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EDITORS NOTE

In this volume of IABS we have gathered articles which provoke unique thought from a socio-economic and inclusive focus in Education, Skills Training in Industry, and Minority Businesses.

Dr. Joseph provides an investigative focus on adult learning and how to create a respectful atmosphere to accomplish societal goals.

Dr's Heinzman & Heinzman introduce a proposal on research towards skills training to support technical and manufacturing trades in the U.S. The proposal also explores behavior that is a barrier to skills training and discusses data pointing to the importance of skills training to support current and future manufacturing in the U.S.

Dr. Bliven introduces a IRB approved quantitative research paper on the impact student recognition has on the motivation and organizational commitment of disaggregated faculty in a Competency based University.

Dr. Kyle presents challenges confronting minority-owned business leaders in Washington State's Puget Sound region. The observations presented in the article explore diverse experiences spanning ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The study is regional but may have broader implications nationwide in the U.S.

Thank you to our authors for their thought-provoking articles contributing to a greater conversation on diversity and inclusion in education and business.

Dr. J. Robert Heinzman

Adult Learner-Educator Dynamics for Success

Dr. Thomas Joseph, PhD., MSM

Western Governors University

February 7, 2024

Abstract

This short paper investigates adult learning in higher education, focusing on its role in promoting diversity, dynamism, and accomplishing societal goals. The study underlines the importance of specialized teaching practices that address adult learners' self-directed nature, goal orientation, and various backgrounds to establish an inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environment. It also emphasizes educators' critical role in creating a healthy classroom environment through active involvement, a respectful atmosphere, and customized feedback, which contributes to academic and personal progress. This strategy supports a culture of lifelong learning, which is critical for adult learners' success in higher education.

Keywords: adult learner, educator, higher education, characteristics of adult learner, learning environment, effective teaching

Introduction

Adult learning has an incalculable impact on higher education, contributing uniquely to the educational landscape. Adult learners, often defined as those aged 25 and up (Southern Regional Education Board, 2020), bring a multitude of experiences, viewpoints, and distinct motivations to the educational setting (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). This demographic's participation improves the entire learning environment, making it more lively, relevant, and responsive to the demands of a diverse and inclusive society. Adult learners have unique traits that set them apart from regular students. These traits, influenced by their life experiences, responsibilities, and personal motivations, help to create a dynamic and diverse learning environment.

The exploration of adult learning in higher education, the characteristics of adult learners, understanding these characteristics for effective teaching, and the role of educators in creating a positive learning environment emphasizes the critical interaction between pedagogy, learner attributes, and the educational setting.

The Significance of Adult Learning in Higher Education

Adult learning is important in higher education because it adds diversity, dynamism, and relevance to the educational experience. Recognizing and supporting adult learners in academic institutions enriches the learning environment while also aligning with societal goals of fostering a skilled, flexible, and empowered community.

One of the most important aspects of adult learning is the variety of

experiences that adult learners bring to the academic setting. Many adults pursue higher education while balancing work, family responsibilities, and other life obstacles. This diversity generates an environment in which multiple points of view converge, resulting in a deeper and more engaging learning experience. According to Taylor, Marienau, and Fiddler (2000), adult learners' experiences enrich classroom discussions and bring theoretical concepts to life.

Furthermore, adult learning is distinguished by its purpose-driven approach. Adults, unlike traditional students who join higher education directly from high school, frequently have specific goals in mind, such as professional growth, skill acquisition, and/or personal development (Knowles et al., 2015). This purpose-driven approach ensures that adult learners are highly motivated and actively involved in the learning process. Their ability to see how their studies apply directly to their professional and personal lives helps them have a better comprehension of the subject.

The emphasis on self-directed learning is another distinguishing element of adult education. Knowles (1975) popularized the term andragogy, arguing that adults prefer a more autonomous and self-directed approach to learning. This autonomy not only meets the need for self-regulation in adult learners, but it also instills a sense of duty and accountability for their education. Self-directed learning prepares people for a continuous learning mindset, which is vital in an age when flexibility is a must-have talent (Merriam & Bierema 2014). Integrating adult learners into higher education promotes the development of critical thinking and problem-

solving abilities. Adults' maturity and life experiences help them to analyze concepts and challenges more deeply. According to Brookfield (2012), adult learners' ability to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios strengthens classroom discussions and encourages peers to think critically.

Adult learning meets the changing needs of the modern workforce. In a fast-changing global economy characterized by technological developments and economic transformations, adults frequently return to higher education to upskill or reskill (Field, 2019). This continual cycle of learning keeps the worker competitive, adaptive, and prepared to face the difficulties of a changing employment market.

Characteristics of Adult Learners

Adult learners, a distinct group in educational settings, have specific qualities that separate them apart from typical pupils. Fensie (2023) confirmed that adult learners possess qualities that influence their ability to learn. These traits, influenced by life experiences, responsibilities, and personal motivations, help to create a dynamic and diverse learning environment.

To begin with, adult learners are distinguished by their self-directedness. Adults prefer autonomy in their learning path, as opposed to traditional students who rely on regimented courses. They have a strong sense of self-regulation, taking responsibility for setting objectives, managing

time, and determining their educational route. This self-directed approach arises from a greater understanding of individuals' unique learning needs and preferences. Another important feature is the breadth of life experiences that adult learners bring to the educational setting. Adults amass a wide reservoir of experiences through job, family, and personal efforts, which serve as a vital resource in the learning process (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). These experiences serve as a lens through which students perceive new information, encouraging a deeper understanding and appreciation of the subject matter.

Adult learners are generally motivated by practical goals and relevance. Adults, unlike their younger counterparts, usually engage in educational programs with specific goals in mind, such as career growth, skill gain, or personal development (Knowles et al., 2015). This goal oriented mindset promotes a high level of involvement and tenacity.

Furthermore, adult learners tend to have a results-oriented mindset. With a firm grasp of their goals, people expect real results from their educational endeavors (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). This pragmatic perspective frequently manifests as a preference for learning experiences that immediately apply to real-world circumstances, emphasizing the practicality and instant use of acquired knowledge. Finally, adult learners' diverse backgrounds and viewpoints strengthen the learning environment. Adult learners, unlike conventional students, come to the classroom with a diverse range of cultural, professional, and personal backgrounds (Brookfield, 2012). This diversity encourages a lively interchange of ideas, extending viewpoints and questioning assumptions.

Despite these distinguishing features, it is critical to remember that adult learners are not a homogeneous population, and their characteristics may differ. Understanding and valuing these traits allows educators and institutions to successfully adjust instructional techniques and support services, resulting in an inclusive and conducive learning environment for adult learners. Adult learners' particular traits, such as self-directedness, life experiences, motivation, results-oriented emphasis, and variety, contribute to a different educational dynamic. Recognizing and exploiting these characteristics is critical for developing educational programs that address the individual requirements and preferences of adult learners, resulting in a transforming and engaging learning experience.

Understanding the Characteristics of Adult Learners: Crucial for Effective Teaching

Catering to the specific qualities of adult learners is not simply a consideration; it is a vital requirement for developing successful teaching and providing meaningful learning experiences. Recognizing and adjusting to these particular characteristics is critical to the success of adult education programs. Adult learners' self-directedness is an important consideration. Adults, unlike conventional students, frequently have a clear knowledge of their learning objectives and bring a variety of personal and professional experiences to the classroom (Knowles, 1975). Recognizing their autonomy and allowing for self-

directed exploration can boost motivation and engagement.

Adult learners prioritize the relevance of their learning. They are frequently motivated by practical objectives, such as professional promotion or skill development (Knowles et al., 2015). As a result, successful teaching entails integrating course content with real-world applications, emphasizing the immediate relevance of information to students' lives. Another important concern is that adult learners are results-driven. They want real results from their education, highlighting the value of practical skills and applicable knowledge (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Teaching styles that emphasize results and application can be more effective for adult learners.

The different origins and experiences that adult learners bring to the classroom necessitate a teaching style that values and utilizes this complex tapestry of viewpoints. Recognizing and using this diversity can result in a dynamic learning environment in which students learn not just from the instructor but also from their classmates' diverse experiences (Brookfield, 2012). Furthermore, knowing the motivations that drive adult learners is critical. Adult learners are frequently driven by personal goals while pursuing education for personal development, professional promotion, or skill acquisition (Knowles et al., 2015). Tapping into these incentives to increase engagement and commitment is essential for effective teaching. Finally, acknowledging that adult learners frequently juggle several commitments, such as employment and family, is critical. Flexible instructional methods, supporting varied learning styles, and providing accessible resources are critical

components of effective adult education teaching.

A clear knowledge of the features of adult learners is more than just an academic exercise; it provides a foundation for effective teaching in higher education. Educators can create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that maximizes adult learners' potential by embracing their self-directed nature, recognizing the relevance of learning, valuing a results-oriented focus, appreciating diversity, understanding motivational factors, and accommodating their unique life circumstances.

The Role of the Educator in Creating a Positive Learning Environment

In higher education, the educator's job goes much beyond simply passing on knowledge. It includes the establishment of a pleasant learning environment that promotes growth, inclusivity, and involvement. According to Ellis (2022), understanding how to improve learning processes can lead to better learning outcomes. This section of the paper outlines techniques for educators to create a supportive and inclusive classroom and learning environment.

- **Establishing clear expectations.** Educators should convey principles, objectives, and assessment criteria. Clarity in expectations helps students grasp the learning process and feel confident in their academic journey (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

- **Promoting active engagement.** Encouraging students to actively participate in conversations, collaborative projects, and hands-on activities increases their sense of belonging and investment in learning (Freeman et al. 2014). This involvement leads to a pleasant classroom environment.
- **Cultivate a culture of respect.** Educators build an environment in which students feel valued and appreciated by demonstrating polite behavior, acknowledging varied opinions, and encouraging open discourse (Davis 2019). Respectful interactions foster a positive and inclusive school environment.
- **Adapting teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences.** Educators should understand their students' specific strengths and problems and use a variety of instructional strategies to meet varied requirements (Grasha, 1996). This inclusivity fosters a happy and helpful learning environment for everyone. Adult learners have different learning styles and interests; therefore, educators must customize their teaching tactics accordingly. Recognizing and leveraging each student's particular skills and limitations, instructors should use a range of educational approaches. This method not only meets diverse learning needs but also promotes a happy and inclusive learning atmosphere. Recent research by Smith et al. (2019) and Jones and Williams (2020) emphasize the value of adaptive teaching strategies in improving student engagement and achievement in adult education.

- **Providing constructive feedback.** Feedback should be timely, detailed, and focused on growth, allowing students to improve their skills and gain confidence (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Constructive feedback promotes a culture of continuous progress.
- **Leveraging the technology of the digital age.** Educators may increase inclusion by embracing technology. Technology-based learning has influenced more active ways to how adults learn (Maoqqa, 2023). Using online platforms, discussion forums, and multimedia resources accommodates different learning styles and guarantees that all students, regardless of background, have equitable access to educational materials (Means et al. 2013).
- **Being approachable and available.** Educators who are available and responsive to students' questions, concerns, and feedback foster a sense of support and approachability (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Availability emphasizes the idea that the educator is a participant in the student's learning process. The educator's role in fostering a healthy learning environment is complex.

Educators contribute considerably to the entire learning experience by setting clear goals, encouraging active participation, building respect, modifying teaching tactics, providing constructive criticism, utilizing technology, and being approachable. A good and inclusive classroom atmosphere not only improves academic performance but also promotes personal and professional development, preparing students for success outside of the classroom.

Conclusion

In conclusion, adult learning in higher education is extremely important, needing tailored approaches that identify and utilize the unique characteristics of adult learners. Understanding these traits is critical, as it serves as the foundation for effective teaching approaches and contributes significantly to the creation of a good and conducive learning environment. It is critical to acknowledge that educators' roles extend beyond the traditional distribution of knowledge; they also cultivate an environment that promotes growth, inclusivity, and active engagement.

Educators have a complex role in shaping a holistic learning experience by recognizing adult learners' distinct characteristics. This includes customizing teaching approaches to adult learners' self-directedness, incorporating real-world applications, and appreciating the different life experiences that learners bring to the educational environment. By doing so, educators not only improve the effectiveness of their instruction but also create an environment that is tailored to the individual needs and ambitions of adult students.

Essentially, educators' collaborative efforts, based on a deep understanding of adult learners, enable higher education institutions to better meet the unique and changing demands of this demographic. This strategy helps to cultivate a culture of lifelong learning, which promotes long-term academic achievement among adult learners in higher education.

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**A Comprehensive Longitudinal Study of US Manufacturing Labor:
Methods to Facilitate Manufacturing Workforce Growth and
Performance**

Joseph Heinzman JR DBA

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Abstract

Manufacturing drives major economic and workplace stability and growth, while a growing population drives the creation of jobs in all economic sectors. Generational behavioral dynamics affect the attitudinal adaptation to performance outcomes of industries. Many factors drive the country's behavioral perspective regarding career pathways and impact the decision to pursue a career in trades such as manufacturing. This proposal posits that a longitudinal exploration of the variables driving industry success such as training, motivation, job satisfaction, performance, and staffing will produce methods to support the current industry demands and onshoring effects.

Introduction

Manufacturing drives major economic and workplace stability and growth, while a growing population drives the creation of jobs in all economic sectors. Generational behavioral dynamics affect the attitudinal adaptation to performance outcomes of industries. Many factors drive the country's behavioral perspective regarding career pathways and impact the decision to pursue a career in trades such as manufacturing. This proposal posits that a longitudinal exploration of the variables driving industry success such as training, motivation, job satisfaction, performance, and staffing will produce methods to support the current industry demands and onshoring effects.

Background

The consequences of offshoring on US production have resulted in a mixed bag of outcomes. On the one hand, it has led to lower prices for consumers as companies have been able to reduce their production costs by shifting jobs overseas. On the other hand, it has led to job losses in some sectors as companies have found it cheaper to produce goods and services abroad. However, the effects of offshoring on US jobs have been more negative. According to a study by the McKinsey Global Institute, offshoring has resulted in millions of US job losses since the 1990s. The study found that the most vulnerable jobs to offshoring are routine, low-skilled, and easily codified (Farrell, 2004).

The impact of offshoring on US workers has also been mixed. Some workers have been able to find new jobs in other sectors, while others have been forced to accept lower wages or take early retirement. The impact has been particularly severe for workers in manufacturing and other industries that have been heavily affected by offshoring. In recent years, there has been a debate about the future of offshoring. Some experts believe that offshoring will continue to decrease as wages rise in developing countries and automation takes over more jobs. Others believe that offshoring will continue to be a significant trend in the global economy as companies seek to reduce their costs and improve their efficiency.

The shortage of technical skills education creates a major roadblock to bringing manufacturing back to the US. A considerable number of American workers lack the necessary skills and knowledge to work in the manufacturing industry, which is attributed to several factors such as the decline of manufacturing in the US. This led to a reduction in the number of manufacturing jobs and the number of people with relevant skills. Moreover, the focus on STEM education has diverted attention from other areas such as manufacturing, leading to fewer people learning technical skills. In addition, the offshoring of US manufacturing since the mid-1970s has caused the traditional technical skilled positions to move into engineering, design, software, and other STEM-oriented positions requiring college degrees.

This shift supported the design in the US and manufacturing offshore at a lower cost strategy and led to a decreased labor force participation rate. Lastly, the current manufacturing workforce in the United States is aging, which means that there are fewer young people entering the manufacturing industry, and the skills of the existing workforce are declining. To facilitate the reshoring of manufacturing, there needs to be a renewed emphasis on technical education in the United States. This includes providing more opportunities for people to learn technical skills through apprenticeships and technical training programs.

Sustaining and growing industry in the US is a challenging task due to various barriers. Some of the most common barriers include high labor costs, complex tax code and regulatory environment, aging infrastructure, shortage of skilled workers, stiff competition from foreign countries, trade wars, and uncertainty in the global economy. Other factors such as the availability of raw materials, the cost of energy, and the political climate can also play a role. To overcome these barriers, businesses need to be innovative and find ways to operate more efficiently. They also need to work with the government to address some of the challenges, such as the skills shortage and the aging infrastructure. By working together, businesses and the government can create a more favorable environment for industry to thrive.

There are various strategies that can be implemented to develop a workforce to support the manufacturing industries in the

United States. These strategies include investing in education and training to provide more opportunities for people to learn technical skills, such as through apprenticeships and technical training programs. Another effective strategy is to promote manufacturing careers by raising awareness of manufacturing opportunities and required skills. Offering competitive wages, benefits, and training opportunities can make manufacturing jobs more attractive and help attract and retain skilled workers. Creating a welcoming and supportive environment for workers can also help in retaining skilled workers.

Purpose of the Proposed Study

Training alternatives need to be developed to support the long-term health of the manufacturing industry. The labor shortage will continue, and it is posited that increased worker performance through new and accelerated training methodologies will reduce the need for new workers. The desirability of manufacturing labor and career pathing will be explored through behavioral research with workforce marketing messaging as a goal. The overarching purpose of the proposed study is to explore behavioral relationships aimed at improving performance and Sociotechnical Systems in the industry and supply guidance for training, attracting, and retaining employees through new and accelerated training models.

Theories to be Tested

The efficacy of training as a methodology to improve motivation

and job satisfaction will be explored and empirically tested. The relationship between motivation and job satisfaction to employee performance will be explored and empirically tested. The impact of the tested variables and relationships on staffing requirements will be analyzed.

Research Questions

1. Is training positively and significantly related to motivation?
2. Is training positively and significantly related to job satisfaction?
3. Is training positively and significantly related to job performance?
4. Is motivation positively and significantly related to employee job performance?
5. Is job satisfaction positively and significantly related to employee job performance?
6. Is job performance positively and significantly related to staffing requirements?

Literature Review

Khan (2012) investigated the relationship between training and motivation on employee performance. Shah, et al. (2022) looked at human resource planning factors such as selection, training, appraisal, etc. on organizational performance. Li and Sanusi (2023) explored entrepreneurial motivation and business

performance. This research will build on these authors' work, and many more, supporting the research questions, hypotheses, and the overarching research model.

Workforce Dynamics

The workforce has been rapidly evolving as technology such as robotics and artificial intelligence rapidly advances. The COVID-19 Pandemic provided shocks to the workforce impacting career changes and contributing to the Great Resignation. While it is perceived that the Great Resignation ended August 2023 (JOLT, BLS.gov) 47.8 million people quit their jobs in 2021 and 50.5 million people (quit their jobs in 2022). The Great Resignation churned the workforce impacting career paths.

There is a labor shortage in the workforce partially due to the Great Resignation. Many of the 98.3 million (47.8M 2021 + 50.5M 2022) quits were looking for improved work-life balance and flexibility, increased pay and benefits, and a strong company culture. Hiring rates have been higher than quit rates since November 2020 but workers do not necessarily return to their previous occupation. The quit rates by industry in June 2023 were as follows (Ferguson, Aug. 10, 2023):

Table 1.

Industry	Quit Rate %
Leisure and Hospitality	5.0%
Wholesale and retail Trade	2.7%
Professional and business services	2.7%
Durable goods manufacturing	1.4%
Financial activities	1.4%

The labor force shortage i.e., unfilled jobs by industry in July 2023 were as follows (Ferguson, Aug. 10, 2023):

Table 2.

Industry	Shortage Rate %
Leisure and Hospitality	30%
Wholesale and retail Trade	25%
Professional and business services	60%
Durable goods manufacturing	25%
Financial activities	55%

At a macro level, the workforce dynamics include governmental regulations, an aging workforce, and workforce participation.

Governmental Regulations

Government regulations are intended to protect consumers, employees, and the general population from workplace discrimination, fraud, product safety, etc. Employment and labor laws help create a safe workplace and a good working environment. There are many other reasons for regulations. Non-compliance with regulations can cause monetary and punitive consequences for a business (Impacts, 2023).

Regulations present barriers to the success of manufacturing in the United States. There are an estimated 297,696 federal regulations impacting manufacturing. While a safe working environment is accepted as a good thing by manufacturers, too many regulations are a barrier to success. Regulations impact small businesses that make up 90% of the total 250,000 manufacturing companies in the United States and impacts their ability to borrow money. (Gray, 2023).

The proposed study will explore the impact of regulations on staffing and other manufacturing elements that are a focus in this longitudinal effort.

Aging Workforce

The US workforce is aging with a median age of 38.9 in 2022 and rising into the future. The increase from 2021 to 2022 was .2 from 38.7 to 38.9. The continued lack of growth of a young workforce creates consequences for business. This process increases

the cost to employers for medical insurance, wage increases, paid time off, and other costs. Women may need to leave the workforce to care for aging parents which will reduce the number of female workers available. (Gonzales, July 27, 2023).

Attracting and retaining a quality manufacturing workforce is a top challenge facing the manufacturing sector. The continued economic expansion and low unemployment will exacerbate the challenge as the Baby Boom generation ages and exits the workforce. 25% of the manufacturing workforce is 55 or older. This aging workforce impacts performance and productivity. Manufacturers are boosting recruiting efforts, inserting innovative technologies, and implementing programs to increase the productivity of older workers. (Manufacturing Institute, 2019).

97% of manufacturing firms are aware and concerned with the aging workforce and 78% of manufacturing firms are very or somewhat concerned with the aging workforce. Many organizations are capitalizing on the talents of the older workers and 46% report benefiting from older workers to a considerable extent.

Successful organizations deal with this aging crisis by focusing on four key objectives.

1. Early Awareness: Creating open communications channels, discuss retirement as retirement age approaches, and ensure that employees feel valued and safe.

2. Knowledge Transfer: Take advantage of mentoring and apprenticeship programs. Collect and track a “lessons learned” database or record. Hire older workers with knowledge and experience.
3. Retention and Productivity Maximization: Increase the use of robotics. Encourage workers to cross train by moving to another position internally. Adopt part-time practices and project contracting.
4. Boost Recruitment: Encourage older workers to help in recruitment efforts. Attain referrals from older workers. (Manufacturing Institute, 2019)

The top 5 tools used to source nonexecutive candidates is as follows: (SHRM Benchmarking, 2022, p6)

Table 3

Tools Used to Recruit Nonexecutives

Tool	Percentage Surveyed Using the Tool
Employee Referrals	95%
Company website	83%
Job Boards (paid)	83%
Job Boards (free)	81%
LinkedIn	73%

The top 5 technical skills needed according to the SHRM Benchmarking: Talent Access Report (2022, p16) are as follows:

Table 4

Technical Skills Needed

Technical Skills Needed	Percentage Surveyed Needing Skill
Trade Skills	85%
Project Management Skills	66%
Data Analytics	53%
Advanced Computer Skills	50%
Bilingual or multilingual skills	20%

The aging workforce will bring many challenges as current conditions go unabated until the depletion of the Baby Boom generation exits the workforce. Solutions need to be found before the youngest Boomers who are 56 years old today leave the workforce.

Workforce Participation

Workforce Participation includes all people actively engaged in the workforce and is the percentage of the total population participating in the workforce. The demographic groups include but are not limited to people having prison records, veterans, women, men, minorities, etc.

The Labor Force Participation rate is an estimate of the economy's active population between the age of 16 and older who are

employed or actively seeking employment. The rate is calculated by dividing the number of people participating by the total non-institutionalized civilian working-age population. (Hayes, Kell, & Rathburn, August 8, 2023).

The Labor Force Participation Rate was 62.8% as of August 2023 down from 66.4% in 2007. The highest participation rate was 67.3% in February 2000. The total US population is estimated at 335 million people and a drop from 67.3 to 62.8 % would represent an employment population decrease of 4.5% or 15 million workers. The decrease from 2007 to 2023 was 12 million of the 15 million workers leaving the workforce. The impact of the pandemic in 2020-2022 on the workforce was significant.

The total population, 10-year compound annual rate of change, peaked in 1978 prox. At 2.1 % and has steadily declined to .9 % in 2022 and project a .7% through 2031. The civilian non-institutionalized population is projected to grow 19.6 million to 281 million in 2031. The projected 19.6 million is less than the 21.8 million that ranged over the 2011-2021 decade. The slowdown in population growth is attributed to lower fertility rates, and reduced immigration compared to previous decades. The slower growth in the total population impacts the participation population. (Employment projections, September 8, 2023).

The authors propose a thorough investigation of factors affecting workforce participation, workforce size, population growth, etc.

Behavioral Factors

This proposed study will explore organizational behaviors as determinants of desired organizational outcomes. Furthermore, the interrelationship of behaviors will be studied to find predictors of desired outcomes that can be affected by organizational actions such as training and recruiting practices. This section addresses a series of relationships that will be included in the longitudinal study designed to support the longitudinal study model presented in this paper.

Motivation and Performance

Li and Sanusi (2023) developed a model that tests several motivation and performance relationships. Their research model is as follows: (Lie & Sanusi, 2023, p8.)

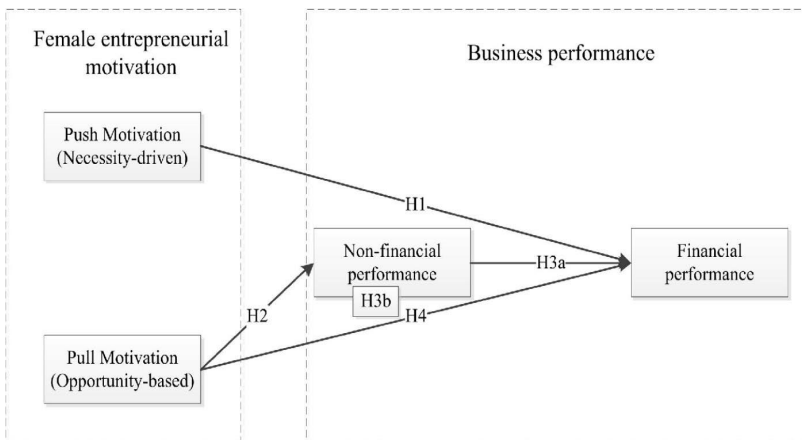


Fig 1. Theoretical model.

The Li and Sanusi (2023) findings were as follows:

H1 is supported. Push motivation significantly affects financial

performance.

H2 is supported. Pull Motivation has a significant effect on non-financial performance.

H3 is supported. Pull motivation has a positive and significant effect on non-financial performance. There is a significant negative effect between pull motivation and financial performance and business nonfinancial performance. There is a significant indirect effect for the mediation of non-financial performance the relationship between pull-motivation and financial performance.

H4 is not supported. Motivation pull has a significant negative influence on business financial performance while a positive influence was expected.

Kahn (2012) researched the impact of training and motivation on the performance of employees.

H1 hypothesized that Training increases the performance of employees. This hypothesis was supported.

H2 hypothesized that Motivation increases performance of employees. This hypothesis was supported.

There was a positive correlation between performance and training and between training and motivation. Findings indicated that if employees are adequately provided with training, they perform better. Training and motivation (if provided effectively) has a

positive influence on performance.

Findings support the positive impact of training, and motivation, and states that an increase in either of these factors increases the performance of the employees.

Job Satisfaction and Motivation

Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs led to the Ohio State studies and the focus on motivation and satisfaction as driving behavioral factors. Hackman and Oldham's (1978) work on job characteristics and psychological states added to the behavioral baseline for researchers. The proposed study will focus on the relationship between these concepts and training and performance.

Job satisfaction has many measurable variables and plethora of survey instruments. However, the generational perspective of behavior may alter the application of instruments. The development of generationally adapted instruments will be explored in this proposed study. Literature is beginning to focus on this concept.

Axelrod & Yirmiyahu (2022) studied job satisfaction, older workers, workplace practices, and job characteristics in a work entitled "Who wants to work and why? Workplace practices, job satisfaction, and the will to work." This study supports a U-shaped relationship of age related to job satisfaction and motivation. Intrinsic motivation is lower in younger than older employees. Older employees (+55) are experienced and adapted to their jobs

and exhibit intrinsic motivation which results in a longer tenure. Older employees are more focused on the positive aspects of their jobs and have higher job satisfaction than younger employees. High work satisfaction is related to job longevity.

Research question 1 was as follows:

“What are the effects workplace practices (weekly working hours, additional benefits, personal sense feelings, (satisfied with income, involved in improvement, influence important decisions, useful work, balance, job security, feel at home, feeling discrimination), job characteristics and conditions, (dangerous job, education-related, new working methods) on the job satisfaction of workers aged 25-54 compared to those of 55+”. This question generated 13 hypotheses.

Research question 2 was as follows:

“What are the effects of personal characteristics and job satisfaction on the will to work among both age groups?’ This question resulted in one hypothesis.

This study covered a broad set of relationships that will broaden the proposed research variables in helping to determine an expanded scope of the proposed paper or follow on research. Attention to behavioral variables and manipulating training and human resource planning to address age and tenured cadres will result in training developed to consider age groups/generations.

Training and Performance

The Kahn (2012) findings stated in the previous section support the relationship between training and performance.

Shah, Muhammad, & Muttalib (2022) also investigated the relationship between training and performance along with other factors. They investigated the practice of Human Resource planning in organizations.

The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What are the main factors human resource planning impacting organizational Performance?

RQ2: Is there any relation of the factors e.g., selection, training, appraisal and working condition with job satisfaction explaining human resources planning?

Their H2 hypothesis was as follows:

H2 There is a significant relationship between training and organizational performance.

H2 was not found to be a predictor of performance but was highly correlated.

This is an area of focus in the proposal where in-depth surveying and analysis will be conducted. Training methods will be evaluated using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Industry Dynamics

The proposed study will focus on three major dynamics; reshoring, domestic expansion, and sociotechnical system impacts. The study would also gather information to enable the analysis section using an adaptation of Porter's Five Forces Model, adaptation of Industrial Organizational Model, and adaptation of Resource Based View of the Firm. Market dynamics will be researched to augment analysis.

Reshoring

Reshoring is the function of bringing manufacturing back to the US from China and other countries. Reshoring will help solve supply chain issues, balance trade, balance import/export flow, and reduce unemployment by creating high-paying manufacturing jobs and creating a skilled workforce. Reshoring will increase revenues for manufacturing companies and help their balance sheet. The supply chain issues experienced during COVID brought to light the need to reshore manufacturing. (Fish & Spillane, July 2020).

Reshoring efforts beginning in 2013 indicated a slow shift in bringing commercial production from other countries, especially China. China's share has declined over the past 5 years benefitting other low-cost Asia countries such as Vietnam, India, and Taiwan. (Keraney, 2023).

In recent years, Mexico has taken a larger share of import markets. Mexican manufactured goods revenue has increased from

\$320 billion (about \$980 per person in the US) (about \$980 per person in the US) to \$402 billion (about \$1,200 per person in the US) an increase of 26+ percent since COVID. Many Chinese companies are moving operations to Mexico to be closer to the US markets. 96 percent of CEOs are considering reshoring, up from 78 percent in 2022. (Kearney, 2023).

Reshoring will increase the need for manufacturing labor impacting an already stressed labor supply. “Workforce capacity limits will limit the manufacturing jobs to an average of 250,000 to 500,000 jobs per year. (Rogers (July 7, 2022)). The reshoring effort and the creation of increased manufacturing labor supply and job performance will be a major focus of the proposed study.

Domestic Expansion

The future of domestic manufacturing is driven by trends, i.e., technology, talent, supply chain, smart factories, and sustainability.

The incorporation of advanced technologies will help mitigate risk. The use of advanced technologies helps manufacturers pivot quickly. Implementing digital capabilities helps secure profitability across the value chain. Robotics and automation can increase performance and efficiency.

Implementing talent management strategies will help to reduce voluntary quits. Pay increases, upskilling and reskilling, DEI Strategies, and flexible work arrangements will aid in attracting

and retaining talent.

Mitigation strategies are needed to achieve supply assurance. Manufacturers will work with suppliers to make them partners and work closely together. Diversifying the supplier base will build redundancy in the supply chain. By boosting local capacity, manufacturers will strengthen the value chain and boost local suppliers of parts and materials.

Implementing digital technologies will increase network visibility and improve supply network control and coordination.

Smart factory initiatives will increase new product opportunities and drive competitiveness. Disrupted technologies such as augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of things, will unlock new horizons.

Focusing on corporate social responsibility such as managing waste, increased supplier diversity, elevated Smart buildings, and electrifying transportation fleets to reduce carbon emissions. (Deloitte, 2023)

Sociotechnical Systems

Sociotechnical systems understanding is useful for creating effective training programs. By understanding both social and technical aspects of the workplace, it should be possible to identify the necessary skills and knowledge for tasks and develop tailored training programs. Effective training programs require an

understanding of how people learn and interact with human and technical resources. Ensuring that training programs are relevant to the industry and organization's goals and objectives can increase their value and the likelihood of workers applying what they learn. Understanding the social and technical context of a workplace can help identify potential barriers to learning, such as lack of access to technology or support from supervisors. This can help address barriers and ensure equal learning opportunities for all workers.

Sociotechnical systems theory recognizes the workplace as a complex system where people and technology interact, influencing learning. This understanding increases the likelihood that training models consider the social and technical factors that impact learning, including organizational culture, work nature, and learner skills and abilities. It can also help identify learners' specific needs, including their knowledge, skills, abilities, motivation, and learning style, to tailor training models. Lastly, Sociotechnical systems theory can evaluate training models' effectiveness in meeting the learners' and organization's needs, considering social and technical factors. Sociotechnical systems understanding can help to identify the specific barriers to embracing technical education and technical careers. These barriers can be social, economic, or cultural.

Sociotechnical systems theory can help to identify the root causes of barriers to technical education and develop tailored interventions. For instance, parents lacking knowledge or skills can be provided with education and financial assistance, or schools can

partner with businesses to offer opportunities. Sociotechnical systems understanding can help evaluate the effectiveness of interventions implemented to address barriers to parents embracing technical education and careers for their children. This can help ensure that the interventions are effective and reach the intended audience.

Economic Environment

Today's economy is a global economy that continues to become more expanded and more globally integrated as countries such as Brazil, India, China, and Russia extend their reach. Globalization forces are focusing on Africa for expansion.

The current global economic environment sees significant levels of global inflation with a recession possible in the next 6 months. Recessions occur about every 10 years. (Franz, Zhou, & Atluri, 2023).

The focus of the proposed study will be to explore the economic risks to the manufacturing industry and risk mitigation methodologies.

Training

Skills training is necessary for trade workers to enter the workforce. Firms prefer a knowledge of skills and one year of experience. Training is needed to support effectiveness in the workplace and to increase performance. General training raises

performance when accomplished within an organization and benefits the worker when they remain within the industry (Khan, 2012).

The author's (Dr. Joseph Heinzman, Jr.) experience as Director of Apprenticeship at Pasco Hernando State College was an enlightening journey. This section is based on his experience working with associations, advisory committees, governmental entities, host companies, community organizations, and much more.

The traditional apprenticeship such as the Independent Electrical Contractors, Florida West Coast Chapter, ([Developing the Electrician Profession | IEC Florida West Coast](#)) uses classroom training and On-The-Job training over a four-year apprenticeship to produce licensed electricians. The apprentices are hired by IECFWC members before starting the apprenticeship program. Some programs use classroom, laboratory, and OJT such as the Withlacoochee River Electric 5-year lineman apprenticeship program. ([WREC is... - Withlacoochee River Electric Cooperative, Inc. | Facebook](#)). Applicants get hired into WREC as apprentices.

There were 547,922 active apprentices in FY21 but manufacturing only had 23,720 apprentices. (FY2021 Data and Statistics, 2023). As of March 2023, there were 693,000 open manufacturing jobs.

(Stephanie Ferguson,2023)

The proposal will explore new training models intended to get

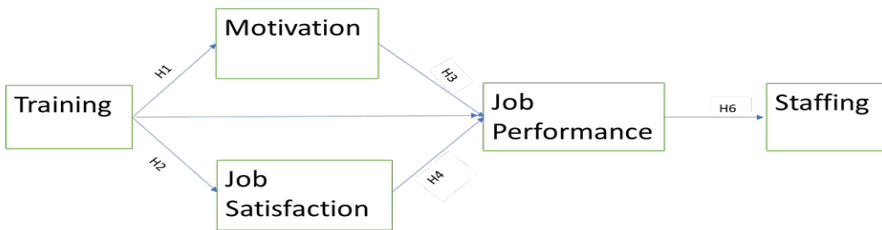
many more entrants into the manufacturing workforce.

Methodology

The proposed research model will explore measurable quantitative variables and qualitative research findings in a mixed-use methodology. The research model demonstrates the relationships expected.

Chart 1

Research Model



The modeled alternative hypotheses are as follows:

H1a Training is positively and significantly related to motivation.

H2a Training is positively and significantly related to job satisfaction.

H3a Training is positively and significantly related to job performance.

H4a Motivation is positively and significantly related to employee job performance.

H5a job satisfaction is positively and significantly related to employee job performance.

H6 Job performance is positively and significantly related to staffing requirements.

Survey instruments will be used or created to gather data for statistical analysis to test the null hypothesis of each alternative hypothesis in this section.

Timeline:

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Literature Research	Literature Research	Literature Research	Literature Research	Literature Research
	Surveys	Surveys	Surveys	Surveys
Industry Interviews	Industry Interviews	Industry Interviews	Industry Interviews	
Analysis	Analysis	Analysis	Analysis	Analysis
Conference(s)	Conference(s)	Conference(s)	Conference(s)	Conference(s)
Publication	Publication	Publication	Publication	Publication
				Final Publication

Work Breakdown:

A Comprehensive Longitudinal Study of

US Manufacturing Labor: Training to

Facilitate Manufacturing Workforce

Growth

WBS

Work Breakdown Structure Description	Element
--------------------------------------	---------

Manufacturing Labor	1.0
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Introduction	1.1
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Literature Review	1.2
-------------------	-----

Workforce Dynamics	1.2.1
--------------------	-------

Governmental Regulations	1.2.1.1
--------------------------	---------

Aging Workforce	1.2.1.2
-----------------	---------

Workforce Participation	1.2.1.3
-------------------------	---------

Demographic Group	1.2.1.3.1
-------------------	-----------

People Having Prison Records	1.2.1.3.1.1
------------------------------	-------------

Veterans	1.2.1.3.1.2
----------	-------------

Women	1.2.1.3.1.3
-------	-------------

Great Resignation	1.2.1.3.2
-------------------	-----------

Competition For Labor	1.2.1.3.3
Other Industries	1.2.1.3.3.1
Online & Remote Jobs	1.2.1.3.3.2
White Collar Jobs	1.2.1.3.3.3
Quits, Openings, & Hires	1.2.1.3.4
Behavioral Factors	1.2.2
Motivation and Performance	1.2.2.1
Job Satisfaction and Performance	1.2.2.2
Training and Performance	1.2.2.3
Parents	1.2.2.4
Schools	1.2.2.5
Social Media	1.2.2.6
Peer Groups	1.2.2.7
Generational Preferences	1.2.2.8
Industry Dynamics	1.2.3
Reshoring	1.2.3.1
Domestic Expansion	1.2.3.2
Economic Environment	1.2.4
Recession	1.2.4.1

Consumer Demand Shift	1.2.4.1.1
Interest Rates	1.2.4.1.2
Taxes	1.2.4.2
Training	1.2.5
Methodology	1.3
Quantitative Methods	1.3.1
Qualitative Methods	1.3.2

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The Impact a Student Recognition Program Has on a Disaggregated Faculty in a Competency-based University (CBU)

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Abstract:

This study aims to determine the relationship between faculty job satisfaction and job retention with the moderating variable of student recognition on a disaggregated faculty in a competency-based university. Barnard Simon's Theory of Organizational Equilibrium posits a faculty's "decision to remain is after weighing one's perception of one's contribution to the organization of one's perception of the organization's contribution to one's life." Using a T-test for Equality of Means and Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, the treatment group had a 14% to 18% greater mean ($p < 0.01$) than the control group for teacher motivation and gratitude.

Abstract

At a time in the history of higher education when the value of a college education is under siege and college faculty are reexamining their career choices, this research study investigates the impact a student recognition program has on a disaggregated faculty in a competency-based university. In this case, three different types of university faculty facilitate the student's learning. This study aims to determine the relationship between faculty job satisfaction and job retention and the impact of student recognition on that relationship. Barnard Simon's Theory of Organizational Equilibrium posits a faculty's "decision to remain is after weighing one's perception of one's contribution to the organization of one's perception of the organization's contribution to one's life."

The treatment group is faculty whose students received an excellence award and wrote grateful messages, and the control group is faculty whose students have not received an excellence award. The faculty completed a survey regarding their level of satisfaction with their career and institution and their gratitude for their life and career. There was also demographic data, including the length of time teaching at the institution. Using a T-test for Equality of Means and Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, the treatment group had a 14% to 18% greater mean ($p < 0.01$) than the control group for teacher motivation and gratitude. There was a tenure difference between the groups by eight years for faculty tenure greater than five years. This study's significant results have shown that the student recognition program positively impacts faculty satisfaction and retention.

Keywords: Job satisfaction, higher education, job retention, intention to leave, student recognition

Introduction

Colleges and universities are challenged with seeking and finding qualified and high quality faculty members. After the search is over and the teaching commences, the strategic challenge begins with keeping this sought-after talent teaching in the classroom. Retention of college faculty is paramount to educating students in their respective colleges or universities. The literature has overwhelming evidence showing positive correlated relationships between job satisfaction and job retention. Researchers in the past 20 years have discovered there are many factors involved in the job satisfaction of college faculty, such as self-efficacy (Caprara et al., 2003; Klassen & Chiu, 2010), motivation (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995), and social-cognitive factors such as affective commitment (Joseph et al., 2017). Past research indicates a relationship between gratitude and job satisfaction (Chugh & Sahai, 2021; Furlong et al., 2014) in domains other than higher education.

The faculty at the competency-based university (CBU) where this research will be performed is disaggregated. Each student has a course instructor, program mentor, and evaluation faculty that supports their pursuit and course performance. The course instructor instructs the student, and the program mentor is the student's coach, advisor, and supervises their course progress. Only the course instructor and program mentor are student-facing. Evaluation faculty (hereafter referred to as

“evaluator”) assess student submissions for competency and has no direct contact with the student. The evaluator has only indirect contact with the student in the form of the feedback they provide to the student. The evaluator is the one to determine a student’s competency by evaluating the student’s work ensuring the student met the rubric requirements to pass a performance assessment, while multiple-choice assessments (AKA: Objective assessments) are machine scored. Unlike the course instructor and program mentor, the evaluator can nominate students for an Excellence Award and recognize them for submitting superior work when the level of performance is greater than competent, and it is apparent the student went above and beyond what was required of them to pass the performance assessment.

The Excellence Awards program at the CBU acknowledges student work that is deemed excellent with evidence of exceeding the requirements to pass the performance assessment. Approximately 3% of all student submissions are nominated for an Excellence Award. About 60% of the awarded students write a "thank you" to their course instructor, mentor, and evaluator who nominated them when the student is notified of their selection. The "thank you" responses often included other instrumental staff of their achievement and success, such as instructors at the Writing Center, Math Lab, Educational Technical Service, and Enrollment Counselors. These grateful responses are shared with the faculty and staff weekly.

Approximately 30% of staff and faculty replied to the shared student's appreciative responses with gratitude for reading what the student wrote. Often, these faculty members express their uplifted spirit, pride in their

student's accomplishments and achievements, increased motivation, and positive attitude toward the university, showing this award program's impact on them personally and professionally.

There is abundant research showing a direct relationship between job satisfaction and job retention in the domain of higher education (Tirta & Enrika, 2020) (Armer, 2011) (ur Rehman et al., 2020) (Takawira et al., 2014). The more satisfied an educator is, the less likely they are to have intentions to leave the university.

Research findings indicate a positive relationship between gratitude and job satisfaction (Aodton, Wareewanich, & Chankoson, 2021; Stegen & Wankier, 2018). Researchers reported that gratitude from others fosters good and positive feelings, emotions, and thoughts. In the case of the CBU, faculty expressed these positive thoughts and emotions in their replies after receiving the shared student's grateful responses. The literature review for this study located no publications or gray papers that addressed the central question proposed.

Research Question

What are the relationships between faculty job satisfaction when their students receive recognition of excellence and faculty notification of student grateful student responses and this, in turn, with intended job retention, intention to leave or stay with the university in a disaggregated competency-based university?

General Objective

Determine the relationship between job satisfaction, student recognition

of excellence, and receiving grateful student responses, and this, in turn, with intended job retention, intention to leave or stay with the university in a disaggregated competency-based university.

Hypotheses

H1: Job satisfaction is positively related to students' recognition of excellence and faculty receiving grateful student responses in a disaggregated faculty at a competency-based university.

H2: Receiving notification of student excellence award and grateful student responses relates positively to job retention in a disaggregated faculty at a competency-based university.

Employing the approaches used by past researchers regarding gratitude, this investigation will further the learning of the influence of student recognition of excellence and student gratitude on faculty job satisfaction and intention to leave the CBU. This construct has never been studied in higher education, especially in the domain of competency-based education.

Theoretical Framework

Barnard Simon's Theory of Organizational Equilibrium states that "motivating participants to continue making contributions is one of the most important activities of management" (March & Simon, 1958, p.56). This theory hypothesizes that turnover is a "decision taken after weighing one's perception of one's contribution to the organization of one's perception of the organization's contribution to one's life" (March and Simon, 1958). Also, according to this theory, "job

satisfaction is connected to one's compatibility with one's different roles at the workplace, on the predictability of their relationship at work, and the conformity of one's job with one's self-image" (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, Eberly, 2008). After their student is selected for an excellence award and after receiving a grateful student response, the faculty express they are uplifted, validated, and feel good about themselves, knowing they have contributed toward the success of their students.

This theory aligns well with the purpose of the research and its placement in the scholarly landscape since it focuses on contribution and the perception of the organization's contribution to one's life. In the case of this research study, it is presupposed that CBU's excellence award, and the student gratitude programs contributes to the faculty's uplifting and exhilaration. The students selected for the excellence award and the positive feedback from students is predicted to lead faculty members to thoughts of remaining employed by the university and making a further contribution.

The dependent variable, Faculty Retention

The literature refers to this construct as an intention to leave. There have been many research investigations into factors relating to faculty intention to leave (Dorenkamp & Weiß, 2018; Rosser, 2004). Pay, workload, and affective commitment directly relate to faculty intention to leave (ur Rehman et al., 2020). Morale is another factor related to the choice to leave (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002). Faculty departure intentions result from antecedent factors such as negative relationships, negative perceived organizational support, and other

factors that lead to job dissatisfaction (Zhou & Volkwein, 2004). Faculty departures take place for a myriad of reasons, sometimes related to the work environment (Rosser, 2014; Chakraborty & Ganguly, 2019), career development (Williams, 2001), and personal factors (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011).

Based on past research findings, it is logical to presuppose that in some small way the student selected to receive an Excellence Award and the faculty receiving a grateful comment from their student may lead to a faculty member feeling that their contribution is valued, appreciated, and recognized. This feeling of appreciation, in turn, may lead to them intending to stay and not leave the university. The findings from this study are anticipated to shed light on faculty retention strategies. Results to items measuring the extent to which faculty see their potential for advancement and the work itself as fulfilling are equated with the indication for faculty retention.

Independent variable, Faculty Job Satisfaction

The definition of job satisfaction most appropriate to this research study was by Saari & Judge (2004), which stated: "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (p. 404). In the case of the CBU's faculty, the selection of their students receiving an excellence award and the positive response from their students lead the faculty members to feel like they did an excellence job and that they matter to the student. It also causes them to feel appreciated and recognized for a job well-done, leading to job satisfaction (Castillo & Cano, 2004).

Research has found that when employees feel appreciated, they experience positive attitudes and job satisfaction (Saari & Judge, 2004). In the case of higher education, in addition to these positive attitudes, there is also a sense of connectedness and value (Umbach and Wawrynski, 2005; Wilson, Gaff, Dienst, Wood, and Bavry, 1975; Williams, 2006). According to Singhapakdi, Lee, Sirgy & Senasu (2015), meaningful job assignment is an essential predictor of enhanced job satisfaction. It is apparent to the faculty that they have a significant job assignment. Reading the grateful student's comment can enhance the faculty's perception of a substantial job assignment. This study equates faculty job satisfaction with positive responses to the scales measuring gratefulness and motivation factors.

***Moderating variable, student excellence award, and the grateful response from students
(Student Gratitude)***

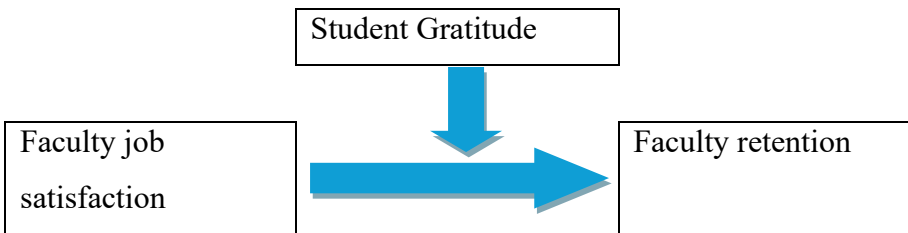
The definition of student gratitude in this research investigation is as stated by Emmons & Paloutzian (2003), gratitude is "to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the roles of other people's benevolence in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains" (p.386). Receiving a grateful response follows "appreciative emotions and moods in work and social communications" (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003, p. 387). The science of gratitude states that gratitude exerts emotion and "can boost neurotransmitter serotonin and activate the brain stem to produce dopamine. The more we think positive, grateful thoughts, the healthier and happier we feel" (Gratitude and the brain,

n.d., p.1).

These positive emotions and thoughts lead faculty members to think more positively of themselves (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006; Adler & Fagley, 2005), their competence (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002), and effectiveness (Lin, 2005; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). In addition, positivity toward their contribution in the classroom leads to elated emotions that act as motivators and stimulators for the intent to make an effort to deliver excellent education (Naz, Li, Nisar, Khan, Ahmad & Anwar, 2020) and less propensity to leave (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2016).

Figure 1

Proposed Research Model



$$FR = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * FSAT + \beta_2 * FSAT * SGRAT$$

FR is faculty retention

FSAT is faculty job satisfaction

SGRAT is student gratitude

Methodology

The study will be observational and descriptive within the quantitative paradigm, including the months of FY22 (July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022). The study population will include faculty members of a disaggregated faculty in a competency-based university. Two questionnaires will be used as the data collection method, in which the scales are validated for the variables and items that better adapt to the context studied. It is based on the GQGratitude Questionnaire developed by McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002) and the Satisfaction Questionnaire by Dr. Mertler (Mertler, 2010).

A survey originally of 30 questions (items) based on the revised theoretical framework was divided into three sections that measure each of the variables. The essential questions (items) are chosen considering the content validity (McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang, 2002).

Two different groups of faculty and staff are asked to complete the GQ-6 Gratitude Questionnaire (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002) with six items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = neutral 5 = slightly agree 6 = agree 7 = strongly agree). See Appendix A for the items of this questionnaire. In addition, Dr. Mertler, Ph.D., adopted a job satisfaction survey at Bowling Green University. This survey is titled "The Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction with ten items on a 6-point Likert scale (from Highly un motivating to Highly Motivating. See Appendix A for the items of this questionnaire. The two groups are based on whether their students received an excellence award.

Addressing Internal and External Validity

There was a random sample of 3,137 in the treatment group and

1,832 in the control group to address and control for the internal validity of this study. There was a completion rate of 37% by the treatment group and 28% by the control group. The missing data of incomplete responses were pruned before data analyses.

To address and control for external validity, using an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in SPSS, measurement reliability based on factor values took place. Ensuring the items measured what was intended was what the EFA accomplished with respectful Cronbach Alphas above .7 (See Table 1).

Results

A disaggregated faculty (N=1510) completed a survey with 16 items. Two separate groups completed the survey. Faculty with students who received an excellence award, the "treatment group" (N=1031), and faculty without students receiving an excellence award, the "control group" (N=479), completed the survey.

The faculty included Course instructors (N=390), Evaluators (N=474), and Program Mentors (N=643). The majority of respondents report over five years in their faculty roles, with the majority age group of respondents being 36-45 years old.

Faculty responded to the survey items on two scales, each with a 7-point Likert scale. The first scale measured gratefulness (1-Strongly Disagree, 7-Strongly Agree) with a Cronbach alpha of .859. Sample questions of this scale include "I have so much in life to be thankful for" and "If I had to list everything, I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list." The second scale measured motivation in two components with a

7-point Likert scale (1-Highly unmotivating, 7Highly motivating). There were two components measured using this scale. The first component was measuring personal motivation with a Cronbach alpha of .755. Sample questions of this component include asking if the items are motivational or non-motivational such as having interpersonal relationships with students and a sense of achievement (e.g., experiencing success. The second component of the motivation measurement was measuring professional motivation with Cronbach alpha .792. Sample questions of this component include asking if the items are motivational or non-motivational such as the potential for advancement (e.g., the possibility of assuming different positions in the profession) or professional growth (e.g., the possibility of improving one's own professional skills).

The data were analyzed using SPSS to conduct an Independent Sample T-test, comparing the means of items measured between the two survey groups and a One-Way ANOVA. The first step in the process of this analysis was an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) testing the reliability of the scale items. Based on this analysis, the EFA shows four of the six items measuring gratefulness were reliable with factor values greater than .4. Six items measuring personal motivation and an additional five measuring professional motivation were also found reliable with factor values greater than .4.

Table 1 Exploratory Factor Analysis

Component Matrix (Reliability Analysis)			
	Gratefulness Component 1	Personal Motivation Component 2	Professional Motivation Component 3
I have so much in life to be grateful for.	0.867		
If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.	0.850		
I am grateful to a wide variety of people.	0.784		
As I get older, I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history.	0.764		
Sense of achievement (e.g., experiencing success).		0.737	
Responsibility (e.g., autonomy, authority, and responsibility for own work).		0.733	
Work itself (e.g., aspects associated with the tasks of teaching)		0.760	

Interpersonal relationships with students (e.g., interaction with students).		0.590	
Factors in personal life (e.g., effects of teaching on one's personal life).		0.669	
Sense of accountability (e.g., being held directly responsible for student learning).		0.592	
Sense of achievement (e.g., experiencing success).			0.735
Potential for professional growth (e.g., possibility of improving one's own professional skills).			0.825
Potential for advancement (e.g., possibility of assuming different positions in the profession).			0.786
Interpersonal relationships with administrators (e.g., interaction with administrators).			0.693
Recognition (e.g., receiving praise from administrators, parents, students, or others).			0.698

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis			
Cronbach Alpha	0.859	0.755	0.792

Factor values >0.04

The Independent Sample T-test showed the comparison of the means between the treatment group and the control group was significant for six of the sixteen items. The test for significance regarding the means comparison of the other survey items was insignificant.

Table 2 T-Test for Equality of Means and Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

Item	Treatment Group	Control Group	t-test for Equality of Means	
			t	Significance (One-sided P)
Sense of accountability (e.g., being held directly responsible for student learning)	6.53	5.37	1.757	0.040

Potential for advancement (e.g., possibility of assuming different positions in the profession)	5.44	4.60	1.734	0.041
If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.	6.35	5.24	1.602	0.045
I have so much in life to be grateful for.	6.53	5.57	2.664	0.008
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				
Item	Treatment Group	Control Group	F	Sig.
Factors in personal life (e.g., effects of teaching on one's personal life)	5.87	4.91	3.767	0.053
Work itself (e.g., aspects associated with the tasks of teaching)	5.75	4.72	6.333	0.012

Significance P value <0.01 and <0.05

Table 2, testing for equality of means and equality of variances, shows a significance of $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$ for six of the sixteen items measured in the study. The items are a mix of gratefulness and

motivation, indicating the moderating variable impacting the means of these groups. Specifically, when the faculty's student receives an excellence award, this impacts the level of gratefulness and motivation for the faculty member.

Additional tests under equal variances were conducted after seeing the insignificance of the other items. The One-Way ANOVA showed a significant finding with four motivation and two grateful items.

Table 3 One-Way ANOVA F-Test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.772	6	.295	1.364	.002
Within Groups	325.281	1503	.216		
Total	327.052	1509			

Table 3 shows the results of an F test, One-Way ANOVA. The significance of $p < 0.05$ is a significant lift within the groups. This lift is evidence that when the faculty's student receives an excellence award, it positively impacts the level of their gratefulness and motivation. As was

shown in previous studies, there is a positive relationship between employee gratefulness and job satisfaction (Umbach and Wawrynski, 2005; Wilson, Gaff, Dienst, Wood, and Bavry, 1975; Williams, 2006), and there is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and job retention (Zhou & Volkwein, 2004). The results in Table 2 and Table 3 indicate significant findings when comparing the mean between the treatment and control groups regarding six of the sixteen items in the survey.

Therefore, it can be logically said that the CBU Excellence Award program positively impacts the faculty's job satisfaction, which is most likely positively impacting their job retention (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002). A Descriptive of Frequencies regarding respondents' tenure ranging from less than a year to five or more years was conducted to test the impact of a faculty member's student receiving an excellence award on their teaching tenure. There was a difference of eight percentage points between the Treatment Group (94%) and the Control Group (86%) indicating that most respondents have five or more years of tenure.

The findings regarding the gratefulness, motivation, and tenure of the faculty resulting from their students receiving excellence awards support both hypotheses:

H1: Job satisfaction is positively related to students' recognition of excellence and faculty receiving grateful student responses in a disaggregated faculty at a competency-based university.

H2: Receiving notification of student excellence award and grateful student responses relates positively to job retention in a disaggregated

faculty at a competency-based university.

In addition to the quantitative findings from this research investigation, there are anecdotal statements from the faculty as further evidence showing a positive impact because of the faculty's students receiving an Excellence Award and the faculty receiving thanks from their students in the manner of student grateful responses. Faculty members whose students receive an excellence award would appear to share in their accomplishments and are elated. The faculty expressed their delight in the grateful responses sent to the team responsible for distributing the student grateful responses. To get a fuller understanding, read the few grateful comments from the students and then read the faculty comments.

Here are just a few of the many student's responses to receiving an excellence award (unedited with student personal info redacted):

"You all have NO idea what this second academic excellence award has done for me. I've loved school since I was a little girl trying to get the highest score in my kindergarten class. However, this last year almost broke me. After losing my job, having multiple deaths in the family, having my account in the negative, almost losing my house and car, going to food banks to eat, waking up partially paralyzed in September,, going on Medical leave in October, being in pain 24/7 for 6 months, dealing with Covid (which hurt worse because every cough sent pain through my paralyzed spine and body), staying up all night every night, coming back to school depressed in January, only typing with one arm, and still trying to stay afloat, I thought this degree would be impossible. I suffered another immediate family death last month and a new medical

issue that left me completely drained of any and all hope...and almost decided I couldn't do this degree. I knew it was the final blow, but I had to try and fight for my dreams with the little strength I had left.

Something inside of me said, "[student name], keep doing your favorite thing: learning." And with the grace of God... I somehow overcame these Today, I'd like to say, thank you so much to your department."

"To be honest I am going through such a rough patch in life right now so to be recognized, to be appreciated means the absolute world to me. I know I might have typed a mini essay by now but even all of these words cannot describe how honored I feel. This is such a picker-upper and gives me an even bigger push to keep persevering not only in my academic journey but in my life's journey as well."

"To the Evaluation faculty: I am so glad I get a chance to thank you! This was my first paper submitted to [university name] - so you can imagine how nerve-wracking it can be for new students. Thank you so much for actually reading my paper and for your kind words. It meant a lot to me. When I received that encouraging response from you, it gave me a much-needed confidence boost. I feel that my final "roadblock" to accomplishing anything I need to do to acquire my degree has disappeared."

Here are some of the faculty's responses after reading the students' grateful responses (unedited):

"Not only does it make the student's day by receiving the award, but it

also makes this Evaluator's Day to read their comments. Thank you!"

"These make my week! Thank you for sending feedback the students leave. It really lifts my spirits!"

"Wow, I am so honored to be mentioned in the student's response. Thank you for sharing. Thank you so much for sharing this news! How Exciting!! It is so good to know that support that this wonderful faculty provides is making a difference."

"It really means a lot when you share with me the kind words my students have shared with you. Thank you for taking the time to do so."

"Thank you for sharing this with me today! Our students do incredible work, and I am privileged to be a part of their journey."

Discussion

A disaggregated faculty that has three faculty roles interacting with students presents challenges and opportunities for sustained job satisfaction and job retention, especially as it relates to the educational environment of competency-based education. The three roles are Program Mentors, Evaluators, and Course instructors. Job satisfaction directly correlates to job retention (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011); therefore, the impact on job satisfaction among a disaggregated faculty is critical to ensure retention.

This research investigation aimed to discover the impact a

student receiving an excellence award may have on the faculty job satisfaction impacting faculty retention in a competency-based education environment. The measures of gratefulness and motivational factors were used in this study per extant literature and with Barnard Simon's Theory of Organizational Equilibrium. The findings from this study indicated a significance in the means comparison of certain items within the measures of gratefulness and personal/professional motivation factors. These results confirm past research indications of what may impact faculty job satisfaction leading to faculty retention and adds knowledge in the research domain of competency-based higher education.

The results of this investigation show faculty are motivated by the students receiving an excellence award to continue making significant contributions to the student's learning and the CBU. This finding is essential since Barnard Simon's Theory of Organizational Equilibrium hypothesizes that turnover is a "decision taken after weighing one's perception of one's contribution to the organization of one's perception of the organization's contribution to one's life" (March and Simon, 1958). When comparing the means of the treatment group to the control group, the item "sense of accountability" had a mean difference of 0.96, $p < 0.05$, and the item "work itself" had a mean difference of 1.03, $p < 0.01$, showing a lift occurs because of the faculty's student receiving an excellence award. This lift also indicates the faculty whose student received an excellence award has greater positivity toward their role and responsibilities. After their student has received an excellence award and the faculty gets a grateful student response, the

faculty express they are uplifted, validated, and feel good about themselves, knowing they have contributed toward the success of their students.

Also, according to this theory, "job satisfaction is connected to one's compatibility with one's different roles at the workplace, on the predictability of their relationship at work, and the conformity of one's job with one's self-image" (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, Eberly, 2008). When comparing the means of the treatment group to the control group, the item "potential for advancement" had a mean difference of 0.84, $p < 0.04$. After receiving a grateful student response, the faculty express they favor the CBU and see a possibility of future advancement. This perception is undoubtedly an indicator of job satisfaction with an intention to remain employed with the CBU, which is a positive indicator and predictor of job retention.

Conclusion

The faculty responses to the grateful student responses and the findings from this research investigation comparing the means of the treatment group to the control group offer evidence of the positive impact taking place by the excellence award program at CBU. When the faculty's student receives an excellence award, that reflects the great job the faculty is doing in supporting the learning of the student. The exertion of effort taking place to support the student's education is evident in the fact the student is excelling in their coursework to the extent they were selected to receive an excellence award. Having their student excel in their coursework makes the faculty feel pleased and proud of the student's accomplishments and their role in that achievement. The feeling of joy adds to the overall positive perception of their work environment.

Positivity breeds retention (ur Rehman et al., 2020), so it is logical to conclude that expressed thankfulness from faculty members and quantitative significance of means comparison are indicators the excellence award program is integral in the CBU's faculty job satisfaction and retention. Since this is the case, the Excellence Award program benefits the CBU greatly in retaining the talented and highly effective faculty supporting and instructing the students in their learning experience, which affects future classroom and career success for the learners.

Recommendations

Further research investigating a student recognition program's

impact on the faculty is encouraged. This study intended to determine the moderating impact of a student receiving an excellence award on the job satisfaction of the disaggregated faculty of the CBU. This intention was accomplished, and this research investigation should be repeated for the predictability of faculty job retention. The result of the quantitative study is valuable when determining the impact of the excellence awards on faculty job satisfaction and, ultimately, job retention of the CBU faculty. However, three questions ensue from the results of this research regarding the attributes of the lift in gratefulness and motivation among the faculty in the treatment group.

(1) Is the lift attributable to the act of the student being referred for an excellence award? (2) Is the lift because the student got recognized for their excellent work? (3) Is the lift due to the student's grateful reply after receiving an excellence award? This additional insight adds to understanding the underlying impact due to this CBU's student recognition program.

Future research in the domain of competency-based higher education should include studies to determine the impact of a student recognition program on the faculty's job satisfaction and job retention. This evidence provides additional perception regarding how faculty contribute toward student learning with more significant effort and is likely to feel favorable toward their role, responsibility, and future with the university.

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Challenges of Minority Business Owners in the Puget Sound region of Washington State

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Abstract

This study delved into challenges confronting minority-owned business leaders in Washington State's Puget Sound region. Employing a descriptive phenomenological method, it explored diverse experiences spanning ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Key findings highlight the necessity of resources like mentorship, concerns about state policies favoring larger corporations, and the ongoing assessment of diversity initiatives. While acknowledging discrimination, few participants disclosed direct experiences. Through in-depth analysis, the study unveiled systemic barriers and cultural influences impacting business strategies. It offers insights for policymaking, business support, and future research, advocating for an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem and equitable opportunities for minority entrepreneurs within and beyond the region.

Introduction

Minorities in America have suffered decades of discrimination in housing, education, leisure activities, employment, and business. Segregation has permeated the nation's climate in real estate, schools, restaurants, churches, sports, and the military. Laws, policies, and regulations have limited the opportunities of minorities by restricting or denying access to essential services and resources that better the lives of individuals, families, communities, and economies. The historical narrative of America is marked by a lamentable pattern of discrimination that has disproportionately affected minority populations across various domains. This intricate web of segregation has insidiously woven itself into the nation's fabric, manifesting in glaring disparities. In real estate, the echoes of discrimination practices still reverberate through the corridors of housing inequality. Minority individuals and families were systematically denied access to specific neighborhoods and confined to segregated areas that lacked the resources and amenities enjoyed by their white counterparts (Summers, 2021), thereby limiting their housing options and perpetuating economic disenfranchisement cycles as property values in these segregated areas stagnated due to intentional neglect (Hayes, 2023). The wealth of white families compared to that of black and Hispanic families is an apparent disparity (Eyal-Cohen, 2021). Privilege and family wealth passed from generation to generation have limited the opportunities for minorities and include a lack of homeownership, considered the most significant of financial assets (Herring & Henderson, 2016). More investment in stocks results in more opportunities to earn wealth. When the value of a particular asset increases, those who own the asset have more wealth,

regardless of any change in their circumstances (Keister & Moller, 2000). Family trust is an avenue of wealth transfer from generation to generation. Upon the death of a parent, the distribution of a sizable estate often benefits not only adult children but the next generation and sometimes even future generations. Whether significant in dollar amount or a substantial tangible asset such as a vehicle, an adult child who is already financially comfortable can continue the transfer of wealth. A family's wealth passed down from generation to generation creates a boundary of comfort and assumed protection from financial pitfalls. Without some form of family wealth, individuals lack the beneficial components that can help pursue entrepreneurship, and many minorities cannot benefit from multiple generations of wealth transfer. A minimal \$20,000 investment for a business venture will go much further than a \$5,000 investment, yet innovation and creativity are stalled at zero without any financial investment. No matter the amount of creativity in mind, the idea crumbles if there are no avenues to expand.

Wealth attained by family businesses can be a powerful commodity in achieving financial equality but also has the potential to exacerbate existing disparities (Means, 2016). Until the 1960s, most African Americans were denied the opportunity to accumulate wealth and, therefore, unable to pass anything financially substantial to their children or future generations (Herring & Henderson, 2016). The most common asset of wealth to be passed on is home ownership, yet African Americans have been consistently denied home loans or at unaffordable interest rates. Homeownership is

a financial asset, and many entrepreneurs and self-employed individuals begin a business venture in a home office, garage, or shop located on their property. More than 50% of companies started at home, and more than 60% without employees are home-based (TeamStage, 2023).

America's history is rich with entrepreneurial success stories from those who rose through low-income families with limited education to create a product or service to appease the masses. Not without significant risks, successful entrepreneurs found the necessary resources to fund ideas and market niches. Throughout its history, however, America's resources have primarily been reserved for the white patriarchal system. By declaring the United States a white nation in 1790, Congress solidified the preference of the white race and sent a clear and ominous message to those who were not. The abolition of slavery gave way to time-limited prosperity for African Americans pursuing entrepreneurial activities until the enactment of Jim Crow laws in 1865 (Editors, History.com, 2018). Gentrification of minority communities has stripped away the safety and comfort of belonging, and continued discrimination has placed minority-owned business leaders at a significant disadvantage for success.

Despite Washington State's commendable commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and its progressive policies, a disconcerting incongruity emerges upon closer examination—the disparity between the state's strong DEI principles and the limited allocation of government-awarded contracts to minority-owned businesses (Workforce Diversity OFM, 2022). The paradox

underscores the complexity of the challenges, prompting a profound exploration into the underlying factors perpetuating such a disconnection between policy and practice.

The United States is more than a hundred years removed from the declaration of a white nation, the African slave trade, and Jim Crow laws, yet discrimination, stereotyping, and racial profiling continue to afflict minorities and their opportunities to thrive. Minority entrepreneurial leaders encounter many more obstacles in creating business ventures than their white counterparts, and established minority-owned businesses are often hindered in their efforts to grow and maintain relevance. Furthermore, these persistent barriers to progress and inequality not only affect minorities' economic opportunities but also extend to their access to education, healthcare, and overall social well-being (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). Despite the advances made in recent decades, the United States still struggles with systemic racism and the lasting effects of historical injustices.

Challenges

The trajectory of progress for minority-owned businesses and minority entrepreneurial leaders has been marked by notable milestones, particularly since the late 1960s. Government initiatives and strategic resource allocation during the 1980s, mid-1990s, and 2000s catalyzed advancements in minority-owned businesses. However, despite these concerted efforts, minority business owners must be more entrenched in multifaceted challenges that impede their journey toward self-employment, effective self-leadership, and equitable wealth distribution. A 2010 report from the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) underscored a striking trend: Minority businesses have demonstrated commendable growth rates surpassing non-minority owned firms. Their growth, however, is shadowed by a persistent predicament—limited access to essential financial capital (Fairlie & Robb, 2010). The report shows that despite minority-owned business leaders exhibiting remarkable potential and innovation, insufficient financial resources often constrain their endeavors. Indeed, innovation flourishes at the intersection of creativity and capital; without a stable financial foundation, even the most ingenious ideas can wither before they blossom. The journey of minority-owned businesses is an intricate tapestry woven with threads of aspiration, innovation, and tenacity. The historical strides made since the late 1960s and subsequent governmental support mark significant landmarks, yet the persistent challenge of limited resources necessitates sustained attention.

Minorities face disproportionate challenges in education with unequally distributed opportunities that lead to achievement gaps and limited access to quality schools and programs, which perpetuates a cycle of inequality and hinders minority students' ability to thrive academically and limits their prospects, which can negatively impact career and professional success (Strickler, 2022). Additionally, economic disparities hinder the growth and success of minority-owned businesses, and access to capital, loans, and business resources remains a challenge for aspiring minority entrepreneurial leaders with an assumption of credit risk (Neville et al., 2018). Discrimination in lending practices and limited networking opportunities contribute to the difficulties minority entrepreneurs face in establishing and expanding their businesses or ideas, and barriers to economic growth affect individual business owners and limit job creation and economic prosperity within minority communities.

A qualitative study using a descriptive phenomenological methodology was conducted to understand better the negative impacts of restricted resources for minority-owned business leaders and their entrepreneurial counterparts. A descriptive phenomenological design allowed an examination of the lived experiences (Hassan, 2022) of minority-owned business leaders and minority entrepreneurial leaders through individual interviews and questions intended to amplify the continuing challenges faced in the business environment. The intent was to create an open, non-judgmental space for minority-owned leaders to share their stories and perspectives. The carefully crafted interview questions were designed to elicit rich and detailed responses

revealing businesses' challenges due to restricted resources. Participant responses sought to capture the aspects of their experiences, including emotions, frustrations, and coping mechanisms employed in the face of adversity.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship symbolizes achievement (Kuratko, 2007), and successful entrepreneurs initiate change through innovation (de la Torre, 2015). Not all individuals have the potential and the desire to become entrepreneurs, but for those who do, leadership is the critical component that fuels the drive to embark upon the venture.

Entrepreneurs can change the world, but when determination, innovation, and lack of resources are restricted or nonexistent, the opportunities for business leadership will elude those in search of it. The world might look vastly different if not for the innovative talents of Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, and Elon Musk, and their status in a white society is not questioned. Minorities are no less capable of outstanding leadership and significant contributions to communities, culture, and global networks. However, when access to essential resources is restricted for those who need them, opportunities for skill development and professional or educational resources are limited, and minority entrepreneurs are more likely to be denied business loans to launch a business (Coleman, 2004).

Research Questions

The core of the qualitative descriptive phenomenological study

sought answers to several pivotal research questions. These questions served as the foundation for the investigation and illuminated the multifaceted nature of the study's focus. To comprehensively explore the dynamics at play within the realm of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies and their impact, the following research questions were utilized:

1. How do DEI policies affect minority-owned businesses and minority entrepreneurial leaders?

The question delves into the impact of DEI on minority-owned businesses and their entrepreneurial counterparts in the Puget Sound region. It explored the lived experiences, perceptions, and practical implications of DEI policies on these groups. The inquiry focused on understanding how these policies may support or hinder the growth and success of minority businesses and the leadership of minority entrepreneurs.

2. What is the awareness of available resources and access to those resources?

The question explored the awareness among minority-owned businesses and entrepreneurial leaders regarding available resources and accessibility. It delves into these individuals' subjective experiences and perspectives in navigating and utilizing the available resources. The inquiry sought to cover any disparities in knowledge and access, shedding light on potential barriers or facilitators in their entrepreneurial endeavors.

3. What additional steps can be implemented to increase equity in the business environment?

This question is forward-looking and aims to generate potential solutions. It inquired into the innovative measures and strategies that can be adopted to foster more significant equity within the business environment for minority-owned enterprises. The inquiry extends beyond descriptive analysis and encourages a proactive exploration of actionable steps. It draws on stakeholders' collective wisdom and creativity to enhance Puget Sound's business landscape equity.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the research study was based on Critical theory, which originated from the Marxist tradition and was formulated by a cohort of sociologists at the University of Frankfurt in Germany, who identified as the Frankfurt School (Crossman, 2019). Critical theory examines societal power dynamics, positing that certain groups can control others through oppressive practices (Sandars, 2015). Minorities have been oppressed by non-minorities in the United States for decades under a white patriarchal system through slavery, indentured servantry, second-class citizenry, subjugation, segregation, gentrification, and limited access to vital resources. Viewed through a Critical theory lens, the challenges and barriers that minorityowned businesses encounter are oppressive. They can prevent successful leadership in the business environment, regardless of the positive impact on economies and communities, through the American power structures that tend to embrace white leadership supposition (Gundemir et al., 2014; Lowe, 2013).

Limitations of the Study

In the limitations of the study section, it was crucial to acknowledge and address certain constraints that may have influenced the results and interpretations of the descriptive phenomenological study. While the research design was deemed the most suitable approach for the investigation, it was essential to recognize the contextual factors that may have impacted the study's outcomes. Cultural competence and understanding represent fundamental components of the study, and it is crucial to acknowledge their importance and potential limitations. The lack of a deep understanding of minority cultures and beliefs could introduce bias or misinterpretations into the data analysis. For example, insights and interventions from the study may not be universally applicable or practical for diverse cultural groups, reducing the research's broader impact. A deficiency in cultural understanding can result in interventions that prove ineffective or even counterproductive. What proves effective in one cultural context may not hold in another, and with a nuanced performance, well-intentioned interventions may continue. Ethical considerations surrounding cultural sensitivity were paramount. Neglecting to grasp and respect minority cultures and beliefs fully can raise ethical concerns, potentially leading to harm or exploitation of minority participants or communities, which is ethically problematic.

Inherent to the chosen descriptive phenomenological methodology, these limitations underscore the need for a nuanced approach when studying diverse cultural contexts. While these

constraints may limit the generalization of study results, acknowledging and addressing them is crucial for comprehensively assessing the methodology employed. The following factors may have impacted the results of the findings:

- The research was limited to the Puget Sound region of Washington State.
- Participants were civilians and did not engage in business activities on the region's sizeable military installation of Joint-Based Lewis McChord.
- Minorities account for less than 25% of the total population of the Puget Sound region of more than four million residents.
- Bias or Misinterpretation: Lack of a deep understanding of minority cultures and beliefs could have led to biased interpretations or misinterpretations of data. For example, researchers may inadvertently overlook or misrepresent critical cultural nuances or perspectives, resulting in incomplete or inaccurate findings.
- Limited Generalizability: If researchers do not comprehensively understand minority cultures, the study's findings may have limited generalizability. The insights or interventions derived from the study may not have been applicable or practical for diverse cultural groups, reducing the study's broader impact.
- Ineffective Interventions: In studies aimed at addressing disparities or implementing interventions to promote equity, a lack of cultural understanding can lead to ineffective or counterproductive interventions. What works in one cultural context may not work in

another, and without a nuanced performance, well-intentioned interventions may fail.

- **Ethical Considerations:** Failing to understand and respect minority cultures and beliefs fully can raise ethical concerns. Research that overlooks cultural sensitivity may inadvertently harm or exploit minority participants or communities, which is ethically problematic.
- **Data Collection Challenges:** The inability to fully comprehend minority cultures and beliefs can pose challenges during data collection. Language barriers, cultural norms, and mistrust of researchers may impede the research process and limit the quality of data collected.
- **Credibility and Trust:** The credibility of the research may be questioned if it is evident that researchers lack cultural competence. Minority participants and stakeholders may have hesitated to engage with or trust research that does not demonstrate an understanding of their culture and beliefs.

Sampling Procedures and Data Collection Sources

Sampling for the descriptive phenomenological study was predetermined using criterion sampling of participants meeting specific criteria (Lunenburg & Irby, 2014). The inclusion criteria were based on participants being a current or previous minority-owned business leader in the Puget Sound region, having attempted to establish a minority-owned business in the Puget Sound region, conducting business in the Puget Sound region for at least five years, and being 25

or older. Participants from various industries were recruited to present a balanced representation, including aquatic science, architectural design, barbering, construction, consulting, cosmetology, landscaping, non-profit, personal care products, photography, and real estate. Additionally, data was incorporated from scholarly publications, articles, and public and government websites, including financial institutions, consulting firms, and other organizations representing minority communities. It provided statistical information and demographics from the Board of County Commissioners, Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Council, Minority Business Development Agency, Association of Minority Contractors, Electrical Workers Minority Caucus, Tacoma Urban League, and the Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises.

Findings

Theme One: Lack of Access to Vital Information and Resources.

The first and most prominent emergent theme from participant interviews was the critical issue of limited access to vital information and resources. Access to financial resources, business networks, and mentorship opportunities was also a significant challenge. The lack of access hampers the ability of minority-owned businesses to make informed decisions and inhibits business growth potential. The participants reiterated the significance of access to resources. The theme encompassed broader access to networks, mentorship, information, funding, and business development opportunities. The participants emphasized that having comprehensive access to these

resources is essential for overcoming various challenges and thriving in competitive markets. The data analysis for the interview question indicated different challenges but did not entirely indicate race as a factor or lack of privilege. Only three of the 12 participants felt that race was a contributing fact.

Theme Two: Financial Capital and Monetary Concerns.

Closely following the theme of limited access to resources, participants highlighted financial capital and monetary concerns as a significant challenge for MOBs and MELs. Access to adequate funding and fair credit opportunities were frequently cited as major hurdles in launching or expanding ventures. The issue of financial disparities and lack of investment in minority-owned enterprises and lending from non-minority institutions (Somashkhar, 2019) underscores the need for more inclusive policies.

Although the interview question was specific to financial institutions, not all participants required external lending sources, but all indicated resources utilized outside lending institutions. The interview data revealed a mix of personal and external funding sources used by participants. Some rely on personal funds, while others utilize external resources such as business credit cards, small loans, or financial institutions. Some participants have not sought financial lending, while others have accessed funding through various means.

Theme Three: DEI Initiatives and Their Impact.

Interestingly, participants acknowledged the existence of DEI initiatives in various industries. However, participants expressed disappointment in the limited impact of these policies. Although the importance of DEI was acknowledged, the participants often felt that the initiatives needed to bring about the desired change and support for minority-owned businesses and minority entrepreneurs.

Theme Four: The Importance of Mentoring in Professional Development.

Mentorship has been recognized as a critical process for achieving personal and professional success (Manuel & Poorsatter, 2021). In today's fast-paced and complex world, mentorship offers invaluable guidance, support, and wisdom to accelerate growth and development professionally and personally. A key benefit of mentorship is transferring knowledge and expertise from experienced mentors to mentees. According to Birt (2022), mentors support growth, serve as a source of knowledge, help to set goals, maintain accountability, offer encouragement, make connections, provide guidelines, and have relevant experience. Mentors possess a wealth of practical insights, lessons learned, and industry-specific knowledge. Mentors also foster personal growth and development and often serve as trusted advisors to help mentees identify strengths and areas for improvement. Mentorship can also significantly enhance networking opportunities and connections. Mentors play a crucial role in assisting mentees to grow personally and professionally and in guiding them to

recognize their strengths and areas that need improvement. Mentorship is often associated with successful family members, knowledge passed down from generation to generation, or, in many instances, a family business. In the absence of generational success that plagues many minorities, however, mentorship outside the family structure is a crucial component of support that might otherwise be nonexistent. Five of the twelve participants expressed the need for mentoring.

Theme Five: Community Support and Equitable Opportunities.

Participants emphasized the role of community support in nurturing and sustaining minority-owned businesses. The interviews revealed that a strong support network can significantly impact the success of these ventures. Additionally, concerns regarding equity and fair opportunities were raised, with participants advocating for policies that level the playing field and promote equal access to resources and opportunities for all entrepreneurs. The data analysis indicated that participants are frustrated with the state's processes, policies, and procedures in addressing equity and inclusion initiatives and the overall business climate.

Supplementary Findings

Two of the objectives of this qualitative study were to determine the impact of DEI initiatives and policies on minority-owned business leaders and their entrepreneurial counterparts and to compile suggestions and recommendations to increase equity in the business environment. However, only four of the 12 participants expressed

frustration from the lack of equity or feelings of discrimination.

All research participants shed light on various challenges small business owners face, particularly minority-owned businesses. These challenges include difficulties accessing marketing opportunities, needing more diversity and inclusion in decision-making processes, limited access to financing and capital, and the need for mentorship and educational resources. Furthermore, participants expressed frustration with the bureaucratic hurdles in starting and growing a business, such as dealing with repetitive paperwork and needing to know the right people to access valuable resources. They stressed the importance of centralized and accessible resources to streamline the processes and enhance support for entrepreneurs. Finally, the participants underlined the existence of disparities in access to opportunities and financial support based on race and gender. They advocate for mentorship programs and improved search engine optimizations to address these imbalances and provide equal opportunities for all aspiring business owners, not just those owned by minorities.

Overall, the interviews highlighted the shared desire for more support and resources to help minority business owners overcome these obstacles and succeed. The participant's stories serve as a reminder that collective efforts are required to break down barriers and create an inclusive environment where everyone can thrive in the world of entrepreneurship. Analysis of the interviews with minority business leaders provided valuable insights into their challenges. The most pressing issues were the lack of access to crucial information and

resources, financial concerns, the impact of DEI initiatives, mentoring opportunities, community support, equity, and overall access to resources. The interviews conducted as part of the study have poignantly underscored a unanimous and fervent desire among minority-owned businesses for enhanced support mechanisms and a more robust allocation of resources. These narratives, each a unique testimony of struggle and resilience, reverberate with a resounding call for collaborative endeavors to dismantle the formidable barriers that stand in the way of their success. In their candid recollections, participants have illuminated the stark reality that a collective and concerted effort is imperative to shatter these barriers and cultivate an all-encompassing ecosystem conducive to the flourishing of entrepreneurial aspirations within the Puget Sound region of Washington State.

The thematic analysis applied to the rich tapestry of interviews yielded a treasure trove of invaluable insights, offering an intricate tapestry of the multifaceted challenges confronted by minority business owners. Foremost among these challenges is the pervasive absence of access to critical information and essential resources. The participants' narratives resound with anecdotes of navigating a labyrinthine landscape characterized by information asymmetry and resource scarcity. The informational void perpetuates a cycle of uncertainty and hindered decision-making, compelling minority business owners to grapple with formidable odds.

Financial concerns did not loom large as a formidable hurdle or cast a long shadow over the entrepreneurial journey of these

individuals. The narratives, instead, are punctuated with accounts of battling limited access to crucial information, a predicament that often stifles innovation and growth. The complex and often confusing regulatory process of business ownership compounds the burden on these business leaders, intertwining with other obstacles and amplifying their impact.

In the context of the qualitative research study focused on minority business owners in the Puget Sound region of Washington State, investigating the impact of DEI initiatives takes center stage. Examining DEI initiatives becomes pivotal as the research delves into these underrepresented groups' challenges. While the initial assumption might have been that DEI initiatives would uniformly shape the trajectory of the research participants, the interviews conducted for the study unveiled a more nuanced perspective. Notably, the far-reaching influence of DEI initiatives did not emerge as a significant factor for all research participants. The intriguing finding underscores the complexity of the interplay between DEI efforts and the experiences of these minority business leaders. The participants' insights emphasize the multifaceted nature of DEI initiatives and their effects. It becomes evident that the outcomes of these initiatives are contingent on various factors, with the depth of integration into the business landscape being a key determinant. The observation highlights the importance of deliberate and thoughtful implementation of DEI strategies. Mere surface-level integration might not yield the desired results, whereas a comprehensive and ingrained approach stands a better chance of effecting meaningful change.

Moreover, the interview shed light on the significance of continuous evaluation in the context of DEI initiatives. The dynamic nature of the business environment, coupled with the evolving challenges faced by minority business owners, necessitates a proactive and ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of these initiatives. Such evaluations allow for course corrections and contribute to accumulating insights that can guide future endeavors in enhancing the inclusivity and support of minority business leaders. The intricate relationship between DEI initiatives and the experiences of minority business leaders in the Puget Sound region becomes evident through the qualitative lens of the research study. The complexity underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors that shape the outcomes of DEI efforts and emphasizes the significance of strategic implementation and continuous evaluation in driving meaningful change.

In a heartening revelation, the interviews unveiled the instrumental role of mentoring opportunities in navigating the intricate web of challenges. Participants attested to the transformative impact of mentorship, underscoring its potential to provide pragmatic guidance and the invaluable intangibles of inspiration and encouragement. The resonance of these mentorship narratives reverberates with the broader theme of community support, where a sense of belonging and shared experiences emerge as a powerful antidote to isolation.

Equity, both in terms of opportunity and representation, remained a resounding refrain throughout these interviews. The participants' voices coalesce to emphasize the urgency of addressing

systemic imbalances that impede the ascent of minority business leaders, which resonates with the overarching aspiration for an equitable entrepreneurial landscape where underrepresented voices are heard and elevated. The interviews illuminate the multifaceted landscape inhabited by minority-owned business leaders in the Puget Sound region. The contours of their challenges, painted with remarkable clarity through the thematic analysis, illuminate the path forward—a way defined by collaborative action, a recalibration of resource allocation, and an unyielding commitment to fostering an ecosystem where every entrepreneurial endeavor can flourish unabridged.

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