2022

Leader Labeling of Employees within Organizations: Descriptions, Daily Patterns, and Contextual Factors

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LEADER LABELING OF EMPLOYEES WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS:

DESCRIPTIONS, DAILY PATTERNS, AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

by

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2022

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April 5, 2022

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY <u>Erin B. Lunday</u> ENTITLED <u>Leader Labeling of Employees in Organizations: Descriptions, Daily Patterns, and Contextual Factors</u> BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF <u>Doctor of Education</u>.

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ABSTRACT

Lunday, Erin B. Ed.D. Department of Leadership in Education and Organizations, Wright State University, 2022. Leader Labeling of Employees Within Organizations: Descriptions, Daily Patterns, And Contextual Factors.

This study explored how formally assigned, organizational leaders perceive their employees using an explanatory sequential mixed-method approach. Applying the tropes associated with labeling theory (i.e., the perceptual frame within the labeling process) and positive organizational elements (i.e., positive deviance and positive leadership), the research determined what potential labels leaders assign to employees they supervise, examined the degree to which self-assessed positive leaders assign more positive descriptors, and identified contextual factors that influence the leaders' labeling process. As part of an eligibility process for the study, leaders completed a positive leader self-assessment ($n = 62$), of which a sample ($n = 46$) participated in a diary study throughout one workweek. As a group, the leaders assigned positive descriptors to their employees 78% of the time during the study. Leaders who assessed themselves as *effective* positive leaders ($M = 20.42$, $SD = 4.010$) used more positive descriptors than those who did not ($M = 15.24$, $SD = 5.533$). Of the descriptors that were considered potential labels, 34% were positive and only 4% were negative. Leader labeling of person-related deviances (rather than job-related) was more likely used to describe extreme traits, behaviors, and

emotions that the leader did or did not value. A more meaningful understanding of what labels leaders apply to employees, why they apply them, and whether they relate to self-assessed positivity can improve leadership within organizations. Empowered with this understanding, leaders can improve self-awareness and more positively influence employees.

Keywords: Leader labeling, positive leadership, leader-employee relationships, leader development

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Acknowledgements

I thank my committee chair, Dr. Mindy McNutt, for her tireless advising, mentoring, and good humor throughout this research. Many thanks to Dr. Rachel Sturm for lending her expertise to my methodological development and her ability to find simplicity and elegance within complexity. I also thank Dr. David Bright for inspiring me and introducing me to positive organizational scholarship (POS) and the greater POS community. Much appreciation is also due to Dr. Corey Seemiller for extensive, constructive feedback that improved both the content and presentation of this research.

Thanks as well to my two program chairs, Dr. Suzanne Franco and Dr. Yoko Miura. Their management of the process and care for students helped me graduate now, rather than "seek tenure" as a doctoral student!

I would be remiss in not thanking my friends and colleagues in the doctoral program, including the Saturday morning writing group. I thank my husband Brian and sons Luke and Sean for their patience, love, and support. All gratitude goes to my mother Dr. Cathy Burns, without whose influence I would not have completed this program. Finally, I thank my ever-present research and writing partner, my golden retriever Logan.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Organizational members, as actors in a social environment, define objects, individuals, and their actions to create shared meaning and provide structure (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). This process, known as labeling, is triggered when an act is perceived as deviating from the norm (Becker, 1963), which can either be perceived as positive or negative (Bright et al., 2006; Cameron, 2003; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004), thereby affecting individuals accordingly. Labeling is present within all organizational life and is used to structure the social environment (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995), facilitate control (Becker, 1963; Burgess, 1931; Erikson, 1962; Goffman, 1974; Lemert, 1951; Oreg & Berson, 2011; Schur, 1971), foster change (Armbruster et al., 2013; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995, 1997), explain events (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Blumer, 1979), and enhance cohesion (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995), among other functions. Indeed, Ashforth and Humphrey (1997) explain how labeling is critical in regards to "interpreting, organizing, and communicating experience within organizations and, in turn, for guiding experience," hence, "labels have a profound effect on how organizational members conceive of social objects and how they act towards those objects" (p. 43).

Labeling is a theoretical approach for analyzing deviant behavior (Orcutt, 1983). Labeling is also a process that occurs in several stages (Knutsson, 1977). Ultimately labeling leads to labels, which are then an outcome that ultimately may affect identity (Becker, 1951, 1953, 1963). Much of the research on labeling, however, tends to

emphasize the perceived (i.e., those receiving the label) and not the perspective of the perceiver.

Specifically, labeling is often studied in the realm of criminology, and focuses on the negative categories in which individuals tend to be categorized (Barmaki, 2019; Denver et al., 2017; Schur, 1971). For example, the emphasis began with "rule-breakers," those individuals who do not follow society's rules (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; Tannenbaum, 1938). Therefore, labels, such as "degenerate," were used by the society within the community to stigmatize the perpetrators of a crime (Becker, 1963). Ironically, there is more recent research that indicates the labels used within criminal justice have a second-order effect that increases, rather than decreases, future criminal behavior (Bernberg, 2019).

Yet, as Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) suggest, labeling can be an appropriate cognitive framework in which the perceiver can view the perceived in more individuating ways and not only in terms of social categories (e.g., gender, job title). Labeling, then, could potentially serve as a way to not necessarily categorize individuals, but instead their independent qualities, which has important implications for leaders in organizations. Leaders, as organizational representatives, interact with employees in distinct ways from the organization, and these interactions can greatly shape how organizational tasks are completed. For example, a military commander is interested in mission accomplishment and will classify and categorize individuals by degree of cooperativeness of the soldiers (the targets) to speedily carry out orders. The means, or the processes and procedures

normalized within the organization, in which roles are carried out affects interaction and generates labeling of employees. Even routine procedures such as onboarding and socializing a new group of people, often labeled "newbie" or "rookie," as well as more demanding organizational time constraints, help to create schemas and norms for quick, subconscious categorization (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). Although Ashforth and Humphrey (1995, 1997) recognize the idea that organizations participate in labeling, they did not specifically address leaders within the organization using labeling.

The purpose of this research is to consider the leader's perceptual frame, thereby examining and exploring the leader's perception of employees, and the triggers that lead to labeling employees (or not). If labeling theory does not account for the leader perspective, it misses a key source of labeling that can impact many organizational members. Because leaders are expected to have a positive impact on others, the triggers that lead to them labeling employees need to be addressed. Particularly important, is to determine which employee actions are perceived as triggers by the leader and the context surrounding those actions. The focus of labeling, though, tends to capture negative deviance and the stigmas associated with it. That is, the conventional or traditional use of the term *deviance* refers to intentional behaviors that depart from organizational norms which threaten the well-being of an organization, its member, or both (R. J. Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). For instance, individuals who create the rules about what is considered negatively deviant, who determine the rules by which others behave, and who enforce these rules are considered moral entrepreneurs (Becker,

1963). Leaders, within their organizations, are encouraged to wear the mantle of moral entrepreneur due to their formal role within the organization, wherein they are expected to maintain and enforce the rules of their organization (Kaptein, 2019). Thus, there is an opportunity to consider how leaders may positively use labels, providing insights into what types of positive deviance initiate the labeling process.

This research contributes to the extant literature in three essential ways. First, this study offered new insights within labeling theory by focusing on the individual perceiver (i.e., leader), which provides a more nuanced look at what the perceiver attends to when interacting with a subordinate (i.e., employee) within the organization. Second, this study advances labeling theory by introducing positive deviance (i.e., intentional and honorable actions) because it enables the examination of labeling within a continuum of deviance rather than only negative aspects of deviance, since deviance is not a static entity: "At the heart of the labeling approach is an emphasis on process; deviance is viewed not as a static entity but rather as a consciously shaped and reshaped outcome of dynamic processes of social interaction" (Schur, 1971, p. 8). Third, this research discovers implications for the practice of leader development and education. Once "leader labeling" of an employee occurs, it may be very difficult to change that label because it requires changing and altering the perception formed by the leader, an area addressed in leader development and education programs. Leader labeling is the act of a leader ascribing a category, classification, characterization, or description to an employee within their organization. Hence, in advancing a relatively new dialogue about leadership and how it

influences organization and individual flourishing, the findings from this research provide a foundation to motivate future research that improves leadership practice.

Statement of the Problem

A label has the potential to shape the reality of both the leader and employee, thereby controlling or influencing the behavior (or action) of the employee (Oreg & Berson, 2011). The process of labeling has rarely been a focus or a source of investigation from a Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) perspective. Furthermore, there is limited research that concentrates on labeling and its effects within the field of leader development.

The foundation of this study involved the labeling process in organizations as defined by Ashforth and Humphrey (1995), in which they asserted that individuals within organizations, as *social* actors in a *social* environment, do indeed label to create shared meaning and provide structure. Additional research, based on their work, concentrated more on how organizational members' labeling of clients or patients (P. Rosenthal & Peccei, 2006) affected those relationships (i.e., without the organization), rather than on co-worker or leader labeling (i.e., within the organization) (Alcadipani, 2018). Considering that characteristics and attributes specific to the behavior or act itself contribute to how the leader-as-audience perceives the action of the employee (Orcutt, 1983), the impact of negatively focused labeling can significantly affect the relational realities that may flow between leader and employee.

Leaders who know and understand the labeling process, may reflect upon the impact of the labels they assign to employees and choose to provide an improved work relationship and environment. For example, resistance to change is typically viewed as an obstacle (Erwin & Garman, 2010) to the change process. The perceived deviation from the norm, which the action of resistance represents and triggers the potential labeling process, is the organization's desire to implement change. Employees associated with resistance to change often receive the negative label "resistor" (Armbruster et al., 2013; Piderit, 2000), experience outcomes such as resentment and dissatisfaction (Folger & Skarlicki, 1999; Oreg et al., 2018), and are perceived by the organizational society as deviant. This "resistor" label is predominant in change literature for practitioners (Harvey & Broyles, 2010; Orridge, 2009; Pennington, 2013) and within management textbooks (Schermerhorn, 2009), creating a common language across organizations for leaders to label their employees.

This study utilized an *explanatory sequential mixed methods approach* (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), by adopting the lens of labeling, to examine the leader and determine potential labels leaders assign employees within an organization. Furthermore, it explored ways in which leaders who assessed themselves as positive leaders sought out positive deviance and created potential positive labels to describe their employees, especially when the leader was fully aware of their use of labels, their leadership approach.

Purpose Statement and Significance of the Study

This study addressed leader labeling of employees within organizations. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used, and involved collecting initial quantitative data to explore, then explain the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the first quantitative phase of the study, the researcher collected survey data, in the form of questionnaires, from organizational leaders, who lead in a variety of organizations within one geographical location and assessed what potential labels and descriptors leaders utilized when thinking of employees, as well as their own perception of their leadership behaviors. The second qualitative phase was conducted as a follow-up to the quantitative results and provided additional context and clarification to the quantitative results. In follow-up interviews, sampled leaders from the first phase of the study further reflected upon events which may have led to the leader's potential labeling during the first phase of the study.

Studying the labels leaders applied to employees provided an opportunity to understand and ultimately affect labeling through leader self-knowledge. This research used the lens of labeling to contribute to the practice of leader development in three ways: 1) induced an awareness of what labels leaders assign employees, 2) explored self-assessed positive leadership behaviors, and 3) contributed insight to practitioners who create leader development programs.

Literature supported that individuals label one another within the workplace in that they use labels to perform sense-making operations prior to decision making (Alcadipani, 2018; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1997). Given the role of a leader is to

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influence employees to attain organizational goals and outcomes (Kotter, 1996, 2006), then labeling and the type of labels leaders apply to employees may lead to significant effects and consequences, both positive and negative. Throughout the researcher's thirty years in the industry, education, and military, she has observed the impact of negative labels on job performance, relationship building, and undervaluing employee potential. The conditions of the organization (e.g., mission, cultural norms) and the leader's role that contributed to labeling, often detracted from the goals of the organization. Additionally, labels affected how a follower felt about themself and, rather than celebrate uniqueness, removed or diminished what made the person an individual. Labeling creates shortcuts on how one thinks others are behaving and how the person labeled thinks they should behave, thereby creating a gap in diversity of thought and encouraging conformity, which may potentially limit the organization's growth. However, labels can be quite useful to provide positive expectations and meaningful goals, but more intentionality is necessary if we choose to use labeling as a flourishing leader tool.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the investigation of the potential labels that organizational leaders assign to their employees:

RQ1: How do leaders describe their employees in their daily organizational life?

RQ2: What labels do leaders assign employees within an organization?

RQ3: What contextual factors (i.e., task, relational) influence the leader

labeling process?

RQ4: Do positive leaders show signs of higher cognitive complexity?

RQ5: Do positive leaders assign more positive descriptors to their

employees within an organization?

This research utilized both quantitative and qualitative research methods in a

mixed-methods approach to understand and explain leader labeling, as it is an inquiry

process that leverages the benefits of both methods to explore social and human problems

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Since labeling is a cognitive process, an explanatory

sequential mixed-methods approach allowed the researcher to study the phenomenon of

labeling both cognitively and contextually. The labeling approach emphasizes process

because deviance is not viewed as a static entity, but "as a continuously shaped and

reshaped *outcome* of dynamic process of social interaction" (Schur, 1971, p. 8).

Therefore to delve into the leader labeling process, the researcher leveraged the use of the

diary method to collect both qualitative (Mehl & Conner, 2012) and quantitative data

(Ohly et al., 2010) using standardized questions daily, rather than a standard survey-

method approach, as the standard approach is bound by forced word choices and could

have been too restrictive. Additionally, phenomenological interviews (Czarniawska,

2002; Kvale, 1996), informed by the previously collected qualitative and quantitative

data from the diary study, further illuminated identified leader labels and revealed the

participant leaders' inner thoughts.

Conceptual Framework

Ravitch and Riggan (2017) defined a conceptual framework as "an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous" (p. 5). The conceptual framework for this study explains the key factors, variables, and constructs and the relationships between them. To fully understand the conceptual framework, it is important to describe the lens of labeling as used in this study.

Labeling, as a theoretical approach, was useful because it offered a relativistic perspective (i.e., deviance as perceived by the leader) to understand reactions to so-called deviant behavior through small-scale interactional process (Orcutt, 1983). The typical source of empirical data when examining these interactional processes is through direct observation; however, this study relied on observations reported by the leaders themselves within the diaries. To fully explain the focus of this research, it is important to describe and define the three different aspects of labeling, which then justified this approach as viable to examining the leader's perceptual frame when observing an employee's behavior.

The Labeling Approach

Since labeling theory appeared in the 1960s the approach has influenced those who study criminology and the behaviors society considers stigmatic, as well as the view people take of these behaviors (Knutsson, 1977). Both Tannenbaum (Barmaki, 2019; 1938) and Mead (1952) are considered the "fathers" of the labeling approach.

Tannenbaum (1938), as a sociologist, studied how the definition of certain behaviors as "evil" extended to the individual who performed the observed behavior. Mead (1952), also a sociologist, who established the concept of symbolic interaction, considered the interplay which exists between an individual and their environment, leading to the basis on which a person sees themself and their identity through another's perspective. The person's self-concept then is a result of how they have been treated and of the expectations placed upon them (Knutsson, 1977).

Labeling Theory

The basic premise of labeling theory is that each individual has, at some time, exhibited a behavior that another might consider, and therefore so call, deviant. Not everyone who exhibits the behavior is called, or so labeled, "deviant." For much of the history of the use of labeling theory, when a label is assigned to a person who has committed a supposed deviant act, the individual is assigned an identity associated with the label, and usually alters the person's identity in a negative way (Becker, 1963). Certain characteristics and qualities then become attributed to them due to this deviant behavior. Two results may occur from this act of labeling: 1) a change to social status or 2) a change to self-image (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1959; Lemert, 1951; Schur, 1971).

The Labeling Process

The process that leads to the result or outcome of labels, as previously described, is considered a primary deviance, set off by a reaction from an audience, or some person or group observing the behavior. The second part of this process is known as secondary

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deviance, wherein the person labeled conceives themself as a deviant and leads to what is now understood to be a career deviance. A career deviance happens when the individual generates this behavior, embraces the associated label as a way of life, and then attaches themself permanently to this label assigned by others. This then creates a deviant identity, in which the individual believes, as do those around them, that this person has always been this way. This new behavior that results from labeling is the definition of secondary deviance (Lemert, 1951). Figure 1.1, details this process as a constant negotiation between those observing the behavior (i.e., determining whether the behavior is considered deviant or not) and the continued interaction and behavioral response of the initial actor.

To further describe the process, as can be seen in the first column on the right (Primary Deviation) of Figure 1.1, society perceives a possible deviance by an individual. This then leads to the next step as to a determination of whether a reaction will occur (see Societal Reaction in the second column, Figure 1.1). If there is no perception of a deviant act, then there ought to be no societal reaction. If there is a perception of deviance occurring, then a society reaction depends upon the social context or type (e.g., an unusual situation, an appropriate context for this deviation).

Figure 1.1

Stages within the Labeling Process
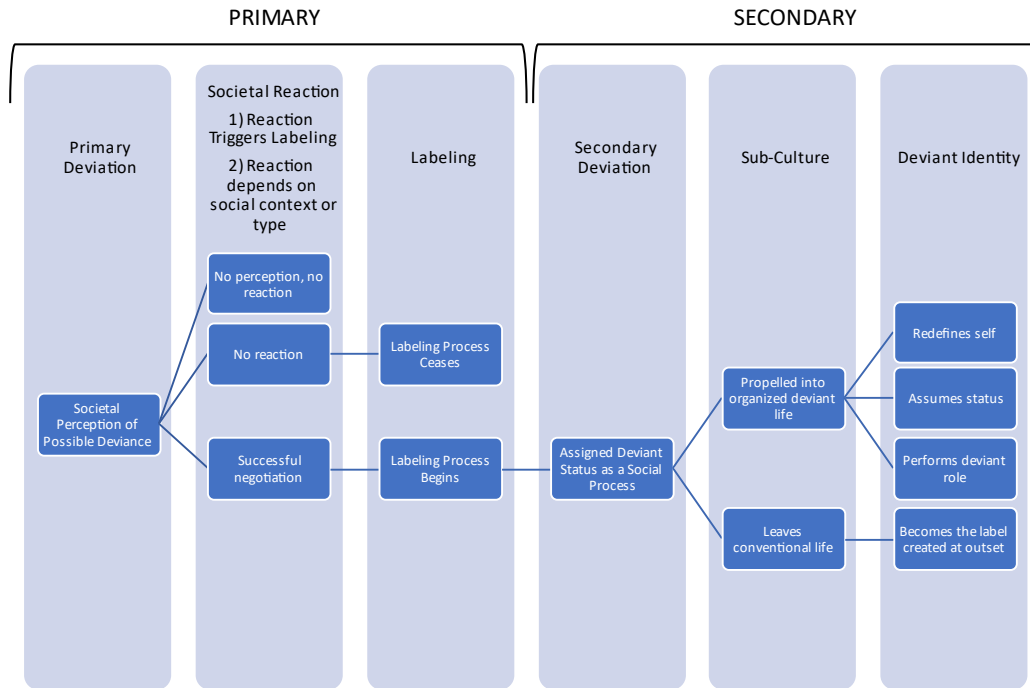
Once again, there may not be a reaction if this is the case, which leads to ceasing

the labeling process as shown in the third column with the heading, "Labeling," in Figure

1.1. However, if the audience perceives and successfully negotiates that there is indeed a

deviation that has occurred and there is a reaction necessary, this then leads to labeling as

reflected in the third column. These steps may or may not ever be verbalized by the

observer(s) during these stages of the process yet concludes the Primary Deviation

process.

What constitutes deviant behavior in the first place? If, as labeling theorists

suggest, everyone exhibits deviant behavior at one time or another, and deviant behavior

is determined by the environment (i.e., the society, individual) observing or reacting to

the behavior, then the deviant behavior is, *in itself*, a label. If there is no reaction to the

behavior as deviant, then deviance does not exist. Therefore, deviance is some behavior

that diverts from the perceived norm. This behavior is often classified historically as

negative behavior, or behavior that deviates from the norm in a stigmatic, negative way

(Orcutt, 1983).

Therefore, Primary Deviation may be caused by a variety of reasons but has never

been fully explored by the labeling theorists. Analysis of labeling tends to start upon the

completion of the Primary Deviation steps, because researchers take it for granted that

everyone conducts a perceived deviant act at some time. As a result, "labeling theory

proceeds on the assumption that in actual fact no people exist who are motivated to

behave deviantly or who possess certain qualities which drive them to do so" (Knutsson,

1977, p. 10). But what about the perceivers who determine whether an act is deviant?

Label as an Outcome

The definition of a label is simply, "a descriptive or identifying word or phrase"

(Merriam-Webster, n.d.). However, when reviewing the process and stages of labeling as

seen in Figure 1.1, originally, those who examined deviance with the labeling approach,

examined labeling as creating labels that ascribe negative qualities to an individual, when

viewed as negative behavior and negative departures from behavioral norms. Defined

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within labeling theory, the definition of a label is tied to the stirrings of secondary deviance, in that what was an initially norm-violating behavior (i.e., primary deviance) and the associated descriptors used to explain the behavior shifts from "*engaging in deviance to becoming* deviant" (Krohn & Lopes, 2015, p. 315). As the descriptor becomes the actor, this is the label. By creating a label, the perceiver then begins to assign the individual into a deviant status, thereby leading to a categorization into a sub-culture that eventually leads to the individual embracing the deviant identity.

The Locus of Leader Labeling

This research, rather than follow through and examine the entire labeling process, focused on the reaction of a leader to an employee's behavior. In addition, this research delved into the perceptual frame of the leader and explored the complexities that determined whether a leader labeled a behavior as deviant or not. Figure 1.2 shows the area of interest as circled.

Figure 1.2

Stages within the Labeling Process with Area of Interest Circled
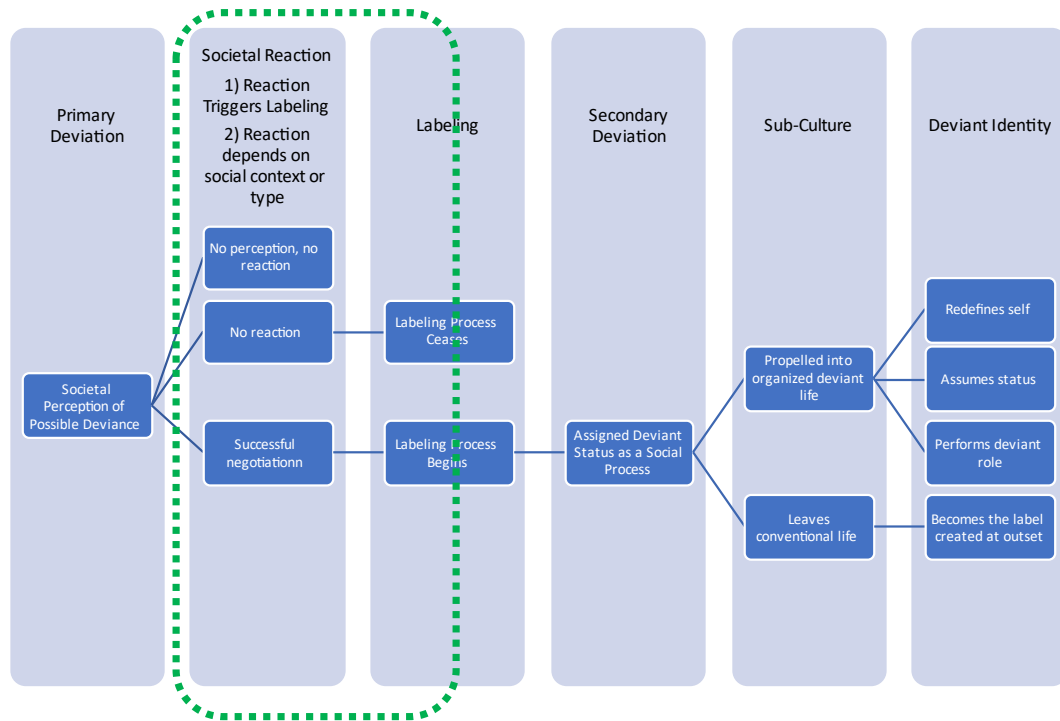
Graphical Representation

A graphical representation of the conceptual framework for the study of leader labeling is displayed in Figure 1.3. The leader's perceptions of their employees, influenced by schematic and categorical information within the labeling process, was the primary focus of this study. The concepts situated in the far left column of Figure 1.3 were important to frame the study. These concepts led to the underlying theories explored and utilized when developing appropriate methods of inquiry, as seen in the third column

in Figure 1.3. Finally, the far right column lists the outcomes as determined by the

questions developed through investigating the phenomenon of leader labeling.

Figure 1.3

Conceptual Framework
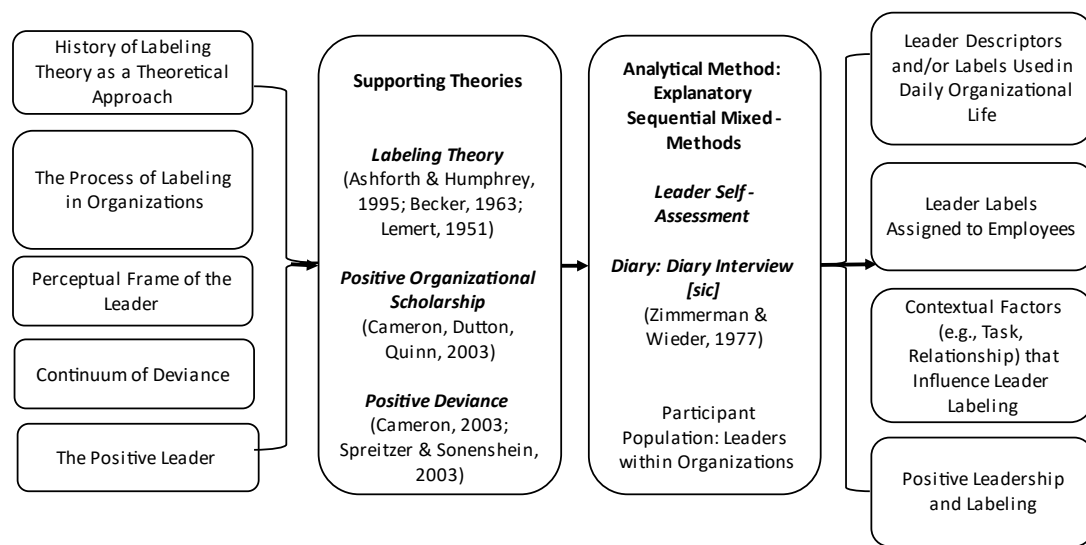
Note: The left column aligns with key concepts explored during the literature review which led to the theories explored to posit the research questions in more detail, as well as which methods might be most appropriate for the study.

Understanding of the history of labeling, in that it first developed out of theories

of symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1979) and criminology (Becker, 1963; T. Bennett,

1979), aided in the development of the collection tools used for this study. Additionally,

examining the process of labeling within organizations (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995)

provided the setting of this research and from where to gather the participants. While

investigating labeling processes, the focus on the specific subject of the leader and their

perceptual frame developed from understanding the triggers, or observed act perceived as deviant, that lead a perceiver to label. A supporting perspective to address acts or behaviors considered deviant within organizations was the "continuum of deviance" (Bright et al., 2006; Cameron, 2003). This context offered a way to further categorize leader labeling and the intentionality or unintentionality of the leader to create labels of positive or negative employee deviance. Placement of leader labels and descriptors within a continuum of deviance aided in the contextual understanding of the leader's own perceptions of their employee. Lastly, reviewing literature associated with the positive leader created an opportunity to examine the type of leader whose entire purpose is to search out and encourage positive deviance (Cameron, 2012; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003), which led to the decision to include a leader self-assessment.

The Perceptual Frame of the Leader

A perceptual frame resides within the leader as to how the leader perceives employee behaviors. The frame is influenced by the context of the organization (i.e., culture, norms, cues, constraints), the roles and tasks associated with those roles of the leader and the employee, and how the leader processes information received when observing the employee (i.e., individuation, cognitive complexity) (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). This perceptual frame determines whether the leader will perceive an action as deviating from the norm (i.e., positively or negatively), whether the leader will react to the perceived deviation from the norm, and whether the leader has successfully negotiated the deviation and appropriate reaction to trigger the labeling of the employee.

Known and agreed upon social categories within an organization require less thought and mental work than more "individuated" perceptions. Therefore, when a leader makes first impressions of others, the impressions are unconsciously based upon those categories to which the target (i.e., employee) may already be assigned within the organization (Fiske, 1993). The cues which the employee enacts provide continued feedback to the leader either confirming or denying the first impression by the leader. This is further enhanced through "variant person knowledge" which is knowledge that might change based upon emotions and traits about someone and "invariant person knowledge" which fits a category that is never changing such as sex and age when perceiving people (Macrae & Quadflieg, 2010). Distinguishing between variant and invariant person knowledge was key to this research, in that an area in which a leader might be able to exercise more personal control, when perceiving an employee, is the area of understanding themself (e.g., own emotions, personality traits, leader traits) or, specifically, their leader perception and/or leader style (e.g., positive leader).

This study provided insight into how leaders created a perceptual frame of the employee. Individuals tend to "live in the minds of others" (Cooley, 1922, p. 208). The leader's perceptual frame became the key area to shape and/or reshape the leader's viewpoint by addressing the triggers that individualized or categorized an employee. Framing changes leader perception and may alter labeling processes, either disrupting the process completely, with no labeling triggers, or creating a new label by focusing on the leader's perception of individual employee behaviors. If individuals "organize their

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experiences of a situation by shuffling through their vocabulary of words, phrases, propositions, and images" (Scheff, 2005, p. 382), the interaction of these factors should cause leaders to categorize their employees less.

Individuation implies that the person is seen as an individual rather than as a member bounded within a particular group, category, or element. Individuation is a more accurate view of who the person *is*. This research resided in the *context* of an organization and the *role/task demands* of the formal leader and aspired to challenge organizational leaders to reassess and rethink their own perception of individual employee behaviors affecting how they respond to *individual differences* (i.e., multitude of personal constructs).

The nature of this research was not to investigate organizational culture, nor change the formal role of the leader within the organization. Rather, the focus was to explore descriptions, contextual factors, and leader-labeling patterns, to lead towards new insights for leader development practices. The elements of context and role were "fixed" and not specifically addressed, nor manipulated in this research. Instead, as seen in Figure 1.2, the focus of this research looked to address the perception of individual employee behaviors as perceived by the organizational leader and their formed perceptual frame of the employee, along with associated leader-labeling triggers.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitations of this research were consistent with the foremost concerns relative to both qualitative and quantitative research. However, these limitations were

mitigated through the use of mixed-methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Limitations related to qualitative research are researcher and participant bias, lack of generalizability and validity, and participant response variability. Limitations related to quantitative research are a loss in richness of meaning, endogeneity, and context-free generalizations (Klenke, 2008).

Qualitative researcher bias occurs when one's own values and opinions might be reflected in the research questions, the methods chosen, or the final analysis and findings (Galdas, 2017). Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended that one way to counter interpretation and bias of the qualitative researcher is to consistently reflect either through journals or memos. Transparency and reflection in the data collection and analysis process, and ensuring self-awareness of researcher biases, mitigated these concerns. In addition, being aware that the researcher's presence may have biased any interview responses, it was important to be mindful of undue influences and unintentional disclosures of information.

A potential lack of generalizability exists when the data is not representative of the subjects studied, in this case organizational leaders. However, to account for such potential limitation, the sample included leaders from a variety of organizations, thereby creating transferability and/or illuminating important differences among organizations. "[S]electing diverse research sites (if using multiple sites) and a range of participants can promote transferability" (Holley & Harris, 2019, p. 122). The range of types of

organizations, as well as range of diverse subjects, aided in applying results and findings to other settings (Holley & Harris, 2019).

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1 (RQ1) was supported by data from the first phase of the study, in that leaders described their employees using positive descriptors and labels about 77% of the time. RQ2 was supported by both Phase 1 and Phase 2 data. Leaders assigned their employees either job-or work-related labels based on the employee's title or job description 49% of the time. Regardless of type of label, leaders tended to use positive or neutral labels 94% of the time. Phase 2 of the study supported RQ3, in that the contextual factors that influenced leader labeling were related to more task-related deviances. However, the contextual factors were difficult to separate from the effect of Covid-19 on the workforce. Both phases provided support to RQ4, in that once Positive Leader was reframed to Effective Positive Leader (PLSA Score ≥ 4), the results indicated that effective positive leaders have a higher cognitive complexity. Lastly, RQ5 was supported by both phases, in that Effective Positive Leaders create more positive descriptors and labels. Additional findings in Phase 2 indicated that Covid-19 impacted daily communications and interactions between leaders and their employees which will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Background and Role of the Researcher

Background

The researcher has over thirty years' experience as a facilitator and a leader. However, her formal training in leader development began as a young cadet at West Point. Upon graduation, she continued to fulfill leadership roles in both command and staff capacities. Training and leader development of others were an integral part of being a military officer. As she transitioned from the military into the civilian professional world, she continued to work in leader and organizational development roles. As a self-classified "life-long learner" she took opportunities to grow as a trainer within the various organizations she operated.

Eventually she found her way back into academia as a student and found excellent professors who taught her new ways of examining the world by using her valuable work experience and combining this experience with the scholar she was becoming. As a scholar-practitioner, experience, theory, and application combine as one to allow her to research, explore, and create change in beneficial ways. In addition, she has taught leader development to all ages, from 7-12th grade children, as a long-term substitute teacher and guest speaker, to undergraduate and graduate students, as an adjunct instructor. In each role she has served, she found common strengths and areas of growth, particularly in the area of perception and interactions with others.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is drawn to research questions that tend to rely upon qualitative research methods. For the purpose of this research, she realized that to fully explore and explain the phenomenon she was investigating, she needed to ask not only qualitative

questions, but questions that fall within the realm of the quantitative as well. Within the qualitative realm, she, as the researcher, was the primary research instrument when conducting qualitative research and was, thereby, located in the center of data collection and analysis (Holley & Harris, 2019). Her worldview dictated that she fill the role of observer and participant in constructing new knowledge. This constructivist approach to leader development suggested a facilitator approach to development; therefore, she adapted to the role of facilitator-interviewer during the final phase of the study and guided the leaders to play an active role in their own understanding of content and context. Her constructivist approach required that while acting as a facilitator, she was in constant dialogue/interaction with the leaders, thereby adding new construction of knowledge and meaning for interpretation and data gathering.

The experiences of the participants, as well as her own, was subjective, which led to separate realities dependent upon those experiences and interpretations of experiences. By introducing a self-assessment following the initial recruitment, not only did the participant express their own view of the world as a leader, but also provided a window into how they experienced and viewed that world through their own self-assessment, creating a shared experience for the participants. The researcher's view of leadership was shaped by her experiences within the military, as a veteran, as well as her 30-plus years as a practitioner, leader developer, and trainer in multiple organizations. Her own experiences with contextual forces such as organizational politics have demonstrated the challenges of navigating between the needs of one's employees and those of the

organization. This research required the construction of leader labeling as a potential influencing occurrence within organizations and, therefore, she tracked and bracketed any biases and emotions that could have affected the course of this study in detailed field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Definitions of Relevant Terms

The following terms are defined to clarify their use in this research.

Audience. Society at large, individuals, or agents of control from which general reactions emerge to various forms of behavior, ascribing labels as a result of positive or negative interactions (Becker, 1963; Erikson, 1962; Goffman, 1974; Schur, 1971).

Audience Reaction Process. Personal opinions formed when confronted by behavior that appear to diverge from the expected norm (Orcutt, 1983).

Categorization. A functional, automatic, instinctive, and gradual process to efficiently organize information about an individual in a perceiver's memory (Allport, 1954; Macrae & Quadflieg, 2010).

Cognitive Complexity. The degree in which an individual differentiates personal constructs in order to interpret encountered behavior (Adams-Webber, 2001; Burleson & Waltman, 1988).

Cognitive Frame. Stable constructs that provide a lens which allows individuals to see and understand a situation. These constructs are schemas, or context-specific interpretations to aid in decision making and action, influenced by our interactions with others (Goffman, 1974; Levine et al., 1993; Smith & Tushman, 2005).

Contextual Factors. The influence of the built and natural environment, as well as the psychological properties of situations which affect perception and behavior (Barker, 1968; Proshansky et al., 1976; Ross & Nisbett, 1991).

Continuum of Deviance. Behaviors which exist within a continuous sequence, wherein those adjacent to one another are not perceptibly different. However, the extremes are either positively or negatively extreme from the center (i.e., the expected norm of behavior) and one another (Bright et al., 2006; Cameron, 2003).

Deviance. Observed "behavior or persons defined as deviant by social audiences" (Orcutt, 1983, p. 6) that depart from organizational norms. Any action that members of a social group treat as a violation of the groups' values or rules.

Individual Differences. Variables that influence the salience or prominence of stereotypic and individuating information (i.e., cognitive complexity) (Adams-Webber, 2001; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995)

Individuation. A person is seen as an individual rather than bounded by classification as a member of a group (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

Invariant-Person Knowledge. Knowledge that fits within a never changing category such as sex (one is born with), color of skin, and age (Macrae & Quadflieg, 2010).

Leader Labeling. The labeling that leaders assign an employee they supervise within an organization (Chapter 2, this work).

Leader-Member Exchange. Leadership theory that suggests both the leader and the follower are active participants in the relationship ranging from high to low quality (Bass & Bass, 2009).

Moral Entrepreneur. Individuals who create the rules about what is considered deviant or non-deviant behavior, determine the rules by which others behave, and enforce the rules on person with less power (Becker, 1963).

Positive Deviance. An evaluative term that addresses behaviors with honorable intentions that diverge from the norm (Clinard & Meier, 2001; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004).

Perception Errors. The individual factors which influence a viewer's perception of an act, thereby leading to inaccurate perceptions (Rookes & Willson, 2000).

Perceptual Frame. The picture created by various contextual factors affecting an individual viewing a behavior, individual, or situation (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

Relational Realities. Continued interactions that form lasting relationships (Hoffman, 1990; Ruesch & Bateson, 1951).

Symbolic Interaction. The assertion that reality is a social construct produced through ongoing interaction and exists through social context (Blumer, 1979).

Variant-Person Knowledge. Knowledge that might change based upon emotions and individual traits (Macrae & Quadflieg, 2010).

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature dealing with an historical analysis of labeling theory and its relation to the study of deviance. The seminal work of Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) provided context for the evolving trend towards positive leadership. Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology of the study, the phases and process for gathering data, and the sample selected. The remainder of the study consists of an analysis of the data and a report of the findings rendered in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides the summary, conclusion, and recommendations of the study. The study concludes with the references and appendices.

Summary

This research demonstrated how leaders create multiple potential labels for employees and the researcher was able to categorize the descriptors and labels as positive, neutral, or negative. The data identified and opened the door to future research into leader perceptions and behaviors that influenced labeling and reinforced the leader's orientation toward an individual employee as either positive, neutral, or negative along a continuum. As such, once individuals who develop leaders (e.g., leader developers) understand the aspects of labeling, then leader developers may choose to incorporate this study's findings in developmental programs, so that leaders can influence followers in a more positive way.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

"At the heart of the labeling approach is an emphasis on process; deviance is viewed

not as a static entity but rather as a consciously shaped and reshaped outcome of

dynamic processes of social interaction" (Schur, 1971, p. 8)

Leader labeling is the act of a leader ascribing a category, classification, characterization, or description to employees within an organization. Important to the current research was understanding the variety of theoretical themes that were relevant to leader labeling within an organizational context. The first strand of literature explains the origin of the labeling process used in this study: the generation of the term "leader labeling" and its definition. In addition, this strand of research addresses the concept of leader individuation, while the context of organization and the roles of both the leader as leader and the follower as follower remained constant, to further explore the leader's perceptual frame of their employee.

The second strand of research describes positive deviance, which is integral to the application of the continuum of deviance construct when determining how leaders observe and understand deviance within their organizations. The application of the continuum of deviance aids in further understanding positive or negative behaviors that contribute to labeling, as well as ways in which leaders who espouse behaviors that are considered positive leader behaviors seek out positive deviance.

<center>**Theoretical Framework**</center>

The history of labeling theory primarily resides within the domains of sociology and social psychology. These domains, when researching behaviors and triggers (or initiators) outside of the societal norm, utilize labeling frameworks to conceptualize individual actions and belief systems. Labeling theory is a frequent lens used to investigate ways in which schemas prompt perception and behavior triggers, as well as how society and individuals view actors who deviate from societal norms. While the majority of research on labeling is in the field of criminology, Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) explored the effects of labeling within organizations as seen through a "perceptual frame." This perceptual frame is informed by the "Audience Reaction Process," the foundation of labeling (Becker, 1963). The interaction between audience and actor (i.e., organizational leader and employee, respectively), in addition to context and situation, informs the process to either create labels deemed to be exclusive or inclusive based on societal standards.

The History of Labeling

Researchers utilize a variety of terms to describe the person or group creating a label and the person receiving the label. To assist the reader in understanding the differences in language used throughout the literature, refer to Figure 2.1. The furthest column on the left, labeled "Subject," lists the most common words used to describe the person or group creating the label. The second column, labeled "Object," are the words commonly associated with the person receiving the label according to the specific

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"Author(s)" as listed in the third column. The fourth column suggests the "Level of
Analysis," that is, the level of analysis in which the author/researcher examined the
labeling process. Macro refers to the analyses at the structural or societal level. Micro
refers to analyses conducted at the individual level. The language of subject and object
within labeling literature depends upon the field in which the studies reside.

Figure 2.1

Language of Subject and Object Within the Labeling Literature

Subject	Object	Author	Level of Analysis	Field-Research Focus
Society	Target	Lemert (1951)	Macro to Micro	Sociology/Criminology- People labeled as criminals undergo an identity change.
Audience	Actor	Becker (1963, 1973) Schur (1971)	Macro/Micro to Micro	Sociology/Criminology- The process by which certain behaviors are criminalized. Sociology— Analysis of Deviance
Perceiver	Target	Fiske & Neuberg (1990)	Micro to Micro	Psychology— Stereotype, Prejudice, and Discrimination
Labeler	Labelee	Braithwaite (1989)	Micro to Micro	Sociology/Criminology— Labeling both increases crime and decreases crime.
Organizational Leader	Follower/ Employee	Lunday (Present)	Micro to Micro	Organizational and Leader Studies- Leader Labeling of Employees

Labeling theory evolved from the field of sociology in the early 1920s. As a
sociologist, Mead (1952) maintained that the way people think of themselves stems from
their interaction with others (i.e., an interactional process). Social experience and activity
with others construct and reconstruct who a person is and becomes. Mead (1952) further
demonstrated that language, as one of the three ways in which the self is developed,

allows people to respond to their own behaviors through the viewed image and attitudes of others.

As previously discussed, descriptors are a "subject," such as a society or a leader in an organizational setting, and an "object," such as an employee within an organizational setting. These levels are associated with macroscopic and microscopic aspects of social analyses as applied to the different objects studied. Identifying the specific domains of the field-research focus contributes to the understanding of labeling theory through viewing micro and macroscopic impacts on the individual, social viewpoints, and behaviors. Regardless of the level of analysis, there is a subject who creates a label and an object who receives the label. As such, one of the values of this study was the focus on the first part of the labeling theory, in which the "audience" was an individual leader and the "actor" was the employee/follower/member, heretofore rarely examined.

The social world is the space in which we act based on our interpretation of the world around us. In other words, action informs meaning, leading to the creation of an understood and perceived reality (Weber & Swedberg, 2009). These conceptualizations are encapsulated by Blumer's (1979) term *symbolic interaction*. Symbolic interaction asserts that reality is a social construct produced through ongoing interaction and only exists through social context. The following principles of symbolic interaction are:

1. We act towards people, things, and events based on how we interpret them and the meaning we derive from these activities with people, things, and events.

2. The meanings we derive are the product of some type of social interaction between people, in that they are social and cultural constructs.

3. Meaning making and discernment is an ongoing interpretive process. The initial meaning might remain the same or evolve depending upon the continued interaction.

An analysis of literature within the sociological domain revealed that labels were usually used to identify others as negative deviants. Labels may be used multi-dimensionally (i.e., cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally) (Orcutt, 1983). Furthermore, labeling theory, as an oft-used sociological theoretical framework, stands as a lens to investigate associated labels as societal control of people, either through the identification of deviant behavior as perceived by particular societal audiences (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1959; Lemert, 1951), and/or defined by the responses of others (Orcutt, 1983). "By labeling we usually mean that the identity ascribed to an individual is in some respect deliberately altered to his discredit because of an alleged deviation" (Knutsson, 1977, p. 39).

The exploration of interactions, symbolic or otherwise, and the understanding of meaning-making and discernment become intrinsically linked to the labeling process. Through a literature review of labeling and organizational leader-follower interactions, a

variety of conceptual frameworks emerged to address the cognitive and interactionist

dimensions associated with labeling. Personal emotions and feelings that motivate

behaviors are different from cognition-based actions and, therefore, need to be addressed

separately within the labeling lens because labeling occurs as a function of cognition, as

we make sense of what we know (Macrae & Quadflieg, 2010).

Labeling and the Impact on Identity, Self-concept, and Behavior

      Labeling in Criminology. Each society and/or its members (i.e., the actor)

determine the labels of an individual (i.e., the target) based on observations of the actions

of those surrounding them (Lemert, 1951). Labels quickly identify behavior as either

acceptable to the society or deviant from the society. In the field of criminology,

researchers found labels (e.g., monster, degenerate, feeble-minded) were used by the

community to "stigmatize" (i.e., a societal reaction) the perpetrators of a crime, thereby

explaining or defining their behavior "for purposes of punishment" (Burgess, 1931, p.

235). Within this context, labeling in the form of stigmatization created a perception of

control.

      Deviance, as a subdivision within labeling research, identified how labeling

affects an individual's identity, self-perception, and perception of others, which in turn

impacts an individual's interactions (Orcutt, 1983). Further research on symbolic

interactionism expanded into the field of criminology and labeling theory became the key

conceptual lens in which to examine criminality as observed in Lemert's (1951) early

research of how people who are labeled as criminals undergo an identity change. In 1963,

Becker, one of the most notable labeling theorists, first disseminated his groundbreaking

research (e.g., the audience; 1951, marijuana use; 1953) as a guide to the study of

deviance within the field of sociology through the process by which certain behaviors are

criminalized. In its original conception, he utilized labeling theory to examine the naming

of deviance regarding individual actions and behaviors during societal interactions within

the social environment (Becker, 1963; Orcutt, 1983).

Most labeling processes, and the theories that developed from them, operate from

the perspective of society and a group of individuals having similar characteristics and

traits (i.e., the audience) (Orcutt, 1983) and led to the popularity of labeling theory

research during the 1950s and 1960s (Becker, 1963; Kitsuse, 1962; Lemert, 1951;

Tannenbaum, 1938). During this time frame, most of the research centered within

criminology, focusing on the consequences associated with the labeling of a person in

connection with criminal acts (Barmaki, 2019; Becker, 1953, 1963; Orcutt, 1983;

Tannenbaum, 1938).

Labeling in Sociology. Sociologists were initially drawn to the roles of

institutions and social practices in support of leadership and social control. These early

studies were the first to examine organizations and describe them from the lens of

labeling and supported the role of the establishment as well as the organizational leader

(Schervish, 1973). Once sociologists became aware of this initial bias, they began to

study situations and aspects of deviant behavior wherein agents of social control

coercively applied labels to individuals, thereby creating boundaries of acceptable, moral

behavior (Schervish, 1973). This shift effectively removed the research out of the domain of the organization and into areas which investigated the effects of labeling upon the individual and social injustice caused by these effects, thereby reinforcing research focus in the fields of criminology and sociology. These early studies demonstrated the profound impact of labeling on identity, self-concept, and behaviors.

When we hear labels of a particular group (e.g., job title), we automatically have an image or a variety of assumptions associated with that label that might alter an attitude or mindset, thereby causing one to react based on those assumptions/perceptions. "Forms of behavior per se do not differentiate deviants from non-deviants; it is the responses of the conventional and conforming members of the society who identify and interpret behavior as deviant which sociologically transform persons into deviants" (Kitsuse, 1962, p. 253).

Labeling research, as previously mentioned, tends to focus on the labeled person and their deviant actions (i.e., behavior) that led to the label in the first place, rather than the audience's (or labeler's) interpretation and perceptual frame (Schervish, 1973). Therefore, a person's responsiveness of social identity to immediate social context remains a central feature of social identity and self-categorization (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010; Hogg et al., 1995; Hogg & Abrams, 1988). This dissertation adds to the literature by addressing both the labels that a leader uses, as well as the context within which the leader formulates those labels.

The Process of Labeling

Several conceptual frameworks utilizing labeling theory describe the labeling process and apply its tenets within multiple fields. Criminology continues to be the primary field that utilizes labeling theory addressing areas such as social injustice, conflict, and power (Barmaki, 2019; Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1959; Meade, 1974; Wellford, 1975). Additionally, due to the ability to address power applying the labeling lens, labeling theory has also been employed within the political science field, for instance, to address political deviance (Schervish, 1973) and to study the legitimization of political activity/activists (van den Broek, 2017).

Common among these various fields is the foundational perspective that labeling is a constantly occurring process that includes the following steps: Audience Reaction Process and Secondary Deviance Process (Orcutt, 1983). The social process of "audience reaction" consists of personal opinions formed when confronted with a person or behavior that appears to diverge from a norm. These opinions are formed due to the perceptual framing which occurs, an internal, cognitive process (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1959, 1974; Kitsuse, 1962; Orcutt, 1983; Schur, 1971). These opinions and perceptions may be kept in the realm of the mind of the perceiver or shared publicly with the actor and the surrounding society. Regardless of the locus of the label, the audience externalizes the label over time, unknowingly or knowingly (Orcutt, 1983; Schur, 1971). A complex interchange between audience and actor characteristics thereby contributes to a labeling assignment that can be either socially inclusive or exclusive. The "secondary

deviance" is a possible result of labeling in which the actor accepts or identifies with the known label and affiliates with others with the same label (Orcutt, 1983). The primary focus of this study will be to examine the "audience reaction process" by which the "audience" is the "leader," and the "actor" is the "employee."

Regardless of the field of study, labeling theory research primarily occurs at the macro/meso level (e.g., society, organization, or group) as the "audience" and the micro level as the "actor" (e.g., the categorized group or the individual receiving the label). However, in this research, the focus was on the leader as audience and the analysis was at the microlevel, because the triggers that start the leader labeling process occur within the cognitive frame and perception of the leader.

Labeling Process in Organizations

The process of labeling, as it occurs within the organization, and the importance of the labeler's perceptual frame during this process, is examined by Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) in their pivotal research. They utilized theories from the fields of psychology and sociology, respectively, to propose a labeling framework which combined Social Categorization Theory and labeling theory and explored ways in which organizational members socially construct the perceptions of individuals working in or transacting with an organization and how these processes affect subsequent interactions. These organizational members, or perceivers, "tend to use social categories and labels to help make sense of the social environment" (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995, p. 414). The central premise and need for this research arose from the authors' observations and

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awareness that sense-making is an ever present and continuous activity occurring within organizations. Decisions and actions revolve around how individuals perceive (active) and are perceived (passive).

Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) used the labeling perspective to provide an explanation for the following critical phenomena within organizations:

1. Categories and labels are both used to reduce uncertainty.

2. Labels foster change in organizations.

3. Labels explain positive and negative events that may occur.

4. Labeling enhances social identity and cohesion.

5. Labels can enhance self-esteem and social esteem.

6. Labeling creates psychological distance.

The overview of their organizational labeling process is provided in Figure 2.2. Utilizing organizations as their overarching context, Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) described the influencing components as organizational cultures, cues, constraints, organizational roles and tasks demands, and individual differences all of which likely affect the perceptual frame of the labeler. These potential variables and their influence (either positive or negative) upon the labeler's (or from here on, the leader's) perceptual frame, as seen in the center of Figure 2.2, ultimately impacts the perception of the target (here on, the employee), either as choosing to place the person within a category or individualizing them within their own mental framework, as viewed on the far right of the figure (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). For example, a leader observes an employee's

action and either places them in a category with other employees or individualizes them

and attributes any potential categorizing behavior to some other event or anomaly.

Consequently, the leader and the employee make sense of the various inputs into the

perceptual frame through the process of naming or labeling.

Figure 2.2

Overview of the Labeling Process in Organizations
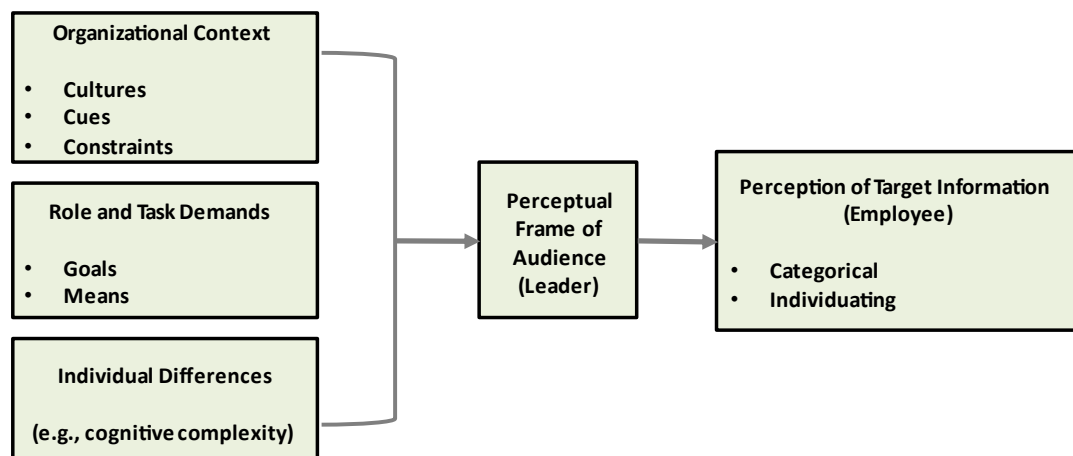
Note: Addition of "Organization," in the first upper box, "Leader," in the center of the figure, and "Employee," in the far right box, are modifications from the original figure. From "Labeling Processes in the Organization: Constructing the Individual," by B. E. Ashforth & R. H. Humphrey, 1995, *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *17*, p. 424. Copyright 1995 by JAI Press, Inc.

Relationship between "Organizational Context" and "Perceptual Frame of

Audience." The social environment of an organization, one in which a coordinated

collective of people (e.g., a corporation or company) work and interact, encompasses

cultures, cues, and constraints. Social interactions are a necessity within this social arena.

Therefore, perceptions of others are a function and dimension of *context* (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995), when viewed within an organization.

The dimensions of organizational context such as *culture* (e.g., values, norms, beliefs and underlying assumptions) (Schein, 2010), if deep-seated, contribute to the people within the organization developing ingrained schemas, thereby using categories and sensemaking practices which channel "action and perception so as to confirm the initial categorizations" (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995, p. 425). In addition, cultures outside the organization may penetrate the organization due to the influences of broader societal beliefs and create stereotypes.

Cues are situational indicators of what the organization values and determine what are appropriate or inappropriate behaviors within an organization. These cues assist the audience when creating criteria for categorization. For example, an organization's structural differences such as functional area, department, hierarchy or position, as well as a person's rank, office location, longevity, or status rapidly leads to categorization (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

Occasionally individuals within an organization may discount behavioral cues associated with a situation and apply it to personal issues or causes, known as fundamental attribution error (Berry, 2015). This false causality creates an error in which the situation is underemphasized, and the individual is overemphasized. This personalization focuses on the individual's personality traits which individuate that

person. When this occurs, the perceptual frame of the perceiver can explain the

individuation based on the role of the target, dismissing individual characteristics.

Lastly, *constraints* within organizations affect the attention and devotion to

individuating the target. Resources such as revenue, capital, and essential supplies are

common examples of organizational constraints (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). The

organization may create the role of a higher authority based on job title and location in

which that role is institutionalized to support the whole organization no matter the

behavior or action of the employee (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

The implications of the previous concepts observed in Figure 2.1 provide ways in

which to shape change in perception which will then lead to changes in labeling, when

necessary. As Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) explained:

"For our purposes, the critical point is that the perceiver tends naturally to

rely on categorical information. Further…the perceiver is often biased

toward interpreting ambiguous and inconsistent information so as to

confirm an initial categorization. However,"

and this is key, when examining leader labeling,

"the perceiver can override these tendencies if he or she is both motivated

and has the attentional resources to perceive individuating attributes in

order to form a more accurate view of the target" (1995, p. 424).

This categorical information allows the perceiver to make sense of the

environment or rely on schemas to move on quickly to more immediate or higher

priority tasks. However, a perceiver (or "leader") may also be inclined to confirm categorization, regardless of social contexts, and further interaction with the person labeled might not be good enough to change the audience's perception or schema. Therefore, "macro, meso, and micro factors" may push organizational members to categorize less and provide more individuation towards the target (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). As a result, the social context impact on individuation implies that the person is seen as an individual rather than as a member bounded within a particular group, category, or element. Individuation is a more accurate view of who the person *is*.

Relationship between "Role and Task Demands" and "Perceptual Frame of Audience." Informal and formal roles, as illustrated by Figure 2.1, influence the way in which tasks are performed and affect the perceptual frame of the audience. When seeking meaning, or maintaining control, motivation to categorize versus individualize a target depends upon the relevance of the *task goal* to the audience in their role within the organization (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995, 1997). These task goals and the *means* available to accomplish the tasks create an implicit classification system of categorization as evidenced in the way tasks are performed, as well as degree of cooperativeness by the target (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). For example, a military commander is interested in mission accomplishment and will classify and categorize soldiers by degree of cooperativeness to speedily carry out orders.

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Furthermore, each role comes with various assumptions regarding the difficulty and/or effective performance within the role, and even the status of the role. The perceiver then determines categorization or individuation based on the degree to which the target performs and whether they meet the expectations of the role. Other factors which determine individuation, rather than categorization, are the amount of time the perceiver and target expect to have with one another, how important the target is to the perceiver, how accountable the perceiver is to the target, and the degree to which the perceiver's categorization is contradicted by continued interaction by the target. If the relationship is short-term, rather than long-term, there is more of a categorization which occurs due to lack of continued feedback over time. Benefits to categorization include a reliance on schemas and decrease time to action; however, the deindividuation can lead to long-term consequences regarding continued relationship building.

The means or the processes and procedures normalized within the organization in which roles are carried out affects interaction and influences labeling of employees. The more routine the procedures, whether it is the onboarding and socializing a new group of people (e.g., "newbies") or time constraints, potentially creates schemas and norms for quick, subconscious categorization (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

Relationship between "Individual Differences" and "Perceptual Frame of Audience." A variable that further affects the perceptual frame of the audience is the third contextual concept of *individual difference* (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). Individual difference implies the ability to differentiate or integrate between complex

stimuli. This differentiation, and the degree to which an individual interprets behaviors, determines whether a person is a cognitively complex perceiver (Adams-Webber, 2001). The most common method to measure the extent of cognitive complexity, and assessing individual differences and constructs between people who are known to one another, is the repertory grid technique, first used by Bieri (1955) in this manner.

As an alternative to the repertory grid, for purposes of analyzing individual differences in cognitive complexity, Crockett (1965) developed the Role Category Questionnaire (RCQ). As a tool, respondents "describe a person as fully as possible within a three-minute time limit" (Crockett, 1965, p. 51). The more different personal constructs used among the descriptions, the higher the cognitive complexity score. Crockett (1965) determined that if collected in a standard manner from samples, then the difference in number of constructs employed, can be assumed to reflect differences in the number of constructs available to the individual.

Cognitively complex perceivers have more differentiated, abstract, and organized constructs (or schemas) for processing social information. Therefore, cognitively complex perceivers have more advanced social perception (Crockett, 1965). This ability to distinguish social interactions leads to less dependence upon schemas and heuristics, creating more opportunity for individuation of a target.

A leader's personal leadership style, as it pertains to whether they tend to seek out strengths or weaknesses in others, may lead to a preference regarding how the individual leader reacts to an employee's behavior, thereby labeling them as either positively or

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negatively deviant. Cameron (2012) and Cissna and Schockman (2020) suggested that positive leaders tend to place more emphasis on employee strengths and seek out positively deviant behavior. These leaders who ascribe to positive leadership ought to, therefore, be more likely to create labels that are triggered by positive deviance.

Relationship between "Perceptual Frame of Audience" and the "Perception of Target Information" (i.e., categorical and individuating). A perceiver's first impressions are unconsciously based upon those categories to which the target may already be assigned within the organization (Fiske, 1993). When making impressions of others, known and agreed upon social categories within an organization require less thought and mental work than more "individuated" perceptions, therefore these already assigned categories create a frame of reference (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). The more doubtful or uncertain the audience/perceiver is regarding the target, the stronger the application of labeling to address the ambiguity, and the perceiver labels (or leader labels) will reflect the audience's confirmatory need to find evidence to support the audience's first instinct or impression (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). Therefore, the cues which the target enacts provides continued feedback to the audience either confirming or denying the first impression of the audience.

The following are various types of psychological effects which could be caused by labeling occurring within the organization: altered interpersonal interactions, group formation and polarization, social identity change, and self-fulfilling prophecies (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). And, although all of these effects are exacerbated within

leader-employee interactions, altered interpersonal interactions is the psychological effect

most salient to this study, because the subject of this research *is* the organizational leader.

If a leader's role is to influence the follower, altered interpersonal interactions will affect

the leader's influence. However, leaders who ascribe to the positive leader model can

counter any of these psychological effects by managing and fostering positive

relationships and interpersonal ties (i.e., individuating) through emphasizing employee

strengths (Cameron, 2012).

The Perceptual Frame of the Leader

The leader, as the perceiver (seen on the left of Figure 2.3), tends to use schemas

to interpret an employee's actions (seen in the center of Figure 2.3), that are vague or

conflicting to conform to initial classifications or categorizations of individuals (Ashforth

& Humphrey, 1995) (as seen on the right in Figure 2.3). However, "…the perceiver can

override these tendencies if they are both motivated and has the attentional resources to

perceive individuating attributes in order to form a more accurate view of the target"

(Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995, p. 424). The macro, meso, and micro factors, as drawn in

the head of the leader in Figures 2.3, and may push the leader to categorize less and

provide more target individuation (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

Figure 2.3

The Elements of a Perceptual Frame

Leader
Leader observes employee behavior.

Employee

Perceptual Frame of Employee
Employee is categorized or labeled like others based on observed behavior.

(Elements within figure: Role (Leader); Context (Organization); Individual Difference (Observed Employee Behavior))
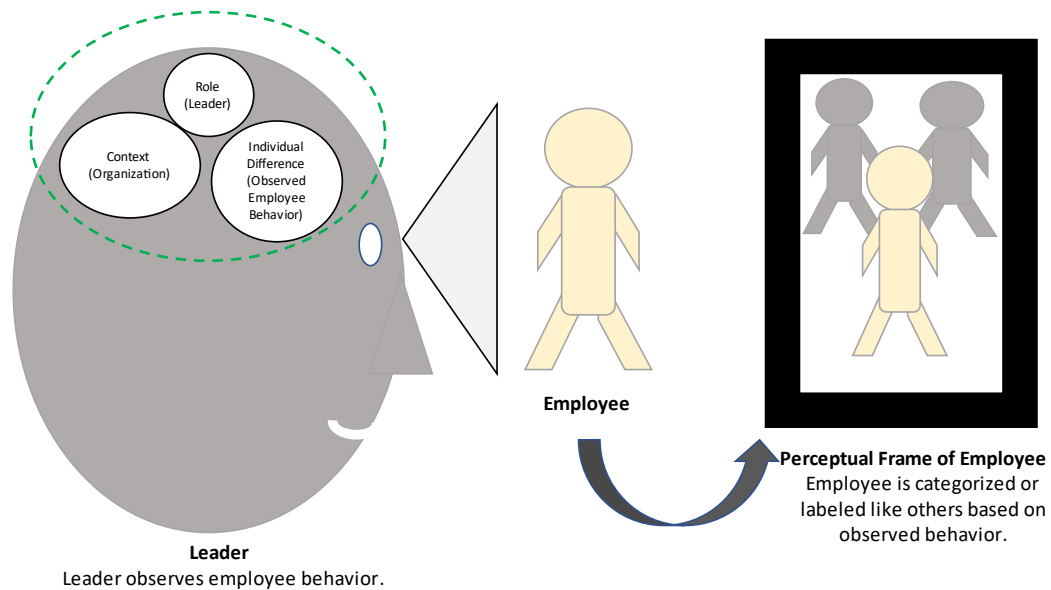
Note: The type of organization and the role of leader are fixed within the organization. The focus for this research is on the mechanisms that affect individuation of an employee within the leader's perceptual frame. The way in which the leader observes an employee creates an opportunity to address specific labels.

If employee behavior appears outside the norm of expected actions, then this enacts a trigger for the leader to make sense of the employee behavior, *within the mind* of the leader. As discussed previously, organizational contexts and specific organizational roles influence the way in which an individual perceives another's behavior. Additionally, the leader's own individuating skills (e.g., cognitive complexity) influence the leader's perceptual frame. Since the leader and employee operate within the context

of the organization, and their formal roles are fixed in the organization, an opportunity

exists, in this study, to examine the leader's individuating abilities.

Granted, the Ashforth and Humphrey (1995, 1997) research addressed the

contextual aspects and use of labeling within organizations, these researchers did not

address labeling by leaders specifically, but rather the general process of labeling

occurring within an organization. As leaders are also individual members within an

organization, and all members within organizations engage in labeling (Ashforth &

Humphrey, 1995), all leaders engage in labeling to some extent. The position of formal

organizational leaders, who may fill specific administrative roles in organizations,

suggests that the effects of leader labeling on others may be magnified in comparison

with other employees who do not hold such positions.

Dimensions of Labeling

The complexity of labeling requires an understanding of social context, but also a

comprehension of the cognitive and behavioral dimensions associated with the labeling

process and how they are applied within this process. The understanding of these labeling

processes is the foundation of Rosenthal and Jacobsen's (1968) work in which they

examined the role of self-fulfilling prophecies within the classroom in the 1960s. Their

research highlighted the interplay between cognitive and behavioral aspects within the

labeling process and became known as the Pygmalion Effect (R. Rosenthal, 2002; R.

Rosenthal & Jacobson, 2003), which determined that teacher expectation affected student

performance. After taking Flanagan's Test of General Ability (TOGA), children were

arbitrarily assigned a score without the knowledge of the teacher to indicate that a student was brighter than average. The teacher received the children and their "potential." Once "labeled" as above average or average, the researchers found that the teacher gave easier work to those children perceived as less able than those who were labeled as more able. The resulting final test scores found that the students who were labeled early on as "brighter" received higher test scores due to the preconceived notions of the teacher, hence fulfilling the expectations of the teacher. Thus, labels are arbitrary, yet the effects can be quite astounding on the individuals labeled, the labeler, and the organization as a whole.

The leader's perception of their role demands, in the context of the formally assigned organizational leader, will lead to expectations to meet these specific role and task demands. A "continuum of deviance" provides a perspective in which to classify and describe actions or behaviors the leader determines deviates from these specific organizational leader expectations.

As an aside, this perspective relates to the researcher's own leadership roles, in that, expectations of employee behavior depended upon the organization in which she operated. For instance, a military leader observing a soldier missing physical fitness training, gaining weight, and eating at a fast-food restaurant, would consider this deviant behavior from the expected norm of military training and demeanor. It was typical to categorize that soldier as a "bad" soldier. However, while observing another soldier, who was constantly exercising, even in their free time, with low body fat, and a strict dietary

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regimen, this soldier was categorized as a "good" soldier. Labels for the "bad" soldier

may include "slug" or "lazy" and for the "good" soldier "stud" or "hardcore." One soldier

was categorized as positively deviant, while the other was categorized as negatively

deviant. By not individualizing the soldier, they were categorized based on the

organizational expectations to meet specific roles and tasks. However, if observing these

same behaviors in a different setting, in which the standards for fitness aligned more with

the organization's norm, the first soldier would not be considered deviant, and the second

soldier might be seen as positively deviant or negatively deviant, depending upon the

extremity of fitness as defined as an addiction (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004).

Additionally, the leader who focused on the soldier's strengths, rather than specific

weaknesses, practices positive leadership. These individual behaviors, observed and

labeled by the leader, present themselves along a *continuum of deviance*.

The Continuum of Deviance

Many scholars overlook how organizations, and their members, partake in

positive behaviors by narrowly conceptualizing deviance as a negative set of behaviors.

Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004) developed a positive deviance construct and theoretical

framework to understand these kinds of behaviors, providing a language for identifying

and explaining positive, norm-departing behaviors. Positive deviance is a foundation to

the Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) movement (Cameron et al., 2003), and

positively deviant behavior has profound effects on the individuals and organizations

who partake and benefit from such behaviors (Quinn, 2012). In this sense, the term

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deviant is truly neither positive nor negative, but rather a descriptor to explain a departure

from the norm. Deviations from the norm might yield a good outcome for an

organization. Deviating from the norm may be a necessity, particularly if an organization

is suffering from norms that lead to poor performance, such as toxic leadership,

dysfunctional practices, and criminal activity. Therefore, this continuum of deviance was

helpful in determining the orientation of the organizational leader and assisted in

developing the data analysis method for the study.

The Continuum of Deviance in Organizations

Labeling theory fails to account for what the various causes are for a particular

behavior to be labeled as deviant since labeling relies on an audience's assessment of the

criterion for norms. A continuum of deviance exists between negative deviance and

positive deviance, with normal behavior existing somewhere between the two (Bright et

al., 2006). Therefore, rather than conceptualize deviant behavior as negative, the

substitution of a criterion such as honorableness allows a pathway to perceiving deviance

in a more positive perspective. One theorist (Cameron, 2003), through his research into

the influence of virtuousness in merged and downsized organizations, closely aligns with

the concept of honorableness. He illustrated the concept of virtuousness in organizations

by locating it along a continuum, situating normal, healthy organizational performance in

the middle of a continuum, with negatively deviant performance on the left and positively

deviant performance on the right (Cameron, 2003). Negatively deviant performance was

considered harmful to the organization, while positively deviant performance was considered virtuous.

When a leader labels an employee's actions, as a reaction to perceived behavior, these labels (or descriptors not quite formed as labels, yet) will fall along this continuum. Figure 2.4 provides a way in which to understand the continuum of deviance from the perspective of organizational relationships. The middle of the continuum shows behaviors that are expected and normal within the organization. These behaviors are considered helpful when considering relationships. To the left of the continuum is negative deviance, observed behaviors that appear undesirable within the organization. The effect of observed negatively deviant behavior is one which leads to harmful relationships. To the right of the continuum is positive deviance, an observed behavior that reflects excellence when viewed in organizational relationships and honors those within the relationship (Bright et al., 2006; Cameron, 2003). Interestingly, less research examines the right side of the continuum, the concepts that characterize it, and the effects of positive leadership, yet, the right side is where excellence resides (Cameron, 2003).

Figure 2.4

Continuum of Deviance and the Effects on Relationships
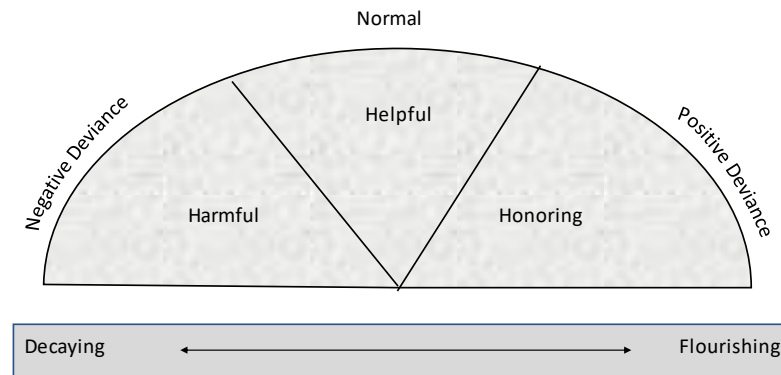
Note. This figure denotes differences between behaviors as a continuum of deviance from normal/acceptable behaviors. This figure represents relationships.

      The organizational leader often approaches the role of leader within the organization as one who must solve problems, thereby focusing on the left side of the continuum; however, if the leader or organization espouses "virtuousness" defined as strength and excellence (Bright et al., 2006; Cameron, 2003; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004), the leader (i.e., a "positive" leader), as their organization's representative, will strive to encourage and find normal to positive deviance, will frame their employees in this perspective, with the goal of fostering a more flourishing organization. If the right side of the continuum is where virtuousness manifests, then, as we evaluate descriptors leaders apply to employees, and determine whether leaders perceive their follower's behaviors as deviant, this continuum of deviance (Bright et al., 2006; Cameron, 2003)

provides a useful construct to examine where leader labels and descriptors lie within the positive domain of excellence and flourishing.

The continuum of deviance provides a standard to show that positive deviance affects leader effectiveness by affecting relationships with others. The leader's perception of the deviant act, and hence the labeling of the act, could determine whether flourishing exists or not within the organization. Furthermore, given that an organizational leader influences and motivates employees to meet organizational goals, the leader's focus is often on effectiveness of meeting those goals. However, leadership goes beyond goal effectiveness. Leadership is relationship (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Leaders interested in the health and success of their employees give individualized consideration (Al-Atwi, 2017), and focus on relationships that provide supportive climates (Deinert et al., 2015). These positive leaders focus on strengths to set the conditions for flourishing relationships within the organization (Ramdas & Patrick, 2019), thereby building relationships that provide their employees an opportunity to experience a sense of well-being, to thrive and to grow as individuals and as an organization.

The Positive Lens in Deviance

The role a leader takes when perceiving behavior as either positive or negative deviance is of significant importance to the interrelationship with their employees. Since the introduction of studying labeling and categorizing within an organizational context by Ashforth and Humphrey in 1995, little research has evolved to address the context of leaders and their role in labeling. The following section introduces literature that

examines ways in which to view leader labeling within organizations, by viewing deviance as a continuum, and presenting the positive aspects of deviance as viewed form the Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) lens. organizations.

Labeling Within the Context of Leader/Follower Relationships

If the leader perceives and labels followers or employees in terms of negative socially constructed categories, this may negatively affect interactions with followers. An example discussed previously was the inducement of self-fulfilling prophecies (Little et al., 2016; Merton, 1948), as also seen in Zimbardo's Stanford experiment (Zimbardo, 2007). An additional related psychological effect is that of altered interpersonal interactions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995) between leaders and followers. Moreover, the interaction pattern between leader and follower may become dysfunctional, contributing to a decline in organizational performance.

The nature or type of relationship the leader and follower share may create categories to make sense of the dynamic interactions between the roles of leader and follower. Current societal norms and previous experiences of both the leader and the follower shape the leader's understanding of an employee's reaction and contribute to leader labeling. Historically, labeling is associated with status and class conflicts, as well as political influences, in regards to who decides what rules should be enforced and whose actions are considered deviant (Becker, 1963; Schervish, 1973). In the traditional, conventional roles of "leader" and "follower," the label of these roles provides perceived boundaries (Kotter, 2006) and in some sense, a class system of its own.

A counter to this process, and a more transactional approach, that further develops the dynamic nature between leader and follower is the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory. This theory proffers that both leaders and followers are active participants in the relationship and can range from high quality relationships, as characterized by a trusting relationship and social support, to low quality relationships, as characterized by distrust and social distance (Bass & Bass, 2009). The quality of the relationships between them may be affected either positively or negatively dependent upon whether the relationship is emotionally positive or negative, whether the relationship is long term or new (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005; van Breukelen et al., 2006), and whether there is personal trust and credibility (Branson et al., 2016), among others.

Positive Organizational Scholarship and Positive Deviance

The context of relationships, as mentioned above, emphasizes that positive and negative experiences may govern how labeling occurs and its impact within the organization. Therefore, when examining these interactions between organizational leaders and employees, it was relevant to further understand and possibly reframe these dynamics by including literature that has grown within the last 20 years which focused upon the positive, known as Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). If deviance was only studied from the negative departure from norms, we miss the other side of the coin - those behaviors that positively depart from the norms which could lead to healthy flourishing individuals and organizations. Therefore, the following strand of literature

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will describe POS, the construct of positive deviance as an offshoot of POS, and its influence upon organizational leadership.

History of Positive Organizational Scholarship and Flourishing Organizations

The Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) movement, introduced during the American Psychological Association's (APA) convention in 1998, formed from a community of scholars and practitioners interested in elevating society (Donaldson, 2011) by focusing on the strengths that exist within society, rather than its deficits (Seligman, 1990). Over the last twenty years, this movement has grown slowly to influence a variety of disciplines due to the focus on strengths and solutions rather than deficits and problem "fixing." Positive-oriented research can be seen within the disciplines of education (Furlong et al., 2014), political science (Linley & Joseph, 2004), leadership (Avolio et al., 2004), management (Ghoshal, 2005), and organizational studies (Cameron et al., 2003; Cameron & Dutton, 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). POS focuses on positive dynamics that bring about positive effects and is "primarily concerned with positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations and their members" (Cameron, 2003, p. 4). Although the areas of research under the purview of POS are strength, resilience, trust, virtuousness, and *positive deviance* within an organizational context (Cameron, 2003; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003, 2004; Weick et al., 2005), it is through an examination of positive deviance, from an organizational context, that we can form a better understanding of leader labeling.

Positive Deviance Research

Early organizational studies overlooked how organizational members participated in positive behaviors by narrowly defining and conceptualizing deviance as a negative set of behaviors. Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004) broadened the understanding of deviance to include *positive* behaviors, thereby contributing to the forming body of POS, as it was quickly discovered that positive deviance is a foundation of the POS movement (Cameron et al., 2003). Previous studies of deviance in the workplace that primarily focused on negative sets of behaviors failed to grasp how organizational members used positive behaviors. Therefore, Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004) proposed a positive deviance construct to provide a conceptual framework to understand positively deviant behaviors. In order to determine a common language, they examined and evaluated four typical sociological perspectives on deviance and the concepts and languages associated with them; statistical, supra-conformity, reactive, and normative (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004). The examination of these perspectives was helpful in defining positive deviance. Even though each perspective did not thoroughly address what these researchers were observing when examining positive deviance, these perspectives aided in the creation of a common language to describe and experience positive deviance and affirmed the need for a new definition.

Statistical deviance explains behaviors that differ from the average or normal experience. When creating normal distribution curves, we generally think of areas on the left of the curve as negatively deviant, while those on the far right are positively deviant. The authors found this term and definition lacking because those who excel, whether in a

good behavior or a bad behavior, would be considered positively deviant, as they would fall along the right side of the curve.

Meanwhile, supra-conformity provides a way of describing excessively normative behavior that may be positive deviance. However, pro-normative behavior becomes deviant because it extends beyond what is deemed appropriate by a referent group (Dodge, 1985). If we think back upon the example of the very athletic soldier, described earlier in the chapter, who was considered positively deviant and so labeled, when the exercise becomes too extreme, this can then lead to addictive behaviors, and can no longer be placed within the realm of positive deviance (Ewald & Jiobu, 1985).

The third construct, the reactive approach to deviance, in which an audience reacts to a behavior considered deviant, is a similar construct to that of labeling. At this point in their examination of the sociological perspectives, this approach appears to be the most closely aligned with what they were seeing in the positive deviance realm. Behavior is deviant if a negative condemnation by an audience occurs (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004), *such as publicly labeling a behavior as depraved or punishing an individual.* In other words, absent a negative audience reaction, no deviant behavior occurs. Here is where the construct diverts from their own views of positive deviance.

The last observed sociological construct, as seen in deviance literature is the normative approach which defines deviance as a departure from the norm (Dodge, 1985). Although most work in organizational studies on normative deviance focused on negative behaviors (e.g., stealing, lying); Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2003) offered a new definition

of the normative approach as "intentional behaviors that depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways" (p. 209). By honorable, the authors refer to virtuousness, a POS imperative (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012), and the associated positive behaviors that improve the human condition and perceived as honorable by an audience or referent group (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003).

This reconstructed view of deviance, with the addition of the positive aspect of honorable, becomes more complete and limits the relevant behaviors of what one ought to do (as found in the statistical approach) and avoids the challenges found in the reactive approach of non-observable behavior (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004). Additionally, this new definition departs from the reactive school of thought, in that the behavior does not have to be labeled deviant, just that it would have been labeled deviant if it had been observed. Most importantly, though, *positive deviance*, focuses on behaviors with honorable intentions, regardless or independent of the outcome. An example of which might be a leader who takes a significant pay cut and quietly donates funds to an employee in financial hardship, whether the employee remains with the organization or not.

Leadership Research

Leadership research does not treat types of leaders all the same. A plethora of leadership styles and theories exist in which overlap between styles exists (Banks et al., 2016; Dinh et al., 2014). In the last twenty years, alone, approximately twenty-five new leadership theories have emerged (Dinh et al., 2014). Recently there has been a push to

see leaders behave positively at work, as well as incorporate behaviors that project

authentic (Beer et al., 2011; George, 2003), ethical (M. E. Brown et al., 2005), virtuous

(R. Boyatzis et al., 2019; Goleman et al., 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2006), and servant

(Coetzer et al., 2017; Greenleaf et al., 1996) leaders. Transformational leaders, servant

leaders, ethical leaders, and authentic leaders are examples of leadership types in which

these positive behaviors are manifested. There are many ways (e.g., leader development

courses, leadership degrees, learning programs within organizations, and self-

assessments) for leaders to understand what type of leader they are or wish to be.

Through reflection, self-awareness exercises, and organizational work leaders can choose

to act in positive ways.

No two leaders are the same; therefore, leadership strategies should be tailored to

each individual leader. However, when tailoring strategies, one common element should

be present: (1) an opportunity to diagnose or assess current behaviors and (2) identifying

specific actions to implement new behaviors or maintain successful behaviors. Cameron

(2012) created a leadership self-assessment tool to aid in leaders' understanding of what

behaviors they feel they manifest in a positive way, and areas in which they could

increase positive behaviors. The Positive Leadership Assessment (Cameron, 2012, pp.

132–133) consists of 24 questions to determine the level in which leaders engage in

positive behaviors in daily practice. Leaders who score between 3-5 (on a - point scale)

for each question tend to manifest more positive leader behaviors and are considered

"effective positive leaders" (Cameron, 2012, p. 134). The average score is usually 4 for each question.

Summary and Implications

Labeling research tends to revolve around perceived behavior that is classified as negatively deviant (Barmaki, 2019; Becker, 1963; Orcutt, 1983; Tannenbaum, 1938; Zimbardo, 2007). The labeling literature which currently exists to aid in defining the leader labeling process of employees does not adequately address labels leaders assign to employees, nor behaviors that may actually be considered positively deviant. In addition, there is little to no literature which specifically addresses the audience reaction process of leader labeling and the contextual factors of the leader as the leader labels employees, triggered by perceived deviant acts. Through an examination of positive deviance as found in positive organizational scholarship, a path opened to explore and examine leader labels more thoroughly.

Rather than just focus upon one aspect of leadership, the typical formal organizational leader approaches often looked at regarding problem solving and deficit-based reactions, this research examined both perceived positive and negative labels construed from positively and negatively deviant perceived behaviors. A positive leader is one who drives higher levels of performance in conjunction with fulfilling the organization's mission and goals. This type of leader is one who focuses energies on those acts that create flourishing and excellence for self, the organization, and the employees within the organization (Ramdas & Patrick, 2019). In this regard, we would

expect to see leaders who ascribe positive descriptors in reaction to their employee's behaviors. The implications for pursuing this line of inquiry lead to ways in which a leader may be able to address and realign their own personal frame of reference to experience a "high sense of well-being" (Ramdas & Patrick, 2019, p. 261), as the leader intentionally perceives deviance as positive. A leader might then "know thyself" and understand the labels and the labeling process to mindfully relate to people within their organization.

A label has the potential to shape the reality of both the leader and employee, thereby controlling or influencing the behavior (or action) of the employee (Oreg & Berson, 2011). The process of labeling has rarely been a focus or a source of investigation within the field of organizational development and change, specifically from a POS perspective. Furthermore, there is limited research that concentrates on labeling and its effects within the field of leader development.

Positive Leadership constitutes the ways in which leaders enable positively deviant performance, in that, rather than focus only on profitably or effectiveness, these leaders intentionally act in ways to encourage the departure from the norm in honorable ways (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003, 2004). Positive Leadership emphasizes the focus on strengths, capabilities, and human potential (Cameron, 2012, 2013). The easiest way to identify positive leadership is to observe positive deviance and instances in which supportive language replaces negative, critical language. In addition, Cameron (2012)

discovered: "The single most important factor in predicting organizational performance…was the ratio of positive statements to negative statements" (p. 66).

The Leader as Organizational Representative and in Relationships

If interactions vary between leaders and their employees due to the dyadic nature of the relationship, these interactions affect the ambiguity of a label (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1997). We may be able to adjust or account for proper training and preparation prior to events that might trigger the labeling process through proactive leader development methods, affecting how the leader perceives the follower and his/her behavior (Bolman & Deal, 2006). If we understand this more specifically, then we can develop training programs that assist the leader in their relationship with the employee.

Schemas allow leaders to make decisions very quickly, but a schema that might be appropriate to categorize a group, may not be accurate for use at the individual level. If leaders observe followers' reactions and try to make sense of the displayed interaction through labels, an interpretive process occurs to deal with potential ambiguity. By understanding these categories, we might more readily develop teaching, training, and developmental strategies to encourage positive relationships, leading to better performance outcomes (Mayfield & Mayfield, 1998) and flourishing organizations (Cameron, 2003).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the methodological approach used to explore and examine the leader as the *Audience* (Orcutt, 1983) and discover what labels leaders assign employees within an organizational context through the lens of labeling theory. Additionally, research questions consistent with the researcher's philosophical paradigm and worldview, directed data input and qualitative examination of the leader's personal understanding of labeling. A detailed description regarding the population, recruitment of participants, access to the sample, and data collection tools and techniques follow. Through this description, a thorough explanation is offered regarding the steps and tools used to gather leaders' descriptors of employees and leader labels, to explore the labels and perceived type of deviance used and reported by leaders, and efforts to determine the nuanced contextual factors of leader labeling. Lastly, ethical considerations and limitations of the study are addressed.

Researcher's Philosophical Paradigm and Worldview

The researcher utilized a primarily Social Constructivist approach to understand and interpret how leaders construct meaning behind employee descriptors and labels using the labeling process as a guide throughout all phases of the study. The Interpretivists, from which the Constructivist theory evolves, lends itself well to this research in that it seeks to explore "subjective reality," constructed by how leaders see and interpret within their respective work contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). This approach recognizes that one's truth is not absolute, but relative to interpretation. This

social constructivist paradigm is used to understand how individuals make sense of their everyday lives (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Although an emphasis is on a qualitative research perspective for this study, the researcher also incorporated a positivist approach through the use of quantitative methods to measure and analyze data to understand multiple perspectives of inquiry. This approach captured the "diversity of the human experience" (Sommer & Sommer, 1991, p. 221) and identified multiple "truths" or principles which guided behavior. It was her desire, that through this research, leaders recognize and identify the labeling of their employees as interpretations of individual differences which become a reality or truth within the work setting.

The researcher's "basic set of beliefs" influenced her decision to research leader phenomena within organizational settings. A fundamental belief of hers is to always aspire to act under principles of love and respect for fellow human beings and to see the best in others. This belief was forged by experience, both as a military child and a soldier living in the United States and in international countries. These experiences exposed her to people of different faiths and cultures; and personal and professional encounters which lead her to understand that one's truth is subjective and construed from one's own personal experiences and perceptual framework. In addition, the researcher's continued work experiences following her military service and the pursuit of her academic growth continues to support the belief that reality is created through interactions and experiences with others. These beliefs affect her curiosity about the world, the research questions she posed, how she chose a framework best suited to investigate the research questions, and

her methodological approach in collecting and analyzing the data (Guba, 1990). Furthermore, these beliefs motivated her desire to further understand how leaders' ideas, emotions, and reflections facilitate and impact their own leadership qualities.

The researcher's worldview embodies the constructivist approach to leader development and therefore dictated that she fill the role of observer and participant in guiding leaders to construct new knowledge. Therefore, she adapted to the role of facilitator-interviewer during the last part of her study and guided the leaders to play an active role in their own understanding of content and context. The researcher employed a constructivist approach by acting as a facilitator and maintained constant dialogue/interaction with the leaders, thereby adding new construction of knowledge and meaning for interpretation and data gathering. All of these factors lead to the creation of the research questions about leader labeling and the research design used to explore and provide answers to these questions.

The Social Constructivist philosophical paradigm to which the researcher is drawn, in addition to reflecting her own worldview, allowed for a variety of methods and ways in which to observe, explore, and study human and leader behavior. Although these methods seemed a good fit for her research, the use of open-ended approaches to qualitative research, as well as the paradigmatic nature of qualitative research, needed to be addressed during the design of the research and rectified to account for limitations and deficiencies. These potential concerns were: 1) multiple realities which may conflict with one another, 2) time and context are crucial to understanding the topic of focus, and 3)

knowledge is intricately interwoven and cannot be separated from the person holding the knowledge or generating the knowledge (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Qualitative research emphasizes the following concept: the act of research can never be fully objective. Meanwhile, a primary concern for quantitative research pertinent to this study, was that statistical findings related to the leader's perceptual frame may be ambiguous and data may not conform to expected theories or relationships between variables, as warned by Remler and Van Ryzin (2014). Additionally, there may be unanticipated findings in the statistical analysis such as findings initially unrelated to the research question, but perhaps important in a broader sense. Therefore, this study relied upon a mixed-methods approach to draw upon the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as to mitigate the limitations inherent in both approaches.

The data collection methods chosen for this research reflected a mixed-methods approach (i.e., diary study - questionnaires and interview). A mixed-methods research design approach to inquiry utilized the collection and integration of both qualitative and quantitative data to gain insights not typically attainable by the use of one method alone. The integration of both types of data was required to fully explore the research questions for this study which were a combination of open (qualitative) and closed-ended questions (quantitative) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This research specifically examined the perceptual frame of the leader and required methods that extract context, meaning, and understanding. Therefore, the procedure for this study, given the previous desire to combine qualitative and quantitative

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data, best utilized is the *explanatory sequential mixed-methods design* (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018). This design involved a two-phase data collection project in which the

researcher first collected quantitative data, analyzed the results, then used the results to

build onto or integrate into the second, qualitative phase. Morse (1991) and Plano-Clark

and Creswell (2008) developed the notations used to simplify this procedure (see Figure

3.1). The design provides a detailed depiction of the research process and the integration

of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

   Phase 1 consisted of two parts. Phase 1a comprised of the recruitment and

selection of the participants to the project and, once eligibility was determined,

participants continued through the questionnaire to complete a leader self-assessment.

Phase 1b contained a daily diary study which included both quantitative and qualitative

responses and data analysis. The data analysis during Phase 1 informed the research in

Phase 2 during the phenomenological interview and led to the intentional selection of the

12 diary participants for the qualitative phase of the study, as well as the types of

questions that were asked of these participants. Therefore, the mixed-method approach to

this design resulted in more richly integrated data in this study.

Figure 3.1

Applied Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design
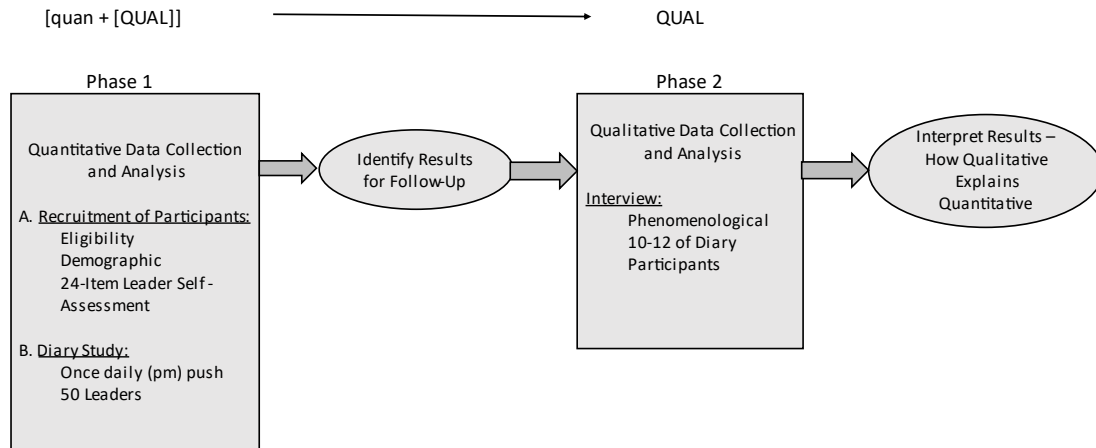
This research required an Institutional Review Board (IRB) assessment due to interactions that occurred with human subjects to ensure the researcher protected participants from potential harm. Although unnecessary for IRB approval, the researcher included a participant consent check at the beginning of the eligibility questionnaire and the diary study questionnaires (see Appendix A) as well as a reminder of consent prior to the interview portion of the study. All data was coded to ensure confidentiality.

Research Questions

The following questions led the investigation into the perceptual frame of leaders through the lens of the labeling process in relation to their employees:

RQ1: How do leaders describe their employees in their daily organizational life?

RQ2: What labels do leaders assign employees within an organization?

RQ3: What contextual factors (i.e., task, relational) influence the leader labeling process?

RQ4: Do positive leaders show signs of higher cognitive complexity?

RQ5: Do positive leaders assign more positive descriptors to their employees within an organization?

These research questions required data collection instruments used in the constructivist paradigms and best suited to qualitative research (Lincoln, 1990). The research instruments chosen in this study were a diary study (daily questionnaire) and phenomenological interviewing. The design was conducted using a multi-phase approach known as the "diary: diary-interview method [*sic*]" (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977, p. 482). This approach collected diaries from participants (in this case, leaders) during the first phase (Phase 1b) of data collection. The analysis of the collected diaries then led to detailed interview protocols for more in-depth data collection (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977) during Phase 2). RQ4 and RQ5 was examined during the integration portion of the two phases drawing upon the quantitative results and analysis from the leader self-assessment and diary study, and the qualitative results of analysis from the diary study and interviews. Finally, a mixed-method process was appropriate for this study to address the quantitative aspects of the research.

The mapping of the research questions, to the specific method, measure, and analysis, are outlined in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2

Research Questions Mapped to Method, Measure, and Analysis

Research Question	Method	Measure	Analysis
RQ1: How do leaders describe their employees in their daily organizational life?	Qualitative	**Diary Study**	Content Analysis
RQ2: What labels do leaders assign employees within an organization?	Qualitative/ Quantitative	**Diary Study** (Daily Survey); **Interview**	Content Analysis
RQ3: What contextual factors (i.e., task, relational) influence the leader labeling process?	Qualitative	Diary Study; **Interview**	Content Analysis
RQ4: Do positive leaders show signs of higher cognitive complexity?	Quantitative	**EDSQ; Diary Study** (Diary Study); Interview	Bi-variate Analysis/Cross-tab; Content Analysis
RQ5: Do positive leaders assign more positive descriptors to their employees within an organization?	Quantitative	**EDSQ; Diary Study** (Daily Survey)	Bi-variate Analysis/Cross-tab; Content Analysis

Note: The primary collection method used to address the research question is bolded. In some instances, data from both were necessary to answer the question more fully.

Research Design

There are a variety of factors associated with how leaders perceive the world. The leader's language, meaning, sensemaking, action, and other similar contexts provide access to their reality (Myers, 2013). Additionally, the leader's reality is determined by social experience and the leader's resultant meanings through interactions within and throughout their social world. This research design, in an effort to answer its research questions, utilized a merging of the constructivist and participatory approach to explore the leader's reality by discovering leader labels and the constructed meaning of such labels during each phase of the study. Traditionally, researchers and practitioner authors have supplied leaders with labels (e.g., "resistors") when dealing with human resource issues in a "top-down" approach. This research sought to explore and expand leaders'

perceptions of employees and associated labels along a continuum of deviance utilizing a phenomenological approach in a novel way to delve into the leaders' varied contextual interpretations.

As discussed earlier, Phase 1 consisted of two parts (Phase 1a and Phase 1b), one that supported determining the population from where the researcher would draw her sample and provided brief demographics of the leaders, including a leader self-assessment. The second part of Phase 1 (Phase 1b) of the research design utilized a data collection method which employed instruments designed to grasp the scope of the cognitive processes and experiences of leaders via daily entries, known as a diary method. The data collected from this method was analyzed through descriptive statistics and content analysis to determine patterns that existed within the leader's perceptual frame and provided insight into leader labeling, reflecting the leader's observance of employee actions along a continuum of deviance. Figure 3.3 is a detailed description of Phase 1 and Phase 2 in this process.

Figure 3.3

Diagram of Data Collection Process
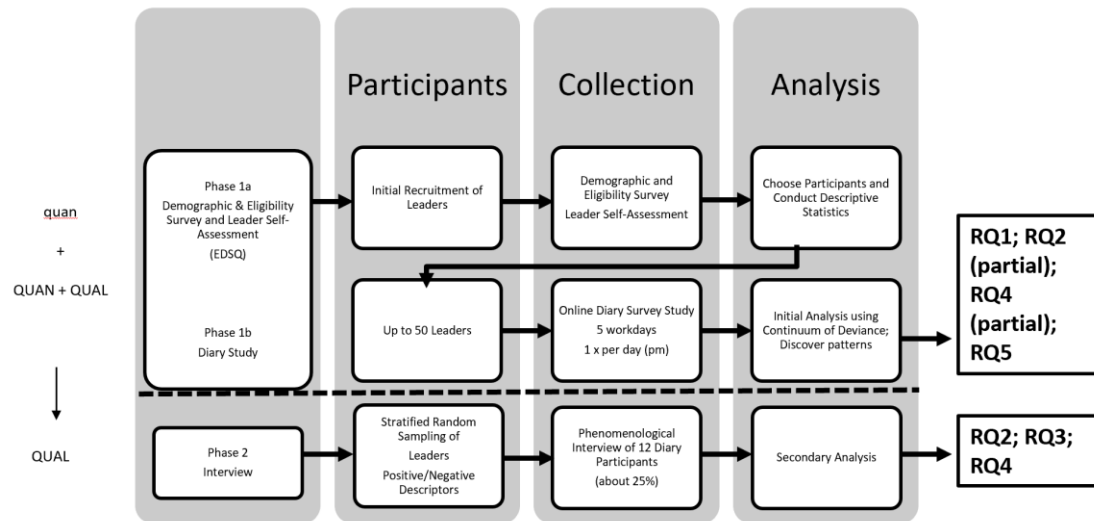
Note: The collection plan is a two-phase process in which the diary study informs the interview protocol by interviewing 10-15 samples from the diary study.

Phase 2 consisted of follow-up interviews with a sample of the diarists, and investigated the leaders' experiences, thereby allowing the leader to aid in the interpretation of their data (Phase 2, Figure 3.3). This process reflected the use of phenomenology, in that the method investigated individual-lived human experiences (Varela & Shear, 1999). Methods to address their experiences in more depth, such as storytelling and narration, assisted the participant to further explore and discuss their labeling processes and the social contexts that influence these. Therefore, questions were experiential in nature, encouraging leaders to reflect upon and share how they felt, how they perceived their interactions with the employees, how they made meaning of the

experience, and how they changed, if at all, throughout the event (Bevan, 2014). This focus on the lived experiences of each leader, discerned the full spectrum of meaning of the leader-employee interactions upon the leaders. Therefore, Phase 2 data collection utilized these techniques and afforded the leaders an opportunity to share these experiences more deeply.

Sampling Design

Population

The population for this study consisted of formal organizational leaders who are assigned as such within their organizations (e.g., supervisor, team lead, manager, executive, etc.). In addition, the formal leader must have directly supervised or evaluated at least one employee within the organization during the study. Another requirement of eligibility was that the participant be over 18 years of age to account for the need to pick participants who were legally classified as adults for the purpose of this study. Lastly, the participant must have been a citizen of the United States to provide some measure of control between potential cultural differences and norms, related to nationality, in leader perception.

Participant Recruitment

The researcher conducted an initial recruitment through her professional and personal network. Through word of mouth (i.e., snowball effect), an invitation to participate in the study reached approximately 430 local leaders. The research sample was an opportunistic convenience sample (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) of formal leaders

within a local, 50-mile geographical area. The researcher personally connected with contacts through the Better Business Bureau, local higher education institutions, and government entities to reach leaders in multiple types and sizes of organizations. The researcher set a goal of 50 participant-leaders from various types and sizes of organizations to be recruited for the study in an effort to address potential transferability and homogeneity issues that might occur (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2014).

Figure 3.4 illustrates the flow of the questions to determine eligibility through the use of a Qualtrics questionnaire for each leader who responded with interest to participate in the study. Once the initial recruitment of leaders was completed through utilization of the questions in Figure 3.4, the participants were directed to continue the questionnaire comprised of leader demographics and a leader self-assessment (see Appendix B).

Figure 3.4

Participant Recruitment Questionnaire Diagram Using Qualtrics
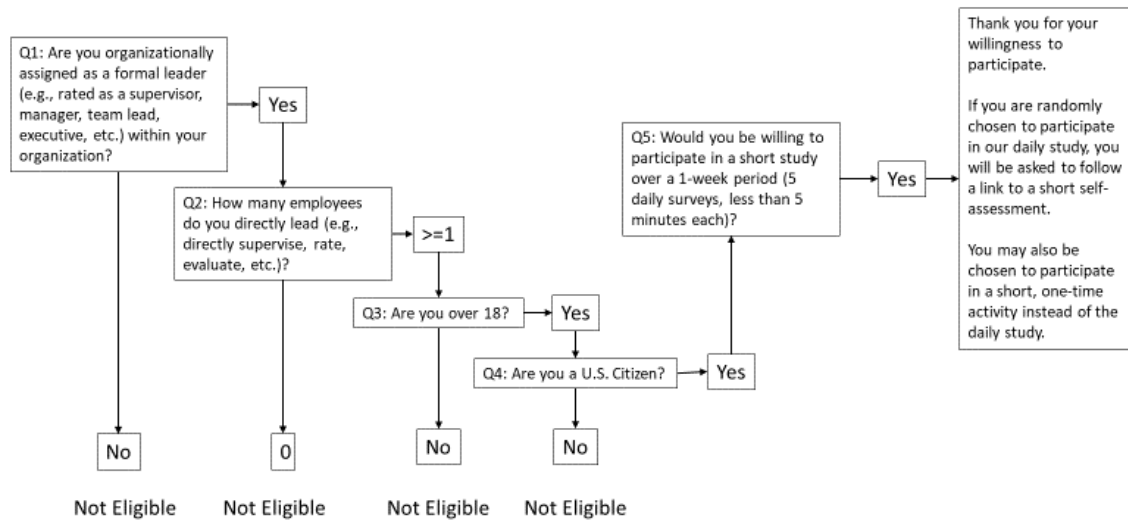
Note. The diagram highlights the steps to determine eligibility and create a population from which to draw the study sample of participants. The first sample is an opportunistic convenience sample already known to the researcher.

Procedural Design

The method of design, as explained previously, followed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Within the Eligibility, Demographic, and Self-Assessment Questionnaire (EDSQ), the demographics and self-assessment would be incorporated as the quantitative portion of the mixed-method design as Phase 1a. Then a description of the value of the data collection method will precede the description of data collection for Phase 1b, the diary study, and Phase 2, the interview.

Data Collection

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Phase 1a: Eligibility, Demographic, and Self-Assessment Questionnaire

(EDSQ). Upon the initial eligibility recruitment of participants, they were asked to

complete a 24-item leader self-assessment (i.e., Positive Leader Self-Assessment) which

includes demographic information. This assessment provided a view of how the leaders

perceive and assess themselves as leaders. The assessment was initially created as a two-

part self-development and growth tool, in which leaders identify to what extent (i.e., on a

Likert Scale, 1= never and 5 = always) they believe they perform specific behaviors that

positive leaders are inclined to perform. The author of the assessment provides theory-

supported actions to improve a leader's positive leader behaviors (Cameron, 2012). As a

standalone instrument in this study, this self-assessment provided a means to explore to

what extent a leader *frames* themself as a positive leader; therefore, validity and

reliability of the tool was not necessary for this study. Examples of questions include

(Cameron, 2012):

- To what extent do you make gratitude visits, and the distribution of gratitude
  notes a daily practice?

- To what extent do you provide more feedback to individuals about their strengths
  rather than their weaknesses?

- To what extent do you communicate a ratio of approximately five positive
  messages for every negative message to those with whom you interact?

- To what extent do you focus on the detrimental behavior and its consequences,
  not on the person, when correcting people or providing negative feedback?

Each of these questions are examples of behaviors that are associated with leaders who practice positive leadership, that is, leadership that focuses on the strengths and activities that create flourishing environments (Cameron, 2013).

The Positive Leader Self-Assessment (PLSA) tool provides an aggregate leader score (Likert score) based on how likely the leader agrees to certain behavioral statements. "All quantitative methods routinely omit most of the details that might be used to construct context" (Scheff, 2005, p. 372). If context is defined as "immediately available events which are compatible with one frame understanding and incompatible with others" (Goffman, 1974, p. 441), then the integration of qualitative methods provide a view of multiple frames. For example, if I ask the question: "Do you have the time?", the interpretation of this frame may lead to various answers (e.g., "Yes, I have the time to complete this project.", "The time is 3:50pm."). Therefore, the questions and the answers are varied because of the lack of context. Some leaders may assess themselves as more of a positive leader than they actually are, because they may not understand the language and behaviors associated with positive organizational theory and positive leadership. Other leaders may be critical of themselves and, in reality they perform these behaviors, just not to the extent they would wish, they may mark the tool lower than they should. Hence, the importance of context.

Phase 1b: Diary Study. The diary study began with 55 leaders who had

completed the Eligibility, Demographic, and Self-Assessment Questionnaire (EDSQ).

This phase collected both quantitative and qualitative data through an online dairy study

(or daily questionnaire) for a five-day/1-week period (refer to the top row in Figure 3.3).

The diary study instrument offered an ability to access leader awareness and cognitive

processes to collect information that may be missed when asking only closed-ended

questions. This was accomplished by stating questions in both a closed-ended

(quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) manner.

A Diary Study as a Research Approach. The diary study is one method that

encompasses a variety of techniques to address interaction and cognitive processes of

organizational leaders. Furthermore, it has the potential to extend field work and provide

understanding of leader social structures and the processes that contribute to labeling

employees. The diary method gathered both quantitative and qualitative data and

addressed theoretical problems associated with social interaction. It is a tool to examine

pre-existing data in blogs, social media accounts, or daily email correspondence created

by individuals within an organization (Hyers, 2018). Additionally, as utilized within this

research protocol, it captured an immediate snapshot of a moment and, with continuous

and frequent recurring snapshots, froze time to break down implicit and unconscious

leader processes.

This ability to view a leader's multiple snapshots over time was useful when

trying to observe a cognitive process or multiple leader-perceived interactions between

them and their employee (Schofield, 2007). The phenomenon of leader labeling was better understood when placed in context and witnessed through pattern recognition over time. Therefore, once written, a diary-type study became multiple windows into cognitive moments and provided an opportunity to understand the leader's perspective (Hyers, 2018).

   The Diary Study as an Examination of Leader Labeling. Ohly and Gochman (2017) found that diary studies as a method of investigation allow for immediate assessment, discussed what might be an adequate study design, and the limitations of such methods. Furthermore, they suggested using dairies to discover the progress of leadership styles of individual leaders and other research that might benefit from examining patterns of behaviors or reactions over time (Ohly & Gochman, 2017). The diary method created an annotated chronological record or log (Allport, 1942) and provided immediate access to the leader's current, lived experience. This method allowed for an observational log, that was both quantitative and qualitative in nature, maintained by leaders, which then lead to samples of intensive phenomenological interviewing (Allport, 1942; Ju et al., 2019; Leavitt et al., 2019; Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977).

   This specific diary study followed a once daily push of both closed- and open-ended questions, at 5 pm every day, and closed at 10 pm each day. The once daily prompts allowed for the leader to determine their own descriptive language; therefore, the prompts remained simple during this part of the study to avoid suggestive language,

descriptors, or behavior characteristics of the employee which were arrive at due to leader-follower interactions.

Examples of questions were: "Describe your employee in five words or less." and "What actions or behaviors did you observe from this person today?" The final question at the end of each day addressed leader-employee interaction. The last diary push (Day 5) provided an opportunity for leaders to address their experience with the diary process, reflections, or revelations. Even if the leaders did not interact with the employees every day during the study, the data still provided evidence of a leader's perceptual frame, and therefore still proved useful. These questions to leaders discovered initial descriptors and/or labels leaders assigned to employees (RQ1 and RQ2) (see Appendix B for complete protocol). Each leader was required to report on the same employee each day during the study as explained in their daily instructions to create consistency. For those participants who completed all five days of the study, they received a $5 Amazon gift card.

The leaders' descriptors of employees were evaluated through a sorting task (described in further detail in analysis section), to determine where along the continuum of deviance the descriptive words resided. This task sort provided an average word score (AWS) or positivity score. This insight guided the sample selection process and any necessary modification to the interview protocol in the second phase of the study. The patterns and categories that emerged from these descriptors provided evidence of triggering behavior and potential labels to address individualizing or categorizing

behavior (see Appendix B). If a pattern emerged, particularly as to the use of positive or negative language, this led to further investigation.

Phase 2: The Interviews. The interview method in Phase 2 was a data collection process that probed leader responses about the structure of their beliefs and understanding the frameworks leaders use. The interview process also sought to extend the leader's awareness of their meanings of labels (Scheff, 2005), by exploring the leader's script or conceptual structure (Bass & Bass, 2009).

Follow-up interviews were conducted through a purposive sampling (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2014) of leaders who participated in the diary study, based upon information gleaned from the Positive Leader Self-Assessment (PLSA) and context analysis of the diaries using the initial coding criteria of positive or negative language for employee descriptors. This sampling process addressed the challenges usually associated with cluster sampling, by completing a review of potential samples to ensure examples and prototypes, or outliers were given voice and context (e.g., PLSA scores and Positivity Score, unusual or unique results); thereby, adding to the transferability of the study between organizations during the second phase of data collection. Interviews allowed for clarification of responses and provided relevant insights to the complexities within the data (see Appendix C for Interview Protocol).

Phenomenological Interviews in the Diary: Diary-Interview Approach. The key to the phenomenological interviewing process was to avoid asking theory-laden questions and, instead, provide space to enable a thorough investigation of the leader's ideas and

beliefs. The value of this process allowed the researcher/interviewer to delve into the complex human experience of the leader and employee relationships and to discover specific meaning in the leader's lived experience relative to understanding leader labeling of employees. There are three main domains that structured the study's phenomenological interview protocol: (1) Contextualization, (2) Apprehending the Phenomenon, and (3) Imaginative Variation (Bevan, 2014).

The first domain, "contextualization," determined the context in which the experience was situated and was examined based on the leader's perspective. Storytelling and "contextual questioning" encouraged the leader to reconstruct the experience and provide significant details. Additionally, interviewing included a process of questioning to elucidate leader descriptions and clarifications of personal perspectives.

The second domain, "apprehending the phenomenon," allowed the researcher to focus more directly on the phenomenon of leader labeling which occurred within the organizational setting. The organizational labeling process itself may be known or unknown to the leaders; they may label subconsciously based upon the norms of the work environment. Therefore, the questions were descriptive in nature addressing the various ways the leader might see and observe the person whom they labeled. However, there needed be a variety of structural questions to account for clarity (Bevan, 2014). Structural questions were consistent questions presented by the interviewer to each leader to eliminate interviewer error (Singleton & Straits, 2002).

The third domain is that of "imaginative variation" in which Bevan (2014) proposed varying frames of reference and using the leader's own imagination to place the leader into different roles and scenarios to seek out the meaning of an event or situation. For example, a possible question might ask the leader to think of the interaction from the perspective of the employee. Any questions posed to the participants were flexible and open enough to account for differences between participants and their answers, since "each person's experience is an experience in its own fullness, but by no means complete" (Bevan, 2014, p. 142). This domain was crucial to validity claims and the dependability of the research because each leader had a unique experience with their employee. Variation questions created by the researcher were generated through active listening and included follow-up questions related to the leader's commonly experienced phenomenon. This type of questioning was key towards providing opportunities for clarification between the leaders' individual experiences and addressed patterns observed over the one-week period of the daily study. See Appendix C for semi-structured interview questions used in this process.

Management of Collected Data

Data collected from all phases and stages of the study were entered into and analyzed with IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 28.0. (e.g., quantitative portions: leader self-assessment, diary study) and transcribed and coded through textual/content analysis, using conventions of phenomenological narrative analysis with

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NVivo software, Version 1.6.1 (e.g., qualitative pieces: portions of diary study, interview) (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2014).

Data Analysis Procedures

As part of an explanatory mixed-method approach, data analysis of the responses generated from the two phases were stored and analyzed separately (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Once the results from the first phase of the study were reported, both the quantitative portion of the data collection (i.e., EDSQ and diary study) and the qualitative (i.e., interviews) portions of the study, were analyzed. This analysis led to the second phase of the study regarding a discussion of the study interviews. The results from both analyses of the databases were then integrated, by creating quantitative variables from the qualitative diary study, as well as quantifying context from the interviews. The interpretation was reported separately, by phase, within the report. A final section of the report described the data in an integrated way and explained how the qualitative findings helped to explain the quantitative results.

Phase 1 Analysis

Phase 1a: Eligibility, Demographic, and Leader Self-Assessment (EDSQ). The data required simple statistical analysis to analyze leader demographics and potential relationships with the leaders' Positive Leader Self-Assessment Scores (PLSA). In addition, frequency distributions were conducted.

Phase 1b: Diary Study. Upon the completion of the diary study, both quantitative data and qualitative data were analyzed. The quantitative data required

simple descriptive statistical analysis to analyze demographic information of the leader's

employees, as well as conducting frequency distributions for a variety of collected

categories (e.g., leaders' descriptors of employees, unique descriptors, etc.). The

qualitative data was examined through frequency of use of terms or the need for a deeper

analysis through deductive coding with terms that indicated labeling, and positive and

negative language, as well as perceived positive and negative reactions to employee

behavior. There was a need to be mindful that "In Vivo Coding" may be appropriate, in

that this type of coding "uses the direct language of participants as codes rather than

researcher-generated words and phrases" (Saldana, 2016, p. 71). Leaders may have

specific language they use dependent upon the organization to which they belong.

  Task-Sorting. Randomly selected participants, who completed the Positive

Leader Self-Assessment (PLSA), but not chosen to complete the diary study, were asked

to sort the descriptors collected during the diary study. This stage of the analysis provided

participants an opportunity to assist in data analysis as raters of their peers' language.

Task sorting facilitated the identification of broad categories that resided within leader

labeling and explored patterns and contextual issues within and between these categories.

Task sorting, as a form of analysis, has been used in studies that explore educational

research and the subjective perspective (Lundberg et al., 2020).

  Participants sorted the words (i.e., descriptors - adjectives, potential labels -

nouns) into three general categories according to whether the leader considered the word

to be positive, negative, or neutral. The continuum of deviance guided the placement of

the words into these categories. By forcing placement in three categories, the participants are forced to judge the words out of context.

Using Qualtrics as the delivery method to the participants, the data was migrated to SPSS, in which each task-sort was given a value (+1 for positive, 0 for neutral, -1 for negative). The total value for each word's sort was summed, then divided by the total number of participants in the sorting exercise. This analysis addressed potential researcher bias when assessing whether a word was considered positive or negative in preparation for Phase 2 and informed the interview protocol. The task sort set became a "launch pad for investigation" (S. Brown, 1980, p. 39) and "as a first step in conjunction with follow-up in-depth interviews with selected participants" (Shinebourne, 2009, p. 96). This analysis allowed categorical information to be transformed into scaled, numerical data, creating a way to quantitatively examine qualitative results.

Phase 2 Analysis

Interview. After each interview was transcribed, the researcher began a deductive analysis to uncover meanings buried in the interview (Kvale, 1996) using an ad hoc analysis approach. An ad hoc approach is one in which different approaches and techniques are used for meaning generation (Kvale, 1996). The

> "researcher may read interviews through and get an overall impression,
> then go back to specific passages, perhaps make some quantifications like
> counting statements indicating different attitudes to a phenomenon, make
> deeper interpretations of specific statements, cast parts of the interview

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into narrative, work out metaphors to capture the material, attempt a

visualization of the findings in flow diagrams, and so on. Such tactics of

meaning generation may…bring out connections and structures significant

to the research project" (Kvale, 1996, pp. 203–204).

As suggested by Mears (2009), to organize data as an aid in its interpretation, two

forms were used to structure analyzing the interview material. After each interview, four

important aspects were considered: 1) main themes or issues that became apparent during

the interview, 2) observations, 3) information that related to specific research questions,

and 4) particularly salient stories.

The first stage of analysis recognized indications related to the research questions

and patterns/themes. The researcher read the interviews multiple times to clarify ideas

and confirm understanding and links between interviews and within interviews, thereby

creating thematic codes and topical codes related to the research questions. Secondary

codes were created based on contextual clarifications and deepening meaning.

Reliability and Validity

When utilizing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach it is important

to be clear with the theoretical perspective guiding the research as well as to enhance

trustworthiness by being distinct as to the what the researcher did and why (Butin, 2010;

Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Reliability

Reliability refers to whether the research is consistent or stable. Ways to ensure reliability require detailed, clear, and an unbiased approach to the study. To create consistency and stability, Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested checking transcripts to ensure any mistakes made in transcriptions were immediately corrected. In addition, the researcher must be mindful of any drifting in the definition of codes by creating a journal or memos about the codes within a codebook. In addition, the researcher provided a detailed account of the focus of the study, her role as a researcher, the basis for leader selection, and the context from which data was gathered. In addition, triangulation of the data occurred through a mixed-method data collection and analysis process. Lastly, the data collection and analysis strategies were reported in detail to provide a clear and accurate picture of the methods used.

Validity

Validity in mixed-methods and qualitative research provides elements of trustworthiness and credibility to the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described two types of validity: internal validity and external validity. To ensure the interval validity in this study, the researcher triangulated the data by examining evidence from both the diary study and the interview. There was additional member checking conducted as part of the interview process itself. Specifically, interviewees were asked to further elaborate on data they provided during the diary study. To address researcher bias, the researcher maintained journals and notes when collecting and analyzing the data. Lastly, to ensure external validity, the researcher provided detailed descriptions for transferability or the

study and its results usefulness to others in similar situations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Limitations and Delimitations

Several potential limitations and delimitations existed during this study. The first limitation of this study was access to organizations. Although a variety of organizations exist within the area of the project, due to Covid-19 restrictions and considerations, physical entry into the organization to gain access to employees was limited. Many employees and leaders were (and continue) working from home and their interactions differed during remote operations.

Due to the mixed-method nature of this research, another potential concern was the insertion of the researcher's personal values and opinion during the qualitative pieces of this research, which could become reflected in the research questions, the methods chosen, or the final analysis and findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Galdas, 2017). Transparency and reflection in the qualitative data collection and analysis process, through active journaling and ensuring self-awareness of the researcher's biases through consistent review of notes, mitigated these concerns. The researcher's view of leadership is shaped by her experiences within the military as well as years as a practitioner, leader developer, and trainer in multiple organizations. Any specific biases, particularly those of which she might be unaware, may bias whether language is observed as positive or negative. Language associated with POS allows for the development of some a priori coding. Additionally, the use of both quantitative and qualitative collection methods

mitigated these biases. Through the inclusion of a peer group to task sort descriptors and potential labels, this created an additional source to aid in the validity of the study by creating another opportunity for triangulation.

The researcher's own experiences with contextual forces, such as organizational politics, have demonstrated the challenges of navigating between the needs of one's employees and those of the organization. This research required the construction of leader labeling as a potential influencing occurrence within organizations and, therefore, she tracked and bracketed any biases that affected the course of this study in detailed field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), and consistently revisited these notes when analyzing data to ensure the data was leading the investigation rather than her biases.

Another potential limitation related to the use of a diary and the time commitment associated with this technique. Some participants may have found the task tedious and wished to complete the diary entries quickly with limited thought or reflection. In addition, one participant left the study and some failed to complete an entry due to outside distractions and commitments, thereby affecting the response rate and/or disqualifying a participant. This limitation was mitigated by creating a fixed period of time for the diary portion of the data collection to five workdays (or one week) and turned it into a delimitation. A fixed end date was provided for participants, as well as "pushes" that were short, consistent, minimally invasive survey-like prompts in which the leader needed to only spend approximately five to ten minutes once a day to complete their entry. The last diary entry included a final question that required the leaders provide

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a short reflection of their experience during the 5-day diary experience to capture any burdens, distractions, new knowledge, challenges, among any other reflections the leader felt was relevant to the process.

A limitation associated with the use of multiple surveys or questionnaires with a participant is attentiveness (e.g., distraction, multi-tasking, complacency, among others) (Hauser & Schwarz, 2016). To ensure attentiveness, tasks were kept short and simple.

This study provided another delimitation by focusing on the perceptual frame and the audience reaction process of organizational leaders in their formal role as leader and from a leader labeling perspective. This delimitation of framing led to a narrowing of selection of literature for research, the type of research questions addressed, the methodology to examine the research questions, and the tools used to gather data. Therefore, this study will provide only one perspective to how a researcher might examine leader interactions with their employees within an organizational setting.

Ethical Considerations

The protection of the leaders' identifiable information was of utmost importance in order to gain trust, since leaders were asked to provide information regarding a current employee relationship. For participants who could not receive Qualtrics links (e.g., government computer servers) participants were asked to provide personal email information from which they received daily reminders and/or the daily questionnaire. Upon completion of the study all identifying information was transcribed into an alpha-numeric code, and names were deleted.

Summary

Since the research questions demanded a tool that required both quantitative and qualitative means in which to gather data, by incorporating the leader self-assessment as an initial experiential measurement tool and utilizing a diary: diary-interview [*sic*] method (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977) to examine leader labeling, data was gathered, in perspective to daily life, from organizational leaders. These tools, thereby, provided an opportunity to observe events which led to leader labeling, in that whether the leader perceives the deviance to be positive or negative, the space between the leader reaction to perceived deviance and leader labeling, as well as leader context (i.e., task, relationship). As a data collection tool, the diary study was a flexible tool to gather both quantitative (e.g., the labels, demographics, etc.) and qualitative data (e.g., open answers regarding context) over time to examine patterns or anomalies of leader labeling within organizations in a new way.

Of note, during the development of this study and final execution of data collection, the United States workforce, along with the rest of the world, changed much of their daily operations due to the Covid-19 pandemic and changing requirements regulated and/or mandated through various government structures. These changes required more leaders and employees to operate in virtual/hybrid environments, some of which were unfamiliar or initially uncomfortable with switching to online platforms. Another challenge with this change was that some organizations did not have the virtual architecture, technology skills, experience, or equipment to continue to operate or provide

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services in a virtual environment. This led to some leaders and employees to rethink day-to-day ways of being. Therefore, questions were added to the study to determine within what environment the leader typically operated during Phase 1 and what effects the Covid-19 pandemic may have contributed to the labeling process in Phase 2.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of the current study was to examine the perceptual frame of the formally assigned leader within an organizational setting as it relates to a direct report/employee. From a labeling theory perspective, it was assumed that some acts are seen by an individual, or in this research, the leader, as deviating from the norm. This process of observing an act as deviant or not deviant lies within the perceptual frame of the individual leader and advances to ascribed labels that replace the identity of the employee. Labels are a designation and differ from everyday descriptors in that they allow the labeler (leader) to evaluate the labelee (employee) and their behavior compared to a physical or mental category (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995, 1997). Labeling occurs when nouns replace verbs or adjectives to characterize people (Pfuhl & Henry, 1993) and create mental shortcuts.

This chapter describes the key findings of this research organized by the four research questions. Due to the methodology, an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach, the research questions were interwoven throughout the process of data collection. The first phase of the study was the exploratory phase, in which the researcher investigated how leaders describe employees in their daily organizational life (RQ1). In addition, the researcher explored what labels might result from interactions with employees and the labels leaders assign to employees within the organization (RQ2). The second phase of the study homed in more deeply as to the contextual factors that might affect or influence the leader labeling process (RQ3), whether positive leaders tend to

show higher cognitive complexity (RQ4), and whether positive leaders assign more positive descriptors to their employees within an organization (RQ5).

The structure for this section follows: results from each method of data collection will begin with an initial description of the population from which the sample was drawn. This initial review of demographics will be followed by any correlations, comparisons, patterns, or discoveries that were expected as well as those unexpected. The summary for each method will include follow-up and direction of continued research for this study and areas of analysis that may need continued examination during future research, as it may be beyond the scope of this current project. The first method of examination will be the Eligibility/Demographic/Self-Assessment Questionnaire (EDSQ), followed by the Diary Study, then the Task Sort Exercise, and concludes with the Interviews.

Phase 1

Phase 1a: Eligibility/Demographic/Self-Assessment Questionnaire (EDSQ)

The researcher searched for participants through her personal work and social network. As a consultant and member of the community, she had direct access to senior formal leaders throughout the community (i.e., women's business networks, entrepreneur centers and resources, local schools, universities, government, and military organizations). Through word-of-mouth (i.e., snowball effect) an invitation to participate in the study reached approximately 430 local leaders.

Description of Participants

A total of 430 people received an invitation, either from the researcher or another known leader in a mid-Western city and its surrounding area; 64 leaders agreed to initially participate in the study. This is an approximately 15% (N = 430, n = 64) response rate to the invitation. The response rate was higher for those who the researcher personally knew and invited (n = 26; 93% of personal invitees), compared to those who were invited through a snowball effect (n = 38; 9% of snowball invitees), in which leaders used personal email requests and introductions, announcements in an organizational newsletter, or word of mouth. The leaders who agreed to participate in the study consist of CEO/C-Suite officers, Partners, Vice-Presidents, Managers, Directors, and Project Managers from various non-profit, not-for-profit, and for-profit industries; Deans, School Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, and School Principals from higher and K-12 education; and General Officers, Directors, and Project Managers from the Government or Military.

Of the 64 leaders, 2 were considered ineligible and did not continue through the initial questionnaire to answer demographic information nor complete the Positive Leader Self-Assessment (PLSA). Participants must supervise at least one employee, be a current formally assigned leader in the organization, be over 18 years old (for IRB approval), and be a United States citizen (to account for potential cultural anomalies). One of the ineligible respondents did not have an employee they were directly supervising at the start of the study. The other ineligible respondent was not a United States citizen.

Of the 62 leaders who completed the EDSQ, 52% ($n = 32$) respondents were female and 48% ($n = 30$) were male. When asked to describe their gender, given the option to describe themselves differently than what they were at birth, no respondent chose a category other than their sex at birth. When examining race, 3% ($n = 2$) respondents classified themselves as Asian/Pacific Islander, 5% ($n = 3$) as Black/African American, 3% ($n = 2$) as Hispanic/Latino, and 87% ($n = 54$) as White/Caucasian. Only 2% ($n = 1$) of the respondents self-classified as multi-racial.

When examining the type of organization in which the respondents are formally assigned leaders, respondents were asked to mark all that apply. The choices were non-profit, not-for-profit, for-profit, government, military, higher education, or other. The following definitions aid in distinguishing between a non-profit, not-for-profit, and for-profit organization. Due to the type of leaders who were investigated in this study, and the level at which they operate, the leaders have a general awareness as to what category their organization falls, due to tax purposes. Non-profit organizations benefit the public good, consist of paid employees and a few volunteers, and earn a profit that does not support any single member within an organization but is used towards running the business (e.g., American Red Cross). Meanwhile, a non-for-profit has no goal to earn revenue but is generally created for the purpose of fulfilling an owner or founder's organizational objectives (e.g., The Alzheimer's Association); a non-for-profit is usually run by volunteers but may have a few paid employees. A for-profit company usually

provides a good or service for money and is typically what is thought of when thinking of business (e.g., The Coca-Cola Company).

About a third of the respondents ($n = 20$) formally lead in for-profit organizations, of which one (n = 1) respondent also formally leads in a non-profit. The next largest organization represented by the respondents were those who formally lead in either a non-profit or not-for-profit organization at 29% ($n = 18$). One respondent identified as leading in both a non-profit and non-for-profit. Because the geographical area in which the respondents work encompasses a large government contractor area, as well as a large military base (the area's largest employer), about 27% ($n = 17$) of the respondents formally lead in either a government or military organization. The location of the study consists of approximately 21 higher education institutions, both private and public. Therefore, the other 10% ($n = 6$) of respondents either serve in higher education or marked themselves as "other.[1]"

In addition to the type of organization, the respondents were asked the size of their organization, by writing in the number of employees that serve in their organization. The minimum number of employees in one respondent's organization was 2 employees, the maximum number of employees in another was 44,000. These results indicate a large variety of sizes and types of organizations to reach leaders from various industries and areas.

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[1] Due to the researcher's personal invitation to leaders to participate in the study, those who marked "other" may likely be formal leaders within the K-12 education system which was not an option on the questionnaire.

These leader-respondents have served in a formal leader role 1 year to 42 years. The respondents as a group have served approximately 20 years ($M = 19.95$ years, $SD = 10.8$ years) as formal leaders throughout their lives (see Figure 4.1). The researcher was successful in recruiting a variety of formal leaders regarding their time having served as formal leaders. The goal was to have a breadth and depth of experience from which to explore.

Figure 4.1

Frequency Distribution of Time Leader Served as Formal Leader in Life

How many years have you filled the formal role of leader (e.g., rated as a supervisor, manager, team lead, executive, etc.) throughout your life?

Mean = 19.95
Std. Dev. = 10.28
N = 62

Frequency

How many years have you filled the formal role of leader (e.g., rated as a supervisor, manager, team lead, executive, etc.) throughout your life?
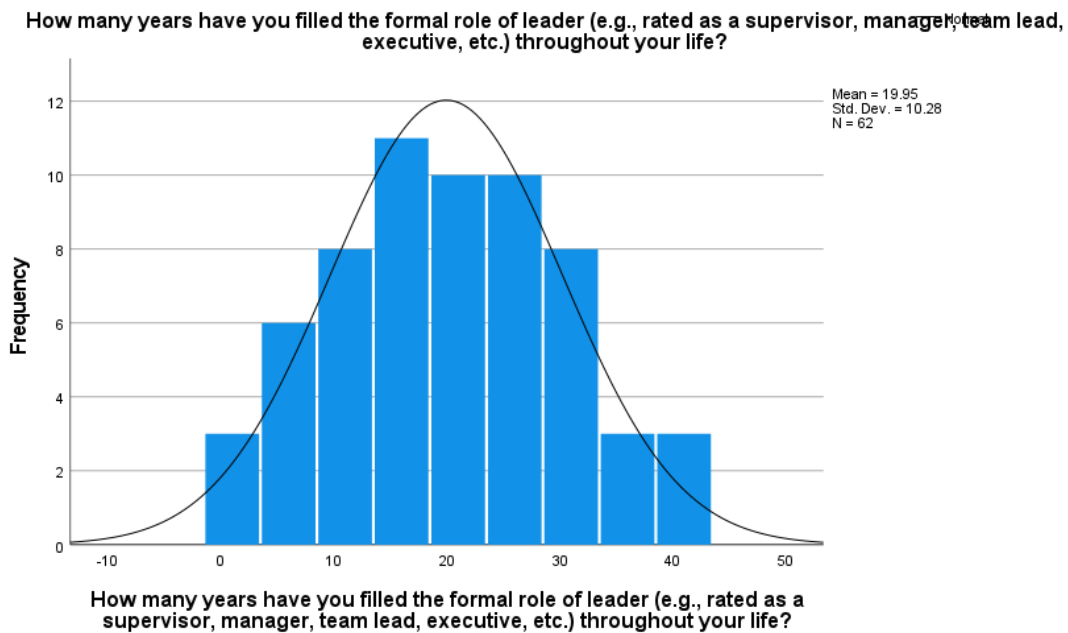
To account for exposure to an organization's culture as a leader, the respondents were asked how long they have spent within the current organization. Approximately 6% ($n = 4$) of the leaders were fairly new to their organization and worked in their current

organization for a year or less. Conversely, one leader had worked in their current

organization for over 40 years. Due to the positive skewness of the leaders' time in the

organization, the median is the most accurate way to determine a middle value for the

group (*Mdn* = 10, *SD* = 9.53). This skewness indicated that the majority of leaders have

served longer than 10 years within the organization. The standard of deviation verifies a

variety of experience and exposure to time within an organization in which the

respondents currently lead in a formally assigned role.

Interestingly, when viewing the data regarding how many years respondents have

filled their current role as a formal leader within their organization, the minimum is less

than a year, while the maximum is 25 years (*Mdn* = 6, *SD* = 6.7). Because of the positive

skewness of the data, the median is the best measure of central tendency (see Figure 4.2).

This analysis more accurately represents the group, yet, in this study, any outliers

or extremes are just as valuable data points as those who are not. During the daily

questionnaire portion of the study, respondents were asked how many years they have

filled the role of leader for the individual employee they chose to report on for five days.

The results are discussed during the diary study section of this chapter.

Figure 4.2

Frequency of Years Leader Served as Formal Leader in Current Organization
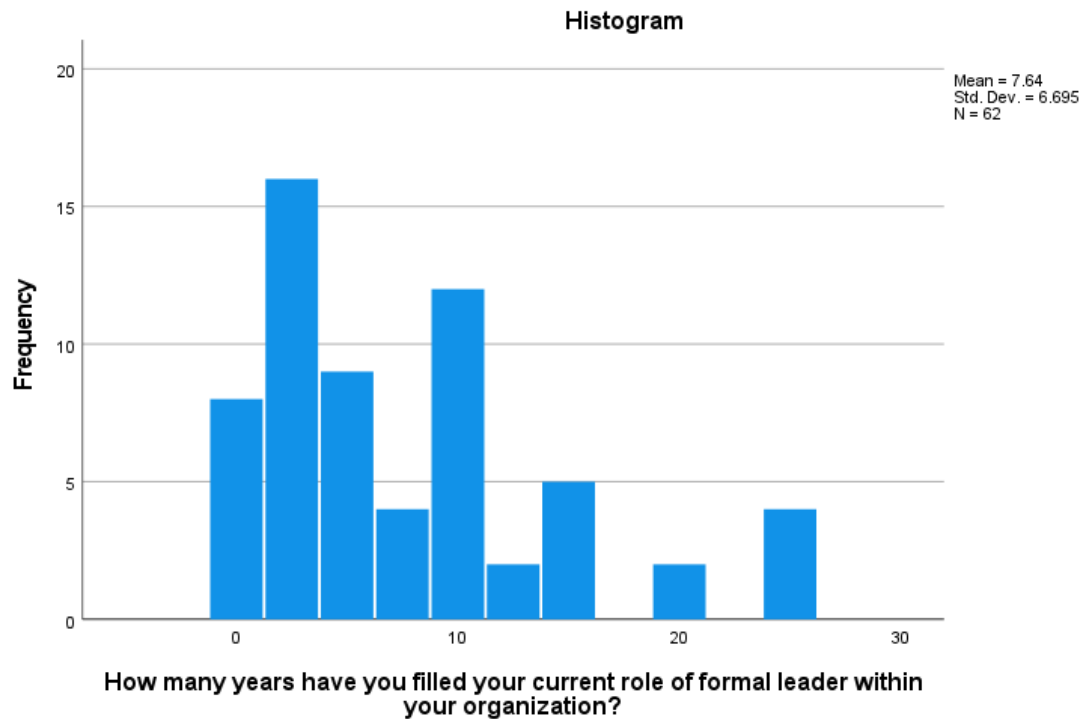
The respondents were also asked to describe the various ways in which they received leader development/education. The choices were experience, organizational leader development/training programs, self-development, or college/university. Respondents were asked to mark all that applied. All but one respondent marked experience as a way in which they learned about leadership, 93% ($n = 58$) marked self-development, 87% ($n = 54$) marked organizational leader development/training programs, and 69% ($n = 43$) indicated they received their leadership education through higher education or college/university. These numbers indicate a self-drive and desire to grow

and learn about leadership since many of the respondents marked at least two or more ways of learning about leadership (97%). Only 6% of the respondents ($n = 4$) relied only on informal education (i.e., experience or self-development) as a way to grow as a leader. Most of the respondents (90%) relied on a mix of informal learning (e.g., experience and self-development) with more formal leader development, either through their organization (i.e., organizational leader development/training programs) or through higher education (i.e., college/university).

As a final portion of the questionnaire, leaders were asked to complete a leader self-assessment, heretofore known as the Positive Leader Self-Assessment (PLSA). Each item on the PLSA addressed a behavior associated with positive leadership theory (Cameron, 2012) and required respondents to choose between "Never" to "Always" on a 5-point Likert Scale as to the perceived frequency of those behaviors they exhibit. Effective positive leaders tend to assess themselves in the 3, 4, or 5 range with an average of 4 or more across the 24-item self-assessment; those leaders who completed the Eligibility/Demographic/Self-Assessment Questionnaire (EDSQ) overall ($n = 62$) assessed themselves through the PLSA at a slightly lower mean ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.491$) than what Cameron (2012) described as an effective positive leader (see Figure 4.3). Those who assessed themselves as effective positive leaders (PLSA ≥ 4) were 25% of the respondents ($n = 16$).

Figure 4.3

Frequency of Positive Leader Self-Assessment (PLSA) Scores
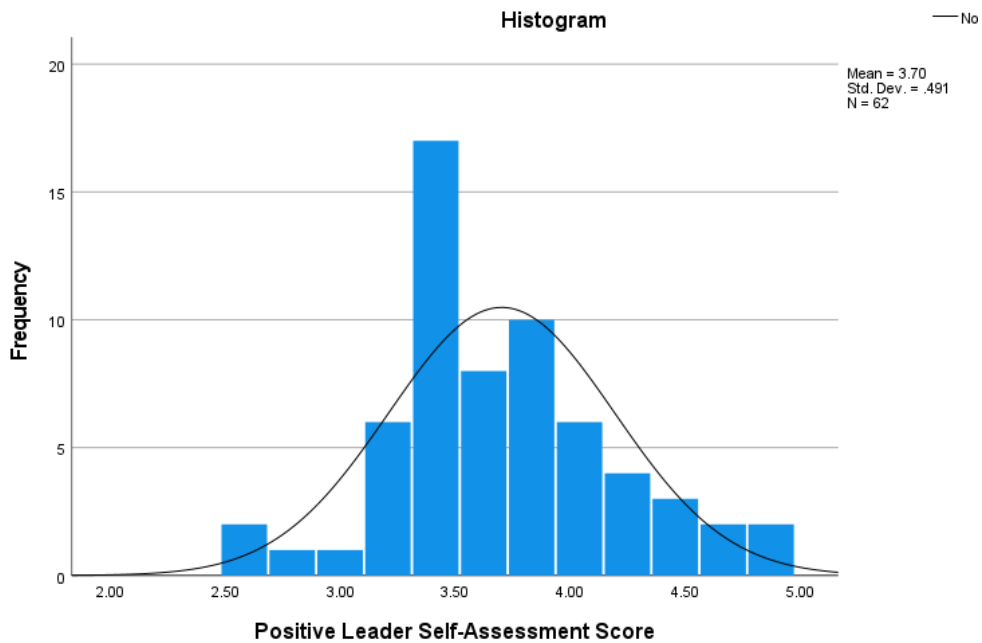
In summary, the population of eligible leaders from which to sample for the diary study are quite diverse in all aspects from a demographic perspective other than people of color. According to the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), senior leaders (or managers) are approximately 41% women, 82% white, 9% black or African American, and 7% Asian. The study included more women leaders than reported in the national average, but only included about half of the number of leaders of color than the national average.

Phase 1b: Diary Study

The first phase began with gathering data through a daily diary study. The daily questionnaire accessed leader awareness and cognitive processes to collect information and was accomplished by stating questions in both a closed-ended (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) manner. The goal of the daily questionnaire was to gather data to understand how leaders describe their employees on a daily basis and whether these words became labels. A secondary goal of the diary study was to determine whether contextual factors were evident, and whether leader cognitive complexity could be identified during this initial phase. If not readily identifiable, then the data would aid in determining probing questions to further address these factors during the interview phase (Phase II) of the study. The final goal of this phase was to determine whether those who assess themselves as effective positive leaders used more positive descriptors when describing their employees.

The diary study method, as a daily survey instrument, gathered both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the leader's perception of an employee. The tool captured an immediate snapshot of moments and, with continuous and frequent recurring snapshots, froze time to break down implicit and unconscious leader labeling processes. Therefore, the data created multiple windows into cognitive moments and provided an opportunity to understand the leader's perspective (Hyers, 2018).

The leaders generally belong to a group that are known to be disinclined to respond to questionnaires (i.e., extremely busy people) (Sivo et al., 2006). To limit non-

response error, the daily questionnaires were set at about 5-minute duration and sent at the same time at the end of every day. The questionnaire remained open for a five-hour window in the evening to account for late work hours as leaders.

On Day 1 of the diary study, leaders[2] ($n = 55$) were invited to participate in the diary study, of which 34 completed all 5 days of the study for the response rate of 62%. However, 74% ($n = 46$) of the leaders completed 4 of the 5 days of the study providing sufficient data for analysis (see Table 4.1). Approximately 87% of the leaders ($n = 48$) completed Day 1. When accounting for those who started the study, and decreasing the sample size due to eligibility to continue the study, 21% ($n = 10$) of participants missed at least one daily entry between Day 2 – Day 4, and 4.17% ($n = 2$) missed only the last day (Day 5). However, their data were included in the final analysis. One of these leaders was an outlier and was chosen for a follow-up interview. Subsequently, we were able to fill in some of the missing information from that day.

Table 4.1

Daily Response of Participants During Diary Study

Day of Study	Total Number of Participants Eligible	Number Completed
Day 1	55	48
Day 2	48 (7 never opened Day 1 questionnaire link)	45
Day 3	48	40
Day 4	47 (1 withdrew from the study)	45
Day 5	47	44

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[2] Although 64 leaders were invited to complete the Eligibility Questionnaire, not every leader completed the questionnaire before the diary study began. Those who completed the eligibility questionnaire after the diary study began, were included in the invite to participate in a follow-up exercise to sort information from the diary study participants.

Of note, one person requested to withdraw from the study on Day 3 due to a family emergency. A response rate below 50% is not considered acceptable in the social sciences (Babbie, 2007; Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993). To ensure lack of response rate did not affect data analysis, the researcher suppressed another participant's results because they did not meet the threshold for inclusion in data analysis. The respondent missed 3 of the 5 days of the one-week daily study, which led to 40% individual response rate.

Description of Participants

Due to the withdrawal of one respondent and the removal of another (i.e., failed to meet the data analysis threshold), the analysis of the diary study consisted of 46 participants ($n = 46$). Of the 46 participants, 50% ($n = 23$) identified as Female and 50% ($n = 23$) as Male. In addition, when asked to identify their race or ethnicity, 89% ($n = 41$) described themselves as White or Caucasian, 4% ($n = 2$) Asian or Pacific Islander, 4% ($n = 2$) Black or African American, and 2% ($n = 1$) Hispanic or Latino. No one identified themselves as multiple races (multi-racial) or a race not listed. The leaders ranged in age from 38 years old to 68 years old ($M = 50.48$, $SD = 8.469$), indicating a variety of ages of the participants. The leaders have served as formal leaders between 1-42 years ($M = 20.2$, $SD = 9.637$) and have currently served as formal leaders within their current organizations between 0-25 years ($Mdn = 5.5$ years, $SD = 6.869$).

The majority of the leaders ($n = 44$, 96%) reported that they received their leader development education through some form of both formal and informal leader education

(i.e., experience, organizational leader development training, self-development, and higher education). Contrastingly, only 4% ($n = 2$) received their leader education through experience only. When analyzing their Positive Leader Self-Assessment Scores, the mean of their scores was 3.667 ($SD = 0.49$). However, when recoding for whether the leader assessed themselves as an effective positive leader (Cameron, 2012), that is a score of 4 or greater, 26% ($n = 12$) scored themselves as such.

Description of Employees

Literature does not provide evidence whether the opposite gender would impact the labels used, nor race or generation. And despite research into workplace deviance, the socio-demographic considerations have been ignored in the literature (Olasupo & Fagbenro, 2021). However, much of deviant literature abandoned comparing gender deviances due to the overwhelming evidence that males tend to act out in more socially deviant manners (Bartusch & Matsueda, 1996). Labeling literature recognizes that deviant behavior may initially arise for any number of reasons and may depend on a wide array of psychological, cultural, and social contexts (Lemert, 1951). In addition, labeling theory suggests that males are more likely than females to be labeled deviant, and labeling may affect females more strongly than males, in that if they are more relationship-oriented, they may be more sensitive to the opinions of others and more vulnerable to negative labels (Bartusch & Matsueda, 1996). Therefore, examining variations in demographics provided context.

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The leaders were asked for demographics regarding the employees who reported to them for that workweek. Half ($n = 23$) of the employees were perceived as male, and half ($n = 23$) were perceived as female. In addition, when accounting for whether the leader and the employee were seen as being the same sex or the opposite sex, 43% (n = 20) of leaders were the same perceived sex as their employee and 57% (n = 26) of leaders were seen as the opposite sex of the employee.

The perceived ages of the employees ranged between 26 and 60 years old ($M = 42.24$, $SD = 9.403$). When accounting for differences in generation between leader and employee, 48% ($n = 22$) were in the same generation, 20% ($n = 20$) were in one generation different than one another, and 7% ($n = 3$) were two generations different than each other. One respondent did not mark the employee's perceived age. The differences in generation may be the leader is older than the employee or vice versa. Generation in age was determined by recoding original age data and creating classifications of generation was based upon Strauss and Howe's (1997) work of classifying generations and their years of birth.

When asked about perceived race or ethnicity, 83% ($n = 38$) were perceived as White or Caucasian, 9% ($n = 4$) were perceived as Black or African American, 4% ($n = 2$) were perceived as Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2% ($n = 1$) were perceived as "A race/ethnicity not listed here." One respondent did not answer the question. An additional recoding was conducted to determine if the leader perceived the employee as being the same race or ethnicity as the leader. The majority of leaders ($n = 37$; 80%) perceived the

employee to be the same race as them, whereas 17% ($n = 8$) perceived the employee to be

a different race as them. One person did not mark the employee's race.

Lastly, the employees were described based on whether they were salaried,

hourly/part-time, or hourly/full-time. The employees were 83% salaried ($n = 38$) and 17%

hourly (full-time) ($n = 8$). None were described as part-time employees.

Leaders were then asked how long they knew the employee as well as how long

the leader had formally led the chosen employee for this study. Leaders knew the

employees between 0-30 years ($Mdn = 4.50$, $SD = 7.325$) and acted in the capacity of

formal leader for the employee between 0-30 years ($Mdn = 2.25$, $SD = 5.681$). Both

answers were positively skewed, 1.821 and 2.967, respectively. Therefore, when

accounting for those leaders who have known their employee for 5 years or less, 48% ($n = 22$) have known their employee for 5 years or less, while 52% ($n = 24$) have known

their employee for longer than 5 years (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4

Frequency of Time Leader Has Led Employee
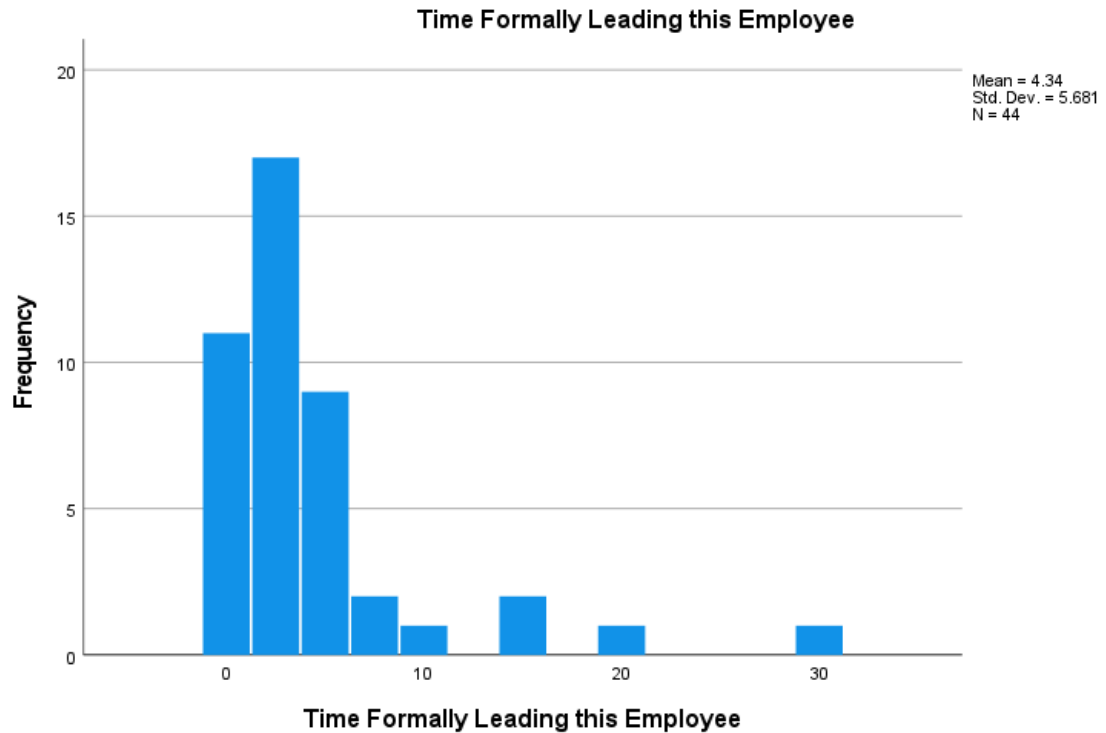
Lastly, when asked whether the leaders and their employees interact with one another outside of the work environment, 80% ($n = 37$) answered "No," while 20% ($n = 9$) answered "Yes." These questions were to determine how much time the leader may know the employee and in what capacity. Interestingly, there was no relationship between those who knew their employees longer and whether they interacted with the employee outside of the work environment (see Table 4.2).

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Table 4.2

Years Leader Known Employee vs. Interact with Employee Outside of Work Hours

		Interact with Employee Outside of Work Hours		
		No	Yes	Total
Number of Years Leader has Known Employee	<5 years	19	5	24
	>=5 years	18	4	22
Total		37	9	46

As found within the group of leader-participants, employees seem to be varied in their age and time working with the leader. However, there was little diversity between leader-participants in regard to race and ethnicity, nor is there much diversity perceived in the chosen employee. Additionally, although a leader may have known or formally led an employee for a long period of time, that does not mean that the leader interacts with the employee more outside of the work environment.

Daily Study Questionnaire Initial Results

Since the primary purpose of the questionnaire was to determine what descriptors and potential labels leaders used to describe their employees, each day, the first question asked leaders to describe their employee using five (5) words or less. Leaders described their employees using 9 to 25 words during the week. The most a leader could list were 25 words for the week ($Mdn = 21$, $SD = 3.885$). The number of unique words per leader ranged between 5 and 24 words ($M = 15.52$, $SD = 4.764$). The most unique words a leader could list were 25 words. The percentage of unique words to the number of words listed by a leader lay between 20 to 100% of their listed words ($Mdn = 76.89\%$, $SD =$

20.06%); leaders tended to choose different words when describing their employee every day.

The rest of the daily questions were posed to gather data to determine whether the descriptors mapped to changes in environment, behavior, or unexpected events. These changes due to a disruption in the typical behavior of the employee is subjective (Watzlawick et al., 1967) and the leader's belief of that employee's expected behavior (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005) is known to effect a leader's perception of an employee.

The leaders were asked to describe actions or behaviors they observed of their employee to provide continued context as well as to understand cognition. This open-ended question provided an opportunity for leaders to write as much or as little as they chose. The more personal constructs the leader wrote about the employee indicated a higher cognitive complexity. Leaders showed as few as nine personal constructs about their employee to as many as 47 over the 5-day period ($M = 24.39$, $SD = 7.437$).

The next question determined whether the leader and employee interactions were in-person, virtual, a hybrid of both, or no interaction that day. Before the start of the study, leaders reported the following typical work environment: 59% ($n = 27$) were a mixture of both in-person and virtual, 39% ($n = 18$) worked in-person/on-site, and only 2% ($n = 1$) reported only working online/virtual. This table does not break down individual patterns of work environment; however, it is an indication of overall interaction which existed during the week of the study (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Work Environment/Location During Daily Study

Work Environment	Day1		Day2		Day3		Day4		Day5	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Online/ Virtual	20	43.50%	21	45.70%	14	30.40%	19	41.30%	23	50.00%
In-Person/ On-site	18	39.10%	16	34.80%	18	39.10%	18	39.10%	13	28.30%
Both	3	6.50%	2	4.30%	4	8.70%	4	8.70%	1	2.20%
None at all today	5	10.90%	6	13.00%	3	6.50%	3	6.50%	7	15.20%
Missing System	0	N/A	1	2.20%	7	15.20%	2	4.30%	2	4.30%

These results indicate that more work than typical was done online/virtual during the week of the diary study. During the eligibility study, 2% of the leaders had reported they operated only virtually during the typical workday; however, during the week of this study, approximately 42% of the leaders interacted with their employees only online/virtually.

Additional questions included whether interactions with the employee, observed by the leader, were considered positive, neutral, or negative. The majority of the respondents indicated that their interactions with their employees from day-to-day tended to be either normal or more positive than normal (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Leader Perception of Interaction with Employee

Leader Interaction with Employee	Day 1		Day 2		Day 3		Day 4		Day 5	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%

more positive than normal	2	4.3%	9	19.6%	7	15.2%	12	26.1%	8	17.4%
same as normal	41	89.1%	31	67.4%	29	63.0%	30	65.2%	33	71.7%
more negative than normal	2	4.3%	4	8.7%	2	4.3%	1	2.2%	1	2.2%
Missing System	1	2.2%	2	4.3%	8	17.4%	3	6.5%	4	8.7%

In addition, when asked whether the employee acted differently from day-to-day, the following observations occurred across the sample (see Table 4.5):

Table 4.5

Daily Description of Whether Leader Observed Employee Acting Differently

Employee act Differently Today		Day 1		Day 2		Day 3		Day 4		Day 5	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Valid	No	43	93.5	29	63.0	34	73.9	38	82.6	37	80.4
	Yes	2	4.3	14	30.4	5	10.9	6	13.0	7	15.2
	Total	45	97.8	43	93.5	39	84.8	44	95.7	44	95.7
Missing System		1	2.2	3	6.5	7	15.2	2	4.3	2	4.3
Total		46	100.0	46	100.0	46	100.0	46	100.0	46	100.0

These results seem to indicate that of those who participated, some of the employees acted differently than expected from day-to-day. However, when asked the follow-up question whether something unexpected happened to either the leader or the employee that day, rarely did something unexpected happen. Therefore, the leader's descriptor's, in concert with an unexpected change, provide context.

Lastly, to determine whether descriptors and possible labels were either positive, neutral, or negative, leaders, drawn from the EDSQ, who did not participate in the diary

study, performed a task sort. Not all descriptors were nouns, rather most were adjectives; therefore, the purpose of the sort was not to determine deviance, but simply to provide context on whether the word itself was considered to be positive, neutral, negative, or lie somewhere upon a continuum of such sentiments.

Task Sort

The method of closed sorting, also known as sorting tasks, has been used in perception research (Blanchard & Banerji, 2016). A closed sorting task asks participants to assign objects to pre-determined categories based on their own perceptions. The key feature behind a closed sorting task versus an open sorting task is that, objectively, a correct answer exists (Grant & Berg, 1949). The purpose of the task sort, as a method in Phase 1 in this study, was to determine a positivity score for the 420 unique descriptive words the diary participants created during their daily study. For the full list of descriptive words/phrases sorted, see Appendix D. Because truth is a matter of consensus (Guba & Lincoln, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 2013), and the participants were current leaders and not biased by the research questions, rather than depend upon the researcher's determination of whether a word was positive, neutral, or negative, three groups of six participants were asked to sort words into three categories: positive, neutral, or negative.

The words were divided into two task sorts, Task Sort #1 and Task Sort #2. Seven leaders were invited to participate in Task Sort #1 and seven different leaders were invited to participate in Task Sort #2. The purpose of dividing the task into more manageable groups was due to best practices when using this method (Blanchard &

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Banerji, 2016), which includes being mindful of the time commitment of the leaders participating, and potential fatigue during sorting. Due to an unexpected technological omission of 46 words, a third group, Task Sort #3, was needed and afforded the researcher another opportunity to further examine inter-rater reliability. Each sorting group had at least six of the seven participants complete the respective task sorts. Task Sort #3 consisted of 4 participants from Sort #2 and two participants who had not sorted any words previously. All six completed the task.

The first group (Task Sort #1) sorted 193 words, of which the sort was broken down into three parts. The first part consisted of a set of 61 adjectives, the second part consisted of another set of 62 additional adjectives, and the third part consisted of 70 nouns. Meanwhile, Task Sort #2 participants sorted 192 words, of which the first part consisted of a set of 62 adjectives, the second part consisted of another set of 62 adjectives, and the third part consisted of 69 nouns. Lastly, Task Sort #3 sorted 57 words, a mix of both adjectives and nouns. Eleven duplicate words were sorted by all three groups to determine inter-rater reliability. The inter-rater reliability across sorts and among leaders was .84. A minimally acceptable level is .70 (Spector, 1992). Only one word fell below this level and is addressed in the results below. The high inter-rater reliability indicated that the different task sort groups were not uniquely different in how the leaders assessed the valence of the words.

Upon completion of the task, positivity scores of each word were created and the results were used to determine the change in positivity score of each diary participant

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from day-to-day, as well as to determine the overall positivity score of the participant

when reporting on their employee. These scores also aided in the researcher's

determination of who to sample for the follow-up interviews in Phase 2 of the research.

For a full list of words and their corresponding positivity scores see Appendix D.

Description of Participants

The sample was drawn from participants who completed the Eligibility,

Demographic, and Self-Assessment Questionnaire (EDSAQ), but did not start the diary

study. Nine participants who originally agreed to participate in the diary study, but did

not start the diary study, agreed to participate in the one-time task sort event. Five

additional participants completed their eligibility questionnaire after the diary study

began but agreed to participate in the task sort.

Of the 14 who were invited to participate, all 14 completed at least one task sort.

Four respondents completed two task sorts. To determine inter-rater reliability, some

words were used multiple times across task sorts. The demographics of the participants

are as follows.

Eight ($n = 8$, 57%) participants identified as female and six ($n = 6$, 43%)

identified as male. When asked to describe themselves by race or ethnicity, 79% ($n= 11$)

identified as White or Caucasian, 7% ($n = 1$) identified as Black or African American,

7% ($n = 1$) identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 7% ($n = 1$) self-classified as multi-racial

(Black or African American and White or Caucasian). The age of the leaders ranged

between 32 and 69 years old ($M = 49.07$, $SD = 10.795$). Contrary to the general

population of participants who completed the EDSQ in which 34% lead in a For-Profit organization, none of the participants conducting the task sort exercise serve in a For-Profit organization; however, 36% ($n = 5$) serve in a Not-for-Profit, 21% ($n = 3$) serve in the Government, 14% ($n = 2$) serve in the Military, 7% ($n = 1$) serves in Higher Education, 7% ($n = 1$) marked Other, 7% serves in a Non-Profit (n = 1), and 7% ($n = 1$) serves in both a Non-Profit and Not-for-Profit organization.

The participants have acted as formal leaders between 2-40 years and served in their role as a formal leader within their current organization between 1-25 years. The participants' Positive Leader Self-Assessment Scores (PLSA) ranged between 3.29 to 4.83 (out of 5 on a Likert Scale) *(M* = 3.87, *SD* = 0.494). Approximately 29% (n = 4) of the leaders in the task sort exercises were considered effective positive leaders – that is, had a self-rated mean of 4 or higher (Cameron, 2012) - and is slightly higher, representative-wise, than the diary study participants.

As to the typical work environment in which they lead, 50% (N = 7) tend to work in-person/on-site, while 50% (N = 7) work in a mixture of both in-person/on-site and online/virtual environments. None of the participants work in a virtual/online-only environment.

Task Sort Results

To create an average word score (AWS) or "positivity" score, the words were given a score of (+1), (0), or (-1) based on whether a participant in the task sort categorized the word as positive, neutral, or negative, respectively. Then, the participants'

categorizations in the individual task sorts were added together, and then divided by the number of participants in that task sort ($n = 6$). The AWS ranges from (-1) to (+1) on a continuous scale. Without accounting for duplicate words, the total number of descriptive words or phrases generated through the diary study were 994 words. Leaders used positive words 78% ($n = 773$) of the time to describe their employee and some used negative words 12% *($n = 116$)* of the time. The rest of the words fell somewhere between the two. The researcher calculated the words and where they fall along the continuum as to more positive or more negative sentiment as follows: more positive is greater than or equal to a positivity score of 0.33; more negative is less than or equal to -0.33; the rest falls somewhere in between (i.e., neutral to positive or neutral to negative).

To create the task sort, the researcher removed duplicate words except for random words used to test interrater reliability. The total number of words evaluated as unique descriptors or potential labels were 420 words. Eleven words were randomly placed across the three task sort exercises to ensure the raters tended to place the words in the same categories (i.e., positive, neutral, negative) across each exercise and across the sorts as a whole. Table 4.6 showcases the results across the sorting exercises. As observed, task sort participants were in complete agreement with some of the words (i.e., civilian, normal, professional). However, the words in which the participants were not in complete agreement across task sorts exercises generally lay within the neutral to positive range when categorized by the participants. In addition, some words were both a noun and an adjective. As such, they were randomly added into a sort twice in some instances (i.e.,

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strategic in Sort #1 as both an adjective and noun; intelligent, loyal, productive, sharp, and special in Sort #2 as both an adjective and noun).

Table 4.6

Random Words to Determine Inter-rater Reliability Across Task Sort Exercises

Word	Task Sort #1	Task Sort #2	Task Sort #3	Inter-rater reliability across sort
civilian	0.00	0.00	0.00	1
creative	0.83	0.60	1.00	.82
focused	1.00	0.75	0.83	.88
intelligent	n/a	1.00/0.83	0.83	.83
loyal	1.00	1.00/1.00	0.83	.94
normal	0.17	0.17	0.17	1
productive	n/a	0.83/1.00	0.83	.87
professional	0.83	0.83	0.83	.83
sharp	n/a	0.67/0.40	0.83	.75
special	n/a	0.2/0.6	0.33	***.50***
strategic	0.67/0.83	0.83	n/a	.79
Mean Inter-rater Reliability Across Sorts and Words				**.84**

Note: Cells with more than one positivity score are instances in which the word appeared as both an adjective and a noun during the same sort. For duplicates in a sort, the first word is an adjective, the second is a noun.

However, of the 420 words (and in some cases phrases) there were 21 words or phrases, as evident in Figure 4.5, that participants disagreed upon in terms of being perceived as positive (top-colored green), neutral (mid-colored yellow), or negative (bottom-colored red).

Figure 4.5

Disagreement among Participants

adequate 16.67% | 66.67% | 16.67%

deliberate 83.33% | 16.67%

excited 66.67% | 16.67% | 16.67%

incisive 50.00% | 16.67% | 33.33%

Sharp 60.00% | 20.00% | 20.00%

Unicorn 50.00% | 33.33% | 16.67%

challenged 16.67% | 83.33%

interesting 66.67% | 16.67% | 16.67%

loves Korean food 16.67% | 66.67% | 16.67%

special 50.00% | 33.33% | 16.67%

systematic 50.00% | 33.33% | 16.67%
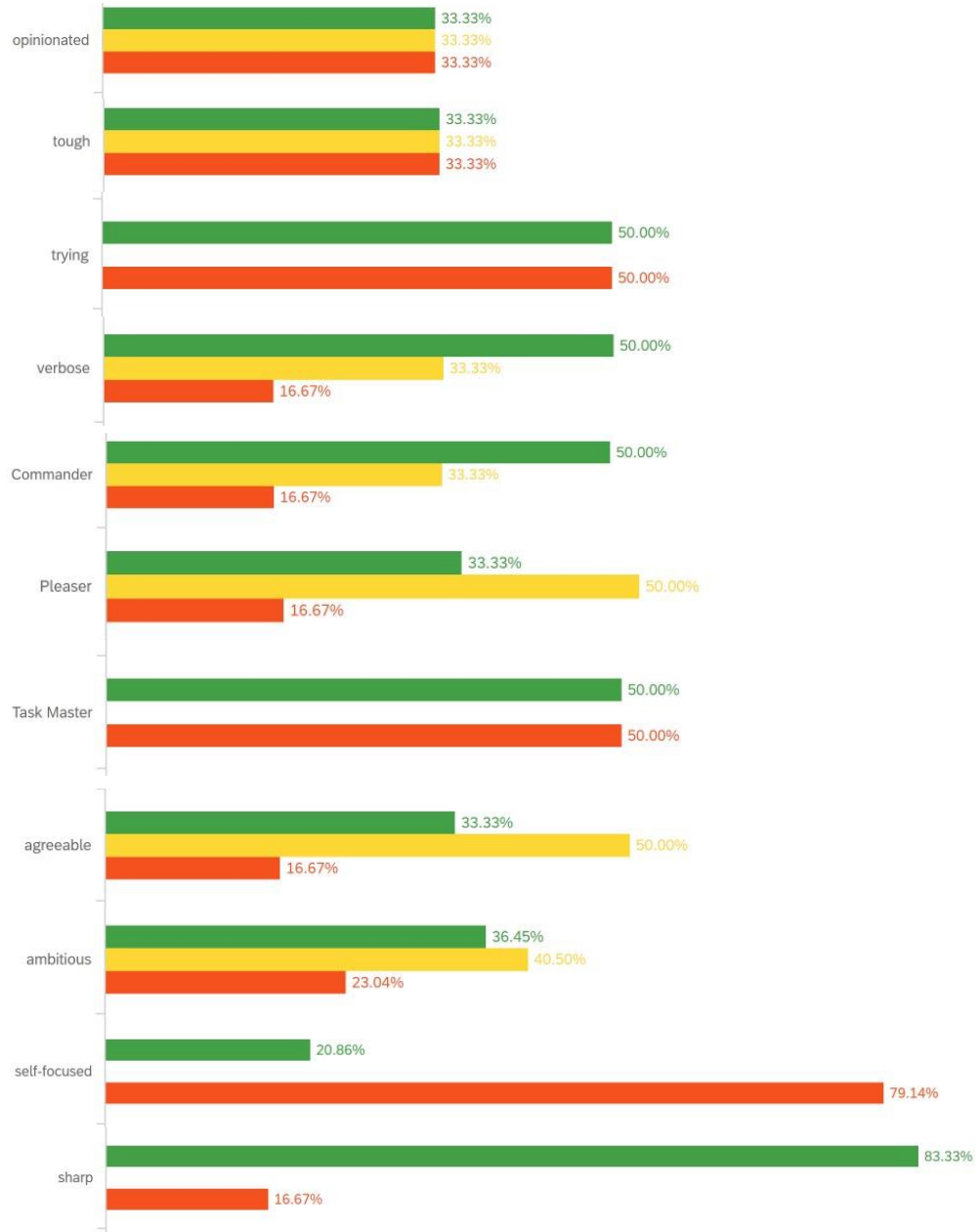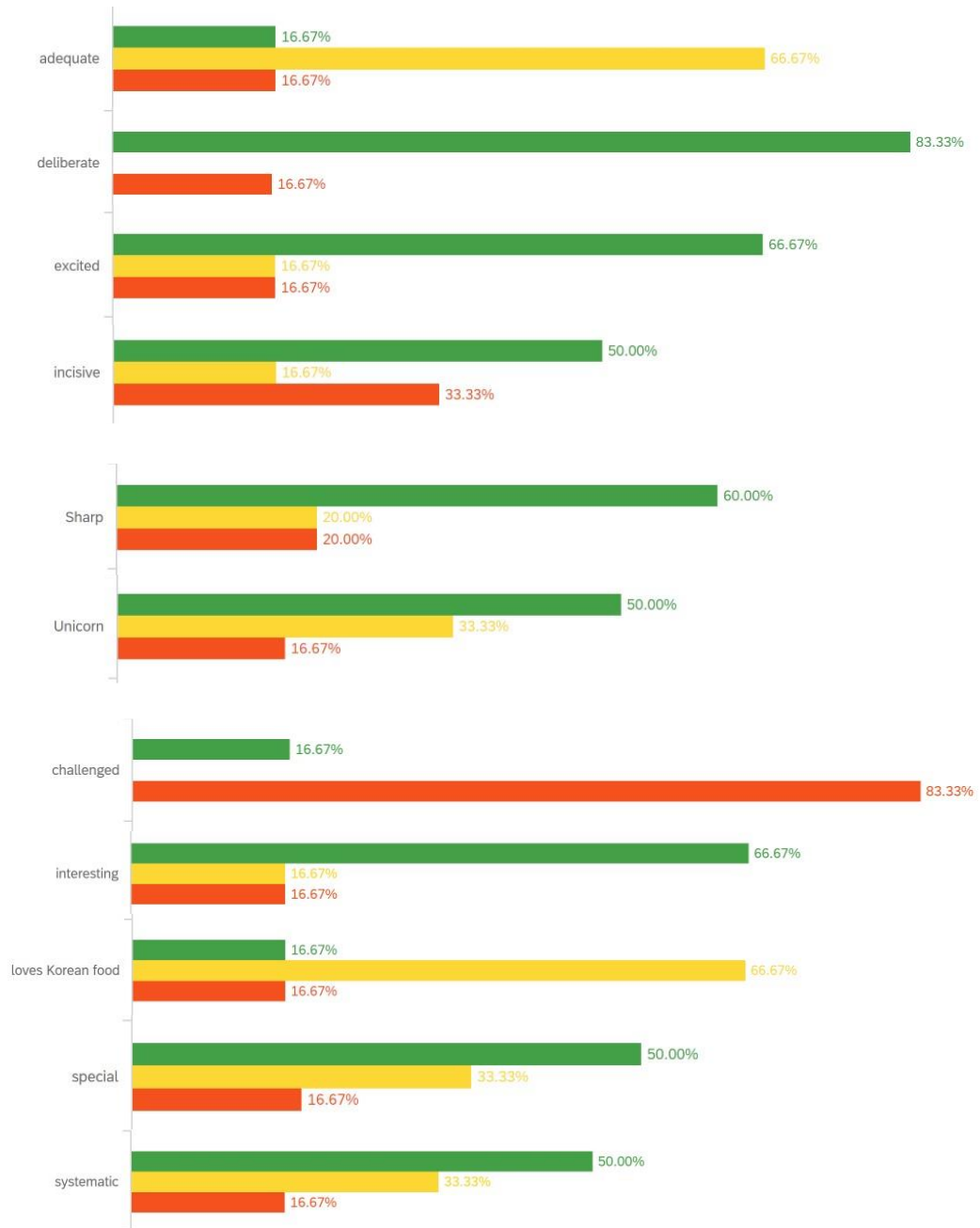
Note: The words "sharp" and "Sharp" were duplicate words used across all three task sorts. These words were the only words to receive disagreement between the same participants within the same task sort in which both the adjective and noun were within the same task sort. Task Sort # 3's task sort is the only one in which "special" is considered a negative word. Four of the six participants considered "special" as either neutral or positive in Task Sort #2.

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These results verify the need to understand context, in that there appears to be more to uncover regarding a leader's perceptual frame than this portion of the study is able to reveal with this initial analysis. However, these results do aid in focusing the second phase of the study. The interview portion of the study gave leaders an opportunity to provide personal context as to what led them to choose the word(s) they did for that employee on that day. Therefore, it is important pick some leaders whose diary studies collected words in which the task sort participants seemed in disagreement for the interview phase of the study.

Diary Study Secondary Results

As each word from the diary study was replaced with its positivity score the researcher examined if there was any relationship between the diary study participant's Positive Leader Self-Assessment (PLSA) scores and their positivity score (AWS) over the entire week (see Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6

Association Between Average Word Score for the Week and PLSA Score

Note: Each dot represents an individual leader.

Since no linear correlation was evident, a grid was placed over the scatterplot to choose potential interviewees by quadrant (see Figure 4.7). A Positive Leader Self-Assessment (PLSA) score of "4" was used as a determining factor to create a left and right side of the quadrant to separate those who were considered effective positive leaders versus not effective positive leaders. To determine the delineation for the top and bottom aspects of the quadrant, the line was drawn at a 0.50 positivity score. As evident in this figure, five leaders were selected to be interviewed given their more extreme scores. The

researcher wanted to ensure that at least one leader from each of the four quadrants were selected in order to understand any contextual factors that would lead to these extremes.

Figure 4.7

Quadrant Placement on Positivity Score and PLSA
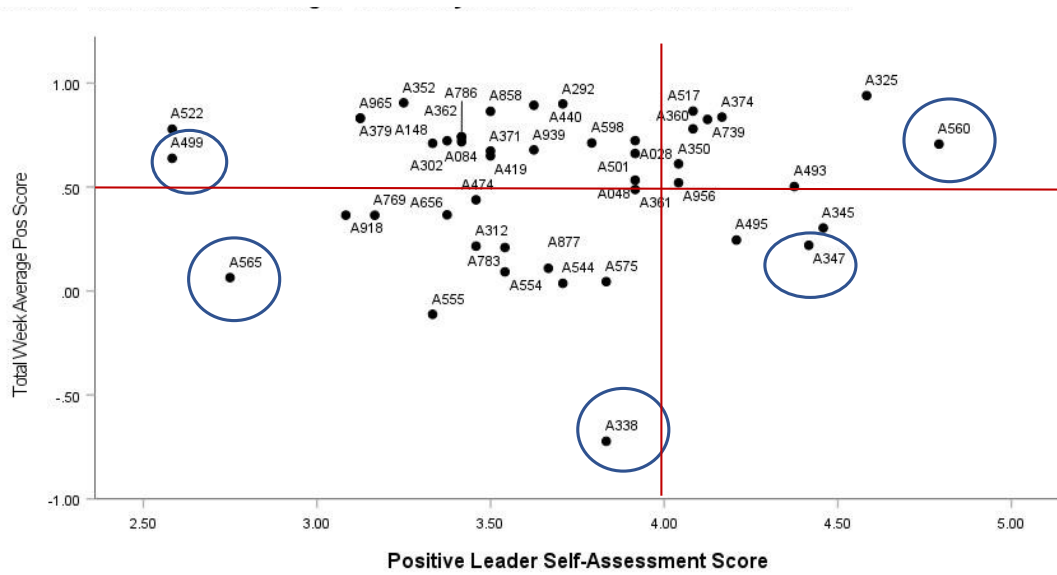
A time-series scatterplot was also created to determine other interviewees of interest. Additional participants were then chosen to represent diarists who were consistent over time with their daily word choice (i.e., positivity score), extreme variability over time, rapid increase, or rapid decrease of positivity score over time. These prototypes would then anchor the others within the research; the graph below depicts additional interviewees chosen with this in mind (see Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8

Daily Average Positivity Score (AWS) Over Time in Days
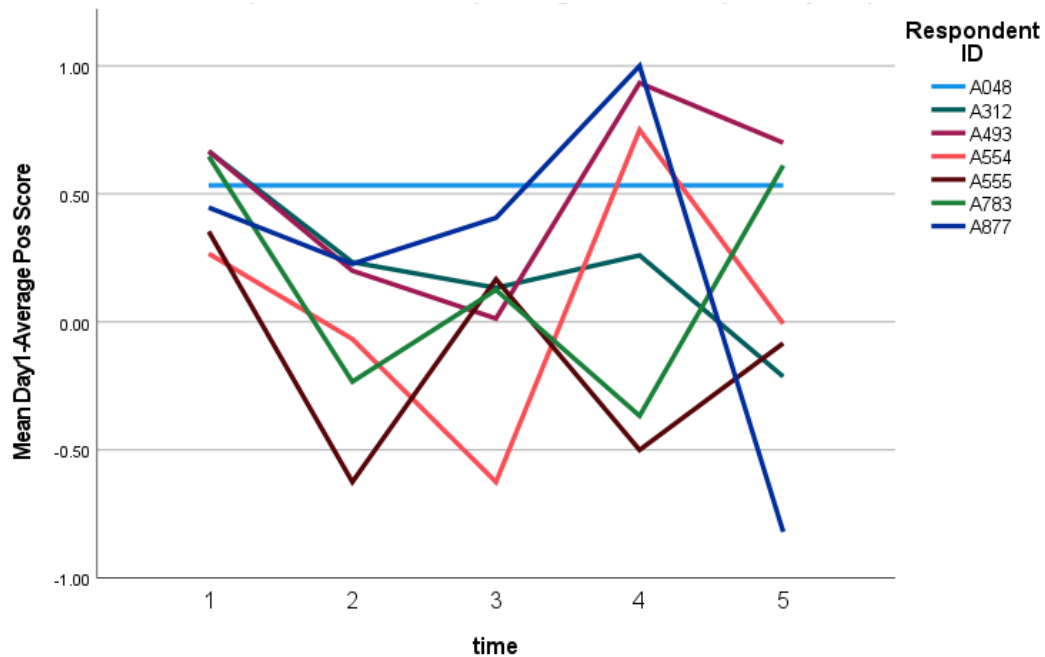
Note: Each line is a respondent that represents a prototype of respondents with similar results (e.g., A048 was consistent all week; A877 had a sharp decline on Day 5).

In summary, the diary study offered an exploration into the daily life and interactions of an employee as perceived by the leader within an organization. Through this daily exploration, an analysis of the leaders' descriptions of their employees, as well as their descriptions of their interactions led to an opportunity to more deeply understand meaning and context associated with the labeling process.

Findings on Research Question 1 (RQ1)

How Do Leaders Describe Their Employees in Their Daily Organizational Life?

Additional potential labels were discovered during the last day (Day 5 of the study) after leaders were directly asked whether they were aware of labels within their organization and what labels they had heard, used, or created. Leader labels across the 5 days was positively skewed (*Mdn* = 2.00, *SD* = 3.711). When accounting for the positively skewed nature of the results, 57% of the leaders used two or less labels during the 5 days. When the researcher attempted to conduct additional statistical analysis to discover whether there was any relationship between the number of words or type of words, regarding various demographics, there was nothing statistically significant. Curiously, when the researcher categorized the leaders and employees by generation, rather than age, to explore if there was a difference between groups regarding the number of noun descriptors (or potential labels) assigned, an interesting finding occurred (see Figure 4.9). The test was not found to be statistically significant, in that the sample size was too small. However, this result suggests further investigation is warranted with a larger sample.

Figure 4.9

Potential Labels Used by Leaders Between Generation Groups
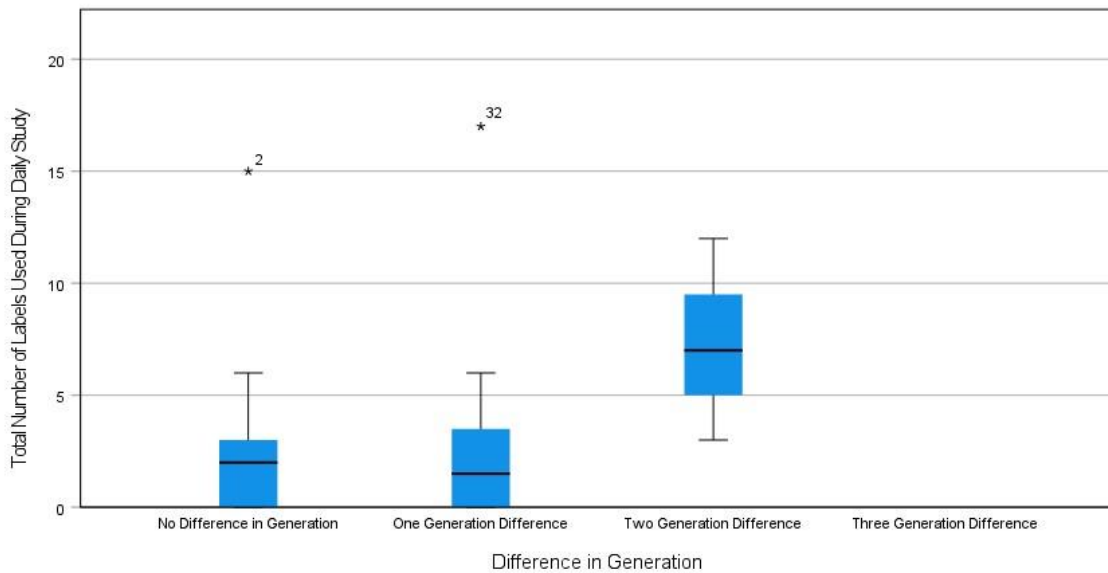
Leaders in the study tended to describe their employees positively approximately 77% of the time, in their daily organizational life, as seen through the descriptive words they shared about their employee (see Appendix D). After assessing a positivity score and placing the words along a continuum, there is evidence that the majority of the words lay along the neutral to positive range (see Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10

Descriptor Words Placed Upon a Continuum
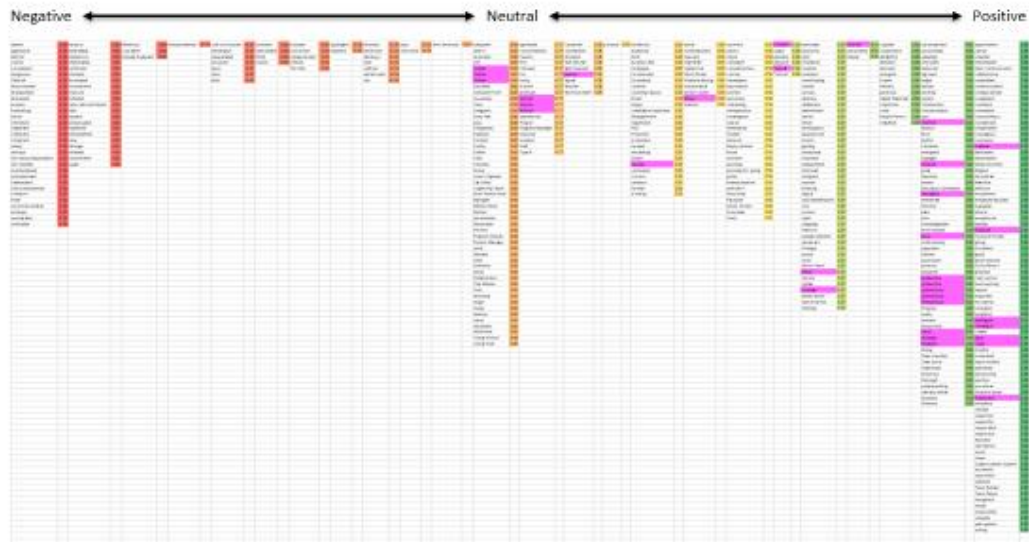
To investigate further, the researcher examined the words at the extremes (-1.00 and +1.00; 31 and 82 words, respectively) and a pattern became evident. The words at the extreme left and right appear to be based on character (i.e., appreciative, courageous) or competence-orientated (i.e., detail-oriented, disorganized) characterizations (see Appendix E). Character is defined as a fusion or combination of virtues, values, and personality traits that enable excellence (Harzer, 2020; Peterson & Park, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Competence is defined as the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to demonstrate competent performance (R. E. Boyatzis, 1982). Although outside the intended scope for this research, it is relevant enough to mention so the reader can anticipate this and appreciate its value. This will also be discussed further in Chapter 5, Future Research.

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Findings on Research Question 2 (RQ2)

What Labels Do Leaders Assign Employees Within an Organization?

Of the 420 words the leaders used, 30% ($n = 124$ words) were nouns.

In addition, as seen by one leader's diary results, the words used to describe the

employee began as more job or task-related words and over time it became evident that

she no longer depended on the nouns to describe the employee but switched to the use of

more adjectives (see Table 4.7). Within the leader's insights garnered that week on Day

5, they write, "I realized in answering these questions, that I went from

detailing/identifying this individual on a professional level in the first couple of days to

recognizing his accomplishments and him from a more personal level…I liked that!" The

leader recognized the change in their perception of their employee and, thus, their

descriptors.

Table 4.7

Example Change in Descriptors Over Time (A554)

Day			*Words*		
Day 1	co-workers	enlisted	civilian	unit deployment manager	installation personnel readiness
Day 2	enlisted	Afro-American	young male	big heart	immature
Day 3	distracted	inexperienced	lacks self-confidence	a lot on his plate	not always dependable
Day 4	outgoing	polite	personable	honest	willing
Day 5	only child	senior airman	father	divorced	loves Korean food

Note: The words are written as the leader submitted them.

Forty-nine percent ($n = 67$) of the potential labels leaders ascribed to their

employees were job or work related based on duty position or title (admin, associate,

computer tech, etc.). In addition, 54% ($n = 73$) of the labels had a positivity score ≥ 0.33,

whereas only 6% ($n = 8$) of the labels were $\leq$ -0.33, indicating that the potential labels

used by leaders tended to be more positive.

One aspect not considered regarding these results are the use of the same

descriptor adjectives by the same leader over multiple days. For example, one leader used

the same five words every day (i.e., professional, knowledgeable, fast-worker, friendly,

mother). This use of consistent words over time requires further investigation in Phase 2

of the study.

Findings on Research Question 4 (RQ4)

Do Positive Leaders Show Signs of Higher Cognitive Complexity?

If conceptualizing positive leaders as a scale based on their Positive Leader Self-

Assessment (PLSA) scores, and conceptualizing cognitive complexity based on number

of total number of unique words a leader used to describe their employee over the five

days (i.e., 0 to 5 words per day or 0 to 25 words for the week) of the study (to simulate

personal constructs), there appears to be no relationship between positive leaders and

higher cognitive complexity (see Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11

Association Between Total Number of Unique Words and PLSA

However, if the variable Positive Leader is reconceptualized by dividing the population into two groups, effective positive leaders (PLSA ≥ 4.0, $n_1 = 12$) and others (PLSA < 4.0, $n_2 = 34$), then we see a different result (see Figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12

Comparison Between Number of Unique Words and Effective Positive Leader
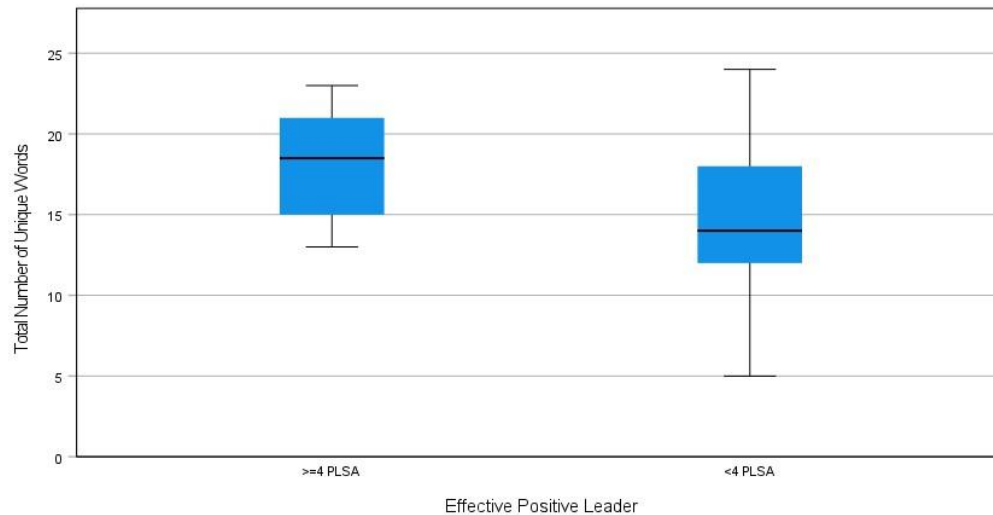
To investigate further, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a difference in the mean number of positive words used per leader. The test was found to be statistically significant, $t(2.722) = 28.04$, $p = 0.005$. The effect size for this analysis ($d = 0.788$) was found to exceed Cohen's (1988) convention for a medium effect ($d = 0.50$). These results indicate that effective positive leaders ($M = 18.17$, $SD = 3.380$) use more unique words than those not assessed as effective positive leaders ($M = 14.59$, $SD = 4.869$), thereby indicating higher cognitive complexity (i.e., more unique words or personal constructs). The more personal constructs, the more cognitively complex the leader (Adams-Webber, 2001; Crockett, 1965).

To address the concept that those who have higher cognitive complexity are less likely to label, the researcher explored whether a relationship existed between the

leaders' PLSA scores and the number of labels they used during the diary study. There was no relationship between PLSA score and number of labels used, as evidenced by the two plots below. The first plot displays the comparison between PLSA score and number of labels used (Figure 4.13). The second plot reveals the recoding of the variables into effective positive leaders versus number of labels used (Figure 4.14).

Figure 4.13

Association Between Total Number of Labels Used During Diary Study and PLSA
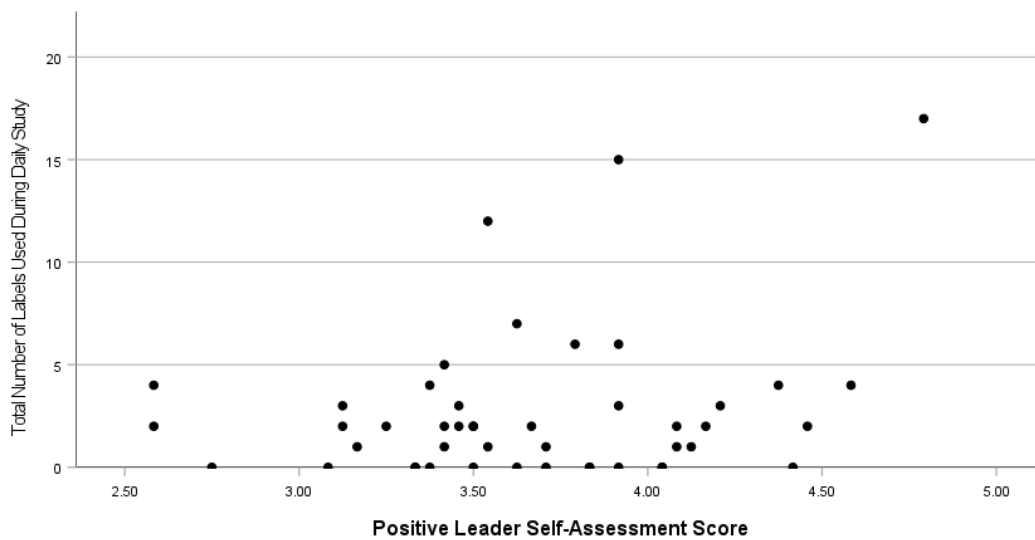
Figure 4.14

Total Number of Labels Used During Diary Study and Effective Positive Leader
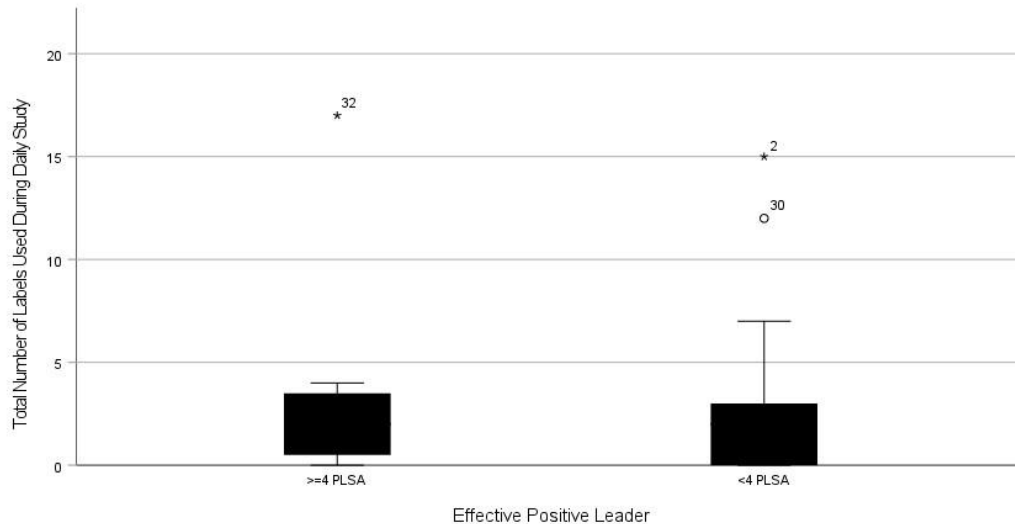
RQ4 was partially answered from Phase 1 of the study. However, based on the current results from the diary study, further analysis is required from data gathered in Phase 2 of the study. As mentioned above regarding RQ2, the same descriptor adjectives by the same leader over multiple days were used by a few of the leaders. This use of consistent words over time requires further investigation in Phase 2 of the study, because this consistency indicates a lack of cognitive complexity due to providing very few personal constructs about the employee.

Findings on Research Question 5 (RQ5)

Do Positive Leaders Assign More Positive Descriptors to Their Employees Within an Organization?

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There was no significant correlation between Positive Leader Self-Assessment

(PLSA) scores, and the number of positive employee descriptors or Average Word Score

(AWS). However, when the population was divided into two groups, effective positive

leaders (PLSA $\geq$ 4.0, n_1 = 12) and others (PLSA < 4.0, n_2 = 34), and, by redefining

positive descriptors (AWS $\geq$ 0.33), a different result occurred.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a

difference in the mean number of positive words used per leader. The test was found to

be statistically significant, $t(26.722) = 3.462$, $p \leq 0.001$. The effect size for this analysis

($d = 0.998$) was found to exceed Cohen's (1988) convention for a large effect ($d = 0.80$).

These results indicated that effective positive leaders ($M = 20.42$, $SD = 4.010$) use more

positive descriptors than those not assessed as effective positive leaders ($M = 15.24$, $SD =$

5.533). Figure 4.15 represents the comparison.

Figure 4.15

Comparison Between Positivity and Effective Positive Leader
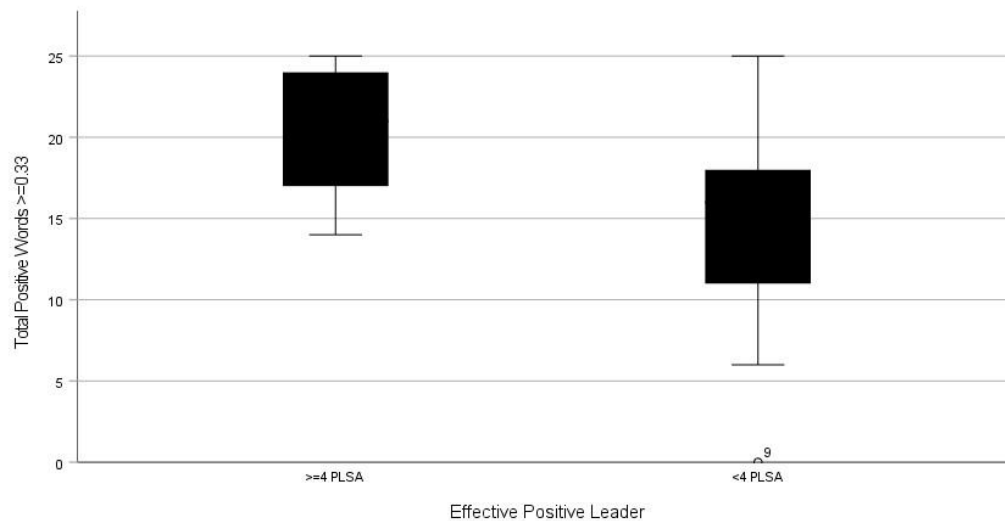
In summary, RQ1 was addressed through analyzing the descriptive words leaders used during the diary study, finding leaders describe their employee positively 77% of the time. RQ2 was partially addressed through analyzing the daily descriptive words, finding that 30% of the descriptors leaders used to describe their employees were nouns which are the basis of creating labels. About 49% of the labels were related to duty position or title (i.e., admin, associate, computer tech, etc.) Approximately 54% of the potential labels had a high positivity score of (AWS ≥ 0.33), indicating that potential labels were more positive than negative. However, more investigation may be useful to understand types of labels and when the labels may be used. RQ3 was not addressed during Phase 1 of the study. RQ4 was partially addressed, in that no evidence was found to determine whether positive leaders show signs of higher cognitive complexity; however, when

reconceptualizing positive leader as an "effective" positive leader (PLSA ≥ 4), there were

indications that effective positive leaders showed signs of higher cognitive complexity.

Further data is required to explore this question in Phase 2 of the study. Lastly, RQ5 was

addressed in Phase 1 of the study and although the researcher did not find a relationship

between positive leaders and positive descriptors, the researcher did find a significant

positive relationship between those classified as effective positive leaders and positive

descriptors. However, further analysis from Phase 2 may provide more insight into this

question, as well.

<div align="center">**Phase 2**</div>

Interview

The diary: diary-interview *[sic]* (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977) interview method

utilized in Phase 2 collected data that delved deeper into leader responses during the diary

portion in Phase 1. The purpose of the interview was to understand contextual factors that

shaped the leader's use of descriptors, particularly those that were labels or may lead to

labeling. As shared in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), labels are an important part of how

people describe their surrounding environment. Within organizations, nouns as labels

provide mental shortcuts with deeper meaning than may be evident from a typical

dictionary definition and can have an effect on how leader or other members of the

organization think about or act towards an employee (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1997).

When leaders were asked to describe their employees, the expectation was that

leaders would use mostly adjectives, since the semantic role of adjectives is to change

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information given by the noun (in this case, the employee). When adjectives are used to describe an attribute of an employee, without context, it is difficult to determine if the attribute is a feature that is characteristic or an inherent part of who the leader believes the employee to be. The interview process sought this context as well as to extend the leader's awareness of their meanings of labels (Scheff, 2005). Exploring the leader's script or conceptual structure (Bass & Bass, 2009) in the interview gives space to delve into the mental operations and network of concepts and relationships relevant more readily to the leader's interactions and experiences with the employee.

As shared in the previous section, the first phase of data collection consisted of diary entries from leaders during a typical workweek. This second phase of data collection consisted of follow-up interviews with a sample of the diarists, investigating the leader's experiences and aiding the researcher in the interpretation of their work domain. This process reflected the use of phenomenology, in that the method investigated first-person events, or the lived human experience associated with cognitive and mental events at the individual level (Varela & Shear, 1999). Through storytelling and narration, the leader further explored and discussed their possible labeling processes and the social contexts that influenced these processes, if they occurred. Therefore, questions were experiential in nature, encouraging leaders to reflect upon and share how they felt, how they perceived their interactions with the employees, how they made meaning of the experience, and how they changed, if at all, throughout the event (Bevan, 2014).

In addition, because the study occurred within the first year and a half of the

Covid-19 pandemic, additional questioning was directed to explore any perceived effects

(i.e., change in environment, operation, or interaction) within the leader's perceptual

frame that may not have occurred, had this event not taken place. Therefore, the results of

Phase 1 led to the intentional selection of 12 diary participants for the qualitative phase of

the study, as well as the questions asked of these participants. In addition, due to the

ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher met in environments that made the leaders

comfortable. Nine of the leaders met the researcher in person (i.e., two in their homes,

four in coffee shops, and three in their offices), and four of the leaders met the researcher

online on virtual/video platforms (i.e., WebEx, GoTo Meetings). Each interview followed

Center for Disease Control (CDC), State, and University-mandated protocols at the time

of the leader's interview.

Description of Participants and Their Employees

The first four leaders were chosen based on where they fit within the quadrants as

described earlier in the diary study results (i.e., positivity score versus effective leader

score), in that one leader was selected from each quadrant. The fifth leader was chosen

because they were an extreme outlier regarding their positivity score (i.e., extremely

low). A leader who lay in the upper left quadrant (i.e., high positivity score, low leader

self-assessment score), had to be replaced with a new leader chosen from that quadrant

(see Figure 4.16). The original leader interviewed revealed their employee was neither a

U.S. Citizen, nor located geographically within the United States. The additional seven

leaders were chosen due to the results of the time-series plot of positivity scores over five days (i.e., extreme variability, consistency, rapid increase, rapid decrease of scores over time). Therefore, 28% ($n = 13$) of the diary study respondents were initially interviewed; however, only 12 leaders' interviews were analyzed for this portion of the study.

Figure 4.16

Choosing a Replacement Leader to Interview

Scatter Plot of Total Week Average Pos Score by Positive Leader Self-Assessment Score
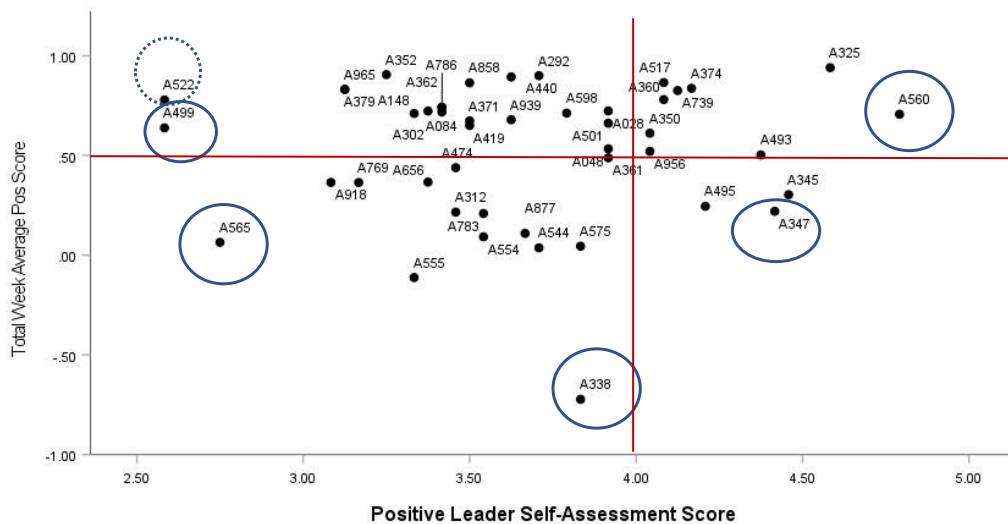
Note: The dotted circle indicates the additional interview to replace A499 due to their employee not being a U.S. Citizen, nor were they residing within the United States.

Of the 12 people interviewed and analyzed during this portion of the study, 67% ($n = 8$) were male and 33% ($n = 4$) were female. Six of the leaders were male leaders who led female employees, and two of the leaders were female leaders who led male

employees. The other four leaders (2 male and 2 female) led perceived same-sex employees.

The leaders were 83% ($n = 10$) White or Caucasian and 17% ($n = 2$) identified as Asian or Pacific Islander. The leaders did not identify as another race or ethnicity; however, 67% ($n = 8$) perceived their employee as the same race or ethnicity as themselves, while 33% ($n = 4$) perceived their race or ethnicity to be different.

The leaders ranged in age between 39 and 68 years old ($M = 52$, $SD = 8.852$); whereas the employees ranged in age between 26 and 60 years old ($M = 40.25$, $SD = 10.083$). When examining what the age differences might be between the leader and their employee, 42% ($n = 5$) led an employee in the same generation as them, while 58% ($n = 7$) led someone one or two generations different from them.

The leaders have been formal leaders between 6 and 36 years ($M = 18.17$, $SD = 9.034$) within their careers. Within their current organizational role, the leaders have served as formal leaders between 0 and 25 years ($M = 9.08$, $SD = 8.743$) and have currently led the employee, about which they conducted the daily study, between 0 and 20 years ($Mdn = 2.00$, $SD = 6.184$). However, the data is positively skewed, in that 67% ($n = 8$) of the leaders have only led their employees for less than two years. There is some variability as to how long the interviewees have known their employees. Most of the leaders, 75% ($n = 9$), have known their employee for 5 years or less. Only three leaders have known their employee longer (i.e., 15, 18, and 20 years) ($Mdn = 3.00$, $SD = 7.146$).

Revision of the Interview Protocols

The initial protocol consisted of semi-structured interview questions and the researcher asked the leader to provide a narrative or story regarding *an* employee that worked for them, not necessarily the employee on which they reported during their diary study. Then the leader was to describe the person in five words or less. Essentially, the questions were replicating the daily study, but relying on memory, rather than events that day. If the story was not about the diary study employee, then the questions shifted to the employee from the diary study. Additional questions asked whether the leader considered either employee's behaviors normal interaction, normal behavior for the organization, and how the leader would wish for the employee to behave.

After the first three interviews were conducted, one at a coffee shop, one on a virtual video platform, and one in the home of the leader, the researcher changed the sequence and format of the interview, by using the diary study results to guide the interview, and, if the original questions had not been answered by the leaders during their responses through story-telling, the researcher used follow-up questions from the interview protocol to fill in any gaps. The researcher recognized she was failing to take advantage of the diary study material to begin the semi-structured interview, in that data captured in real time from the diary studies were less affected and biased by memory processes and cognitive heuristics (Schwarz, 2012). She found that by following this new sequence, the interview became more natural and fluid, leaders were able to go at their own pace, and remain within the time frame allotted, and questions from the original

interview protocol were answered more organically and consistent with best practices (Kvale, 1996).

The interviews conducted through WebEx and GoTo Meetings were transcribed through the respective platforms. All others, as well as the in-person interviews, were recorded on the researcher's phone and transcribed by Otter.ai, a virtual transcription service. After each interview was transcribed, the researcher reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and removed any identifying information. If any transcribed material was removed from the document, an explanation for the removal was included in italics within the transcript.

Once the transcriptions were cleaned, the documents were moved to an analytic software (i.e., NVivo) and a deductive analysis began. The goal of the analysis was to discover context using both a thematic and an ad hoc analysis approach. The first stage of analysis required the researcher to map interview content with codes developed through the understanding of labeling theory, positive organizational scholarship, and positive leadership. This required multiple readings of individual interviews. The first level of coding was created due to observation of topical codes and themes related to the research questions as seen in Table 4.8. These codes are "Labels" and "Employee Behavior – Continuum of Deviance." The code, "COVID" replaced the "Continuum of Deviance" code, as it became evident the Covid-19 pandemic affected the way in which deviance was or was not observed by the leaders and was prolific in its references during the interview analysis. An additional code, "Leader Reflections," will be addressed at the end

of the results sections to understand what insights or changes occurred due to the diary

study.

Table 4.8

Thematic Coding in NVivo with Descriptions

Name	Description
Labels	Ascribing a category, classification, or description to an employee within the organization.
Job-related	Labels that address job, task, role of employee
Non-role or position label	Label might not change even if job description or assignment changes
Role or position Label	Label assigned due to organizational role. Role might change due to promotion or job task
Person-related	Labels that reflect the person's personality, or non-job-related activity
Invariant Knowledge	Category that is never changing such as sex, age, demographics
Variant knowledge	Knowledge that might change based upon emotions and traits about someone
COVID	References to the effect or perceived effect of Covid-19 within the workplace.
Work Environment	Virtual, Hybrid, In-person
Virtual	All activities were conducted online, by phone, etc. in various physical space.
Work Performance	Focus of leader's perception of employee deviance based on work performance actions.
Relationship Performance	Focus of leader's perception of employee deviance based on relationship performance actions.
Remaining Virtual	Organization did not return to in-person work environments. Completely virtual or hybrid.
Residual Prior Knowledge of Employee	Knew the person prior to Covid-19 and effect in virtual/hybrid environment.
Leader Introduced to Employee During Covid-19	Leader and/or employee began relationship during Covid-19
In-Person	Operations conducted in person, in physical locations with employee.
Relationship Performance	Focus of leader's perception of employee deviance based on relationship performance actions.
Employee Behavior-Continuum of Deviance	*Observed employee behavior as positive, negative, or neutral.*

Negative Deviance	*Intentional behavior that significantly departs from the norms. Often in harmful ways.*
Neutral	*Behavior that does not depart from the norm (Bright, et.al., 2006)*
Positive Deviance	*(Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003) Intentional behaviors that depart from the norms of the referent group in honorable ways. Lay person would see this as valuable or virtuous ways.*
Leader Reflections	Final thoughts at end of interview-Discussion of insights on diary study
Appreciation & Gratitude	Discovered how important the employee was to them personally or professionally.
Interactions	Realized some aspect of the interaction was not what they had expected.
Transformational Changes	The leader, the employee, or the organization was transformed in some way due to the study.

Note: Although "*Employee Behavior-Continuum of Deviance,"* italicized, is no longer a theme, the definitions were useful in analyzing Theme 2: COVID.

The second level of coding was generated after further analysis to determine

patterns which existed within the first level of coding, thereby creating subcategories.

The category of "Label" needed a second level of coding as a pattern emerged that labels

were either job/role-related or person-related. Both of these codes were split again into a

third level of coding that addressed whether the job/role-related label was due to a work

position/title or a non-specific label that might follow the employee regardless of the

work position/title, as well as a pattern emerging within the person-related label, in that

potential labels appeared to be based on either variant person knowledge or invariant

person knowledge (Macrae & Quadflieg, 2010).

The category of "COVID" needed multiple levels and sublevels as well. The

levels included the Work Environment, with three third-level codes of Virtual,

Remaining Virtual, and In-Person). The fourth level of codes emerging from this theme

were related to Work Performance, Relationship Performance, and knowing the

employee Before (residual knowledge) or During (hired during Covid-19).

Interview Results

Two primary research questions guided this phase of the study:

RQ2: *What labels do leaders assign employees within an organization?*

RQ3: *What contextual factors influence the leader labeling process?*

Two distinct sub-categories emerged from the examination of *Theme 1: Labels*.

These labels were either Job-related or Person-related. In addition, labels were

categorized further to distinguish whether labels that were job-related were formal labels

related to a role or position within the organization (e.g., nurse, engineer, foreman), or

labels that might not change once the employee moved to another position, but still

related to work or a job (e.g., superstar, self-driver). If labels were person-related, they

were subcategorized as to whether they were labels that characterized a feature that the

employee had little control over (i.e., race, sex, some personality-types), also known as

invariant, or they were features that might change (i.e., emotions, some personality-types,

traits, skills), also known as variant. Through the creation of a matrix query in NVivo,

many of the referenced behaviors that leaders labeled lay somewhere along the

continuum of deviance towards the negative (see Figure 4.17). Labels that tended towards

the positive were due to person-related, variant characteristics.

Figure 4.17

Matrix Query of Labels versus Continuum of Deviance (Observed Behavior)
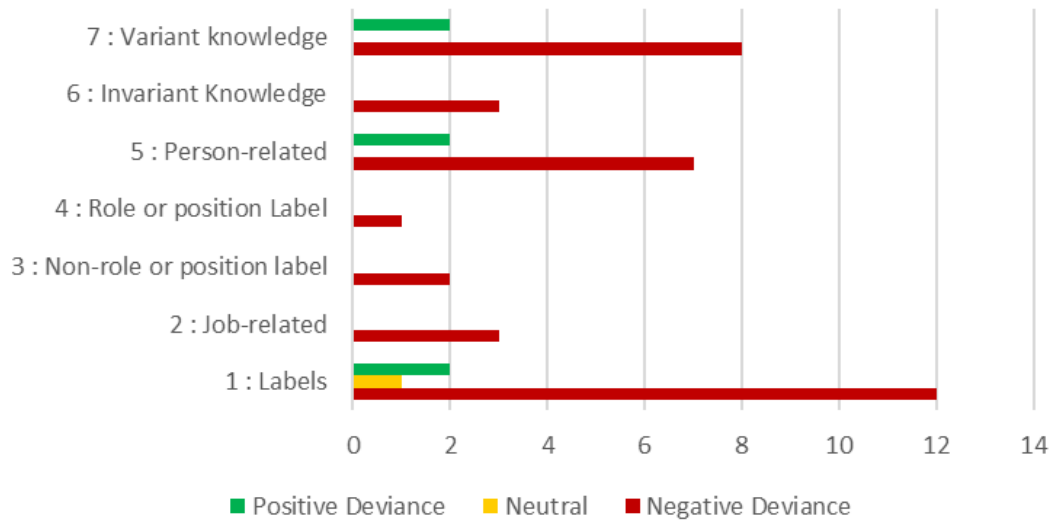
The second theme, *Theme 2: COVID* examined how events related to the pandemic contextually factored into influencing leader labeling. Recall Knutsson's (1977) model of the stages in the labeling process in Figure 1.2, Chapter 1 of this paper. Primary deviation is the first stage of the labeling process. To begin this process the leader has a perception of what is a possible deviance. The second stage is whether the leader has a reaction to a possible deviant act. One of three outcomes occur in this second stage. The first one is that if there is no perception of deviance, there is no reaction, there is no labeling. The second outcome is that although there is an acknowledge perception of a deviation occurring, the leader does not react and the labeling process ceases. The third and final outcome that is possible in this second stage is that there is a reaction to the observed possible deviance, the reaction triggers labeling, the reaction depends on the

social context or type of deviance, and, once there is successful negotiation between these elements, the labeling process begins. Covid-19 reshaped the perception of possible deviance, both societally and organizationally, as evidenced within the interview responses. Covid-19 changed the social context, thereby changing the contextual factors (i.e., task, relationship) within the organization that previously existed.

Each theme is discussed in detail below. *Theme 1: Labels* details the responses from selected interview references that pattern either job-related labels or person-related labels and the leader-perceived behaviors that may have led to choosing descriptors and labels. *Theme 2: COVID* details responses from leaders in which Covid-19 created the conditions and context for perceived behavior and whether said behavior was considered deviant and, therefore, so labeled.

Theme 1: Labels

Eight of the twelve leaders used at least one label during the diary study to describe their employee; however, seven of those eight leaders were unaware that they had used labels. When the interviewer mentioned they had used a label, they were surprised. Leaders produced additional labels during their narratives when asked to expand upon what led them to choosing the descriptors they selected during the daily study. Some leaders were very detailed and specific describing characteristics or behaviors that produced the label. When the descriptor was a label, the interviewer asked the leader to describe the behavior that led to the label. The purpose was to understand whether the leader perceived the behavior as deviant (positively or negatively).

One leader used the word "Strategic" as a potential label to describe their employee; however, their definition of strategic, relative to the perceived deviant behavior observed of the employee, was political, rather than observing the employee conducting long-term organizational development. Leader A048 provided a variety of labels from "Millennials" to "Steady-Eddies" to "the IT guy" to "Special K." Therefore, not only was it important to understand context of the use of a label (i.e., "strategic") and the definition created by the leader, but also understand in what ways leaders were categorizing behaviors or characteristics.

A thematic map was created in NVivo to provide a visual representation of the codes related to primary code of Labels (see Figure 4.18). There were 178 references to labels among the 12 leaders interviewed. These references were either leaders explaining why they chose the descriptors they did over the 5 days of the diary study, or these references were additional labels that leaders either knowingly shared during the interview or unknowingly shared. The majority of the references related to labels were job-related labels rather than person-related, 104 and 74, respectively.

Figure 4.18

Thematic Map of Potential Labels
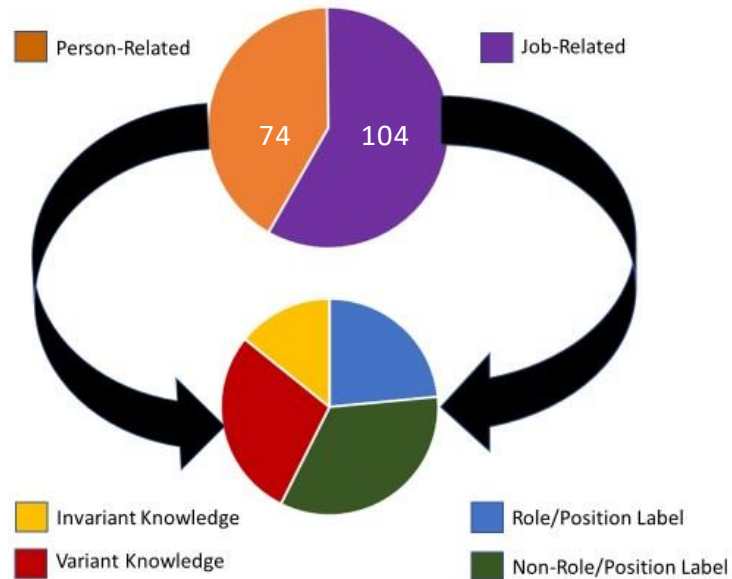
Job-Related Labels

Leaders seemed more aware of using labels associated with job-titles or roles within the organization more than person-related roles.

Role-Specific Labels. One leader, A048, had significantly more references to role or position labels than any other leader (i.e., 46% of the references). These labels were not specifically directed at his employee, but rather more to the composition of fellow employees he and his specific employee deal with on a regular basis. Examples of the job/role-related labels he used are "users," "new hire," "associate," "long-term employee," "I.T. people," "V.P.," etcetera. When asked about other labels that exist

within the organization, perhaps nouns that replace the name of an individual, he

answered:

> "I mean, you know, we'll talk, maybe sometimes we'll say, you know, the welders, but it's, because that's what they do…they're welders…the project managers, because that's the group in the department, it's what they do…I'm just the computer guy."

Some additional examples from other interviewees:

> "We usually just describe people based on their job title, and also call people managers or directors or, you know, techs or supervisors or things like that."

> "I'm talking staff, I'm talking maintenance, I'm talking cafeteria, I'm talking those kinds of positions, you know, all of that. When I say faculty, I mean those in the classroom setting."

> Another leader created their own label for the employees based on their roles as

leaders working for them - The Leadership Team:

> "Yeah, so when I think of my leadership team, you know, rather than calling them 'direct reports,' and, and here's where I kind of ticked my admin off…I still am happy I made the decision I made…buy when I do have a meeting with my direct reports, she's technically a direct report, but it's leadership-type stuff we're talking about. It's strategy. It's personnel. I didn't feel like an admin should, like in her role, should be privy to some of the conversations that we have. So, when I think about my leadership team, it's the people leading our department, both from a personnel and strategy standpoint."

Non-Role Specific Labels. As observed, labels that are job/role-specific are

general use labels. However, there are other labels that emerged that were job-related, but

non-role specific. These labels were usually used to address performance or task and not

necessarily to the title of the position. Some examples of these labels were fast-worker,

"dud," superstar, experts, self-directed team, superuser, rockstar, rockstar-in-training,

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"hypo" (high potential performer), guru, resource (one leader used this label 13 times), driver, innovator, "doer," "all-star," "The A-Team," and "Batman and Robin." Examples of when these terms were used in context by various interviewees follow:

> "You know, we're like Batman and Robin…and it was really her and I, in terms of we're COVID…I mean, if the principal knows anything about COVID, it was either through her or I."

> "I don't evaluate teachers, but I deal a lot with the mistakes they make, I guess. And so, they're, you know, I'm trying to think of what labels would…"a dud," you know, I guess that's maybe a label…that person's a dud. That's usually to describe a teacher that is not up to par."

> "I put fast worker *[as one of the diary study's words]* in there, as there's kind of the dual side. The fast, right? So. she's very fast, but she kind of struggles with the quality, in that she sometimes puts the urgency of the moment to get something done ahead of the urgency to get it done right."

> *[When asked about their use of the word resource.]* "I think, I probably use this, I've been using this for a while. I previously worked for *[Company Name]* for twenty plus years, so I probably picked it up from there, rather than taking the name *[of the person]* using 'resource' as a way to communicate.[3]"

> "We do have a couple of pathologists, we call them 'The A-Team,' because, like they're really slow. It's kind of ironic, okay. It's not something they know."

> "When I say that *['doe'"]*, that means like, they hit everything that day. Because that's the type of people I want to do work with, people who are just like, 'I'm gonna get it done.'"

> "I tell people upfront, we have a self-directed team…they either have a background in that, or at least bring in the operations, and they know what that looks like, because they've been trained, you know, in terms of they're really 'super-users.'"

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[3] Of note, this leader used the label 'resource' 13 times in his interview with me rather than call the employee by name or use some other word to reference the employee or others within the organization.

This last leader explained that the employee, on whom they reported during the study was an "outlier:" "It was clear from my team perspective that here was the team, and there was an outlier." This label of "outlier" is a label that is job-related regarding tasks or performance. However, when investigated further through coding, this label addressed a deeper issue. This label also coded as a person-related reference, thereby exploring what actions or behaviors identified this person as an outlier.

Person-Related Labels

Person-related labels are labels generated due to unique person characteristics. These characteristics can be variant (i.e., changeable characteristics such as emotion, traits) or invariant (i.e., fits into a never changing category such as sex, age, race). Leaders seemed to be more aware of times in which they created invariant labels than variant labels. There were a few times during an interview, when the leader was unaware of creating a variant label unless the researcher pointed it out to them and asked a follow-up question.

However, when they were aware of person-related labels, leaders distinguished between creating labels for peers, more than for subordinates.

> "I guess sometimes we have kind of playful nicknames about people. You know, I mean, it's more, not something we do on a professional level, but just like when you're sort of gossiping or, you know, something like that. Like one of the pathologists, his name is Dr. *[last name]*. And my, our, spell checks always change it to 'buttons.' So, we call him 'Buttons'…I mean, it's kind of an endearing thing, you know, like, 'Oh, Buttons is here.'"

When asked whether the leader had heard of other labels used within the organization, like nicknames for others, they responded:

> I don't think so. Because, you know, again, a lot of the time, you know, like I said, we kind of hold them *[admin and tech staff]* to a little bit of a lower standard. And so, you know, if a pathologist is causing some disruption or problem, it's going to earn a nickname, whereas, if a tech is having a problem, it's more, it's more of like sympathy.

The leader acknowledged that if a nickname (i.e., label) were created, it would be in response to (i.e., in reaction to) a disruption or problem (i.e., a perceived deviant act), but only if the person performing the perceived deviant act is a work peer, rather than a subordinate, due to the social context.

Person-Related Invariant Labels. Only a third of the potential labels referenced in the interview material across respondents were classified as invariant labels. Some of the labels generated were related to age, intelligence, or a play on someone's name. Only one leader used the same five words to describe the employee every day of the week. This leader had led their employee for almost 20 years, both serving in the same positions the entire time. This case was unusual. When asked about using the same words (i.e., Professional, Fast-Worker, Mother, knowledgeable, friendly), the leader state he used the words "almost intentionally" and smiled. When asked what made him decide to do so, the following dialogue ensued:

> "I've worked for her for so many years. One day isn't going to change what I think about her."
>
> *[Later in the interview…]*

"Yeah, she's still her. Even if she has a bad day today. She's still her. And it doesn't change my opinion of her as an individual person."

[Towards the end of the interview, when asked whether he has ever used a specific label for her or thought about one…]
"No, it's always *[Employee name]*".

Yet, this same leader did use labels to describe this employee. They used the word "mother," an invariant label. The word "mother" is a neutral word on its own; however, it could imply that the leader feels the person behaves as a mother to organizational members or that the employee's priority is on her role as a mother, rather than her role as an employee. For an individual who used role or position labels to describe most of the members within his organization, at a rate three to ten times more than some of the other leaders who were interviewed, the fact this leader used a person-related, invariant label to describe their employee was further investigated.

Do you have some examples of why those words were most appropriate for this person?
"So just a little bit of context. I've been at my place of employment for 25 years, and she has worked for me for 20 of those 25 years. So, we have a very good, very good relationship. I.T. is a very thankless job. We have 180 users, there's only two of us…her attitude, and I hope to think, or I'm told by my boss, that my attitude is always, you know, calm and reasonable…She's been at our company, like I said, for 20 years. She always has that helping attitude and so the knowledgeable and professional. And of course, you know, I also kind of pick mother as well, because she has told me, we've had these conversations. She's a little bit younger than me, I'm not going to work forever, although it may be close to forever, but probably won't be forever, or if I did choose to take another job, I have asked her quite candidly, 'Are you interested in my job, or taking over for me, when or if I would leave?' And she's told me privately, 'No way in hell. I don't want your job. It's too demanding. I like my work-life balance that I have now. Being a mom and supporting my family business is important to me.' So that's why I picked those words."

These results indeed indicated that the leader perceives the employee to value her role of

mother more than that of employee, based on these conversations he appears to have had

over the last twenty years.

Meanwhile, other leader interview results suggest the formation of potential labels

based on age or generation, another invariant, person-related label.

> "Slow isn't necessarily a positive attribute. But it's probably the first thing that
> anybody who meets this employee thinks…She is, ah, physically, just a very slow
> person. She's an older employee. She's heavy. And, you know, she just, partly
> from a motivation standpoint, and partly just from a physical standpoint, does not
> move fast. And I'm in an environment, where moving fast is highly valued. It's a
> medical environment, where the things that we do are time dependent. You know,
> like, answers are expected within minutes. And so, when you have an employee
> who takes minutes to get from location to location, when the expectation is that
> you take, maybe seconds, um, it's problematic. So that particular descriptive is
> not positive."

The leader does not specifically mention a label they have created; yet, for the entire

week, the word slow, or some variant of slow is used every day. At one point in the

interview the descriptor slow is revisited:

When asked again about his descriptor of his employee, "slow," on the last day of

the diary study:

"Yeah. She's slow every day.
*She's slow every day, but you're mostly referring to the physical aspects, not so
much to her competency.*
Um, when you say competency, you mean like cognition or thinking or, you
know, I mean, yeah, it's more of a physical thing. But I mean, the physical thing is
part of competency,
Because it's a skill that…
Yeah, because she's cutting frozen specimens. And, you know, I mean, if you're
fast at doing that, that is your competency. And she's not the best at doing

them…But she's not mentally slow or anything. Because she's a smart lady. She's just, just slow as molasses."

As evidenced in the above dialogue, the leader values speed over slowness. He perceives her slowness as a physical deviance due to age and weight, but also perceives the slowness hampering her job and attributing it to a lack of motivation. Towards the end of this selection of the interview, the leader references molasses. This takes an adjective that is used multiple times and connects it with a noun. There is the potential for this situation to create a label if this person is consistently tied to the description "slow as molasses." At this point, it appears as though the leader attributes the employee's slowness due to something that the leader cannot change: her age and her weight. The leader, as of yet, has not verbalized the label molasses as a replacement for the employee's name or personage. However, he no longer refers to her actions as slow, rather the employee herself *is* slow. This subtle change in perception indicates the leader lies somewhere within the second or third stage of the labeling process (i.e., negotiating), since the descriptor does not appear solidified as a label yet (see Figure 1.3, this paper).

Person-Related Variant Labels. The last subcategory of labels is that of variant, ones based upon characteristics that are changeable (i.e., thoughts, feelings, behaviors). This subcategory is related to deviance, in that a leader's perception of an employee's behavior may lead to labeling if that behavior appears to deviate from the leader's understanding of a norm. Leader A048 stated it succinctly when it came to their view of their employee: "I've worked with her for so many years, one day isn't going to change

what I think of her." This leader believes that no matter what their observations are of this employee, their perceptual frame will remain constant. Their routine they have developed over the years has turned them into what the leader labeled as "Steady Eddies." The leader referenced that they and their employee did not act any differently than they normally do and that their interactions must appear boring although he likes the consistency.

Only two other leaders have known their employees for quite some time. One leader (A877) has known the person through non-work-related activities for 18 years, but the person has worked for the leader for 14 years in other positions within the organization and the employee has been in their current position for two years. The other leader (A783) has known their employee as a friend for 15 years but been their employee for 2 years. Although the underlying nature of who the employee is does not change, based on their interactions with their employees and longevity of knowing them, they see that their employee is changing on a day-to-day basis: "He was someone that I had known just in passing, but when he came in and interviewed for the job, he came in very, I don't want to say "stuffed shirt," that doesn't sound positive, but very rigid, very set in what he felt we needed and what his role was going to be…and the change has been incredible…he's very much a different person than he was."

Neither one of them seemed to be in stagnant relationship. Rather, because the employees are in new positions or new to working for the leader, there is a different relationship formed, a more dynamic relationship that requires apparent mentoring.

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Therefore, how much time a leader has known an employee in context of working the same job created a schema or short-cut for the first respondent ("Steady Eddies"), but a change occurred from one leader's initial impression of their employee as a "Stuffed Shirt" to being something more and more importantly, changeable. The other leader, A783 points this out as well: "Because it changes on the task, and it changes on the day, and we're navigating each other professionally, right? So it's almost like, it's like any relationship, you know, you're trying to figure out what works, what doesn't...He grows from experience, like, I mean, basically, it's, it's a relief to have people like that." It is evident that this leader values the changeable nature and the employee's ability to grow, whether he knew him personally for 14 years prior to being his leader or not.

Three leaders were hired into their organization within the last two years and immediately filled the role of leader for their employee. Additional leaders have been in their role for five years or less and they have known their current employee for even less time. One of the leaders, A544, stated that her employee is "a big gamer, stays up late, single, you know. And he just doesn't think. He just doesn't think." She continues later in the interview, when asked what his behavior would look like if he was at his best,

> "Again, it goes back to maturity. And when he's on, he's there, present. And hadn't been up all-night playing games.
> *How did you find out about that, by the way?*
> Oh, I hear about it all day long.
> *He tells you about it?*
> All day.
> *…So, he feels comfortable sharing that with you?*
> *(Both laughing)*

Oh, yeah! No, we have a personal relationship, that he can talk to me, confide in me, because there are some issues for him, you know, for such a young person. So, yeah."

Even the leader sees this behavior as variant, in that they believe the behavior is due to immaturity and the employee can change.

Whereas A312 described their employee positively as the Robin to their Batman when providing context to their relationship, creating a label that is job-related, but non-role specific behavior. Contrastingly, when asked about the label, "strategic," as well as "bold, opinionated, and dangerous," the leader observed another type of behavior of this employee that was related to a non-job specific task in a very negative way:

"Strategic. So, I think there's some strategic type of dialogue that goes on, in order to gain information. And I can't remember the exact example. But that's kind of that boldness…because opinionated is, is a factor in the whole, in all of that, too. So, if you gain information, and you want to find out what's going on, you're going to… she's going to draw a conclusion…and be bold about it, you know, and potentially, you know, let people know that that's wrong or that that's right, or, you know, so those that's…Was the word dangerous? Was that what I put?

[He explains further…]
I see a busy bee, building relationships in a lot of ways to gain information about what's going on. And I think that's strategic a little bit, within that person's behavior.
So, when you use the term strategic, it's not at the level of like, strategic planning. You're talking about strategic from the perspective of a political…?
Ah, no. I mean in a negative sense. In a political, a political sense…Yeah, not… not to make the organization better."

This dialog emphasizes non-job specific behavior that the leader perceives the person not focused on making the organization better. The leaders from the task sort who sorted the word "strategic," categorized the word as positive. However, in this context, and from

within this leader's perceptional frame, the word strategic is not positive and could

effectively change A312's Positivity Score (Average Word Score) from Phase 1. This

example exemplifies the importance of understanding underlying context.

Another portion of interview from this leader continues to demonstrate behavior

the leader does not value, in that the behavior labeling someone a "beast" is one that

distracts the leader from accomplishing his own job and goals. The following dialog is in

response to being asked whether they had created or used any other labels within the

organization,

> Oh, yeah. So, and I don't, and I won't take full credit. But the term "beast"
> …That's, um, that's a lot of contexts around that word. Usually, it's negative, but
> it can certainly be a positive, too. Nine out of 10 times if someone's, if I call them
> a "beast," it's usually negative.
>
> *[When asked to elaborate further on what a person might do or say to be labeled
> a "beast" …]*
> Just dominated the conversation… or the decision or… you couldn't get an edge
> word… a word in edgewise. You couldn't, you know, just… just a beast, you
> know, just, just taking charge, running people over, and driving you bonkers.
>
> *[Further in the interview…]*
> …You can use the term beast, like, if I'm referring to, like, a student-athlete, or
> there is a superstar beast and that… and that's a positive. But maybe it's my own.
> It's rare that you come across someone like that, and it's rare that I'm using the
> term "beast" in a positive… Yeah, but it can be… if you use it in the positive
> sense, they'd be like, yeah, you're right. And if you use it in the negative sense,
> they'll be… yeah, you're right. So, they'll know it either way, in an unspoken
> way…to describe the incident, the person, in that moment.
>
> *[When asked about any other labels he has heard or used in the organization…]*
> …I'm probably more likely to use labels than anyone else in this organization.
> Knowing that, there's not a ton of labels people throw around. I feel like I'm
> probably… and that's probably a good thing, but I'm more likely to use them. I'm
> trying to think. I use "beast" a lot. Because if I'm having a negative interaction

with a parent, you know, I'll get off the phone and say she was a beast or, you know, something like that. Yeah. So that's my go-to to describe tough conversations.

[When asked if he had ever used any specific labels to describe his employee, on whom he reported during the diary study…]
Yeah, well, I mean she can fall into the beast category at times. So yeah, no. Not, not anymore that week."

This leader appears very aware of some of the labels he creates to categorize people

based upon specific acts of deviance. He was very animated and quite excited to share the

word "beast" that he has brought into the organization from another position. Labels such

as these are not organizational specific or job specific and can transfer based on the

individual who has created the label to make sense of their world. When revisiting

A338's label of "outlier," the broad term is used to make sense of a member not "fitting

in" with a team:

"It was clear from a team perspective that here was the team and there was an outlier…You know, my team will always tell me I'm very clear, what I call it my realistic job preview, to the point where I almost talk people out of jobs. "Bear with me, I'm gonna get Negative Nelly. This is not the cartwheels that y'all think our department is. Let me tell you what it's really like behind the scenes," and I make a point to do that every time and I did with this.

[When asked if leader used any specific labels for this employee.]
Yes, there were "too high maintenance" and "drama," which was I think I put in the thing *[the diary entry]*. Those were the two things where I was if I were being real, that I was coming to, because it just created unnecessary drama."

When A338 stated, "those were the two things…that I was coming to," although

she had not formalized those terms as specific labels for her employee, continued

exposure may have led them becoming solidified. These were behaviors that could have

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been changed, but the employee chose not to do so. This example is another one in which

the leader appears to be in the negotiation stage. She has reacted to her employee's

behavior as deviant (negatively) but has not necessarily created a label that the Primary

Deviance stages (i.e., actions) to enter the Secondary Deviance stages (i.e., identity) (see

Figure 1.2, this paper).

Lastly, another leader (A347) shared that her employee tends to exude behavior

that is "over-the-top." She stated

 "…her personality can be like, I know I'm going to use an example that is a
weird example, but like Mimi from The Drew Carey Show, like this big, bold, big
personality. Everybody knows she's in the room and she kind of overcompensates
sometimes, in an attempt to get attention."

Interestingly, later in the interview, when asked to discuss how Covid and the move to

online interactions changed how the leader brought in the new employee, a director, she

leader shared:

I had never considered that…I actually think it was a better circumstance to have
us at home, which is not an answer you probably expect. So let me tell you why
my thought process is…you know, remember I likened her to this really big
personality. She is very loud. Like, in the Cube World, there would be complaints
about like how boisterous and over-the-top her personality was, right? Which, you
know, if you're an introvert sitting beside her, you want to crawl under your desk,
right? And so, she, like, there's a little bit of a rub from that standpoint. So, getting
her kind of out-of-sight, out-of-mind, and out of that environment, definitely
helped form a relationship with her team members. And I also think her not being
able to walk down the hallway and stand at my door or follow me to the
bathroom… which is kind of how aggressive she is, made her probably learn to
fish on her own a little bit more versus coming to me for the answer. Because
there is a barrier that's created when you have to ping somebody, when you have
to figure out where they have an opening on their schedule, versus seeing them
walk down the hallway. And so, I would actually say if I, like, it was a really

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weird way to react to that. But she likely was set up for more success in a remote environment.

This insight leads to the next theme and determining what contextual factors, if any, Covid-19 had on leader labeling.

Theme 2: COVID

Reactions that lead to the labeling process depend on a social context (Knutsson, 1977). Covid-19 has affected all aspects of social life across the world. When the pandemic officially arrived in The United States in March 2020, the American workforce, and its children, were sent home, while policies and procedures were implemented or created to protect employees and citizens. Some organizations, according to the interviewees, had been experimenting with work-from-home or hybrid environments.

Whether virtual, hybrid, or in person, the Covid-19 pandemic affected the way in which people communicate with one another. Many of the leaders who were interviewed attribute this to Covid-19 and the extraordinary situation the pandemic has produced. This led to interesting results. If the leader had some sense of who the employee was prior to Covid-19, whether they had positive perceptions or negative perceptions of prior performance or relationship, Covid-19 exasperated them in some way as modeled in Figure 4.19.

This model was developed based on patterns that emerged from the interview material. The cone in the figure represents the leader's perception of whether a reaction occurred based on a perception of possible deviance of performance, as well as whether a

label or potential label resulted. Performance could signify task (i.e., exceptional to poor), relationships (i.e., flourishing to dysfunctional), or a combination of the two. As the interactions appeared more virtual between the leader and their employee, the leaders focused more on what the leader's values (task or relationship) and the expectations of behavior associated with those values.

Figure 4.19

Representation of Leader's Perception of Focus on Degree of Type of Performance Dependent on Work Environment
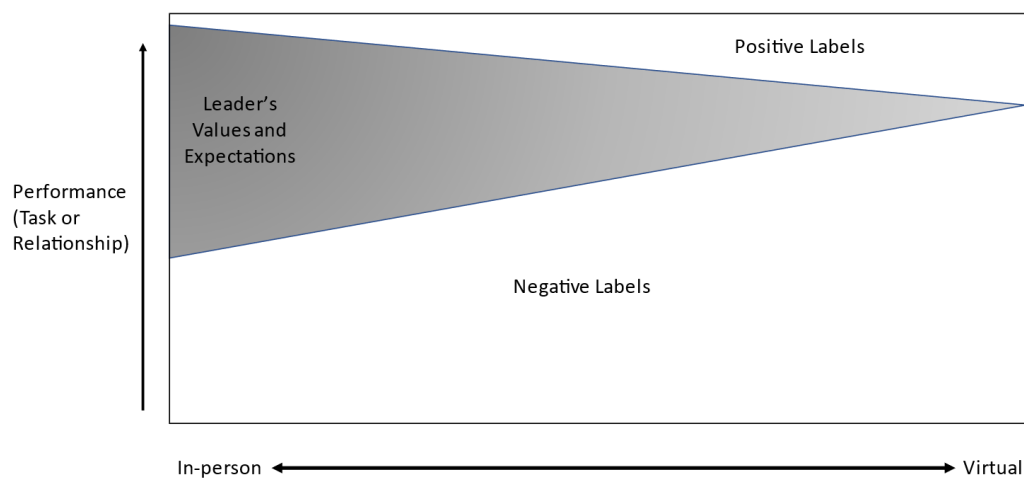
Note: Not to scale. A simple representation of the leader's perceptual frame. As the leader moves into a more virtual world, the leader's values or expectations become more focused on the level of performance the leader values (i.e., task or relationship).

Of the twelve leaders interviewed, nine of the leaders have known their employees for three years or less. Four of the nine leaders have led their employee less than that time. Therefore, the majority of the time these nine leaders have known their employees has been during the Covid-19 pandemic. This reality created an important

boundary on the results and how labeling will look different. Given the reality of the pandemic, when or if the effects are ever eradicated, the Center for Disease Control has made it clear that this is the new normal and there will be constant long-term effects as this research concludes in the third year of the pandemic (Steenhuysen, 2022).

Work Environment

Organizations that had virtual architecture already in place saw little interruption to the daily tasks and routines, depending on the industry. However, organizations that relied on in-person meeting and services, such as the education and medical industries, needed time to re-establish appropriate tasks in a virtual or hybrid landscape. Four of the twelve leaders worked in organizations that relied on quickly returning to in-person services (i.e., education, medical). As described in Phase 1 of the results, although only 2% of the leaders reported working in an online-only environment during the Eligibility, Demographic, and Self-Assessment Questionnaire (EDSQ), when leaders reported their work environment regarding their interactions with their employees, 42% of the leaders only interacted with their employees virtually. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, only three leaders interviewed had interacted with their employees in an online environment, albeit rarely. These events created unforeseen stressors in an extra-ordinary situation. This change in environment and how the leader perceived deviance, as well as what reactions would trigger labeling, were examined from this context.

Virtual. Virtual environments consisted of email communication[4], video

teleconferences, online meetings, phone calls, and any other type of work environment in

which work and communication between the leader and the employee required

interactions not held in person (i.e., both individuals are in separate physical locations).

The initial move to virtual environments changed societal reactions on what was

perceived as deviant due to lack of skills and performance, as the changes required

laypeople to learn new technology. Those who adapted quickly were seen as being

positively deviant, while those who failed to, were not necessarily seen as negatively

deviant. As time progressed, though, and workers began learning how to operate and

perform under the new reality of virtual work and learning, those who were not

proficient, or organizations who were not able to transition received negative societal

perception of deviance.

Perception of Possible Deviance in the Virtual World (Work/Task

Performance). Work performance that may receive a leader reaction are those actions

related to leader expected job tasks and skills. Some leaders saw advantages to the move

online due to this massive change event, particularly if the leader was a champion of

various models for work environments and was well-prepared. Leader A048 shared:

> "So, we were very fortunate, because I was an early advocate of adopting cloud
> technologies…I even moved our phone system into a cloud service provider
> probably five or six years ago. Now, when Covid hit, it had been five years. So,
> when we sent everyone home, it was really a very easy transition for us because
> all of the infrastructure for doing so was already in place...I sent *[employee's*

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[4] A few leaders did mention they did not consider emails as interaction.

name] home, because she didn't mind working at home. I had absolutely zero desire to be at home. Because my wife and kids were at home, because they had also been sent home. And I just, no desire, no desire.

[Later in the interview…]
…friends of mine, with other companies, you know, they're about all chaos and mayhem. And for us, it was business as usual. If you call anybody, called someone's office desk number, their soft phone on their computer, regardless of where they are…exactly the way it was supposed to.

This leader was "really, really proud of how everything we built performed, and especially how it held up under this strain of everyone being at home." The above quote reinforces this leader's perception of he and his employee's work as well as the label he had created for the two of them, "Steady Eddies." They continued to provide services with no change in performance, while the rest of society (and the leader's industry) was facing "chaos." This perception of an effortless move with no change in performance was societally deviant, but positively deviant.

There were some changes to interactions between the two of them. The leader did say that before Covid-19, he would "poke my nose into her office and see if she's on the phone;" however, he noticed that when she was at home, interactions were less frequent, and he was less able to jump in quickly to assign a task if he saw she was free. Any past behaviors that had been negotiated into labels (i.e., Steady Eddies, Mother) appear to be reinforced through this extreme change experience. The leader and the employee had created platforms that continued to reinforce the perception that the two were steady and consistent in their jobs. Additionally, while the leader had no desire to work from home, the employee did, reinforcing the leader's schema of the employee's perceived identity as

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a mother outweighed the desire to come to work, the opposite of the leader's desire. This leads more specifically into Secondary Deviance, which was not the primary focus of the study, but in the realm of future research.

Perception of Possible Deviance in the Virtual World (Relationship Performance). Relationship performance deviances that leaders reacted to were more related to personal support and acceptance (or non-support and non-acceptance) of an employee, depending on whether the leader valued interactions and relationship building with the person as an individual, or not. Another leader's organization had been experimenting with virtual, in-person, and hybrid operations for years. When A347's organization also easily moved to a virtual platform, they found that their employee, who started in a new position during Covid-19, appeared to benefit from being introduced to the team online. The employee has a boisterous personality that the leader and some of the other leaders and employees find negatively deviant. The leader felt that had they been in person, the employee's team may have reacted poorly:

> "Because there is a barrier that's created when you have to ping somebody, when you have to figure out where they have an opening on their schedule, versus seeing them walk down the hallway…I would actually say if I, like, it was a really weird way to react to that, but she likely was set up for more success in a remote environment."

Another positive result from the move to a virtual environment was the ability to connect people in different geographical regions. These new and more frequent connections built upon developing relationships with a more diverse group of people, in which the leader is exposed to more frequent interactions than in less frequent in-person

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meetings. This was particularly true of a leader who works with Governor-appointed

members across their state.

> "How's… wow it's tough because it's like, 'could you do more?' 'Yes.' 'And you
> did more?' 'Yes.' 'But were there restrictions or parameters on what you could
> have done or what you typically would have done in the past?'…But then if
> you're helping larger geographic areas, you can get going faster and easier this
> way. And so there has been a blessing, as well as a push-away, if you will, to get
> where we're at here. In that two-year mark, or year-and-a-half mark, whatever
> may be."

They further explained that prior to Covid-19, conducting business and interacting

with members of the team through virtual platforms, was frustrating and he would notice

those who did not have the skills to turn on their video or use a video platform were more

disruptive to the meeting when they tried to participate through a phone call. The phone

call and/or lack of video sometimes indicated the person was distracted by driving or

being in a location not conducive to conducting a meeting, particularly those who did not

have a video platform:

> "If you called in, you know, you might not feel compelled to *[turn on the video]*,
> unless you were in the room in that interaction, so yes, I do think that it has
> changed things in our world for, typically, in the positive when you're looking at
> it, case-by-case."

A Focus on Task and Work Performance for Those Who Remained

Online/Hybrid. Leaders who remained online in a virtual environment, or practiced

hybrid activities once some restrictions lifted, tended to focus on their employee's task

and work performance, rather than personality or other personal characteristics. Any

perceived deviant behavior, whether positive or negative, reflected these observations.

Two different leaders responded as follows:

> "I think I recognized certain things about his work ethic…and I think age has a lot to do with that, and missing that supervision, you know it got relaxed."

> "…in the nature of our work, you don't really have to be here to do it. So, it's been almost all virtual since then…our relationship probably varied the least after the pandemic hit, because she is just so bright and so concise with her language that you can almost chat with her like on Teams, and not really feel like something's missing, the way you do with some other people."

Residual Prior Personal Knowledge of the Employee and Perception of Possible

Deviance. In addition, if the employee knew the person prior to Covid, some residual person-knowledge, whether it was variant or invariant, affected how the leader responded to the employee, when a task performance exceeded expectations or failed to meet expectations. The following leader had known and been close friends with his employee for 14 years prior to hiring him. The leader began working with the employee about two months into their new leader/employee relationship. Although the employee was new to his position and new to the job, prior personal knowledge gave the leader patience with the onboarding process of the new employee:

> "Prior to the shutdown, I had a sit down with that employee and kind of said, from a developmental perspective, this is gonna be tough. So, I gave them some tasks that did not require as much handholding, but also were educational to products, procedures, solutions, people, right...'You're literally just going to dive into this one thing and become an expert in it'…I gave them hardware to take home and all that kind of stuff. So then, I tried to have more regular check-ins as that was occurring, and was very, very explicit on tasking, because I wasn't able to obviously observe the employee regularly…"

This leader knew the employee was not going to be able to learn the skills at the level needed, due to the inability to onboard the person the way he would have liked. Therefore, the leader had no reaction to deviance because he knew the situation was not caused by the employee, and he knew the employee from a previously positive relationship, thereby appearing to mitigate any deviance as to expected skills or performance.

Another leader's employee, although having worked for her for 14 years and knowing him for 15 years, changed roles and responsibilities just prior to Covid-19. The employee stepped into a job with more strategic responsibility, specifically handling technology issues for the entire organization:

> "Right as COVID hit…his concern initially was that he did not have the skills. And what we all knew, as much as our former, as much as his predecessor was beloved, he would not have had the skills to get us through COVID or take on the other activities and projects for the community. He just wouldn't have…It was a case of, we found out on Friday that we were closed…and this individual jumped, teaching teachers how to do online teaching and all of that kind of thing. I don't, I can't imagine what it would have looked like if we hadn't had that, that experience. I think it drew us all together, and it helped this individual find his footing."

This leader had a positive reaction to the employee's societally deviant behavior, his knowledge and skills to handle an event no one else could, within the organization at the beginning of the pandemic. In addition, her personal knowledge of the employee, as well as his predecessor, solidified how extraordinarily deviant this employee's actions were, in a positive way. This event 'drew us all together,' and created what the leader called (and labeled) a new 'Right-hand Man,' after the loss of the previous employee.

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Leaders Introduced to Their Employee During Covid-19. Leaders who were

introduced to their employee during Covid, either as the new leader to the organization,

or hiring a new employee, could only rely on virtual or task performances observed by

the employee. Regardless of whether the leader knew the person before Covid-19,

perceived work ethic, communication, and attention to detail became more noticeable

than when leaders were exposed to their employees in the office.

> "Well, the COVID environment, because we were on alternating schedules,
> because of the work I do, I have to be there in the vault to do it. I can't do
> everything from home…so it was that missed communication, that face-to-face
> communication, that I think hindered that relationship, being able to still get the
> data I needed. But I think without that day-to-day guidance, you know there were
> a lot of things missed. So, it was frustrating to say the least."

Initially the leader attributed any deviant behavior to COVID. However, as time

progressed, and work deadlines were being missed, the lack of timely communication and

response to requests to complete tasks created a reaction due to the social context of the

necessity of working in a vault. They were not able to communicate with one another as

needed, and barriers were created working virtually or in the hybrid environment. The

leader felt that much of their frustration could have been mitigated through small, non-

work-related interactions, since when they are in-person, they sit back-to-back to one

another. However, the only evidence available to the leader to understand the employee

was work performance and completion of tasks. This makes the leader open to potential

leader labeling of the employee.

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Return to In-Person. Four of the twelve leaders worked in organizations that relied on quickly returning to in-person services (i.e., education, medical). Environmental barriers to protect the spread of the disease, per federal, state, and local guidance determined what protections needed to be emplaced in order to return to in-person work environments. In addition, masks and distancing measure made it more difficult to read physical and facial cues when collaborating in the workplace.

Perception of Possible Deviance In-Person (Relationship Performance). Leaders who returned quickly to an in-person work environment found some challenges interacting with others in the workplace due to Covid-protection barriers like mask requirements, closed office doors ("It's not as friendly an environment."), lack of dining options, percentage of workforce in and out (lack of overlap of employees), and concern for civility due to the politicization of Covid prevention practices and response in the United States.

> "…we probably interact less, like, just in the workplace in general. It's not as friendly an environment. Because we all wear masks now. It's not super comfortable talking when you're wearing a mask…Everybody basically just hides in their office…A lot of us keep our door closed or just opened a crack, because we don't wear masks in the office…it's almost a courtesy thing where you just sort of close your door most of the way…there's less interactions. It's just not as open an environment as it used to be…a lot of our meetings are virtual…We don't eat together anymore."

Reactions and non-reactions within the labeling process depend upon social context. Not only had this environment affected this leader's interactions with peers, but it also has affected their interaction with their employee. They admit that an act they

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would normally not consider negatively deviant becomes deviant when you have less

interactions from which to evaluate a person:

> "…it used to be that my door was open, so every time she walked up and down the hall, we'd interact a little bit…there are days, if we don't have all these procedures, I don't even see her anymore…usually she checks in with me before she leaves.
>
> *[Later in the interview…]*
> I would actually say before COVID, when I was interacting multiple times a day with her, I probably would have had less negative feelings about a negative experience with her. You know, like if she did something wrong, I'd probably be more likely to just let it go. Whereas now, when that's the only experience you have with her during the day, you're more likely to be a little bit more annoyed by it, just because 90% of your interactions during, the data just from the interactions, and one of them is sort of a professional interaction that they don't get quite right, you're probably more likely to let it go, than if the only time to see them during the day is during this thing that they just messed up. So, I mean, I think that's probably true."

Additional effects for those leaders who had to return quickly, to an in-person

environment, due to the nature of their organization's mission (i.e., education), found a

weariness in civility in some situations, particularly with language and rhetoric. Societal

norms were shifting, when dealing with the political landscape, as to the nature of Covid-

19 and what was considered appropriate responses to the pandemic in some workplaces,

particularly for those in the industry of educating children:

> "I think people, you started out the whole meeting with civility, I mean, I think people are struggling with that. You know, overall, I think last year was weirdly a better year. And there was more civility last year. I think people were just ecstatic that school was open and that *[city name]* did a nice job keeping it open…And this year, there's just less civility. People are kind of done with the pandemic…"

One leader shared an incident in which two employees had a verbal altercation

within the school environment, one of which was the employee on which the leader had

reported for the week. However, the leader understood the social context of the possible

deviance, had seen positive deviance in the past (quick response to moving material for

students online), and although the leader perceived the altercation as negatively deviant,

they chose not to have a reaction that required negotiation (Knutsson, 1977). The

example below provides the evidence:

> "There was a verbal altercation…it centers around the culture that we're living in
> and all the protocols and things connected with COVID. One individual feels a
> certain way and the other individual feels another way…I was literally between
> them…they were verbally very angry, very upset. It was just, it was not a good
> spot… they both realized that they can't agree…this topic can't come up again
> between them because of the very strong feelings on both sides. And it was just, it
> was, it was not good. It was not…That individual was so upset. I mean, I, I kept
> him later to make sure he was okay, because he was just…He's not an individual
> that I would say…have a temper that I've seen, but I saw a temper that day, and I
> saw real anger. And it was being directed right back at him from the other
> individual. And it was like right there. So, it has been a difficult two and a half
> years. And I know, personally, that he does not agree with everything that we
> have chosen to do in regard to that, but he has followed it. He's implemented it.
> He's lived by it. But that person just knew how to push his buttons. And he was to
> the point that he said perhaps he might have to resign. That he just felt that
> strongly.
>
> *[When asked whether this would have occurred prior to the pandemic…]*
> No, I think two and a half years ago, everyone had a different take, a different
> feeling, a different sense. I think people were hopeful that if we followed
> protocols, and we did this and that we would be moving on. And so, but yes, I
> really, truly feel like, I don't want to use the word violence, but the depth of his
> emotions, I think took him off guard. It took me off guard. I know it took the
> other person off guard, …But when he came in on the following workday, he
> apologized. And he said, that was not appropriate. I should not have reacted that
> way. I said, I understand. This is a topic that we may not agree on. But I
> understand. And we left it at that."

These stories all point to the conclusion that whether virtual, hybrid, or in person, the Covid-19 pandemic affected the way in which people communicate with one another. The pandemic also changed societal perceptions of possible deviance. This meant that leaders reframed many of their own perceptions of employee behaviors. Many of the leaders who were interviewed attributed potential negatively deviant behaviors to Covid-19 and the extraordinary situation the pandemic produced. This reality created an important boundary on the results and how labeling will look different. Given the reality of the pandemic, when or if the effects are ever eradicated, the Center for Disease Control has made it clear that this is the new normal and there will be constant long-term effects as this research concludes in the third year of the pandemic (Steenhuysen, 2022).

Findings on Research Question 2 (RQ2)

What Labels Do Leaders Assign Employees Within an Organization?

Phase 1 of the study could only partially provide data to answer RQ2. The interviews in Phase 2 filled in gaps as to specific labels that were known and used, and labels that may have been unknowingly used by the leader. *Theme 1: Labels* provided evidence that leaders assigned two distinct types of labels to employees within an organization. The labels are either job- or person-related. When leaders assign potential labels to employees, the labels tend to be based on variant characteristics (i.e., emotions, traits, behaviors) or non-role specific behaviors (actions or tasks related performance expectations).

Findings on Research Question 3 (RQ3)

What Contextual Factors (i.e., Task, Relational) Influence the Leader Labeling

Process?

       Theme 1: Labels and *Theme 2: COVID* answered RQ3. The difficulty in

answering this research question lay in examining this question without considering the

effects of Covid-19. Leader labeling that reflected task-related deviances were more

inclined to describe professionalism and skills that deviated positively or negatively from

the norm of job expectations. However, with the shutting down of the American

workforce and the return to work at different levels, using new modes, and new

environments, job expectations shifted in many ways. Leader labeling that reflected

relationship-related deviances were more likely used to describe extreme traits,

behaviors, and emotions that the leader did or did not value.

Additional Findings

       As a final question during the Diary Study, leaders were asked to share any

insights they garnered about themselves, their interactions with their employee, or the

process of the diary study over the five days of the exercise. The purpose of this question

was two-fold. The first was to review the material that might lead to additional context

should the leader refer to the employee by a label. The second was to provide the leader

an opportunity for reflection, a practice that effective positive leaders do on a regular

basis.

Leader Reflections

As a group, the leaders felt the diary study was a positive experience. For some,

they found the study an opportunity to focus on one individual for the week; for others,

they used the study as an opportunity to learn and grow. Quite a few wrote how grateful

they were for their employee and wished they acknowledged them more.

"I appreciate my employee."

"Not sure. I guess I like my team."

"I tend to think about and focus on characteristics that are challenging yet these are far outweighed by the positive."

"I should provide more feedback to them of things I observe and let them know how much I appreciate their work."

"I reflected more on the relationship and valued their contributions to our success."

"I am not recognizing my employees as much as I thought I was."

"How much this colleague handles the little details for the larger mission we are on with many others."

"Realized how lucky I am to have the employees I have to work with and under my supervision. Am incredibly fortunate to have motivated, hardworking, and dedicated employees to the mission of our company."

"This study definitely made me think about how I value my teammates. I enjoyed reflecting on the day through the study."

Of interest are comments in which leaders did not realize they were not spending

as much time with the employee as they thought they were. Other interesting insights

were the two leaders who mentioned that their interactions were on "autopilot" or "dull

and routine." Meanwhile, one leader became very aware that face-to-face interaction

worked best for both them and their employee.

> "This was a good experience to focus on 1 individual, direct-report for me and to analyze his performance and my interaction with him."

> "I chose this employee carefully, she's one of my newest direct reports, and works closely for me…she would probably like to hear the five words I use to describe her. I think I share often, with her…but it's a great reminder…"

> "From writing down the actions, I observed of the employee each day, I realized that I do not spend as much time on the warehouse floor engaging with the employees as I would have guessed."

> "It was interesting to evaluate his personality on a daily basis and to see how it shifted under different circumstances."

> "Face to face interaction is often better with this person."

> "This exercise required me to reflect more on my interactions with my team. While it didn't change my behavior, I was much more in tune to what I was observing and how I might better provide feedback and support."

> "I did become more mindful of our interactions after taking the 1st days survey. We have worked together for a while, our interactions had been on autopilot."

> "While IT is very chaotic, [our] interactions are dull and routine."

There were three leaders who stated they did not garner any insights from the

study. One said, "I was puzzled by the focus of this research." However, there were

others who felt the lessons they learned about themselves, and their employee, changed

the way they operated or planned to operate in the future. The most transformative

examples follow:

> "Made me think about my daily interaction and to be more aware or present.

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I started duplicating the study in my head for other employees with whom I regularly interact and could see certain characteristics prevalent across the organization or with certain individuals."

"…with our interaction only being virtual due to physical location, I feel like I should have done a better job at finding out what is going on in his life in addition to all the work-specific items we discuss. This would be more how I would interact with people I physically work with. I take pride in engaging with my employees on a more personal level (as they dictate), and this made me realize that I engage in a less personal way with my virtual employees."

"This exercise caused me to pause and reflect on my interactions with this employee. I found myself being mindful of how I was behaving in relation to how she was behaving."

"…Knew but saw each day how we're only working and talking virtually. This would have been the opposite 2 years ago when we were in the office. Thought it was interesting how they changed, but I was keeping my interaction consistent and positive, no matter what was happening in my day. Thank you for the opportunity!"

The most illuminating reflection of all of the participants, though, was from one of the leaders chosen as an interviewee, "I realized answering these questions, that I went from detailing/identifying this individual on a professional level in the first couple of days to recognizing his accomplishments and him from a personal level…I liked that!" This event was the key to the research. Identifying the leader's perceptual frame and understanding at what point the leader labeling process is triggered. In this case, the study forced the leader to process what was happening, and they began to individuate, once they recognized what they were doing.

During the follow-up interview, the leader addressed this action further. They had addressed the professional titles and roles on the first day, when they realized the same question would be asked all five days, they stated,

> "Uh oh, now I've got to rethink…And when I found myself, interestingly enough, looking at beyond what he does at work and looking at him as an individual, as a young man. So, I think that's probably why it just kind of veered off, because I'd already covered his professionalism, his tasks, things I noted about the work, in that relationship. So now I moved beyond to how he and I, personal relationship, interact as two human beings and not an overseer of his work.
>
> *Did that surprise you?*
> It did, it really did. And I loved it. But what I loved about it was now recognizing him as a person, not just a co-worker."

A Revisit of the Findings on Research Question 4 (RQ4)

Do Positive Leaders Show Signs of Higher Cognitive Complexity?

Although there was evidence in Phase 1 that leaders showed signs of higher cognitive complexity, when readjusting the positive leader variable to be reconceptualized to "effective" positive leader. There did not seem to be any supporting evidence of positive leaders exhibiting higher cognitive complexity in Phase 2 of the study. However, once the leaders provided context to some of their descriptors used during the diary study, and what actions they took when confronted with employee behavior, some of their positivity scores for their words and their Positive Leader Self-Assessment scores, might have resulted in a different outcome. As an example, the word "strategic" was classified as positive in the task sort, but one of the interviewees meant the descriptor to reflect negatively upon their employee. Additionally, one of the

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questions in the Positive Leader Self-Assessment is "as a leader, to what extent do you

make gratitude visits, and the distribution of gratitude notes a daily practice?" (See

Appendix B, Q20, #6). One of the leaders had marked "never;" however, he made sure

to thank her at the end of every day for her work (A048).

Summary

This chapter presented the results from the Eligibility, Demographic, and Leader

Self-assessment Questionnaire (EDSQ) (Phase 1a); Phase 1b, the Diary Study; Phase 2,

the Interview; and the integration of both phases. Findings were presented in four

sections that corresponded with the various phases of the study. As is standard practice

for an explanatory sequential mixed-method design, the quantitative results of the first

phase of the study built on the second, qualitative phase of the study (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018; Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2008). Hence, the findings for the various

research questions were spread throughout the chapter dependent upon which phase

supported the specific RQ's findings. Research Questions 1 (RQ1) was supported by data

from the first phase of the study, in that leaders described their employees using positive

descriptors and labels about 77% of the time. RQ2 was supported by both Phase 1 and

Phase 2 data. Leaders assigned their employees either job-or work-related labels based on

the employee's title or job description 49% of the time. Regardless of type of label,

leaders tended to use positive or neutral labels 94% of the time. Phase 2 of the study

supported RQ3, in that the contextual factors that influenced leader labeling were related

to more task-related deviances. However, the contextual factors were difficult to separate

from the effect of Covid-19 on the workforce. Both phases provided support to RQ4, in that once Positive Leader was reframed to Effective Positive Leader (PLSA Score ≥ 4), the results indicated that effective positive leaders have a higher cognitive complexity. Lastly, RQ5 was supported by both phases, in that Effective Positive Leaders create more positive descriptors and labels. Additional findings in Phase 2 indicated that Covid-19 impacted daily communications and interactions between leaders and their employees which will be further discussed in Chapter 5. In addition, Chapter 5 presents a detailed discussion of the results, provides recommendations for future research, and implications for leaders and leader developers.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the leader's perceptual frame, through examining and exploring the leader's perception of employees, and any triggers that did or did not lead to leader labeling of employees. The act of labeling typically captures negative deviance and the stigmas associated with it. Due to their formal role within the organization, leaders are expected to maintain and enforce the rules of their organization. Yet, leaders are also expected to inspire and be transformative, and some labels may encourage healthy and flourishing opportunities for the organization and the individuals within. Particularly important was to determine which employee actions are perceived as triggers within the leader's own perceptual frame. Therefore, this study offered an opportunity to consider how leaders may positively use labels, providing insights into what types of positive deviance initiate the labeling process. The researcher used an explanatory mixed method approach to address the following five research questions:

> **RQ1:** *How do leaders describe their employees in their daily organizational life?*
>
> **RQ2:** *What labels do leaders assign employees within an organization?*
>
> **RQ3:** *What contextual factors (i.e., task, relational) influence the leader labeling process?*
>
> **RQ4:** *Do positive leaders show signs of higher cognitive complexity?*
>
> **RQ5:** *Do positive leaders assign more positive descriptors to their employees within an organization?*

The researcher developed a conceptual framework to map and focus data collection and analysis (see Figure 1.3). These assumptions were garnered through theories and key concepts within the literature: labeling within organizations, positive organizational scholarship, positive deviance, and leadership. An integration across these various fields led to an innovative perspective when examining leadership within the organization.

Prior to conducting the formal data collection process, the researcher provided willing leader participants with an eligibility questionnaire ($n = 62$) to determine whether they met specific criteria to take part in the study. Once individuals were determined to be eligible to participate, the study was conducted in two phases. The first phase gathered data from formal leaders through a daily questionnaire ($n = 46$). A distinct set of eligible leaders, who did not participate in the diary study, were invited to assist in task sorting exercises ($n = 14$). The researcher conducted a variety of descriptive statistics to determine initial demographics and search for patterns and trends regarding descriptors and labels among the leaders. The statistical analysis portion of the data occurred within the statistical software package, SPSS. The results from this phase informed the types of leaders to be selected for the qualitative phase of the project.

The second phase consisted of follow up interviews with selected leaders from the diary study ($n = 12$). The qualitative interview data helped the researcher explain the labeling and descriptor word choices, as well as confusing, contradictory, or unusual survey responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The qualitative data was examined

through the software package, NVivo. In this final chapter, the researcher will address the contributions from this study, the ways in which leaders and those who develop leaders can apply the findings, any limitations found in the study, the connections to previous research within the literature, and the implications for future research.

Discussion

It would be remiss not to state an important aspect of this research upfront. During the development and conduct of this study, the global Covid-19 pandemic effectively forced many organizations to change the way they operated. For periods of time, many leaders and employees were working virtually from home or other locations. Some leaders and employees were unfamiliar with the necessary hardware and software to conduct daily organizational processes off-site, depending on the type of organization and the technology available to the individual employees within the organization. Others were forced to change on-site practices to continue their mission, if their mission required continued in person service. Because of this event, the researcher was unable to interview participants whose environments and practices were not changed in some part due to the pandemic, since the pandemic was ongoing during the data collection stage of this process through the completion of this study.

However, this unusual situation, a global event, and its impact on all society, provided an excellent opportunity to examine leaders during a mass change event. This event, nevertheless, led to some interesting findings, that may have taken longer to glean from leaders, but because of the unusual situation, leaders appeared more aware of some

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of their interactions with their employees. For those who had slowly lost touch with their employee, participating in the study focused leader attention back on the employee. If employees were continuing to perform to standard in the online environment, leaders felt no need to check in frequently, whereas, when leaders were in person, pre-pandemic day-to-day movements in the office or organizational environment would bring leaders and employees into contact, both regularly and irregularly, whether tasks were completed to standard or not. This activity between leaders and followers is an important process when understanding how leaders generated labels and perceived their employees during the time of the research.

The most important contribution of this research is the acknowledgement that leader labeling does occur within the organization. However, the majority of labels are intentional labels related to job titles and/or work-related nouns that reflect an individual's formal or assigned position. These were standard, specific labels that were used across industries for the same type of job (e.g., welder, project manager, admin) to categorize employees and is supported by literature (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995, 1997). However, a subset of labels that leaders generated were related to the individual person as triggered by a perceived deviant action or event. The contextual factors that influenced the leader's perceptual frame, and led to triggering labels, appeared to be tied to some extent to what the leader valued, in that whether the leader valued task completion, growing a relationship, perhaps even more personal values related to whether the behavior exhibited was behavior the leader expected of that employee, within the

workplace. Due to COVID, personality-driven employee behaviors, that would often

trigger the labeling process, were less evident when both parties were virtual, and instead,

the leader's focused more towards task- and performance-related perceived deviances.

To evaluate findings, RQ1 was addressed through analyzing the descriptive words

leaders used during the diary study. RQ2 was partially addressed through analyzing the

daily descriptive words generated from the diary study; further questioning during the

interview process proved useful to understanding types of labels and when the labels

were used. RQ3 was addressed through examining interview responses. RQ4 relied on

descriptive words, uniqueness of words, and personal constructs as evidenced in the daily

explanation of leaders' observed behaviors of their employees. Leaders' reflections on

Day 5 of the diary study, as well as final opportunities for reflection at the end of the

interviews offered additional insight. Lastly, RQ5 was addressed in Phase 1 of the study

and although the researcher did not find a relationship between positive leaders and

positive descriptors, the researcher did find a significant difference between leaders

classified as effective positive leaders (PLSA ≥ 4) and their use of positive descriptors

(AWS ≥ +0.33). However, further questioning in the interviews revealed that some words

were provided a positivity score during the task sort that did not reflect the context in

which the leader themselves defined or used that word. The research questions are

addressed more in depth below.

RQ1: How Do Leaders Describe Their Employees in Their Daily Organizational

Life?

Leaders in the study described their employees positively in their daily organizational life 77% of the time, when providing descriptive words about their employee. To see the full list of words/phrases, see Appendix D.

RQ2: What Labels Do Leaders Assign Employees Within an Organization?

Of the 420 unique words the leaders used in the diary study, 30% (n = 124 words) were nouns, which are the semantic foundation of labels. When leaders were directly asked whether they were aware of labels within their organization and what labels they had heard around them in the organization, used in the past, or created for their own use, there was a disconnect regarding the leaders' self-awareness of their own labeling of an employee. About 80% of the leaders stated they did not label their employee during the week; however, about 70% of the leaders had. About 57% of the leaders used two or less labels during the 5 days.

Within the diary study, 49% (n = 67) of the potential labels leaders ascribed to their employees were job- or work-related based on duty position or title (e.g., admin, associate, computer tech, etc.). In addition, 54% (n = 73) of the labels had a positivity score $\geq$ +0.33, whereas only 6% (n = 8) of the labels were $\leq$ -0.33, indicating that when leaders did use nouns or potential labels, these words were more positive.

The interview results revealed that leaders assigned two distinct types of labels to employees within an organization. The labels were either job-related or person-related. When leaders assigned labels to employees, the labels tended to be based on variant

characteristics (person-related) or non-role specific (job-related) behaviors exhibited as perceived by the leader.

RQ3: What Contextual Factors (i.e., Task, Relational) Influence the Leader Labeling Process?

The effects of Covid-19 provided a challenge when examining what contextual factors influence the leader labeling process, as it could not be answered without considering the effects of Covid-19 itself. Leader labeling that reflected task-related deviances were more inclined to describe professionalism and skills that deviated positively or negatively from the norm of job expectations. However, with the shutting down of the American workforce and the return to work at different levels, using new modes, and new environments, job expectations shifted in many ways. Leader labeling that reflected relationship-related deviances were more likely to be used to describe extreme traits, behaviors, and emotions that the leader did or did not value.

RQ4: Do Positive Leaders Show Signs of Higher Cognitive Complexity?

The researcher conceptualized a positive leader through the use of the PLSA, as the assessment addresses the leader's own awareness of leader behaviors in which positive leaders are known to behave. The researcher explored whether a relationship existed between the leaders' PLSA scores and the number of labels the leader used during the diary study, since the act of labeling implies a lack of individuation and lower cognitive complexity (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). There was no relationship between PLSA scores, and number of labels used by leaders. The researcher then conceptualized

cognitive complexity dependent upon the number of unique descriptor words the leaders used during the diary study (to simulate personal constructs) (Crockett, 1965). There was no relationship evident between positive leaders and higher cognitive complexity.

One leader used the same five words each day to describe their employee, of which three of the words were noun-like, which signals their potential to become labels. This consistent and/or similar use of words over time, indicated a lack of cognitive complexity providing very few personal constructs about the employee. The more number of personal constructs, the more cognitively complex the leader (Adams-Webber, 2001; Crockett, 1965). Follow-up interviews afforded an opportunity for more data collection in Phase 2 of the study.

There was no initial evidence from the interviews to indicate that positive leaders showed signs of higher cognitive complexity. However, during the interviews, leaders provided context to some of their descriptors and potential labels they reported during the diary study. These responses in the interviews allowed the leader to expand upon actions they took, or reactions they had, when perceiving employee behavior. As such, some of the leader actions did not match with the responses of their PLSA scores. Changing these scores to reflect these actions/reactions might result in a different score. This led the researcher to reconceptualize Positive Leader into two groups, Effective Positive Leaders (PLSA ≥ 4) and all others. Different results materialized that indicated that Effective Positive Leaders use more unique words, indicating a higher cognitive complexity.

RQ5: Do Positive Leaders Assign More Positive Descriptors to Their Employees Within an Organization?

There was no significant correlation between PLSA scores, and the number of positive employee descriptors or Average Word Score (AWS). However, when the population was divided into two groups, Effective Positive Leaders (PLSA ≥ 4) and all others, as well as redefining what score constituted positive descriptors (positivity score (AWS) ≥ +0.33), a different result occurred. These results indicated that Effective Positive Leaders used more positive descriptors than those leaders who did not assess themselves as such. Additionally, interview results supported that some descriptors may have been mis-scored due to context. Some words were assigned a score below zero (e.g., sharp, flirtatious, busy) and the leaders who used those words perceived them as neutral or positive. Meanwhile other words were assigned a score above zero (e.g., apologetic, strategic) and the leaders who used those words perceived them as negative in the context of describing their employee.

Additional Findings

As a final question on the last day of the Diary Study, leaders were asked to share any insights they garnered about themselves, their interactions with their employee, or the process of the diary study. The purpose of this question was two-fold. The first was to explore whether the leader referred to the employee by a label, since the reflection was an open response answer. The second was to provide the leader a space for an immediate opportunity for reflection, a practice that effective positive leaders conduct regularly.

As a group, the leaders felt the diary study was a positive experience. Some found the study to be an opportunity to focus on one individual for the week; for others, they used the study as an opportunity to learn and grow as leaders. Quite a few wrote how grateful they were for their employee and realized they did not acknowledge their employee's achievements as much as they wished, a behavior attributed to positive leadership.

Some leaders realized they were not spending as much time with the employee as they thought they were. Two leaders mentioned that their interactions were on "autopilot" or "dull and routine." Meanwhile, one leader became very aware that face-to-face interaction worked best for both he and his employee.

Three leaders stated they did not garner any insights from the study. Interestingly, these three leaders had some of the lowest scores on their PLSA (2.75, 3.33, and 2.58) as well as the fewest personal constructs when describing their employee (5, 7, and 8). This would imply that perhaps a relationship between PLSA and Cognitive Complexity does exist when we include the ability to self-reflect following a change in routine.

However, there were others who felt the lessons they learned about themselves, and their employee, changed the way they operated or plan to operate in the future. In fact, the most illuminating reflection of all the participants, was from one of the leaders chosen as an interviewee. This leader recognized a shift in how they viewed the employee over the one-week study. The leader went from seeing the employee as just another employee who they oversaw to a more personal relationship as "two human

beings…recognizing him as a person, not just a co-worker." Another leader found they

were becoming more mindful of their own behavior in response to their employee's

behavior. And another leader began finding themself replicating the study in their head

with their other employees to understand interactions better. These three results were key

to this research in which the research accessed certain processes within the leader's

perceptual frame and its various stages in leading to triggers within the leader labeling

process. In this case, the study forced the leaders to process what was happening, and

they began to individuate once they *recognized* their responses to their employee's

behaviors.

Implications and Recommendations

This research, rather than follow through and examine the entire labeling process,

focused on the elements of Primary Deviance within the labeling process and the leader-

as-audience of an employee. In addition, this research delved into the perceptual frame of

the leader and explored the complexities that determined whether a leader labeled a

behavior as deviant or not. As a review, Figure 5.1 shows the area of interest for this

study circled. This dissertation added to the literature by addressing both the labels that a

leader uses, as well as the context, task or relational performance, within which the leader

formulates those labels. Covid-19 organizational response and reactions accentuated or

accelerated the contexts that already existed except in a few situations (i.e., improved

work relationship of people in geographical distance and aided starting a new position of

an employee's personality or physical behavior might be negatively percieved within an in-person environment).

Figure 5.1

Stages within the Labeling Process with Area of Interest Circled
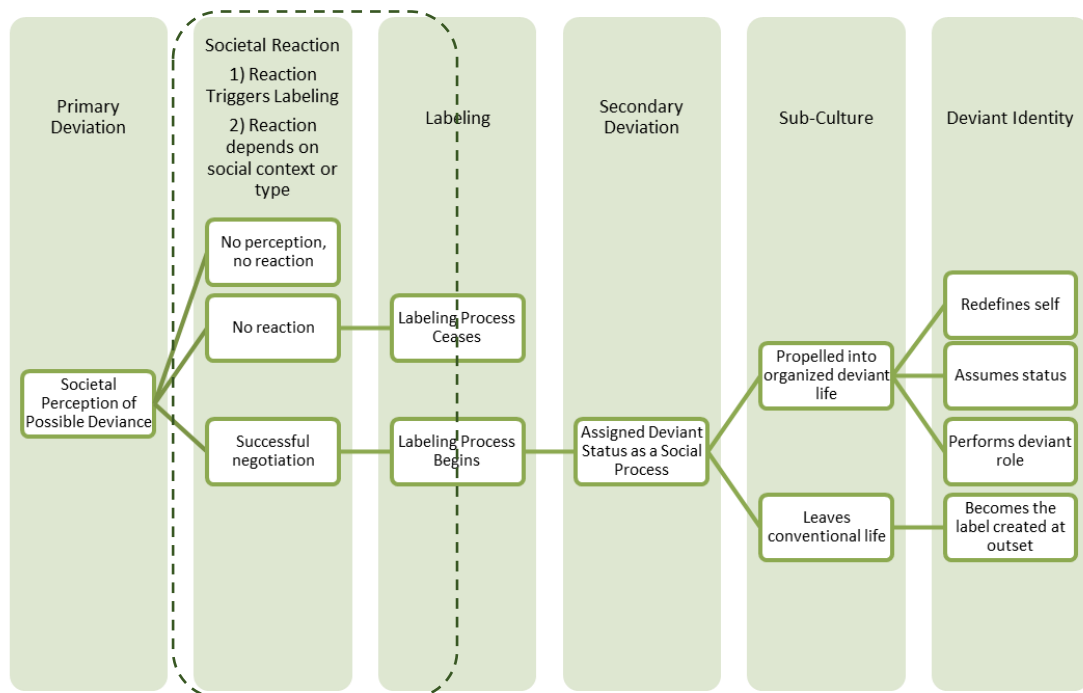
Labeling research tends to investigate perceived behavior and its classification as negatively deviant (Barmaki, 2019; Becker, 1963; Orcutt, 1983; Tannenbaum, 1938; Zimbardo, 2007) and how those in power use labels for social control (Erikson, 1962; Tannenbaum, 1938). In addition, there is little to no literature which examines the perceptual frame of the leader as they work through the audience reaction process of leader labeling, nor the contextual factors of the leader labeling of employees by perceived positively or negatively deviant acts. This research explored labeling utilizing

assumptions and definitions associated with positive deviance (Spreitzer et al., 2021; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003, 2004) and positive organizational scholarship (Cameron & Dutton, 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012) to examine leader labeling more thoroughly.

Some researchers have used the lens of labeling to examine organizational identity and sense making (Alcadipani, 2018; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995, 1997), specifically around the understanding of organizing and communicating experience throughout an organization. However, much of the research in organizations at the individual or micro level are directed towards service encounters or interactions and behaviors in which individuals within the organization are interacting with those outside the organization as representatives of the organization. This research examined the formally assigned leader as an organizational representative in addition to existing within a dyadic relationship with the person whom they supervise. As such, organizational labels are created based on situational criteria, such as role or task (or job-related) labels, that organizations use to swiftly make sense of individual positioning within the organization (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). No study, of which the researcher was aware, examined non-role or non-task specific labels that may or may not have been related to or within the workplace.

This study found that task and role labels were indeed found to be the primary labels of which leaders were most aware; however, leaders were less aware of the more person-related leader labeling of employees in their organization for which they were responsible. This is significant to practitioners, in that labeling processes are known to

create conflict within groups between the perceiver (i.e., the leader) and the social object (i.e., the employee) (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This conflict also occurs at the individual level. Therefore, the exploration of interactions, symbolic or otherwise, and the understanding of meaning-making and discernment become intrinsically linked to the labeling process. This research looked for cognitive-based contextual factors because labeling occurs as a function of cognition, as we make sense of what we know (Macrae & Quadflieg, 2010). However, there was some indication in the interviews that emotions and feelings should be further investigated.

Contrary to previous research, because this research addressed leader labels as well as behaviors that may be considered positively deviant, this study added to current positive leadership literature. The research focus fell on the leader as audience and the analysis was at the microlevel, because the triggers that start the leader labeling process occur within the cognitive frame and perception of the leader. To date, the researcher is unaware of any literature which examined the dissonance between positive leader behaviors and labeling. In that, if labeling occurs due to a lack of individuation or a lack of cognitive complexity, and positive leader behaviors consist of behaviors that encourage individuation and cognitive complexity, then positive leaders would not show evidence of labeling. However, positive leader behaviors also consist of behaviors that focus energies towards creating environments of flourishing and excellence (Ramdas & Patrick, 2019), in which positive leaders actively seek out positively deviant behavior and performance (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003, 2004). This means that positive leaders'

perceptual frames are both primed for labeling positive deviance, but also primed to not label negative deviance. This study indeed showed there was no relationship between positive leaders and labeling. However, there seemed to be some relationship between "effective" positive leaders, as defined by Cameron (2012), and positive employee descriptors and labels.

Lastly, due to the varied and dyadic nature of relationships between leaders and their employees (van Breukelen et al., 2006), understanding the context of labels may affect the ambiguity of a label (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1997). Preparation prior to events that might trigger labeling to occur, can be adjusted through proactive leader development methods, thereby affecting the way the leader perceives the employee and their behavior (Bolman & Deal, 2006). This study provides such evidence, in that many leaders reflected on the ways in which they were interacting with their employee and changes that occurred due to this awareness.

Limitations

Participants

The participants were initially gathered through the researcher's personal and professional network. Although the researcher attempted to target a variety of levels of leader, the majority of the participants served in the higher echelons within their organizations. In addition, the sample size of participants who completed the quantitative portion of the study was under 50 ($n = 46$). This sample size is adequate for mixed-method and qualitative methods, in that there was intentional choice and criteria

established for these participants. However, as the researcher recruited leaders through her professional and personal network, the sample was an opportunistic convenience sample and may not be as generalizable in the quantitative aspects of the research.

A few participants did not consider emailing with an employee to constitute an interaction. This affected the diary study when they were asked if they had any interaction with an employee that day. Defining what an interaction is would have led to more consistency when reporting on an interaction.

Some leaders may have affected the results of the study depending on whom they chose to report. Recognizing the study was a leader study, some leaders shared that they specifically picked a certain employee with whom they were challenged, to garner insights into their own leader development/actions. One leader fired their employee at the end of the study. The study made them more aware of the lack of fit within the organization faster than if they had just been operating as usual. Others picked new employees and used the study as an exercise to get to know the employee better. For some of the leaders, this variability aided into what is known as the Hawthorne Effect, in that, whenever a simple change is introduced due to studying human beings (i.e., a leader participating in a daily study looking at an employee), other unanticipated changes may also occur (Roethlisberger, 2011).

Data Sources

The duration of the diary study affected some leaders. Depending on the week the diary study was held, some leaders said their employee happened to be on vacation that

week. Others said it was not a typical week due to end of fiscal year requirements or open enrollment for medical plans.

Data Collection

The use of surveys as a means of data collection is often limited by response rate. When research is conducted longitudinally, response rates decrease over time, as respondents become survey weary. To account for these known limitations, the researcher ensured that the questionnaires would only be 5 minutes in duration at the end of the workday. The researcher also sent personal reminders to individual leaders, when they had failed to complete their questionnaire for the day.

However, when distributing the eligibility survey, the researcher became aware quickly that emails on government, and some financial institution, servers were unable to receive the Qualtrics links. This required trying to receive another email address, other than a work email, to send the daily study. A few challenges arose from having to provide a work around. First, the leaders were required to complete the daily 5-minute study between 5:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. each evening. If the leader did not access their non-work email, they would not see the request. The researcher would email a notification or "heads up" email every day after noon, and another one sometime before the close of the questionnaire every evening. Leaders who missed a daily questionnaire said they either received the link at work and happened to have the day off that day, or they were working late and forgot to access their non-work email. The Qualtrics survey platform does not have a current system in place to send one unique personal link to multiple email

accounts for one participant. Having this option would have increased the response daily response rate.

Data Analysis

A limitation with survey or questionnaires conducted online are unanswered questions. The lack of answers, missing data, or incorrect answers can affect the data analysis. One advantage the researcher had was that she had access to and full knowledge of who the participants were. Therefore, if follow-up was necessary to fill in an unanswered question, she was able to do so.

Another challenge was that some of the questions were open-ended. The participants fell into a category known for having challenges with response rates (i.e., very busy). Therefore, some of the leaders might have had more to share but did not have the time to fill in the open-ended questions in the online daily questionnaire. This limitation was evidenced by the researcher when she conducted follow-up interviews with a selection of the diary study participants. Indeed, some of the leaders shared more information about employee behavior verbally, than they did in their writing.

The researcher also created the sorting exercises with clear definitions for the three categories of positive, negative, and neutral. Leaders who participated in the sorting exercise were not the same as the leaders who participated in the diary study. However, the instructions for the exercise included the following phrase: "The following words are sometimes used to describe an employee. Sort the descriptive words into the appropriate box." This phrasing may have biased their categorizing by thinking of their own

employee, rather than a general categorization of terms. In addition, through later interviews, the researcher discovered that the leaders claimed familiarity with the term "positive leader," but few could define the term as it is found in the literature. The researcher did provide a definition for "positive" in the task sort, but words sorted into the positive category may not have been true positive words, as defined by literature. For future studies, it may be useful to provide a small information session regarding the term "positive" before asking the leaders to sort the descriptors.

Secondly, the sort did not require leader participants to sort synonyms together. This lack of depth in analyzing the language created a gap when trying to examine number of personal constructs. Even though there may have been more unique words to indicate more personal constructs, if the words were similar in nature/context, then this fails to indicate a greater number of personal constructs and affected how to rate a leader's cognitive complexity. For example, one diary study participant used the words sharp, insightful, keen, intelligent, clever, and analytical. This leader was classified as having 15 unique words overall, but six of those words are related to intelligence. During this leader's interview, they focused quite extensively on stories in which they saw this employee's intelligence manifest itself. Therefore, if synonyms had been accounted for, the relationship between effective positive leaders and higher cognitively complexity might also change.

Lastly, the researcher was the only one coding data directly into NVivo. Although the researcher used "a priori" coding as determined by the literature, there were some

instances of emerging themes in which the researcher may have been biased in examining the interpretation of interviewee's words.

Future Research

This research was exploratory in nature. Although the theory base was known (i.e., Labeling, Positive Deviance, Positive Leadership), very little research combined all elements of the theories. Labels within organizations are regulated to criteria such as role and rank. This type of label is not created through perception of deviance. They are labels known to all that are simply identifiers within an organization and interchangeable depending upon who is filling the role or rank.

The nature of this research was to identify how leaders described employees, and whether or not the triggering event of when descriptors (adjectives) become labels (nouns) in response to perceived deviance, either positive or negative, could be observed. The diaries provided an opportunity to examine this phenomenon over time and focus on the present tense, rather than rely on a leader's memory. In addition, using the diary study as part of the interview protocol during follow up interviews, made it easier for the leader to reconstruct more accurately the meanings or sentiments behind the descriptors, and by default labels, the leader used to describe the employee on that day. There appeared to be a lack of agreement across task sorts for certain words and lack of agreement within task sort regarding extremes (pos-neg) or (pos-neu-neg). Is this because the leader participating in the task sort was relying on reconstructed memories of their own

knowledge of the word and how they might view it, versus the diary study leader's

context?

A result from the departure of primary analysis of what labels leaders use within

an organization (RQ2) and a foray into what types of labels or descriptors exist within an

organization, yielded a recognition that the far left (i.e., AWS = -1.00; negative) and right

(i.e., AWS = +1.00; positive) limits of the descriptor words were associated with

perceived employee character and competencies. Although outside the intended scope for

this research, this result warrants further investigation in a duplicate study to thoroughly

scrutinize and determine whether leaders knowingly search for competency or character

behaviors when observing their employees. Is the focus of this potential subdivision due

to current employee performance review models and assessment, hence when deviance is

observed these are the skills and traits for which the leader searches when observing an

employee? In addition, when the required knowledge, skills, or abilities change for the

employee due to a promotion or move within the organization, and the leader is still the

direct supervisor, does the leader change their perceptual frame to account for this

change? Last, does the perception of the value of certain character traits change based on

the mission or functional area to which the employee is assigned?

Since this research only focused on the Audience Reaction Process (Orcutt,

1983), another possible research thread lies in the realm of exploring Leader Labeling

and its effects on Secondary Deviance. Of specific interests is examining these processes

as they intersect with inclusivity: How might leader labeling address inclusivity, or

feelings of belongingness and feelings of uniqueness? Labels that are known to the employee might affect how a follower feels about themself and, rather than celebrate uniqueness, remove or diminish what made the person an individual. Labeling creates shortcuts on how one thinks others are behaving and how the person labeled thinks they should behave, thereby creating a gap in diversity of thought and encouraging conformity, which may potentially limit the organization's growth.

Covid-19 restrictions made it difficult to brief communities and organizations on the value of the research, thus the researcher relied on emails and word of mouth to encourage participation. Including more people of color, younger people, people who lead or follow those who are two or three generations different from them, or those new to formal leadership roles would provide additional opportunities to compare groups. In addition, the self-assessment scores were fairly consistent. Including more leaders who self-assessed on the lower end of the scale, as well as conducting a shorter follow-up interview with each participant to determine whether they considered their descriptor words as positive, negative, or neutral, may lead to different results, as the leader provides their own context and rating of their words, rather than use a general task sort.

Another interesting possibility with a larger sample size would be to compare organizations in which employees have longevity compared to the leader versus those organizations in which the leaders may have more longevity than the employees. These organizations have different missions, different purposes, different cultures, norms and ways to address employee needs (e.g., longevity, tenure, products, types of clients or

services). These organizations may also have leaders who view the employee in different ways. Does an employee's status of tenure, union membership, or longevity versus frequent moves and quick turnover increase or decrease the leader's potential of labeling? Would we see organizations similar to military, firefighter, or police organizations use more labels, since they have to rely on each other for physical survival compared to most organizations? There were hints of this during the leader interviews, but undeveloped.

In some ways, Covid-19 provided an opportunity to view a large change event and how that may or may not have effected leader labeling. However, conducting the study prior to a known change event, then replicating the study after the event might offer more clues as to whether leaders attributed employee behaviors to the change event and chose to label or not, or whether effective positive leaders specifically looked for positive deviance from their employees to create positive change during and after the change event. COVID has affected how leaders and employees communicate with one another, as well as their mode of interaction. This reality creates an important boundary that is going to lean into the foreseeable future. This provides a warning of caution to leaders and begs the question: How might leaders replicate relationship building around the "water cooler," during "coffee breaks," and going out for "lunches" that are just as important and organic, but in the virtual/hybrid world to stave off negative leader labeling effects? A deeper examination of purposeful labeling of positive deviance and its relation to a leader's value system versus job role expectations would be worth a further investigation.

Although the research provided evidence of some knowledge of positive leadership, most leaders did not understand the theoretical term of "positive" as used in research and the literature. Conducting an experiment in which one group receives instruction and facilitation while one does not, might lead to some interesting results as to whether the experimental group searches for more positive deviance, thereby creating more positive labels than the control group.

Summary

Studying the labels leaders applied to employees provided an opportunity to understand and ultimately affect labeling through leader self-knowledge. This research used the lens of labeling to contribute to the practice of leader development--and thereby organization development--in three ways: 1) Induced an awareness of what labels leaders assign employees, 2) Explored a leader style self-assessment (e.g., positive leadership behaviors), and 3) Contributed insight for practitioners of leader development programs towards understanding potential effects of a leader's perception and how that might affect their relationship with their employee.

There is still much to explore to understand behavior. Behavior is a range of actions. Behavior can manifest itself physically, the most common observable way. However, behavior also manifests itself in the language used, both verbal and written, they ways in which we communicate, in person or through email, and the choices we make. We see these actions as an image, which may reinforce or change our view/mindset, which is a part of how we construct our reality. We may be able to adjust

or account for proper training and preparation prior to events that might trigger the labeling process through proactive leader development methods, affecting how the leader perceives the follower and their behavior (Bolman & Deal, 2006). If we understand this more specifically, then we can develop training programs that assist the leader in their relationship with the employee.

For example, an unexpected outcome of the study was the formation of a future intervention tool (i.e., the daily questionnaire followed by an interview) to reframe the leader's perceptual frame of the employee to a more positive and flourishing outcome, as well as a more helpful and honoring relationship. Creating more experiences for leaders as the diary study created for them, along with reflection and follow-up interviewing and processing such experiences, will lead to teaching, training, and developmental strategies to encourage positive relationships, leading to better performance outcomes (Mayfield & Mayfield, 1998) and flourishing organizations (Cameron, 2003).

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<center>**Appendix A**</center>

<center>**Participant Consent Form**</center>

<center>Leader Perception</center>

Key Information

Consent is being sought as a voluntary research participant. Please consider the information carefully. We are conducting this study to learn more about leader perceptions of employee behaviors in an organizational setting. If you agree to participate, you will respond to questions in an initial online survey to determine your eligibility for this project (< 5 min.). Once eligibility is determined, you will be asked to fill out a leader self-assessment and questionnaire requesting demographic information (<5 min.). Within a week, you may then be asked to participate in a diary study (< 5min., once a day short survey for 5 x days during one work week). About two weeks following completion of the diary study, you may be asked to participate in a follow-up one-on-one interview (< 60 min).

There are no significant risks to you to participate in this study. There may be some benefits through self-reflection. Your name will not be linked to your survey responses; however, a code will link to your email address in case we wish to interview you more in depth. Please keep in mind that details of your experiences may be unique to you regardless of whether your name is attached. Additionally, we may quote from your interviews or describe your interactions when we share our findings in research

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publications and presentations. In these materials we will make our best efforts to remove anything that may be more identifiable, such as a specific location or organization.

About This Research Study

You are asked to participate in a research study. Scientists do research to answer important questions which might help change or improve the way we do things in the future. This consent form will give you information about the study to help you decide if you want to participate.

This study is being conducted by: Erin B. Lunday, Department of Leadership Studies in Education and Organizations, Wright State University, under the direction of Mindy McNutt, Ph.D., Department of Leadership Studies in Education and Organizations, Wright State University.

Why is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to understand leader perception of interactions with employees. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been identified as a potential leader within your organization. If you agree to participate, you will be one of 50 participants taking part in this study.

Taking Part in this Study is Voluntary

You may choose not to take part in this study or choose to leave the study at any time. Deciding to not participate, or deciding to leave the study later, will not result in any penalty. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the diary study or interview at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study

will not affect your employment (or grades in school if you are also a Wright State student).

What Will Happen During the Study?

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Complete an initial online questionnaire to determine further participation. The diary study will consist of short questionnaires pushed to you through email once a day for 5 working days. Once completed, we will select participants for further one-on-one interviews, either in person or through a video call.

The leadership assessment and demographic questionnaire will collect information about you, such as demographic information, and the diary study will collect information you give as part of the study. Information gathered may be about your race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexuality, and age in survey form or during the interview if deemed necessary.

Participation in the study involves the following time commitment: The first online questionnaire should take no more than 3 minutes. The diary study will take less than five minutes, once a day, for five days (one work week). The interview will take approximately one hour. If you are chosen and volunteer to participate in all aspects of this phase of the study, your total time commitment will be no more than 75 minutes total over a one-month period.

What are the Risks of Taking Part in the Study?

The study involves the following foreseeable risks or discomforts:

There are no known risks associated with this project, other than a potential breach of confidentiality. To mitigate this risk, we will assign codes to emails to protect individual identity. The codes assigned for emails will only be used to conduct follow-up interviews. Once the interviews are complete, email addresses will be deleted from documents.

What Steps Are Being Taken to Reduce Risk of Coronavirus Infection?

The following steps are being taken to address the risk of coronavirus infection, for in-person interviews:

Screening: Researchers and participants who show potential symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath, etc.) will be asked to conduct the interview over a video platform or reschedule in-person interviews.

Physical distancing: Whenever possible, we will maintain at least 6 feet of distance between persons while conducting in-person interviews if both parties are not vaccinated.

Mask/Covering: Researchers will wear, and participants will be advised, to shield their mouth and nose with a cloth face cover or mask during the in-person interview phase, even when maintaining at least 6 feet of distance if not conducted during a video conference and not vaccinated.

Handwashing: Researchers and participants will wash hands before/during the interview or use a hand sanitizer.

Disinfecting materials: When feasible, researchers will clean and disinfect surfaces between participants, using an EPA-registered disinfectant or a bleach solution (5 tablespoons of regular bleach per gallon of water) for hard materials and by laundering soft materials. Disinfected materials will be handled using gloves, paper towel, plastic wrap or storage bags to reduce the chance of re-contamination of materials.

Electronics: N/A.

<u>**What are the Potential Benefits of Taking Part in the Study?**</u>

The benefits to participation are: There are no direct benefits to you. More broadly, this study may help the researchers learn more about interactions between leaders and their employees and may help in creating material which leads to greater leader self-knowledge and improved relationships within the organization.

<u>**Will I Receive my research results?**</u>

No.

<u>**Will I be Paid to Participate in the Research?**</u>

If you participate in the research, you will receive a $5 Amazon Gift Card upon completion of all 5 days of the diary study. You will be given this payment through your email address.

<u>**How Will my Information Be Protected?**</u> The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number/pseudonym. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked

file separate from the research data. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report. However, it may be possible for someone to recognize your particular story/situation/response.

Your data will be stored in a restricted access folder on Dropbox.com. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, all code lists linking names to study numbers will be destroyed. This is expected to occur no later than one year after the collection of the data. Any and all audio/video recording during the interview of the phase (10-15 participants) will be transcribed. The audio/video recording will be kept as part of the study records for two years. This informed consent form will be kept for three years after the study is complete, and then it will be destroyed.

The Primary Investigator will ensure confidentiality to the degree permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the internet. If you have concerns, you should consult the survey provider privacy policy at [https://www.qualtrics.com/privacy-statement/].

It is unlikely, but possible, that others responsible for research oversight may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately (e.g., Wright State Institutional Review Board (IRB)

and research investigators). We will only share your information if law or policy requires us to do so.

Will My Information Be Used for Research in the Future?

Information collected from you may be used for future research studies or shared with other researchers for future research. If this happens, information which could identify you will be removed before any information is shared. Results of this study may be presented at conferences, or published in journals, books, and the popular media.

Who Should I Call with Questions?

If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at [erin.lunday@wright.edu]. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this study, please contact the IRB at (937) 775-4462 or irb-rsp@wright.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information provided in this form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. In consideration of all information provided in this form, I give my consent to participate in this research study. You will be provided with a copy of this form to keep for your records.

*A Waiver of Documentation of Consent (No Signature Line) was granted.***If you agree to participate in this research, please** click "I agree" to continue.

Appendix B

Diary Study Questions

(Questions distributed through Qualtrics)

I. Recruitment Questionnaire (Eligibility)
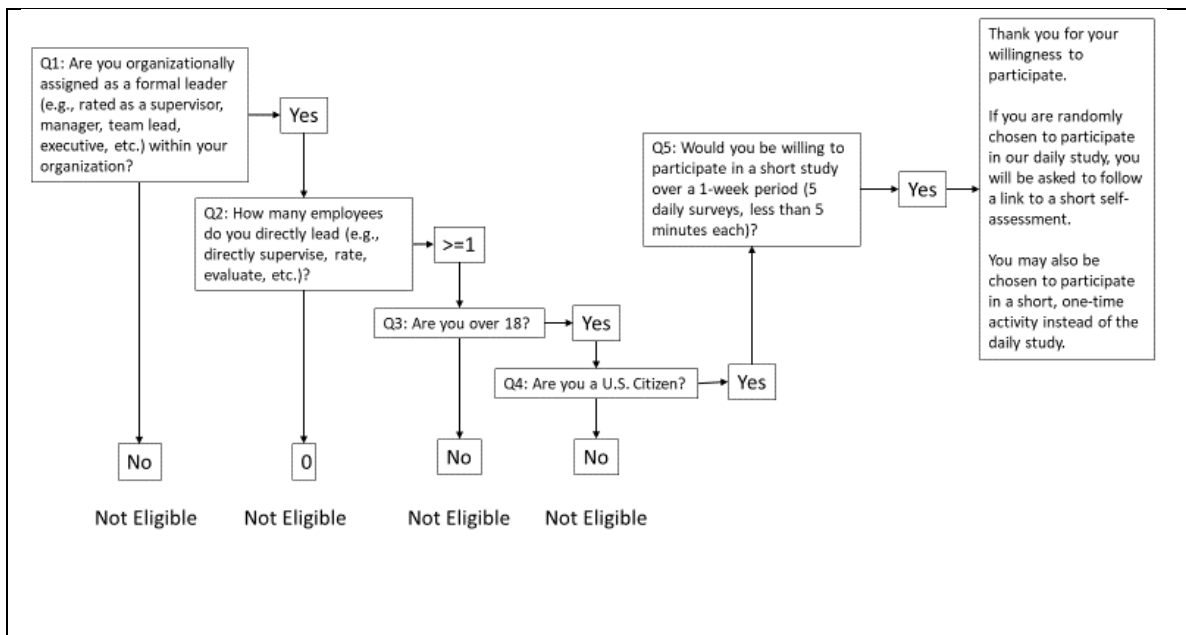
II. Leader Demographic questions and Positive Leader Self-Assessment

1. How many years have you filled the formal role of leader (e.g., rated as a supervisor,

manager, team lead, executive, etc.) throughout your life?

# of years

2. How many years have you filled the formal role of leader within your current

organization?

# of years

4. In what type of organization do you currently serve as a formal leader? (Mark all that apply.)

Non-profit

Not-for-profit

For-profit

Government

Higher Ed

Other

5. Sex at birth

Male

Female

6. What best describes your gender?

Woman

Man

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self-describe _____

7. Do you identify as transgender?

Yes

No

8. Which of the following best describe you?

Please select all that apply:

Asian or Pacific Islander

Black or African American

Hispanic or Latino

Native American or Alaskan Native

White or Caucasian

A race/ethnicity not listed here

9. Age

# of years

10. Select all of the ways in which you have engaged in leadership development:

(Mark All That Apply)

Experience (e.g., Work, Volunteer)

Organizational Leader Development/Training Programs

College/University

11. Time in your current Organization

# of years

12. Average workday/hours

Less than 5 hours a day

5-10 hours a day

More than 10 hours a day

13. Do you work outside the typical workday of 9am to 5pm?

Yes

No

14. Work environment

Online

In-person

Mixture of both

III. Leadership anchoring

15. Positive Leadership Assessment

As a leader, to what extent do you:	1=Never	2=Seldom	3=Sometimes	4=Frequently	5=Always
1. Foster information sharing so that people become aware of a colleagues' difficulties and, therefore can express compassion?					
2. Encourage the public expression of compassion by sponsoring formal events to communicate emotional support?					
3. Demonstrate forgiveness for mistakes and errors rather than punish perpetrators or hold grudges?					
4. Provide support and development as an indicator of forgiveness for individuals who have blundered?					
5. Express gratitude to multiple employees each day?					
6. Make gratitude visits and the distribution of gratitude notes a daily practice?					
7. Ensure that employees have an opportunity to provide emotional, intellectual, or physical support *to* others in addition to receiving support *from* the organization?					
8. Model positive energy yourself, and also recognize and encourage other positive energizers in your organization?					
9. Diagnose your organization's energy networks so that you support and utilize individuals in energy hubs as well as help develop peripheral members?					
10. Provide more feedback to individuals about their strengths rather than their weaknesses?					
11. Spend more time with your strongest performers than with your weakest performers?					
12. Communicate a ratio of approximately five positive messages for every negative message to those with whom you interact?					
13. Provide opportunities for employees to receive best-self feedback and develop best-self portraits?					
14. Consistently distribute notes or cards to your					

employees complimenting their performance?					
15. Provide negative feedback in supportive ways – especially using descriptive rather than evaluative statements-so that the relationship is strengthened?					
16. Focus on the detrimental *behavior* and its consequences, not on the person, when correcting people or providing negative feedback?					
17. Establish, recognize, reward, and maintain accountability for goals that contribute to human benefit so that the effects on other people are obvious?					
18. Emphasize and reinforce the core values of the individuals who work in the organization so that congruence between what the organization accomplishes and what people value is transparent?					
19. Tie the outcomes of the work to an extended time frame so that long-term benefits are clear?					
20. Ensure that contribution goals take precedence over acquisition goals for individuals in the organization?					
21. Clarify for your direct reports the specific set of expectations and responsibilities associated with their roles, as well as the mission, values, and culture of the organization?					
22. Meet at least monthly in one-on-one meetings with your direct reports?					
23. Consistently and continually emphasize continuous improvement and the development of strong interpersonal relationships among your direct reports?					
24. Have a formalized routine in which you can regularly demonstrate positive climates, positive relationships, positive communications, and positive meaning associated with work?					

III. Diary Study (once daily over 1 weeks/5 workdays at the end of the workday)

Daily question prompt:

Think of one employee you directly lead as a formal leader within your organization.

The employee will be the same employee you will need to think of each time you

complete your entry for the next 5 workdays.

1) Describe your employee in 5 words or less.

Employee					

2) My interaction today was: online, in-person, both, or none at all today.

3) Briefly describe what actions or behaviors you observed from this person today?

(Limit to short answer)

4) Did this employee act differently today? Yes or No

If yes, then how?

5) My interaction was: more positive than normal, same as normal, more negative than

normal.

6) Did something unexpected happen to you today?

7) Did something unexpected happen to this employee today?

Demographics of Employee (First Day Only):

-What best describes this Employee's gender?

Woman

Man

Non-Binary

Not Listed

-To your best knowledge, does this Employee identify as transgender?

Yes

No

Not sure

-Which of the following best describes this Employee? (Mark all that apply)

Asian or Pacific Islander

Black or African American

Hispanic or Latino

Native American or Alaskan Native

White or Caucasian

A race/ethnicity not listed here

-Is this Employee

Salaried

Hourly (Full-Time)

Hourly (Part-Time)

-What is this Employee's Age (or perceived age)?

# of years

-How long have you known this Employee?

# of years

-How long have you directly led/supervised this Employee?

# of years

-Do you also interact with this Employee outside of the workplace?

Yes

No

If yes, in what ways?

***Additional questions only on last day of diary study:**

A label is a word or short phrase used to describe a person. A label can become a replacement for the name or identity of the person when you or others think about that person.

-What labels are commonly used within your organization to describe employee behavior? List the three most common.

-Have you created your own labels to describe employee behavior in your organization?

Yes - List the three you use the most.

No

-Have you ever used any specific labels for the Employee you thought of when conducting the diary study?

Yes-List them.

No

-Please share any insights you garnered about yourself, your interactions with you employee(s), or the process of the diary over the 5 days of this exercise. (Limit to short answer.)

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Sample:

Pull 10-15 people from the Diary Study.

Interview Guide (Mears, 2009)

Primary Research Question:

What contextual factors (i.e., task, relational) influence the leader labeling process?

Interview

Introduction to the project and expectations

Explain the purpose of the research and how it will be used. Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to assist me with my research. The purpose of this research is to explore leader-employee relationships within organizations. The research uncovered should lead to leader self-knowledge and improved relationships within organizations. This research is conducted to fulfill graduation requirements for a doctorate in education. Should the opportunity arise, I plan to publish my findings.

Tell how I got their name, and why I selected them to participate. I randomly chose your name from the diary study in which you participated.

Explain the interview process, why it is being recorded, what to expect, etc.

Informed consent

Review in detail the Informed Consent Form and ask them to sign a copy. Give them a copy of the form for their records.

Open-ended questions to help frame discussion to follow

Tell me about an employee who works for you.

From resulting narratives and storytelling look for potential <u>reactions</u> of participant to an <u>action of the follower</u>. Observe body language, voice, tone and note. Listen for language associated with labeling (e.g., deviant behavior that triggered labeling).

Tell me more about him or her.

Note anything that would imply behavior, characteristics, or traits. (Deviation from the norm.)

From the resulting narratives and storytelling ask for follow-up questions related to whether those who stood out were for a <u>positive reason</u> or <u>negative reason</u>.

What actions did you observe regarding this person?

This will address perception. Follow up with questions related to context, characteristics of the situation, specific acts performed by the follower, perceived characteristics of the follower, the reactions of the leader/subject.

If you had to describe this person for me in five words or less, how would you describe this person?

Prepare to list words and clarify, if needed.

What led you to choosing these words?

Allows for self-reflection of leader.

Tell me about an observation or interaction you had with this employee this week.

Is the employee the same as the employeesyou thought about during your daily surveys?

If not, tell me about an interaction (or multiple interactions) you have had with the employee from the diary study?

How long have you known this employee?

Would you consider this behavior typical of this employee? Why or why not?

Would your organization consider this behavior to abide by the organization's norms for behavior? Why or why not?

Do you consider this behavior or interaction normal behavior? Why or why not?

Why do you think the employee behaved or interacted with you in this way?

How do you wish this employee would behave?

Final question:

In what way do you feel your interaction with your employee(s) have been affected due to recent COVID-related events?

Appendix D

Descriptive Words with Positivity Scores Following Task Sort

(Words highlighted in gray are nouns and potential labels.)

a lot on his plate	-0.67		classified	0.00		dangerous	-1.00
absent	-1.00		clear communicator	1.00		decisive	0.67
accomplished	0.83		clever	0.50		dedicated	1.00
accountable	0.83		coaches	0.67		deliberate	0.67
active	0.40		coarse	-1.00		delightful	0.80
adapting	0.83		collaborative	1.00		dependable	1.00
adequate	0.00		collaborator	0.83		designers	0.00
admin	0.00		colleague	0.33		detailed	0.80
Afro-American	-0.17		collected	0.67		detail-oriented	1.00
aggressive	-1.00		commander	0.33		determined	0.67
agreeable	0.17		committed	1.00		developers	0.50
ambitious	0.33		communicative	1.00		devoted	0.80
amenable	0.67		communicator	0.83		difficult	-1.00
analytical	0.33		compassionate	1.00		diligent	1.00
anxious	-0.83		competent	1.00		direct	0.33
apologetic	-0.40		complacent	-1.00		disciplined	1.00
appreciative	1.00		complex	-0.50		disconnected	-1.00
articulate	0.83		compliant	0.50		disorganized	-1.00
assertive	0.50		complimentary	0.50		distracted	-1.00
associate	0.00		computer tech	0.00		diverse	0.83
astute	0.50		concerned	-0.50		divorced	-0.33
awesome	0.67		concise	0.50		doer	0.83
balanced	0.83		confident	1.00		dramatic	-0.83
befuddling	-0.83		conflicted	-0.83		driven	0.67
behind	-1.00		confused	-0.60		driver	0.67
big heart	0.83		connected	1.00		dutiful	0.83
boisterous	-0.83		conscientious	1.00		duty title	0.00
bold	0.33		considerate	1.00		eager	0.60
bright	0.83		consultant	0.33		easy	0.00
builder	0.83		contemplative	0.40		educated	0.83
business-like	0.33		content	0.33		educational	0.50

255

busy	-0.20	conversational	0.17	educator	0.20
calm	0.67	cool	0.83	effective	1.00
calming	0.83	cooperation	1.00	efficient	1.00
capable	0.80	cooperative	0.80	emotional	-0.33
careful	0.83	coordinating	0.67	empathetic	1.00
caring	1.00	coordinator	0.20	employee-focused	1.00
carpenter	0.20	cordial	0.67	employees	0.00
cell	0.00	courageous	1.00	energetic	0.80
challenged	-0.67	courteous	1.00	energized	0.83
challenging	-0.83	covering classes	0.33	engaged	0.83
champion	0.67	co-worker	0.00	engaging	1.00
cheerful	1.00	creative	0.83	engineer	0.00
cheerleader	1.00	creative	1.00	enlisted	0.00
civilian	0.00	creative	0.60	enthusiastic	0.67
civilian	0.00	crew	0.00	ethical	1.00
civilian	0.00	curious	0.67	evasive	-1.00
exasperated	-0.67	honest	0.83	listening	0.67
exceptional	1.00	humorous	0.50	logical	0.67
excited	0.50	immature	-1.00	loud	-0.33
executor	0.40	impactful	1.00	loves Korean food	0.00
experienced	0.67	impatient	-1.00	low-biller	-0.80
expert	0.80	improved	0.67	low-maintenance	0.67
fab guys	-0.33	incisive	0.17	loyal	0.83
faculty	0.17	inconsistent	-0.83	loyal	1.00
family	0.00	indecisive	-1.00	loyal	1.00
fast-worker	0.20	independent	0.67	management	0.33
father	0.00	individual contributor	0.83	manager	0.00
firm	0.17	inexperienced	-0.50	methodical	0.50
flexible	1.00	informed	0.67	military rank	0.00
flirtatious	-0.80	innovative	1.00	mindful	1.00
focused	0.83	innovator	1.00	modest	0.50
focused	0.75	inquisitive	0.80	mother	0.00
focused	1.00	insecure	-0.83	motivated	1.00
folks	0.00	insightful	1.00	multi-tasker	0.40
follower	0.17	installation readiness	0.33	multi-tasking	0.83
foreman	0.00	intelligent	0.83	needy	-1.00
forward thinker	1.00	intelligent	1.00	negotiator	0.33

friend	0.67	intelligent	1.00	nervous	-1.00
friendly	0.80	intense	-0.50	network	0.50
frustrated	-0.83	interested	0.83	newly minted	0.50
frustrating	-1.00	interesting	0.50	nice	0.67
fun	0.17	intolerant	-1.00	normal	0.17
funny	0.17	intrigued	0.67	normal	0.17
generous	0.80	introspective	0.50	normal	0.17
genuine	0.60	intuitive	0.83	not always dependable	-1.00
giving	1.00	investigator	0.50	not credible	-1.00
go-getter	1.00	irritated	-0.83	nurse	0.50
good	1.00	junior engineer	0.00	occupied	-0.67
good-natured	1.00	keen	0.83	only child	-0.20
go-to person	1.00	kind	0.83	on-task	0.67
gracious	1.00	knowledgeable	0.83	open	0.67
great	0.83	lab techs	0.00	open-minded	1.00
group	0.00	lacks self-confidence	-0.83	operational	0.17
guiding	0.67	laid-back	0.17	opinionated	0.00
handyman	0.67	late	-0.83	optimistic	1.00
happy	0.33	lead	0.80	organized	0.83
hard worker	1.00	leader	1.00	outgoing	0.67
hard-working	1.00	leadership	0.40	overburdened	-1.00
heartfelt	0.83	leadership team	0.00	overloaded	-0.60
hectic	-1.00	learner	0.67	overseer	0.50
helpful	1.00	level-headed	0.83	overwhelmed	-1.00
high biller	0.40	liaison	0.50	partner	0.83
highly talented	0.80	light-hearted	0.20	partners	0.67
passionate	0.83	relieved	0.00	strange	-0.83
passive	-0.83	reserved	0.17	strategic	0.67
people person	0.80	resilient	0.83	strategic	0.83
people-oriented	0.67	resource	0.50	strategic	0.83
persevering	1.00	resourceful	0.83	street smart	0.67
persistent	0.67	respected	1.00	stressed	-0.83
personable	0.75	respectful	1.00	strict	-0.67
personal	0.25	responsible	1.00	strong	0.83
personalist	0.00	responsive	1.00	stubborn	-1.00
planning	0.50	rewarding	0.33	subject matter experts	1.00

planning for spring	0.50		rockstar	1.00		successful	1.00
pleasant	0.60		sales	0.00		supportive	1.00
pleaser	0.17		sassy	-0.67		systematic	0.33
POC	0.33		savvy	0.67		tactical	0.60
polite	0.50		scattered	-0.83		talented	1.00
political	-0.33		secretary	0.00		talkative	-0.40
positive	1.00		self-focused	-0.33		Task Master	0.00
practical	0.83		self-starter	1.00		task-oriented	0.67
preoccupied	-0.83		senior	0.33		teacher	0.20
prepared	0.83		senior airman	0.50		team	0.50
presenter	0.33		senior leader	0.40		team builder	1.00
printers	0.00		senior team	0.67		team member	0.83
pro-active	1.00		sharp	0.83		team player	1.00
problem solver	1.00		sharp	0.67		team spirit	0.83
problem-solving	0.40		sharp	0.40		teammate	0.83
productive	0.83		shortsighted	-0.83		tech	0.00
productive	0.83		shy	-0.33		technical	0.00
productive	1.00		sidetracked	-1.00		technical staff	0.20
professional	0.83		sincere	0.67		temperamental	-0.75
professional	0.83		skilled	0.67		tenacious	0.83
professional	0.83		slow	-0.83		The Kids	-0.50
professionalism	0.50		smart	1.00		thinking	0.67
proficient	0.50		smart	1.00		thorough	0.83
program analyst	0.00		sociable	0.17		thoughtful	1.00
program manager	0.17		social	0.00		timely	1.00
progress	0.83		socially awkward	-0.80		timid	-0.60
project manager	0.00		special	0.33		tired	-1.00
protective	0.33		special	0.20		tolerant	0.40
protégé	0.67		special	0.60		tough	0.00
proud	0.67		squad	0.20		trustworthy	1.00
quiet	0.00		staff	0.17		trying	0.00
ready	0.83		stakeholders	0.00		Type B	0.17
reassuring	0.50		steadfast	0.80		uncommunicative	-1.00
receptive	1.00		steady	0.75		unconfident	-0.83
reciprocative	0.40		stern	-0.67		understanding	0.83
relaxed	0.33		still overburdened	-1.00		unhappy	-1.00
reliable	1.00		storyteller	0.50		Unicorn	0.33

unprepared	-1.00					
unreliable	-1.00					
unsure	-0.60					
upset	-0.83					
valuable	1.00					
verbally-skilled	0.83					
verbose	0.33					
versatile	0.83					
veteran	0.00					
visionary	0.83					
visual	0.00					
volunteer	0.00					
well-spoken	1.00					
willing	1.00					
worker	0.33					
workforce	0.00					
working	0.33					
young airman	0.00					
young male	0.00					

Appendix E

Descriptive Words at the Extremes of a Continuum (-1.00; +1.00)

Implications of Character and Competence[5]

Extreme Negative		Extreme Positive					
absent	-1.00	appreciative	1.00	Focused	1.00	respected	1.00
aggressive	-1.00	caring	1.00	Forward Thinker	1.00	respectful	1.00
behind	-1.00	cheerful	1.00	giving	1.00	responsible	1.00
coarse	-1.00	Cheerleader	1.00	Go-Getter	1.00	responsive	1.00
complacent	-1.00	Clear Communicator	1.00	good	1.00	Rockstar	1.00
dangerous	-1.00	collaborative	1.00	good-natured	1.00	Self-Starter	1.00
Difficult	-1.00	committed	1.00	Go-to Person	1.00	smart	1.00
disconnected	-1.00	communicative	1.00	gracious	1.00	Smart	1.00
disorganized	-1.00	compassionate	1.00	Hard worker	1.00	Subject Matter Experts	1.00
distracted	-1.00	competent	1.00	hard-working	1.00	successful	1.00
evasive	-1.00	confident	1.00	helpful	1.00	supportive	1.00
frustrating	-1.00	connected	1.00	impactful	1.00	talented	1.00
hectic	-1.00	conscientious	1.00	innovative	1.00	Team Builder	1.00
immature	-1.00	considerate	1.00	Innovator	1.00	Team Player	1.00
impatient	-1.00	cooperation	1.00	insightful	1.00	thoughtful	1.00
indecisive	-1.00	courageous	1.00	intelligent	1.00	timely	1.00
intolerant	-1.00	courteous	1.00	Intelligent	1.00	trustworthy	1.00
needy	-1.00	creative	1.00	Leader	1.00	valuable	1.00
nervous	-1.00	dedicated	1.00	loyal	1.00	well-spoken	1.00
not always dependable	-1.00	dependable	1.00	Loyal	1.00	willing	1.00
not credible	-1.00	detail-oriented	1.00	mindful	1.00		
overburdened	-1.00	diligent	1.00	motivated	1.00		
overwhelmed	-1.00	disciplined	1.00	open-minded	1.00		
sidetracked	-1.00	effective	1.00	optimistic	1.00		
still overburdened	-1.00	efficient	1.00	persevering	1.00		
stubborn	-1.00	empathetic	1.00	positive	1.00		
tired	-1.00	employee-focused	1.00	pro-active	1.00		

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[5] Addressed in Chapter 4, an additional excursion identified another potential subdivision in taxonomy (i.e., character, competence). Although outside the intended scope for this research, it is relevant enough to mention so the reader can anticipate it and appreciate its value. It will also be discussed further in Chapter 5, Recommendations for Future Research.

				Problem			
uncommunicative	-1.00	engaging	1.00	Solver	1.00		
unhappy	-1.00	ethical	1.00	Productive	1.00		
unprepared	-1.00	exceptional	1.00	receptive	1.00		
unreliable	-1.00	flexible	1.00	reliable	1.00		