

LEADERSHIP BEST PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY STUDY

Karl Thompson, University of Phoenix
Jon K. Webber, University of Phoenix

ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored leadership best practices among senior managers at a major telecommunications organization in to determine the perceived effects that such routines had on actual employee performance. The study took place in State of Georgia in the United States from January 16 to February 18, 2014 and involved ten selected managers who held the role of customer service manager for a minimum of 2 years and were identified as a top performer based on the ranking and rating reports from the organization's data. The major themes that emerged centered around four major areas: (1) employee-oriented perspective of best leadership practices, (2) performance perspective of best leadership practices, (3) process perspective of best leadership practices, (4) learning and growth perspective of best leadership practices. It was determined that leaders should create a working environment where there is increased employee engagement and participation; communicate goals, gain employee understanding, and apply communication styles that fit the need of each employee at all levels; identify and plan opportunities of growth for employees through training and development; recognize the importance of personally engaging with their employees; and, understand the importance of having regular meetings to update employees about new products and services.

JEL: M10, M12, M15, M53, M54

KEYWORDS: Telecommunications, Leadership, Best Practices, Employee Engagement, Training, Employee Performance, Training

INTRODUCTION

Employees are valuable assets of an organization and the leaders of profitable companies place a high premium on increasing employee performance levels (Leigh, 2009). Leadership best practice are a powerful way to enhance individual growth and development, customer experience, employee performance, and organizational productivity (McNeese-Smith, 1996). The importance of leadership in an organization is no surprise as American business leaders spends more than \$55 billion on organizational productivity and employee performance improvement initiatives (Enos, 2000). Examining gaps between employee performance and leadership best practices assist organizations in developing a partnership for improving employee commitment, job satisfaction, and ultimately, organizational performance through best practices and consistency in leadership (Keiu, 2010). Having employees operate at their highest level of performance is of paramount importance to 21st century organizations (Drucker, 1999).

Leaders provide direction, leading by example, maintaining appropriate tools for process measurement, and creating a high level of credibility as time progresses (Kouzes & Posner, 2002), influencing employee performance. Leaders motivate employees by encouraging them to contribute ideas, which results in a fulfilling and enriching work environment (Khaliq, 2001). This study focused on the best practices of

leadership and its effects on employee performance at a major telecommunication company in the state of Georgia in the United States. Primarily, the study sought to discover the findings of role model leaders in that organization and how exhibiting such exemplary behaviors might affect employee performance.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore what telecommunication leaders perceive as leadership best practices and to determine the perceived effects of leadership best practices on employee performance. From the practical organizational perspective, the study sought to determine how leadership best practices play a role in nurturing a productive work environment that optimizes performance to achieve organizational objectives. The experiences of 10 senior leaders in the telecommunication customer service sector were explored and analyzed through sampling.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section includes a literature review which shows that humans need to be motivated to perform at their highest potential level of work and that best practices are key in empowering organizations to produce optimal performance in their employees. The third section describes the data and methodology used to discover how best practices are potentially transferred from those who do them in senior leadership down through the rank and file in the organization to effect a change. The results and discussion portion reviews the four main findings of the study involving employee-oriented perspectives of best leadership practices, performance perspectives of best leadership practices, process perspectives of best leadership practices, and learning and growth perspectives of best leadership practices. The final section offers concluding comments and recommendations for further study and implementation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership styles for many years were consistent with McGregor's human motivational theories of Theory X and Theory Y. The leader who advocate one of the two extremes based on their management viewpoint. The leader's role, according to Theory X, is to forcefully control their employees by portraying them in a negative light where they are seen as disliking work, being lazy, and tending to avoid work whenever possible. In contrast, the Theory Y represented the notion that employees enjoyed working, were not lazy, and were motivated and developed their potential to perform their task (McGregor, 1960).

These two notions on motivation lasted for about 20 years when Blake and Moulton (1985) proposed that a leader with a high concern for production often demonstrates an autocratic leadership style. The autocratic leader retains all authority, dictates how work should be perform, and makes decisions without gathering input from others. The autocratic leader discourages employee participation. In contrast, leaders with a high concern for people often demonstrate a democratic style. The democratic leader involves employees in decisions affecting them, delegates' authority and tasks, encourages employee input, and uses feedback as an opportunity for performance improvement.

As theorists started mulling over what motivated employees, Goleman (1994) suggested the beginnings of what would become emotional intelligence. According to Goleman, there is a reciprocal relationship between the work environment, leadership style, and employee performance. In this reciprocal relationship Goleman asserts five key factors: (a) a work environment where employees can be creative and innovative, (b) performance feedback, (c) recognitions and rewards valued by employees, (d) mission and goals explained to employees, and (e) employees committed to the vision of the organization.

Best practices are behaviors adopted to fit a particular organization to produce superior results (Ashton, 1998). According to Idris and Ali (2008), organizations can adopt the best practices of top performing leaders and employees and use them as an advantage to assist low and medium performers raise their performance and operate at a higher level of their capacity by implementing many of the common factors or best practices used by the top performing employees in their organization.

Organizations must increase their reliance on employee involvement and improved relationships as their success depends on the firm's ability to build and harness employee skills and knowledge (Bass & Avolio, 1994). According to Drucker (1999), to increase knowledge-worker performance and productivity, there are six factors leaders must reinforce: (a) create a workplace requiring constant learning, teaching, and growth; (b) clarity on the exact task to be accomplished; (c) provide attention to the quality of work done by employees; (d) the autonomy to have employees handle their own performance concerns; (e) design a work environment for creativity and innovation; and (f) treat employees as intellectual assets and not simply a cost to the business.

Richman, Civian, Shannon, Hill, and Brennan (2008) suggested employee engagement refers to an increase in the intellectual and emotional commitment an employee expresses towards their job, manager, or organization, resulting in the employee exerting additional work. Organizational leaders must make employee engagement an ongoing best practice and prioritize their approach in handling any problem areas to ensure improvement in employee engagement. The best practices include maximizing leaders capabilities, leadership being engaged, leaders understanding how to help their team members, a good picture of what full engagement looks like, leaders being accountable for the coaching and development of their employees, and making sure employees know how they can contribute to the success of the organization (LaBarbara, 1999)

Employee full engagement is hard to sustain; however, it is important to nurture, recognize, train, and develop employees. When employees are involved and engaged in the decision-making process they will know what they do well and keep doing their job with confidence (Strom, 2010). Conversation with the employee is the most effective way to provide feedback on performance, allowing the generation of new ideas and increasing personal satisfaction and business results. This will also prevent a misunderstanding and build trust in the engagement process, helping employees understand the direction the organization is going and their role in the process (Wallace & Trinka, 2009).

Leadership best practices in the telecommunication company are when leaders establish measurable, realistic, specific, and timely goals to improve employee performance and assist in achieving improved team results. Goals are important since they provide the areas of attentiveness and focus to which performance improvements are required (Snow & Hrebiniak, 2002). Three factors for improving employee performance are (a) committed employees who are motivated to achieve key performance measures, (b) identification of progress and resources needed to achieve goals, and (c) raising employee performance and organizational productivity by building a learning organization (McNeese-Smith, 1996).

Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman's (1959) motivation theory identified factors such as the task or job design as satisfiers or motivators. The motivational theory is based on tasks specific to enhancing and motivating employees (Ramlall, 2004). Having an understanding of the various aspects of employee behavior can assist leaders in building a sense of worth, improving communication and self-esteem, and increasing employee performance (Covey, 2006). The daily task (job) performed and the assignment of the task to employees can influence their performance, motivational levels, and organizational productivity (Davis, 2010). The leader is the most likely the source of positive feedback or reinforcement toward employees for performing well (doing a great job) (Schull, 2010).

Employee morale results from a positive or negative attitude held by an individual, their attitude toward their job, and the organization the perception of a leader. Improving morale is dependent on how organizational leaders communicate and establish strategies. Included in this are the manner in which they appraise their leadership styles and the employees, assist in balancing their employees' work and life, promote a team-oriented environment, and how individuals are hired and positioned in the organization (Enos, 2000). The morale of an employee is a powerful indicator for the health and productivity of an

organization; hence, the challenge of leadership is to maintain and sustain the morale of employees (Brode, 2012).

Understanding employee turnover is of great importance and is especially evident when a rival is attempting to hire high performing employees. According to Hom and Kinichi (2001), a high turnover rate can negatively affect the performance of an organization. Hence, identifying the reasons for employees' intention to leave provides an opportunity to predict turnover behaviors and implement measures to prevent or reduce turnover. A leaders' behavior can encourage or influence employees to exit the organization. Firmand (2009) made reference to inadequate training in leadership in the areas of personnel management and the adoption of a transformational approach as factors creating an imbalance for handling the task and the people being led.

Organizational culture is a set of norms, beliefs, and shared values dictating how organizational members interact with each other, as well as with external stakeholders (Jones, 2011). While some suggest the leader creates the culture (Schein, 1985), others argue the actors in the organization are the ones responsible for creating the culture (Lakos, 2007). Corporate culture works toward distinct ends and cross-cultural communication differences include languages, meaning, myth, and value of the culture (Hill, 2005). Leaders need to be sensitive to these barriers to effectively prepare their teams to improve communication in a cross-cultural environment (Fang, 2011).

Understanding cross-cultural communication and enhancing skills can affect many facets of behavior and reduce cross-cultural obstacles. Knowing how to communicate helps reduce noise and enhances encoding and decoding of communications (Francesco & Gold, 2005). Leadership must be sensitive to cultural differences and language barriers as difficulties can arise when communicating, especially when the conversation is via technology. A collective capability is required to get the necessary performance out of a cross-cultural team when its members are operating from different levels within their respective organization's hierarchy (Kirkbride, 2006).

Empowerment is characterized by decision-making and providing employees the power to carry out the job their position demands (Carson & King, 2005). Empowering employees gives them a sense of ownership and belonging, motivating them and reducing their intentions to leave the organization. Empowering employees combined with transformational leadership practices will fuel the interest of employees as this type of leadership is less task-oriented and more people-oriented, thus creating a balance to generate positive results to the organization's bottom line (Mobley, 1977).

According to Sonnenberg, Bas, and Jaap (2011), empowering employees is significantly important for any organization seeking to develop and improve overall productivity and performance. Empowerment involves investing legal power unto another person and properly providing a perpetually positive personnel performance. Although empowerment is positive, the key to empowerment is the proper preparation and development of subordinates, including appropriate training for the employees; allowing sufficient time to complete the task; ensuring the task is fully understood and give time for questions; providing guidance when requested; monitoring the progress of the task; and evaluating and providing feedback in concert with holding the employee responsible for the results of the task completed (Sonnenberg, et al.).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological research design using open-ended interviews as the premise for data collection, theory generation, observation, and content analysis (Lim, 2008). This phenomenological study was used to better understand how leadership best practices may influence employee job performance for the organization, helping to transform and modernize the industry (Bennis, 2007). The study took place from January 16 to February 18, 2014 and involved ten selected managers

who held the role of customer service manager in a telecommunication company in the state of Georgia, for a minimum of 2 years and were identified as a top performer based on the ranking and rating reports from the organization’s data as a means of assessing the sample and allowing a detailed qualitative analysis, demographic information including age range, gender, and years’ experience as a customer service manager was collected during the interview process. Discussions of the demographic and professional information are shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

The age ranges considered in the study were 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, and 46+. Table 1 shows that no participants were in the lower 18-25 age range. Three participants (30%) were 26-35, five participants (50%) were 36-45, and two participants (20%) were 46 or over. The role of those interviewed was typically a medium level position in large organizations. While the majority of participants were male, as Table 2 shows females were well represented.

Table 1: Distribution of Study Participants by Age

Study Participant	Age Range	Study Participant	Age Range
P1	46+	P6	26-35
P2	36-45	P7	36-45
P3	26-35	P8	26-35
P4	36-45	P9	36-45
P5	46+	P10	36-45

Table 1 illustrates the participants’ age. N=10

Table 2: Distribution of Study Participants by Gender

Gender	No. (% of Total)
Female	3 (30%)
Male	7 (70%)

Table 2 illustrates the gender classification for the participants. N=10

This study involved open-ended interviews with 10 participants who were top performers and had direct experience in the telecommunication company being studied. The population was drawn from a diverse group of customer service employees in the customer service department who had at least two years of experience. According to Creswell (2005), normal sample size for a phenomenological studies range from 5 to 25 participants. Within the population, sampling is a crucial factor (Neuman, 2006). One important sampling criterion used in this study was that the participants had been recognized for their best practice performance.

All participants were required to have at least two years of experience to participate in the study. Participant experiences in a leadership role ranged from 3-16 years, with a mean of 10.2 years. In analyzing the data, experience was divided into three ranges, 3-6, 7-10, and 11-16. As shown in Table 3, most of the participants had considerable experience, with only 30% having 3-6 years, while 70% had 7-16 years of leadership experience.

To ensure the validity of the study, a pilot study with two participants was conducted to obtain feedback regarding the effectiveness of the one-on-one interview process and the clarity of the interview questions. The data from the pilot study interviews was not included in the results, but provided an opportunity to improve the clarity and reliability of the survey questions, as well as enhance the validity of the study (Neuman, 2006). Based on the feedback from the pilot study, insignificant modifications were made to the research question, allowing it to be more specific. Minor rewording of the interview questions improved

their clarity, allowing the participant to more directly answer the questions. The finalized version of the interview questions is provided in Appendix A.

Table 3 Distribution of Study Participants by Years of Experience

Work Experience (Years)	Number of Participants	Percent of Total
3 – 6	3	30%
7 – 10	3	30%
11 - 16	4	40%
Total	10	100%

Table 3 illustrates the years of experience classification for the participants. N=10

In-depth interviews with open-ended questions lasted 45-60 minutes with the questions providing a semi-structured format of the 10 respondents regarding their perception of leadership best practices and employee performance. The purposes of the questions were to obtain information about their lived experience for the research. Information obtained included the perception and feeling of the respondents as indicated through their responses to the interview questions. Data was subsequently analyzed by the process of comparison, categorization, and grouping of data and results compared with data gathered from literature review. NVivo10® qualitative data analysis software tool facilitated the analysis of the data in the study.

The data analysis began upon completion of the data collection process and submission of the finalized interview transcripts. To ensure anonymity, an identification code was given to each study participant (P1 to P10) to assist in determining responses in place of using the actual name of the subject, which also provided the authors the ability to distinguish the results while maintaining confidentiality. Responses were obtained from face-to-face audio digital recorded interviews, which occurred between January 16, 2014, and February 18, 2014.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The narrative data were analyzed, and themes pertaining to leadership best practices emerged regarding the viewpoints of the 10 senior level workers in this state of Georgia telecommunications organization. The themes that emerged from the interviews reflected a managerial leadership framework that aligns with the balanced scorecard perspective of organizational performance (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). Emergent themes were classified as major or sub based on the number of references from the interview process coded to the theme. The major themes centered around four major areas:

- 1) Employee-oriented perspective of best leadership practices.
- 2) Performance perspective of best leadership practices.
- 3) Process perspective of best leadership practices.
- 4) Learning and growth perspective of best leadership practices.

The major research question addressed is: What are the perceptions of leaders/managers of the telecommunication company in southern Georgia regarding leadership best practices and their experience of how these practices affect employee performance?

As shown in Table 4 Panel A sub themes, for employee oriented perspective of best leadership practices, four sub-themes emerged from the responses of the data collected during the study interviews: support, recognition, empowerment, and relationship. These themes suggested human resources management processes managers pursue to increase employee motivation and performance.

For Table 4 Panel B, for performance perspective of best leadership practices, two sub-themes emerged from the responses of the data collected during the study interviews: performance-oriented leadership behavior and goal-oriented leadership behavior. These sub-themes focused on the processes regarding what is required to improve employee performance and assist in achieving improved team results.

As shown in Table 4 Panel C, for process perspective of best leadership practices, two sub-themes emerged from the responses of the data collected during the study interviews: participative leadership behavior and communication leadership behavior. The participative approach involved including employees in the decision making process, leveraging employee skill sets and making a collaborative effort to acknowledge and celebrate employee success. The communication leadership behaviors focused on communication and ensure understanding and the accomplishment of goals.

Finally, Table 4 Panel D, for learning, training and development perspective of best leadership practices, three leadership behavior sub-themes emerged from the responses of the data collected during the study interviews: training and development, learning, and performance appraisal. Training and development leadership behaviors involved activities to develop employees and increase the competencies they need to achieve their objectives and improve organizational results. Learning leadership behavior involved spending time to know employees; viewing they will work harder if you show them that you care about their growth and development and building confident employees who are self-motivated and have a desire to win. The performance appraisal leadership behavior focused on coaching; developing actions; planning to leverage employee skill sets; being a good teacher in improving employee knowledge; creating high confidence levels on the customer experience; and interacting, guiding, and developing employees.

Table 4: Combined Sub Themes

Panel A: Themes on Employee-oriented Perspective of Best Leadership Practices	
Major Theme	Sub Themes
Employee-oriented perspective of best leadership practices	Support Recognition Empowerment Relationship
Panel B: Themes on Performance Perspective of Best Leadership Practices	
Major Theme	Sub Themes
Performance perspective of best leadership practices	Performance-oriented leadership behavior Goal-oriented leadership behavior
Panel C: Themes on Process Perspective of Best Leadership Practices	
Major Theme	Sub Themes
Process perspective of best leadership practices	Participative leadership behavior Communication leadership behavior
Panel D: Themes on Learning, Training, and Development Perspective of Best Leadership Practices	
Major Theme	Sub Themes
Learning, training, and development perspective of best leadership practices	Training and development leadership behavior Learning leadership behavior Performance appraisal leadership behavior

Table 4 Panel A illustrates the themes of employee oriented best practices.

Table 4 Panel B illustrates the themes of performance perspective of best leadership practices.

Table 4 Panel C illustrates the themes of process perspectives of best leadership practices

Table 4 Panel D illustrates the themes of learning, training, and development perspectives of best leadership practices.

The major research question addressed is: What are the perceptions of leaders/managers of the telecommunication company in the state of Georgia regarding leadership best practices and their experience of how these practices affect employee performance?

The first major theme was the employee oriented perspective of best leadership practices. This theme was evident in the narrative through 114 counts (32.9%) and referenced the variety of human resources practices that managers pursue in support of employee productivity and organizational growth. Of the sub-themes,

participants mentioned support 10 times (2.8%), recognition 15 times (4.3%), empowerment 6 times (1.75%), and relationship 10 times (2.9%).

As shown in Table 5 Panel A, 80% of the participants indicated support and recognition formulated the major aspect of employee-oriented perspective of best leadership practices. This was followed by 40% of participants supporting the importance of empowerment and relationships. The sub-themes provide important strategies for improving employee performance through leadership best practices. The second major theme was the performance perspective of best leadership practices. This theme was evident in the narrative through 85 counts (26%) and referenced the importance of ensuring that employees bought into the vision, being a change catalyst, and focusing on accountability. Of the subthemes, participants mentioned performance-oriented leadership 25 times (7.2%) and goal-oriented leadership 24 times (6.9%).

Table 5: Combined Themes 1, 2, 3 and 4

Panel A: Theme 1-Employees-oriented Perspective of Best Leadership Practices			
Sub-themes	Participants Indicating Sub-theme	Percent of Participants	References by Participants
Support	P1.6; P2.6; P4.8; P5.6; P6.8; P7.6; P9.6; P10.6	80%	10
Recognition	P1.10; P3.10; P4.10; P5.10; P6.10; P7.10, P8.10; P9.10	80%	15
Empowerment	P2.11; P7.9; P8.9; P10.9	40%	6
Relationship	P1.10; P3.6; P4.6; P10.9	40%	10
Panel B: Theme 2: Performance Perspective of Best Leadership Practices			
Sub-themes	*Participants Indicating Sub-theme	Percent of Participants	References by Participants
Performance-oriented leadership	P1.7; P1.8; P1.8; P2.4; P2.6; P2.12; P3.4, P4.5; P4.12; P6.4; P6.10; P8.5; P9.9	70%	25
Goal-oriented leadership	P1.4; P2.4; P3.4; P4.4; P4.11; P6.10; P6.12; P9.9	60%	24
Panel C: Theme 3: Process Perspective of Best Leadership Practices			
Sub-themes	*Participants Indicating Sub-theme	Percent of Participants	References by Participants
Participative leadership behavior	P1.10; P2.11; P3.9; P3.12; P4.6; P4.11; P5.11; P8.4; P8.11	60%	15
Communication leadership behavior	P1.8; P1.11; P2.8; P3.9; P4.9; P6.9; P8.9	60%	22
Panel C: Theme 4: Learning, Training and Development Perspective of Best Leadership Practices			
Sub-themes	*Participants Indicating Sub-theme	Percent of Participants	References by Participants
Training and development leadership behavior	P2.5; P2.6; P2.11; P3.9; P3.12; P4.6; P5.6; P5.7; P5.8; P6.9; P8.9; P10.6; P10.9	80%	10
Learning leadership behavior	P1.5, P1.10a; P1.11; P2.9; P3.11; P3.12; P4.8; P5.12; P7.9; P9.4; P9.8; P10.7; P10.8	80%	11
Performance appraisal	P1.9; P1.10; P2.7; P5.12; P6.9; P7.6; P8.8	60%	11

Table 5 Panel A illustrates the themes of employee oriented best practices indicating the participant and the interview question, e.g., P1.6 was the response from participant P1 to interview question #6. N=10

Table 5 Panel B illustrates the themes of employee performance perspectives of best leadership practices, The * indicates the participant and the interview question, e.g., P1.7 was the response from participant P1 to interview question #7. N=10

Table 5 Panel C illustrates the themes of process perspectives of best leadership practices, The *indicates the participant and the interview question, e.g., P1.10 was the response from participant P1 to interview question #10.

Table 5 Panel D illustrates the themes of learning, training, and development perspectives of best leadership practices. The *entry indicates the participant and the interview question, e.g., P2.5 was the response from participant P2 to interview question #5. N=10

As shown in Table 5 Panel B, 70% of the participants mentioned focusing on the performance oriented best leadership practices with 60% for the goal-oriented best leadership practices. The sub-themes provide important strategies for improving employee performance through leadership best practices.

The third major theme was the process perspective of best leadership practices. This theme was evident in the narrative through 52 counts (18%) and references identifying the various processes to improve employee performance and assist in achieving improved organizational results. Of the sub-themes, participants mentioned participative leadership behavior 18 times (4.5 %) and communication leadership behavior 22 times (6.3%). As shown in Table 5 Panel C, the concepts of participative and involvement and

good communication were both indicated as key by 60% of the participants. The sub-themes provide important strategies for improving employee performance through leadership best practices.

The fourth major theme was learning, training, and development perspective of best leadership practices. This theme was evident in the narrative through 42 counts (12.1%) and referenced the importance of leaders spending time getting to know employees. Of the sub-themes, participants mentioned raining and development leadership behavior 10 times (2.9%), learning leadership behavior 11 times (3.2%), and performance appraisal 11 times (3.2%). Table 5 Panel D shows that 80% of participants indicated training and developing employees in having a *customer service mindset* was critical to enabling employees to get the job done, while establishing diversity from top-down and setting employees on a career development track. An equal 80% emphasized leadership behavior of spending time to know employees. Performance appraisal was also important, with 60% of participants noting the value of coaching, leveraging employee skill sets, improving employee knowledge, and creating high confidence levels. The sub-themes provide important strategies for improving employee performance through leadership best practices.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The goal was to research an area of interest and value to a telecommunication organization, identify and document patterns that emerged, and allow the researcher to generate leadership theories based on data gathered and analyzed. To ensure the validity of the study, a pilot study with two participants was conducted to obtain feedback regarding the effectiveness of the one-on-one interview process and the clarity of the interview questions. The data from the pilot study interviews was not included in the results, but provided an opportunity to improve the clarity and reliability of the survey questions, as well as enhance the validity of the study (Neuman, 2006).

Those in leadership positions within various telecommunication organizations may discover that the findings contained in the study can be used for the advancement of their organization and their leaders. The conclusions suggest a better way for leaders to lead people and get the most out of the experience. The results of the study extend the body of knowledge on best leadership practices. Six specific recommendations for leaders developed out of this study: 1) Leaders should create a working environment where there is increased employee engagement and participation. This will lead to greater employee decision-making ability and result in more productive employees who have a higher level of performance. 2) Leaders should communicate goals, gain employee understanding, and apply communication styles that fit the need of each employee at all levels. It is imperative for leaders to make a collaborative effort to create an environment that fosters open communication with employees through coaching, guiding, and developing them. 3) It is important for leaders to identify opportunities of growth for employees and plan execution through training and development. This will build confident employees who will be self-motivated and have a desire to win. Companies face escalating human capital needs and declining budgets; hence, the choice is to provide the training to build leaders or watch employees leave for other opportunities. 4) A key factor for leaders is to know their employees. They should connect with employees and stay engaged by asking pertinent questions, such as, how is everything going? How is your family doing? This builds awareness and shows that you care about their personal lives, as well as their success. 5) Leaders must develop an interest in the human side of the employee by developing a comprehensive training and development plan that addresses the employee's career path objectives and positively impacts employee advancement and growth. This will lead to creating a balanced framework of best practices leading to employee productivity. 6) It is important for leaders to have regular meetings with employees to update them and communicate about new products and services. Meetings open the gate to hear ideas and gain understanding of new products and address challenges. Leaders must exercise the behavior of being great listeners, students, and teachers. When leaders develop an attitude of oneness where they learn from the employee, as well as being a good teacher, it creates high confidence levels with employees to deliver on the customer experience and improve their knowledge and performance levels.

With companies facing cuts in profits and people based on economic conditions and an increased competitive environment, leaders in companies will need to re-focus and concentrate on leadership best practices to improve employee performance, retain the best talents, and allow companies to stay competitive and survive (Goolsby, 2009).

The quality of research depends on the volume of data collected, and depending on the skills of the researcher, can make analysis and interpretation time consuming. There is also a limitation in the phenomenological process itself as it allows the researcher’s biases to influence the interpretation of data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Thus, a limitation of the study was the interpretation of interview responses since these were central to the results and conclusion. A mistaken expression of a participant’s professional and personal experiences could limit the interpretation of the study and any conclusion.

The focus of the phenomenological study on leadership best practices and employee performance was limited to leaders in the telecommunications industry in the southern Georgia area. Further research that includes other geographic areas may prove beneficial to leaders. In addition, based on the results of this study, three areas would seem to offer valuable avenues for future research within the phenomenon of leadership best practices: 1) A quantitative study on how best leadership practices can positively impact employee performance and improve organizational performance and productivity. 2) Since leadership changes with growing trends and quality of employees hired, a qualitative study re-focusing on leadership best practices and employee performance could be re-visited, focusing on developing skills to meet organizational plans. 3) A quantitative study on the success or failure of leadership best practices programs could be conducted to help leaders in other industries focus on programs/practices that improve organizational productivity while affording employees the opportunity to improve performance by developing their skills (Goolsby, 2009).

The results of the study provide a starting point for gaining a better understanding of the relationship between modeling such behavior and increasing employee performance within the customer service area of the telecommunications industry. A conclusion of the research findings is that when leaders create a work environment where there is employee engagement and participation through leadership best practice, the result is greater employee decision-making ability and in turn a more productive employee with a higher level of performance. From this point of view, organizations have an opportunity for success by promoting partnership with employees and working together to embrace excellence in performance, while promoting continuous organizational improvement.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Begin Study Participant #	
Demographic Information – Section 1	
1	Age: 18 – 25 <input type="checkbox"/> 26 – 35 <input type="checkbox"/> 36 – 45 <input type="checkbox"/> 46 and over <input type="checkbox"/>
2	Gender: Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>
3	Number of Years as a Customer Service Leadership role: <input type="text"/>

Open-Ended Interview Questions – Section 2	
4	What is your understanding of leadership?
5	How do you see leadership and how it is working in your organization?
6	What are some of your best leadership practices in managing employees?
7	What are some leadership practices that have a negative impact on your performance?
8	What are some leadership practices that have a positive impact on your performance?
9	What factors would improve employee-manager working relationship and build trust?
10	What factors would make you feel more appreciated at work?
11	What leadership style would make a difference in your organization?
12	How would this impact your performance?

REFERENCES

- Ashton, P. (1998). *Managing best practices*. London, UK: Business Intelligence.
- Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. (1994). *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bennis, W. (2007). The challenges of leadership in the modern world. *American Psychologist*, 62(1), 2-5. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.62.1.2
- Blake, R., & Mouton, J. (1985). *The new managerial grid*. Mumbai, India: Jaico Publishing.
- Brode, A. M. (2012). *The leadership role in organizational morale: A case study*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3490498)
- Carson, C. M., & King, J. E., Jr. (2005). Conceptual paper. Leaving leadership: Solving leadership problems through empowerment. *Management Decision*, 43, 1049-1053. Retrieved from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/loi/md>
- Covey, S. (2006). Servant leadership: Use your voice to serve others. *Leadership Excellence*, 23(12), 5-6. Retrieved from http://www.hr.com/en/topleaders/top_leaders_in_leadership/
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Davis, L. A. (2010). *Ability of leaders to effectively communicate and influence employees' commitment to organizational goals*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3442742)
- Drucker, P. F. (1999). *Management challenges for the 21st century*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Enos, D. D. (2000). *Performance improvements: Making it happen*. New York, NY: St. Lucie Press.
- Fang, J. (2011). A study on pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 8(1), 42-46. Retrieved from http://www.davidpublishing.org/journals_info.asp?jld=1891
- Firmand, S. M. (2009). *Employee turnover and cognition: A phenomenological study*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3381823)
- Francesco, A. M., & Gold, B. C. (2005). *International organizational behavior* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Goleman, D. (1994). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Goolsby, K. (2009, March 1). Tough economic times ratchet up need for investing in employee and leadership development services. *Outsourcing Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.outsourcing-center.com/2009-03-tough-economic-times-ratchet-up-need-for-investing-in-employee-and-leadership-development-services-article-37391.html>

Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., & Snyderman, B. (1959). *The motivation of work* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Hill, J. H. (2005). *World business: Globalization, strategy, and analysis*. Mason, OH: Thomson Southwestern.

Hom, P. W., & Kinichi, A. J. (2001). Towards a greater understanding of how dissatisfaction drives employees' turnover. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(5), 975-981. doi:10.2307/3069441

Idris, F., & Ali, K. (2008). The impact of leadership and best practices on company performances: Empirical evidence from business firms in Malaysia. *Total Quality Management*, 19(1-2), 163-171. Retrieved from <http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/products/journals/journals.htm?id=tqm>

Jones, A. (2011). *The role of servant leadership in establishing a participative business culture focuses on profitability, employee satisfaction and empowerment*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3450515)

Kaplan, R., & Norton, D. (1996). Using the balance scorecard as a strategic management system. *Harvard Business Review*, 74(1), 75-85. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/>

Keiu, H. Q. (2010). *Leadership styles and organizational performance: A predictive analysis*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3442746)

Khaliq, A. (2001). Corporate leadership and workplace motivation in Malaysia. *International Journal of Commerce and Management*, 11(1), 82-101. Retrieved from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journal/ijcoma>

Kirkbride, P. (2006). Developing transformational leaders: The full range leadership model in action. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 38(1), 23-32. doi:10.1108/00197850610646016

Kouzes, J., & Posner, B. (2002). *The leadership challenge*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

LaBarbara, B. (1999, May 1). A fully functional employee, the impossible dream? *Supervision*, 52(3). Retrieved from <http://www.supervisionmagazine.com/>

Lakos, A. (2007). Evidence-based library management: The leadership challenge. *Libraries of the Academy*, 7(4), 431-450. doi:10.1353/pla.2007.0049

Leedy, P. & Ormord, J. (2013). *Practical research: Planning and design*. (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Leigh, R. S. (2009). *A correlation analysis of the leadership learning analysis associated with organizational profitability*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3353750)

Lim, E. (2008). A review of the literature pertaining to the relationship between leadership practices and employee turnover. *Consortium Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Management*, 13(1). Retrieved from <http://www.highbeam.com/publications/consortium-journal-of-hospitality--tourism-management-p438457>

McGregor, D. (1960). *The human side of enterprise*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

McNeese-Smith, D. (1996). Increasing employee productivity, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. *Journal of Healthcare Management*, 41(2), 160-175. Retrieved from https://ache.org/pubs/jhm/jhm_index.cfm

Mobley, W. H. (1977). Intermediate linkage in the relationship between job satisfaction and employee turnover. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 62(2), 237-240. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.62.2.237

Neuman, W. L. (2006). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Ramlall, S. (2004). A review of employee motivation theories and their implications for employee retention within organizations. *The Journal of American Business Review, Cambridge*, 5(1&2), 52-64. Retrieved from <http://www.jaabc.com>

Richman, A., Civian, J., Shannon, L., Hill, E. J., & Brennan, R. (2008). The relationship of perceived flexibility, supportive work-life policies, and use of formal flexible arrangements and occasional flexibility to employee engagement and expected retention. *Community, Work & Family*, 11(2), 183-197. doi:10.1080/13668800802050350

Schein, E., H. (1985). Defining organizational culture. In J. Shafritz and J. S. Ott (Eds.), *Classics of Organization Theory* (pp. 490-502). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College Publishers.

Snow, C. C., & Hrebiniak, L. G. (2002). Strategy, distinctive competence and organizational performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 25(2), 317-336. Retrieved from <http://asq.sagepub.com/>

Sonnenberg, M., Bas K., & Jaap, P. (2011). Balancing HRM: The psychological contact of employees: A multi-level study. *Personnel Review*, 40(6), 664-683. doi: 10.1108/00483481111169625

Wallace, L., & Trinkka, J. (2009). Leadership and employee engagement. *Public Management* 91(5), 10-13. Retrieved from http://icma.org/en/press/pm_magazine/current_issue

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Karl Thompson is an Associate Professor at St. Thomas University and Founder/CEO of Technical Support Leadership Consulting. Dr. Thompson worked in the telecommunication/service industry for over 20 years at various mid to high level positions and has led several projects that successfully improved processes and systems, developed motivated employees, and significantly improved customer service experience. Additionally, Karl has spearheaded business development initiatives in a highly regulated industry. He has conducted training and development events, need analysis to align with key business objectives in conjunction with budgetary goals and timelines and has served as a key member of leadership

teams that formulated recognition programs as a motivational tool to drive organizations strategic direction. He can be contacted at: 953 Poplar Mill Way, Buford, Georgia 30518. US Email: drkthom50@gmail.com

Dr. Jon Webber is an Associate Professor at the University of Phoenix. He is also the President/CEO of Webber Impact Management, a global consulting organization. His research appears in journals such as *Advances in Management and Applied Economics*, *Global Journal of Business Research*, *International Journal of Gambling Business and Economics*, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Technology, and Management*, *International Journal of Management and Marketing*, *Journal of Management and Marketing Research*, and the *Journal of Business and Economics Review of Business and Finance Case Studies*. He has also published work in Cambridge Scholars Publishing (UK). He can be contacted at: 5015 Sunset Trail, Cumming, Georgia 30040. US Email: drjonwebber@gmail.com