclusively. This researcher has been able to apply many theories and suggestions within one's own leadership experiences successfully that can be attributed to the research process and findings of this study.

Further growth and application will be anticipated throughout this researcher's academic and professional career.

Biblical Perspective

The industry of public safety and firefighting specifically aligned with a Christian worldview, as exemplified through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the research conducted within the study, the majority of firefighters and lieutenants responded, noting that one of the key factors to their entry into the fire service, as well as their continued participation, was the desire to help and serve others. Jesus expressed the notion of service to others in Matthew 20:26–28 (*New International Bible [NIV]*, 1978/2011), in which He said:

> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your
> servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave- just as the Son of Man did not
> come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

While the respondents did not note that their desire to serve others was based on biblical guidance, the action and motivation behind the service to others perfectly aligned with Jesus' teachings.

Another theme that was discovered through the interview process was the motivation that was expressed when firefighters and lieutenants alike had a desire to grow together within their crews. It was noted multiple times that the comradery experienced at the fire station level directly led to positive increases in morale and motivation. Hebrews 10:24–25 (*NIV*, 1978/2011) said:

> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not
> giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one
> another- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10 discussed how we may preserve our faith through the collective motivation and

growth in fellowship. This notion aligned with the findings of the research, in which firefighters,

through fellowship and comradery, were able to motivate each other, despite potential negative

influences occurring around them.

      The characteristics of a leader that were mentioned by respondents in the study were

critical to the biblical alignment of the research, as well as the fire service industry. Should the

positive chrematistics noted not align with scripture, then the mindset and the opinions of the

firefighters would not align with a Christian worldview. In the case of this study, the most-

frequently-noted positive leadership style was indeed supported by biblical scripture.

Respondents overwhelmingly noted that leading by example was the most impactful and sought-

after leadership style, which their lieutenants and upper-level management could utilize for

successfully motivating the firefighters. The New Testament confirmed that scripture and the

teaching of Jesus Christ supported the notion of leading by example. Titus 2:6–8 (*NIV*,

1978/2011) said:

> Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an
>
> example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and
>
> soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those you oppose you may be
>
> ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

Leadership, specifically leading by example, was a key concept of the Christian faith. In the

book of Acts 20:35, the Apostle, Paul, noted, "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind

of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: It is

more blessed to give than to receive" (*NIV*, 1978/2011). The Apostle Paul related that he did not

tell them but rather showed them and provided them an example of leadership.

Scripture and the application of scripture to our lives will be essential for living out the Christian faith. Utilizing the Bible as a resource for the decisions that we make, as well as the leadership practices that we want to convey, will be critical for our success as a leader. This study not only aligned with the Christian worldview, but the responses gathered from the participants of the study also revealed that the fire service industry appeared to align with scripture as well. Research and knowledge itself aligned with the teaching of scripture and was supported by the decision of Luke to write his account of what occurred in the Gospel of Luke, as noted in Luke 1:3: "With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write and orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus" (*NIV*, 1978/2011). It will be our duty to explore and research events that unfold throughout the world to understand what has occurred and how to grow as a society to overcome the problems that we see. Christianity supported the idea of research and problem solving.

Summary of Reflections

Reflections of research and the impact that it has made upon the researcher will be essential for the growth as a leader and a researcher. The personal growth in leadership obtained through the findings of the study, as well as the responses from the participants of the study, has been powerful and vast. Each respondent brought details, opinions, and ideas that have impacted this researcher in a large way. The responses have built a greater understanding of the needs of the firefighters, as well as what motivators and methods of leadership they seek, and has been incorporated into practice of this researcher. Additionally, the biblical integration and study of scripture as it relates to the research completed, as well as the topic studied, has led to an increase in spiritual connection of faith and application in leadership. God has demonstrated all aspects of leadership and memorialized them in scripture that we can seek for guidance and

instruction. The reflections noted within this section have helped to provide a description of growth, as the study has impacted the researcher.

Summary of Section 3

The core of the qualitative, single-case study was the research conducted through interviews and focus groups. Section 3 has provided an in-depth look at the findings of the qualitative research that was conducted. Through the thematic coding process, trends were developed and analyzed. The findings were then compared to the previously completed literary research to develop alignment and understanding, using both Maslow's needs theory and the social exchange theory. After developing a greater understanding of the problem being researched, as well as the opinions and perceived motivators of the firefighter and lieutenant respondents, the information was used to develop suggested solutions and implementation strategies to improve the situation discovered. The applications to practice were critical to the applied doctoral research project as a single-case study, as they provided not only an in-depth review of the problem discovered, but also potential application of the findings to improve the situation that had caused the problem. Suggestions of further study will be utilized to expose any potential gaps in the research that may have been discovered to improve understanding or problems that were further discovered through the data analysis phase of the research.

Reflections of the research and how it impacted the researcher was an aspect of understanding the personal growth that was accomplished through the research phase of the program. It was important to not only look at the completion of research, as the presentation of findings and conclusions discovered, but also how the researcher has expanded their knowledge and wisdom throughout the process. Self-reflection revealed many areas of personal growth for this researcher. Additionally, biblical integration allowed the entire project to be viewed from a

Christian worldview to ensure that the process, findings, and applications to practice aligned

with scripture to ensure that Christian values were championed through the research. The duty of

research with a Christian worldview is to grow the body of knowledge relating to the subject, as

well as the knowledge of Jesus Christ within anyone who reads the study.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Leadership in all industries seek to influence their followers to inspire and motivate them

to complete tasks and assignments. Understanding what motivates a leader's employees can help

the leader be an efficient and successful manager. This research study evaluated the intrinsic and

extrinsic motivators of firefighters within Brevard County Fire Rescue, as well as the challenges

that leadership faces in motivating those same firefighters. The research found that leadership

attributes had a high impact on morale and job satisfaction of the firefighter. Leading by example

was noted as the most-stated positive leadership style or attribute. Conversely, micromanaging

was noted as the most-stated negative leadership attribute. The most-common intrinsic

motivators noted among all respondents were the desire to help others and the feeling of

comradery among their crew.

Through the review of the findings, as compared and related to Maslow's (1943)

hierarchy of needs theory, it was discovered that firefighters' turnover intent was directly

correlated with the varying levels of Maslow's theory. When the lower levels of Maslow's

theory, physiological needs, such as a livable wage, and safety needs, like job and financial

security, were met, the firefighters relied upon morale as the primary factor for deciding turnover

intent. However, when the lower levels of motivation noted in Maslow's (1943) theory were not

met, morale had no impact on turnover intent, with an overwhelming response of seeking

employment elsewhere. One can infer that leadership's impacts at the direct-report level only impact attrition when the financial and physiological needs of the employee have been met.

The data identified within this qualitative, single-case study have created a better understanding of the motivations of firefighters and the challenges that leadership faces in leading these firefighters. While the single-case study focused on Brevard County Fire Rescue, the results found may be generalizable to other similar organizations facing similar challenges. Additionally, the research process and findings have exposed other areas of study that should be conducted to better understand the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators on the morale of firefighters industrywide. Analyzing the study using a Christian worldview found many similarities between positive leadership attributes, as desired by firefighters, and the servant leadership displayed by Jesus Christ. The study was concluded with the implementation suggestions for Brevard County Fire Rescue of investing in leadership training, as well as meeting the needs of the extrinsic motivators of firefighters, to reduce the turnover intent and increase morale and motivation among the employees.

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Appendix A: Respondent Information Sheet

<u>Assigned Respondent Number</u>

1) What is your gender?

2) What is your age?

3) What race/ethnicity do you identify as?

4) What is your highest level of formal education?

5) Are you a firefighter or supervisor?

Appendix B: Permission Request Letter

September 4th, 2024

Dear Fire Chief Patrick Voltaire,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Business at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand an issue that refers to leadership. The title of my research project is *Fire Department Leadership: Understanding the Influence of Positive Leadership on the Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivators of Entry-level Firefighters*, and the purpose of my research is to explore the influence of positive leadership on firefighters' morale through intrinsic and extrinsic means, leading to decreased organizational turnover.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at Brevard County Fire Rescue and invite staff from your organization to participate in my research study. Staff will be selected by rank of firefighter and Lieutenant to allow for leadership and direct reports to provide responses for the qualitative study. The individual participants will be selected at random from the population group ensuring that both genders are represented in each population group.

Participants will be asked to schedule an interview with me and partake in a focus group with others from their specific population group. Participants will be presented with consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time. All respondents will be provided with a candidate identification number to ensure anonymity of responses as well as strict confidentiality.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval of the study within your organization. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns via email at MJDestefano@Liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Michael DeStefano
Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University School of Business

Appendix C: Permission Response Letter

Brevard County Fire Rescue

Timothy J. Mills Fire Rescue Center
1040 S. Florida Avenue
Rockledge, FL 32955
Phone: (321) 633-2056 Fax: (321) 633-2057

September 30th, 2024

Dear Michael DeStefano:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled *Fire Department Leadership: Understanding the Influence of Positive Leadership on the Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivators of Entry-level Firefighters*, I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at Brevard County Fire Rescue and inviting staff members from our organization to participate as respondents in your research study. Additionally, I grant you permission to utilize employee records for the purpose of selecting a population and sample group for both interviews and focus groups.

Sincerely,

Patrick Voltaire
Fire Chief
Brevard County Fire Rescue

Appendix D: Individual Interview Guide (Firefighter)

Overall Career Questions

1) What is your level of experience with the fire department?

2) Why did you select the fire service as a career?

3) What aspects of the job motivate you to continue this career?

4) What aspects of the job discourage you from continuing this career?

Brevard County Fire Rescue Specific Questions

5) Describe some of the positive characteristics of leaders you have worked for.

6) How do a leader's positive characteristics impact your motivation?

7) Describe some of the negative characteristics of leaders you have worked for.

8) How do a leader's negative characteristics impact your motivation?

9) What motivators are most important to you?

10) How do you feel about the morale of Brevard County Fire Rescue?

11) How do you perceive the leadership styles and characteristics impact morale?

12) What factors would lead you to search for another department to work for?

13) How does morale impact your desire to stay at Brevard County Fire Rescue?

14) Are there any other factors regarding morale or motivation you would like to add?

Appendix E: Individual Interview Guide (Leadership)

Overall Career Questions

1) What is your level of experience with the fire department?

2) Why did you select the fire service as a career?

3) What aspects of the job motivate you to continue this career?

4) What aspects of the job push you away from continuing this career?

5) What formal leadership training have you obtained beyond the minimum requirements of Fire Officer I?

Brevard County Fire Rescue Specific Questions

6) Describe your leadership style.

7) How has your leadership worked to motivate firefighters in your command?

8) What leadership styles do you find have a negative response?

9) Describe some challenges that you have faced motivating and leading firefighters.

10) What motivators do you think your firefighters are influenced by?

11) How would you describe the morale of your station/shift that you lead?

12) How do you feel leadership impacts morale?

13) How does morale impact the desire to leave one organization for another?

14) Are there any other factors regarding morale or motivation that you would like to add?

Appendix F: Focus Group Questions (Both Groups)

1) Describe some examples of positive leadership and what makes them positive.

2) Describe some examples of negative leadership and what makes them negative.

3) How does leadership style impact employee engagement?

4) What motivators do you think firefighters have to enter the field?

5) How can the motivation of firefighters be improved at Brevard County Fire Rescue?

6) How is the morale at your organization?

7) How has morale impacted the turnover intent of the firefighters at Brevard County Fire Rescue?

8) Are there any other factors regarding morale or motivation that you would like to add?