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## Relational Leadership Strategies in U.S. Banking

Irakli Bandzeladze

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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES IN U.S. BANKING

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Irakli Bandzeladze

October 2022

Laura Hyatt, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, my wife Veronica and our 9-year-old twins, Michael and Emma. To my amazing wife, thank you for your support and encouragement. I could not have done this without you. To my beautiful children, I want you to know that you can accomplish anything in life that you set your hearts and minds to, as long as you do it with love, hard work, and a grateful heart. You are my heart and my soul. Your mom and I love you very much!

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To my fantastic committee members, Dr. Paul Sparks and Dr. Latrissa Lee Neiworth, thank you for your guidance and support. I have had the privilege of working with you for the last few months, and I am deeply grateful for your time, engagement, and expertise.

## VITA

Irakli (Rocky) Bandzeladze has more than 2 decades of leadership experience in driving large- scale growth in financial organizations. He has expertise in organizational transformation, strategic planning and implementation, P&L management, and leading Business and Commercial Banking networks. As an Executive Vice President, Rocky currently serves as the Head of Business Banking at Banc of California.

Prior to joining Banc of California, Rocky served as Strategy Manager at California Bank & Trust, leading strategic initiatives statewide in a turnaround environment for a major division of the bank. Throughout his career Rocky has held several key leadership positions. His leadership consistently produced record growth coupled with high employee engagement in all turn-around assignments.

Georgian native (former Soviet Union), Rocky came to the U.S. at the age of 18. Shaped by his humble upbringing and multicultural background, Rocky brings a unique insight into the value of leadership in strategic decision- making. As a competitive chess player, he founded Chess Power Kid, a nonprofit organization that teaches children mental discipline, problem-solving, and creative thinking through the game of chess. Rocky has given back to the community through nonprofit participation with organizations such as Orange County Junior Achievement, the Children's Hospital of Orange County, and the Orange County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce where he currently serves as a board member.

He holds an MBA from California State University, San Marcos, and two BA degrees in Economics, the first earned at the age of 18, from Georgian State University, and the second from California State University, Long Beach. He resides in Huntington Beach with his wife and two children.

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aimed to gain an understanding of relational leadership strategies currently employed among banking leaders developing quality workplace relationships. A quality workplace environment is where individual differences are nurtured, information is not suppressed or spun but instead openly shared, and where employees feel the company adds value to them, rather than only expecting it from them (Goffee & Jones; 2013; Katz & Miller, 2014; Tan, 2019).

This study employed Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership model to explore the research question: What are relational leadership strategies commonly practiced by banking leaders to foster quality workplace environments? The study employed a qualitative design utilizing narratives. Narrative inquiry provided a method to discover leadership strategies. Narratives from publicly available and accessible sources were collected and analyzed.

An extensive literature review highlighted authors pointing out distinctions that correspond to relational leaders' characteristics as culture creators (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010), influencers (Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; House, 1976), inclusive (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a; Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016), and engaging (Antonakis, 2012; Carter et al., 2015; Dewar et al., 2020; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Katz & Miller, 2014). Using narrative inquiry, 12 strategies were identified after reviewing the data. The strategies gleaned were reviewed for alignment with relational leaders' key characteristics as culture creators, influencers, inclusive, and engaging.

The emergent themes indicate a connection between relational leaders' strategies for creating quality workplace environments and Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership theory. To create culture, relational leaders use clear language; they are forward-looking and build trust

through feedback and collaboration. As influencers, relational leaders use empathy and emotional connection; they are honest and transparent and use straight talk when communicating. As inclusive, relational leaders create diverse teams; they focus on teamwork and people development and create psychological safety. Finally, as engagers, relational leaders empower employees; they establish connections and encourage collaboration and communication.

Further research would provide additional insights. Furthermore, research including banking institutions outside the U.S. might produce information on relational leadership practices worldwide. Last, a quantitative or a mixed-methods study may yield critical supplementary data.

## Chapter 1: Relational Leadership Strategies in U.S. Banking

### Background

The writings on leaders and leadership can be traced back to old Greek philosophers, yet, the word leader, as we use it today, did not come to the English language until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in Society*, Carlyle (1841) elaborated on how the history of the world is nothing but the biography of great men leading—the concept that gave birth to the Great Man theory. The story of King Arthur, one of the most prominent stories of European folklore, exemplifies the Great Man Theory. Anyone who knows this story understands that Arthur, chosen by a divine being, the Lady of the Lake, was destined to lead. By being the only man capable of pulling Excalibur from the stone, Arthur proved that he was born to lead.

Inspired mainly by male leaders in high positions, many writers supporting the Great Men theory (Cowley, 1928; Galton, 1869; Weber, 1958) claimed that leadership qualities are innate. This concept gave birth to early trait theories, which attempted to demonstrate how personality traits could predict success in leadership. Several notable works on this topic (Allport & Odbert, 1936; Cattell, 1965; Eysenck, 1992) identified personality traits that differentiate individuals as leaders and followers. One of the pioneering works of trait theory is by Allport and Odbert (1936), which categorized traits as (a) cardinal—specific traits that differentiate individuals (e.g., Abraham Lincoln’s honesty); (b) central—general characteristics of individuals, such as shyness or intelligence; and (c) secondary—traits that are sometimes related to attitude that often appear in specific situations (e.g., nervousness before public speaking). Cattell (1965) grouped common characteristics from Allport and Odbert’s (1936) initial list and reduced the total to 171 traits. Eysenck (1992) further narrowed the list of individual

characteristics down to three main areas—introversion/extroversion, neuroticism/emotional stability, and psychoticism. He claimed that personality traits exist in clusters and multiple characteristics may be concurrently active.

Critics of early trait theories claimed that Gordon Allport's theory is too broad, Cattell's theory is too complex, and Eysenck's theory is too limited in scope (Kanodia & Sacher, 2016). Subsequently, the Five-Factor Model emerged (Fiske, 1949; Goldberg, 1981; McCrae & Costa, 1987; Norman, 1967), commonly believed to represent the middle ground among various early trait theories. The Five-Factor Model described the basic individual traits: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. However, one of the main criticisms of the Five-Factor trait theory is that it does not consider situational factors. For instance, if a leader exhibits a greater level of extraversion, it does not mean that this trait can assist this leader in being effective in all situations (Kanodia & Sacher, 2016).

One of the early studies conducted by Terman (as cited in Gladwell, 2008) on gifted children unveiled the limitations of the trait theory. Believing that IQ was a predictor of the likelihood of one's future success, Terman worked closely with California's elementary and high schools to conduct IQ tests on the student population in the state (as cited in Gladwell, 2008). Through a series of tests, Terman ultimately identified 1,470 children whose IQs averaged between 140 and 200. Convinced that these children, who were later dubbed Termites, would be future national leaders, Terman meticulously followed their lives and methodically documented every success in their professional careers in his research, *Genetic Studies of Genius*. Unfortunately, "by the time the Termites reached adulthood, Terman's error was plain to see" (Gladwell, 2008, p. 89). While many of these children became productive members of society, most of them had careers that "could only be considered ordinary, and a surprising number ended

up with careers that even Terman considered failures” (Gladwell, 2008, p. 89). None of them emerged as nationally known figures. Terman rejected two students from his study for not having a high enough IQ, who later became Nobel laureates (as cited in Gladwell, 2008). Terman’s study demonstrated that personality traits do not predict leadership effectiveness or who can lead.

Convinced by the limitation of trait theories, Stogdill (1948) claimed that leadership occurs between individuals in a social context, and the leader who is effective in one situation may not be able to lead in another situation. Stogdill’s (1948) comments consequently led researchers to shift the focus from personality traits as leadership predictors to leaders’ behaviors and the situations in which leadership occurs.

One of the early studies on behavioral leadership was conducted in the 1940s by Ohio State University. Based on many employee interviews, the Ohio State University research narrowed leadership behaviors into two categories: initiating structure behavior and consideration behavior. Leaders engage in the initiating structure behavior, define leader-subordinate roles and expectations clearly, and establish transparent processes and communication lines to ensure followers perform specific tasks according to the plan. On the other hand, leaders engaged in the consideration behavior are concerned for their subordinate’s welfare and attempt to create a trust-based, friendly work environment. The study also showed that these two behavioral dimensions are not mutually exclusive, and scoring low in one does not automatically mean a leader would score high on another. The study found that leaders rated high in both dimensions were more likely to achieve high employee engagement and performance. However, a high-high rating did not always render positive consequences. In some cases, a high rating in the initiating structure behavior dimension resulted in higher absenteeism



and employee turnover levels. Alternatively, a high rating in the consideration behavior resulted in lower performance evaluation scores from the leaders' managers. While the study suggested that a high-high rating generally resulted in positive outcomes, sufficient evidence suggests that situational factors also mattered. This outcome triggered the contingency approach to leadership.

Several contingency models emerged through research (Fiedler, 1964; Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; House, 1996). Focusing on the importance of a leader's personality and the unique situation surrounding the leader, Fiedler (1964) outlined two styles of leadership: task-motivated, referring to task accomplishment, and relationship motivated, referring to interpersonal relationships. Fiedler's (1964) Least Preferred Co-Worker metric demonstrated a leadership scoring scale, where leaders are categorized as relationship or task motivated depending on how high or how low they score. The Path-Goal theory, later reformulated by House (1996), focused on how different leadership behaviors, such as directive, supportive, achievement-oriented, and participative can assist followers in accomplishing their goals. The type of style is contingent on the unique task in which followers are engaged. On the other hand, Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) model focused on the maturity level of subordinates, which then triggers the specific style that is preferred in a given situation.

While contingency theories remain popular and help account for unique leadership situations where leader-follower exchanges take place, they fail to explain the process of how leaders adapt and change their behaviors or styles (Gill, 2011). More recent theoretical development on leadership theory, such as Social Constructivism, viewed trait-based, behavior-based, and contingency-based models as limiting, as they focus on individual decision makers only (Grint, 2005). The fundamental assumption of the trait-based theories is that certain traits can contribute to leadership success. The underlying assumption of situational theories is that not

only the correct analysis of a particular situation is possible, but it can also trigger a particular leadership response toward a successful outcome. Last, the primary assumption of contingency theories is that it is possible to identify correctly the leadership and situational characteristics that could lead toward the successful adaptation of the two (Billsberry, 2009). Grint (2005) called these assumptions naïve and argued that they underestimate the extent to which the context or a particular situation is actively created. Grint (2005) claimed that individual leaders are not independent agents, able to manipulate the world around them. Instead, they are part of the “social construction of the context that both legitimates a particular form of action and constitutes the world in the process” (Grint, 2005, p. 1471). In other words, the focus shifts from defining what is the situation to “how it is situated” (p. 1471).

The relational leadership construct that is of main interest in this study is consistent with Grint’s (2005) observation of the collective approach toward building a relational world where leaders, followers, and their respective organizations thrive. The aim is to explore how relational leaders in the banking industry are able to create quality workplace environments that have a positive impact on creating engaging and inclusive organizational cultures.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in the U.S. on January 20, 2020 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022) created massive challenges in the country. With millions sick, hundreds of thousands of lives lost, a record number of businesses closed, and soaring unemployment, organizations across the country experienced an unprecedented disruption in how employees work, how they interact with their leaders and each other, and how organizational cultures are created and maintained. The banking sector was not immune to these challenges. According to Statista (“Financial Institutions,” n.d., Number of employees section),

FDIC insured commercial banks employ approximately 1.9 million individuals nationwide, which makes the banking industry as the nation's top employers.

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. banks were already undergoing significant changes. Throughout the years, the retail branch network had shrunk by 20% (Hu et al., 2021). As banks digitized many of their services to save costs, they started to reduce their workforce. Despite the financial growth, between 2007 and 2018, the nation's four largest banks, which collectively manage 41% of the industry's total assets, reduced staff by a combined 300,000 positions (Brooks, 2021). Many banking employees found that leaders were expecting more from fewer resources. This paradigm shift negatively impacted employee morale and engagement, especially in large banking institutions (Aiello & Tarbert, 2010).

The pandemic introduced a new set of complexities for banking executives. The state and regulatory restrictions and concern for the spread of the virus at the workplace forced executives to redeploy the vast majority of the employees to work remotely. Banking leaders had to lead a predominantly remote workforce, which was a drastic change from the historical norm. Leaders could no longer leverage the personal connections that were typically created by daily face-to-face contact with employees. Instead, they had to interact with employees via various teleconference media, which required planned meetings with employees and created a need for executives to be more intentional on how they showed up daily. Many executives realized that conducting meetings via teleconference media uniquely opened a room for participants to see each other in a home setting, often see each other's families, which required a softer touch (Dewar et al., 2020). David Schwimmer, CEO of London Stock Exchange Group, stated:

People are looking to me for a different kind of leadership. In a normal environment, it is about business leadership and setting up strategy, as well as culture and people decisions. In this environment, it is about helping people maintain morale. It is about people being

prepared for whatever may come in the face of uncertainty. (as cited in Dewar et al., 2020, p. 3)

Moreover, if the shareholder interest was always the first thought for bank CEOs, the focus on the employees' well-being trumped all other priorities during the pandemic (Dewar et al., 2020). CEOs were called upon to make decisions they were never trained for—tough leadership decisions with profound human consequences, such as which groups of employees to deploy to interface with clients and thus, exposing them to a higher chance of catching the virus; how to manage the pandemic spread in the employee ranks when someone contracts the virus; and when is it safe to return to offices. All these changes had brought people issues to the top of banking leaders' agendas.

Currently, there is a significant rift between what employees and leaders want in the postpandemic era. While most Americans prefer to work from home at least some of the days during the week (Barrero et al., 2021; Parker et al., 2020), many Wall Street CEOs claim that employees' working from home are not working for their organizations (The Wall Street Journal, 2021). Many bank leaders argue that working remotely prevents their organizations from collaborating effectively and building internal relationships necessary for the success of their companies (The Wall Street Journal, 2021). As a result, many bank CEOs have already mandated a full return to offices.

While the arguments on both sides are noteworthy, it is undeniable that the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed how leaders and employees interact, build relationships, and create organizational cultures. There is currently an active dialogue among banking leaders on the topics such as employees' return to work, the effectiveness of the remote workforce, and the culture creation in the current unprecedented times. Unfortunately, there is a significantly limited discourse on the concepts of leaders' roles and leadership during these transitional times. The

ability of banking leaders to connect with employees, forge trust-based relationships, and build relational cultures together with their followers, especially during these trying times, is practically missing in the current environment. This research intends to shed light on how banking leaders can lead more effectively through relational leadership.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain a deeper understanding of what relational leadership strategies are currently employed among banking leaders who are focused on developing quality workplace relationships. Additionally, this study investigates how relational leaders influence people around them to create inclusive and engaging cultures. While there is an existing theoretical framework on relational leadership, there is limited literature on how banking leaders utilize this leadership style, specifically in the banking industry. By gaining a deeper understanding of relational leadership and its potential positive benefits on creating inclusive and engaging corporate cultures, banking leaders will be better equipped to lead their teams and navigate their organizations in the postpandemic era.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Uhl-Bien's (2006) Relational Leadership theory provided the theoretical framework for this research study. A review of the literature produced many authors supporting Uhl-Bien's (2006) Relational Leadership theory and the two distinct perspectives of the relational approach: the entity perspective and the relational perspective.

An entity perspective focuses on the leadership process from an individual standpoint. The focus is on specific characteristics and behaviors of leaders as individuals and how they interact and establish secure emotional bonds with followers. On the other hand, a relational perspective shifts the focus from an individual to a collective dynamic, where leaders and those

with whom they interact are collectively responsible for the relationships they construct. Uhl-Bien (2006) referred to this perspective as “a process of social construction through which certain understandings of leadership come about and are given privileged ontology” (p. 654).

While the entity and relational perspectives approach leadership from a significantly contrasting point of view, the relational leadership theory draws from both methodologies. This particular leadership model is the primary interest for the current research that focuses on how U.S. banking leaders utilize relational leadership style in practice.

A thorough review of literature on relational leadership called out several common characteristics of relational leaders: culture-creators (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006), influencers (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bass, 1985, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976), inclusive (Brower et al., 2000; Brown & Hosking, 1986; Dachler & Hosking, 1995a; Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016), and engaging (Antonakis, 2012; Carter et al., 2015; Chia, 1995; Dewar et al., 2020; Fiol et al., 1999; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Katz & Miller, 2014). This research explores how banking leaders demonstrate such characteristics to create inclusive and engaging relational cultures.

### **Research Questions**

The objective of this study was to explore how banking leaders practice the relational leadership style. The study sought to investigate this objective by establishing the following research questions:

The main question for this study was:

- What are the relational leadership strategies commonly practiced by banking leaders to foster quality workplace environments?

Subquestions included:

- Research Question 1: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create quality organizational cultures?
- Research Question 2: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to influence others?
- Research Question 3: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create inclusivity?
- Research Question 4: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create employee and organizational engagement?

## **Methods**

This study employs a qualitative design utilizing narratives in the data collection process. This study employs Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership model as the foundation for the theoretical framework to explore the main research question: What are relational leadership strategies commonly practiced by banking leaders to foster quality workplace environments? A quality workplace environment in this study is defined as an organizational culture where individual differences are nurtured, information is not suppressed or spun, but rather openly shared with all associates, and where employees feel the company adds value to them, rather than only expecting it from them (Goffee & Jones; 2013). Leadership strategies are gathered from various publicly available and accessible sources, such as, books, websites, journals, and news articles.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Because "the research involves collecting data about people" (as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 88), a central ethical consideration in this study is to maintain the anonymity

of individuals. For this purpose, the researcher will not use the names, titles, or names of organizations. Instead, the researcher will refer to individuals as banking leaders. In this study, banking leaders will be described as those people who hold a senior leadership or management positions.

To further protect anonymity, the researcher will obfuscate the obtained data by assigning a numeric number to researched leaders. For example, the first source utilized for the first research question will be notated as A1, the second source as A2, the third as A3, and so on. Only the researcher will hold the list of obtained sources in an electronic folder, saved in the private, password-protected computer, which will be stored in a locked cabinet when unused and destroyed upon completion of the study. A detailed list of the processes utilized in the study to protect the identities of the researched banking leaders is outlined in Chapter 3 of this research document.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

This section discusses the key assumptions, limitations, and delimitations for the study. The key assumptions for the study are as follows:

- A qualitative narrative study is appropriate for the current research, and the number of selected sources is sufficient to answer the research questions and draw adequate conclusions.
- Researched leaders are relational leaders who created positive results for the organizations they worked for and people they have the privilege of leading.
- Researched individuals provided a truthful and candid reflections involving relational leadership strategies.



Limitations of a study may affect the researcher's ability to generalize the findings (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The limitations of the study are as follows:

- Researched banking leaders are employed by banking institutions in the United States, and consequently, the study's findings may have a cultural bias.
- While generally speaking the job descriptions for banking leaders are likely to be similar, there may be some differences between organizations including their geographical locations.
- The study will contain a limited number of data sources and, therefore, is not generalizable.

### **Significance of the Research**

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented disruption in the banking industry, specifically with how leaders and followers interact with each other and how organizational cultures are created and preserved. Banking leaders' ability to forge close relationships with employees and to impact organizational culture creation fundamentally changed in the predominantly remote work environment. There is currently an extensive dialogue among bank CEOs on various topics ranging from evaluating the effectiveness of the remote workforce to preserving inclusive and engaging organizational cultures during such unprecedented times (The Wall Street Journal, 2021). However, what's missing in the current dialogue is the emphasis on the leader's role in these critical topics.

The significance of this research is to shed light on how banking leaders lead more effectively through relational leadership. The main research question in this study is: What are the relational leadership strategies commonly practiced by banking leaders to foster quality workplace environments? While there is a significant body of work available on the topic of

relational leadership, currently there is limited literature on how banking leaders employ this leadership style. This study also explores various relational practices utilized by banking leaders to create inclusive cultures with employee and organizational engagement.

### **Operational Definitions**

- *CEO*: CEO is a Chief Executive Officer—the title represents the highest-ranking person in an institution, ultimately responsible for making managerial decisions and setting the course for the organization (Dewar et al., 2020; Katz & Miller, 2014).
- *Charismatic leadership*: Charismatic leadership is a leadership style where leaders possess an extraordinary gift, enabling leaders to have profound and extraordinary effects on followers (Antonakis, 2012; Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976; Tucker, 1968; Weber, 1947).
- *Commercial banks*: Commercial banks are for-profit banking organizations that perform the functions of accepting deposits from the general public as well as businesses, and provide loans to both individual as well as business borrowers (Getter, 2016).
- *Coordination of action*: Coordination of action is a social process in which the leader's voice is one among many and the responsibility for enacting relational processes is equally distributed among leaders and followers (Brown & Hosking, 1986; Dachler & Hosking, 1995b; Gronn, 2009).
- *Culture creators*: Culture creators are individuals, who among other things, lead with values and inspire others around them, leaders and followers alike, to help each other advance to a higher level of motivation (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

- *Emotional intelligence (EI)*: EI is an individual's ability to perceive emotions, manage emotions, understand emotions, and facilitate using emotions (Goleman, 1995; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).
- *Employee engagement*: Employee engagement describes the process where employees are involved in the organization's success, are enthusiastic, and committed to their work and workplace (Antonakis, 2012; Carter et al., 2015; Chia, 1995; Dewar et al., 2020; Fiol et al., 1999; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Katz & Miller, 2014).
- *Entity perspective*: The entity perspective focuses on leadership through individual "perceptions, intentions, behaviors, personalities, expectations, and evaluations relative to their relationships with one other" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655).
- *Executive leadership*: Executive leadership comprises senior-level managers in a bank, typically with an Executive Vice President or Senior Vice President titles (Groysberg et al., 2011).
- *Inclusivity*: Inclusivity refers to the intentional, ongoing practice of diverse people being welcomed to take part in "all aspects of the work of an organization, including leadership positions and decision-making process" (Tan, 2019, p. 31; see also Brower et al., 2000; Brown & Hosking, 1986; Dachler & Hosking, 1995a, Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016).
- *Influencer*: Influencer refers to individuals who, in addition to strong professional and charismatic capabilities, possess high levels of social and relational connectivity with others (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bass, 1985, 1995b, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976; Tan, 2019).
- *Leader-member-exchange (LMX)*: LMX describes how effective leadership

relationships develop among dyad partners, such as leaders and team members or peers, to generate bases of leadership influence (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016; Lunenburg, 2010; Rockstuhl, 2012; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

- *Leader-member, member-member (LMX-MMX)*: LMX-MMX leadership moves beyond the limiting supervisor-follower relationship to outside formal reporting structures and calls for leadership sharing among various parties (Dansereau et al., 1975; Fiol et al., 1999; Graen, 2016; Schyns & Day, 2010).
- *Multiloguing*: Multiloguing describes the process of speaking of many, concerning many contexts in the relational perspective (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a; Drath, 2001).
- *Organizational culture*: Organizational culture is defined both as a product and a process (Bolman & Deal, 2017). “As a product, it embodies wisdom accumulated from experience” (p. 258); and, as a process, it is created and repeated by individuals who “learn the old ways and eventually become the teachers themselves” (p. 258).
- *Profit and loss*: Profit and loss refers to accounting statements summarizing the organization’s revenues, expenses, and income generated during a specified period (Marilena & Alice, 2012).
- *Quality workplace environment*: Quality workplace environment where individual differences are nurtured, information is not suppressed or spun, but rather openly shared with all associates, and where employees feel the company adds value to them, rather than only expecting it from them (Goffee & Jones; 2013; Katz & Miller, 2014; Tan, 2019).
- *Relational constructionism*: Relational constructionism is a process where leadership voice is one of many, and knowledge is discovered collectively with many parties

- working together (Chia, 1995; Dachler & Hosking, 1995b; Hosking, 1988; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006).
- *Relational leadership*: Relational leadership style focuses on developing quality, trusting work relationships created and maintained by leaders and followers collectively (Brower et al., 2000; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hosking, 1988; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Murrell; 1997; Uhl-Bien, 2006).
  - *Relational perspective*: The relational perspective focuses on the process of relational leadership creation, where leaders and followers are collectively responsible for ultimate results (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a; Hosking, 1988; Uhl-Bien, 2006).
  - *Relational self*: Relational self stems from interpersonal relationships and interdependencies with significant others (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Andersen & Glassman, 1996; Baldwin et al., 1990; Baldwin & Holmes, 1987).
  - *Self-efficacy*: Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in self-capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Anderson et al., 2008; Bandura 1977, 1978; Galozi & Jibrin, 2016; Judge et al., 2007; Semadar et al., 2006; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).
  - *Senior leadership/management*: Senior leaders/management, also known as C-Suite leaders, typically includes roles such as CEO, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Risk Officer, Chief Credit Officer, and Chief Information Officer (Groysberg et al., 2011).
  - *Servant leadership*: Servant leadership is a leadership style that focuses on the well-being of the followers first, among other priorities (Avolio et al., 2009; Block, 2006;

- Coetzer et al., 2017; Greenleaf, 1977; Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone, 2002; Spears, 2010; Van Dierendonck, 2011).
- *Social identity*: Social identity is the concept that theorizes how people see themselves within a group context (Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Hogg, 2001; Smith & Henry, 1996; Tajfel, 1972).
  - *Social network theory*: Social network theory refers to how social networks influence leaders within organizations (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005; Carter et al., 2015; Lord & Emrich, 2001; Uhl-Bien, 2006).
  - *Transformational leadership*: Transformational leadership is a process in which leaders and followers help each other advance to a higher-level motivation and morality (Bass, 1985, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Hollander 1992; Tracey & Hinkin, 1998).

## **Summary**

Chapter 1 introduced a historical overview of various leadership theories, leading up to a more contemporary model of relational leadership. It highlighted the problem statement, which focuses on the banking institutions in the U.S., and elaborated on the purpose of the research, along with the theoretical framework, research questions, assumptions, limitations, the significance of the study, and operating definitions.

Chapter 2 follows and delves into the literature review. Additionally, it highlights the common characteristics of relational leaders drawn from various relational leadership theories. Chapter 3 describes the study methods by elaborating on the following areas: methodological approach and study design relative to the study purpose, data sources, data gathering instruments,

procedures, and data analysis. Chapter 4 describes the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 elaborates on the conclusions and implications of the study, and highlights recommendations.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

While the concept of relationship-oriented leadership has been examined in various academic writings (Brower et al., 2000; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Murrell, 1997; Uhl-Bien, 2006), the term relational leadership is relatively new (Uhl-Bien, 2006). The term relational has a different meaning by different researchers approaching this concept from various theoretical backgrounds (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a; Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hollander, 1992; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Many existing writings focus on exploring relationship-oriented behaviors from an individual standpoint, either from leader's or follower's perspective (Bass, 1985; Brower et al., 2000; Burns, 1978; Dansereau et al., 1975; Drath, 1990; Graen 2016; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hollander, 1992). These writings suggest that relationship-focused exchanges between leaders and followers create open, supportive, trusting work environments that "encourage people to leave their comfort zones and explore how their purpose might be better met at work" (Dewar et al., 2020, p. 3). Relational leadership theory builds on these leader-follower, manager-subordinate relationships and focuses on the "relational processes by which leadership is produced and enabled" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 667). Recent writings (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hosking, 1988; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Murrell, 1997; Uhl-Bien, 2006) suggested the evolution of the term relational leadership toward a view of "leadership and organization as human social constructions that emanate from the rich connections and interdependencies of organizations and their members" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655).

Uhl-Bien (2006) offered two distinct perspectives of relational leadership. An entity perspective, which can be considered a more traditional view, focuses on individual leaders and followers, their characteristics, and how they build mutually beneficial work environments. This



approach focuses on leadership through individual “perceptions, intentions, behaviors, personalities, expectations, and evaluations relative to their relationships with one other” (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655). Many relationship-oriented behavior-based leadership theories (Bass, 1999; Burns, 1978; Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992; House, 1976; Weber, 1947) fit well within this perspective. While some of these theories incorporate collective leadership components—leaders and followers creating leadership cultures together, the primary focus still remains on leaders as individuals, and their actions to create relational dynamics.

In contrast to the entity approach, a relational perspective shifts the focus toward the process of relational leadership creation, where leaders and followers are collectively responsible for ultimate results (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a). Uhl-Bien (2006) claimed that in the relational perspective model, “leadership is not concentrated within certain individuals but is distributed throughout the social field” (p. 662). Contrary to many traditional leadership theories where the leader is a central figure in creating a trust-based, cohesive social and organizational environment, the relational perspective promotes that creating such relationship-based environments becomes a collective mission of all individuals involved in the process (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

To establish the epistemological context for relational theory, when exploring the two relational perspectives, it is critical not to see them in silos or to choose one approach over another (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Uhl-Bien (2006) suggested that while the implications for the research and practice of the entity and relational perspectives are different, relational leadership theory draws from both viewpoints. Furthermore, Uhl-Bien (2006) contended that viewing these perspectives holistically will produce more thorough exploration of

how leaders and followers interact with one other to create relational context and how organizations benefit from these dynamics. Using Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership theory as a theoretical framework, this research explores various leadership models for entity and relational perspectives and seeks a deeper understanding of the relational leadership theory.

### **The Entity Perspective and Associated Theories**

The entity perspective focuses on the individual characteristics of leaders and followers, their perceptions, behaviors, and interactions with one another (Uhl-Bien, 2006). As a traditional view, the entity perspective incorporates various theories that explore leadership from the standpoint of "individuals as independent, discrete entities" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655). Dachler and Hosking (1995a) called the entity perspective possessive individualism, explaining that theories that fit within this construct typically emphasize individuals as entities, where leaders "are understood to possess certain characteristics on the basis of which they carry out their leadership functions" (p. 7). This research delves into the entity perspective of Relational Leadership theory by exploring the following theories: LMX, LMX-MMX, Hollander's relational theory, transformational, transactional, charismatic, servant leadership, individual and collective self-concepts, social networks, self-efficacy, and EI theories. The following section highlights each of these theories with a specific focus on the relational leadership context.

#### ***LMX Theory***

One of the most prominent relationship-based approaches is the LMX theory. Before LMX theory, researchers treated leadership as something leaders did toward all their followers. Dansereau et al. (1975) challenged the existing models by pointing out two erroneous assumptions that these theories predominantly hold. The first assumption is that the followers in the same organizational unit under one leader are "sufficiently homogeneous on the relevant

dimensions (e.g., perceptions, interpretations and reactions) and that they can be considered as a single entity” (Dansereau et al., 1975, p. 47). The second assumption is that leaders behave in essentially the same manner toward all followers. Contrary to these assumptions, LMX theory focuses on the relationship between a leader and a follower contained in a dyad. This approach allows for the case where “each of the vertical dyadic relationships contained within a unit are radically different” (p. 47).

The central concept of the LMX theory is that leadership occurs when leaders and followers develop effective relationships that result in incremental influence. As a result, they gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring. LMX theory describes how effective leadership relationships develop among dyad partners, such as leaders and team members or peers, to generate bases of leadership influence (Graen, 2016; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Early LMX theory focused on two general types of relationships: in-groups and out-groups. Followers become a part of the in-group or the out-group based on how well they work with the leader and how well the leader works with them (Dansereau et al., 1975). In-group followers enjoy increased job latitude and greater confidence from leaders, which often results in reciprocation from in-group followers, who assume “greater responsibility, and commitment to the success of the organization” (Lunenburg, 2010, p. 2). Relationships with out-group members are typically governed “within the narrow limits of their formal employment contract” (p. 2). Leaders who understand the significance of LMX recognize that they need to avoid creating out-groups wherever possible and maximize the size of the in-group. Research shows that high-quality LMX produces less employee turnover, more significant organizational commitment, better job attitudes, more attention and support from the leader, and greater engagement from employees (Beverly, 2016; Gajendran & Aparna, 2012; Graen, 2016; Lunenburg, 2010; Power, 2013).

One criticism of LMX theory is that it fails to consider the broader social and cultural context in which organizational leadership occurs. Rockstuhl (2012) argued that LMX predicts followers will favor leaders who show a highly personalized interactive style. However, whether LMX theory, developed in the Western culture, can be as effective in another cultural context remains doubtful (Rockstuhl, 2012). Several LMX studies in Asia suggested that LMX may operate differently in more collectivistic and higher power distance cultures (Power, 2013; Rockstuhl, 2012). For example, an exploration of the effects of group identity in Scottish and Indian business organizations demonstrated followers' propensity to favor a highly depersonalized leadership style, where leaders were recognized for practicing less favoritism and regarded as fairer and more equitable (Power, 2013). Therefore, the effectiveness of LMX in non-Western cultures remains uncertain (Power, 2013; Rockstuhl, 2012).

### ***LMX-MMX Sharing Network Theory***

More recent research has moved beyond the dyadic relationships and has begun to explore the interrelationships between and among leaders and followers (Graen, 2016). Graen (2016) offered a transformation of LMX theory to what he calls the new LMX-MMX theory of sharing network leadership and proposed that leadership moves beyond the limiting supervisor-follower relationship to outside formal reporting structures. He called this construct a "leadership sharing process" (Graen, 2016, p. 26). Graen (2016) argued that such a leadership sharing process is different from "dumping unwanted tasks, formal or informal delegation, and getting someone to do your pseudo leadership sharing" (p. 26). The LMX-MMX model maintains that leaders and followers share risks and rewards collectively and equitably, which involves a higher level of trust, mutual respect, and commitment from the parties involved to maintain its development (Graen, 2016).

Graen (2016) drew differences between LMX-MMX and other leadership models by arguing that LMX-MMX team leaders prefer followers with clearly defined self-concepts who want to make helpful suggestions for improvements. In contrast, charismatic leaders seek followers with more ambiguous self-concepts, who prefer leaders to give directions. Charismatic leaders attempt to persuade followers to embrace change and achieve transformation with strong engagement, and increase the intrinsic value of followers to accomplish the set vision (Fiol et al., 1999). To develop a quality leadership sharing culture, Graen (2016) suggested that leaders assess the characteristics of their team members in terms of these two leadership styles. If the employees prefer to contribute to creating the leadership culture, they are predisposed to LMX leadership sharing. In contrast, they are predisposed to charismatic leadership if they prefer to be told what to do and avoid the responsibility of enriched roles (Graen, 2016).

Although LMX-MMX theory gives valuable insights into enhancing the relationships between leaders and subordinates, it falls short in some notable ways. According to Graen (2016), subordinate characteristics often fall between the two extremes—some followers preferring much or some leadership sharing and others preferring none. As a result, a significant level of complexity is associated with leaders' ability to determine accurately which style the employees prefer (Graen, 2016). Furthermore, while the theory emphasizes selecting subordinates who are willing to make helpful suggestions for improvements, it assumes that all followers start at the same baseline, equally worthy of the leader's trust and reliance. The reality is often very different. Individuals are uniquely different, and a leader may establish trust with some employees faster than others, which could bias the leader to select more trustworthy employees in an in-group quicker (Graen, 2016). Last, most of the LMX-MMX research focuses on examining the perspectives from the leader's standpoint. Building a mutually beneficial

leadership environment does not guarantee that leader and follower values are the same. For leader-member alignment to be established, leaders and members must rate their mutual relationship equally (Schyns & Day, 2010).

Unfortunately, power dynamics often concentrated in leaders may skew this equilibrium. Friedrich (1961) contended that power is not only a possession but a relation, claiming, “If power is looked in the dimension of time, it becomes clear that its relational quality is the more evident, the longer the time span involved” (p. 4). This is especially prevalent when leaders use a reward or coercive power to advance their interests (French & Raven, 1959). Lewin (1947) provided some insight on the distinction and balance between reward and coercive power. Because leaders can use coercive power, they must exercise restraint to establish balanced relational exchange with their subordinates (Lewin, 1947). Friedrich (1961) argued that coercion and consent are not mutually exclusive concepts, and each is present in a leader-follower relationship. Additionally, Friedrich (1961) claimed that the formula for power is the amount of power corresponding to the amount of coercion plus that of consent in the most general sense. For a leader-member alignment to be established, parties involved need to view the level of power, coercion, and consent equally balanced (Friedrich, 1961; Schyns & Day, 2010).

### ***Hollander's Relational Theory***

Hollander provided yet another prominent relationship-based approach to leadership. The essential points of his model are: (a) leadership is a process of establishing and influencing relationships, (b) the leader is one among other participants in the relationship-building process, and (c) certain interactions occur between leaders and followers, which Hollander calls transactions exchanges (Hollander, 1992; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Hollander (2010) argued that followers have certain expectations of some benefits that their leaders will provide. These

benefits are essential to leader-follower interdependence, and leaders use them to award those followers who support the leader (Hollander, 1992, 2010). Furthermore, Hollander (1992, 2010) argued that leaders are given a certain latitude in a credit-building process. He contended that this process is a function of the followers' perceptions of the leader's competency and relatability that creates follower trust and loyalty in the leader. To build on Hollander's (1992) argument, it is noteworthy that leaders who are self-absorbed often fail in building trust and loyalty with their employees (McCall et al., 1988). In fact, David Lee Roth's famous quote, an ounce of image is worth a pound of performance, holds true here. In some cases, employee perceptions of their leaders may obscure the realities of the leader's performance, at least in the short term (McCall et al., 1988). Hollander (1992) contended that leaders who are consumed with managing their self-image may become detached from their followers and "cease to be concerned about how their actions will be perceived by and affect followers and their mutual activities" (p. 72). Subsequently, relationships between leaders and followers diminish in strength and value.

McCall et al. (1988), who provided extensive work on how successful executives develop on the job, conducted a study of 400 up-and-coming executives. They found that those executives failing to reach their expected potential had a tendency to show various inconsiderate behaviors toward others. McCall et al. (1988) claimed that rich human connections and relationships move managers through the learning process and advance them to their full potential.

Consistent with the entity perspective, Hollander (1992) focused on the relational process from the standpoint of the individual. However, he claimed, "Leaders do command greater attention and influence, but followers can affect and even constrain leaders' activity in more than passive ways" (Hollander, 1992, p. 71). He transitioned the focus from leaders, their functions,

traits, and behaviors to “qualities and responsiveness of followers, with their needs, expectations, and perceptions” (p. 71). According to Hollander (1992), positive qualities sought in good leaders, such as honesty, dependability, trustworthiness, are also included among attributes of good followers. While certain traits in leaders, such as drive, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, and cognitive ability matter (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991), Hollander (1992) claimed that these traits are more important within the context of their fit with the “followers’ attributions about leaders and if they elicit a response, affirmative or otherwise, from followers” (p. 71).

One of the criticisms of Hollander’s (1992) theory is that leaders may attract only a particular type of followers that fits within their specific leadership style. For example, authoritarian leaders may attract followers who want to appease the leader and may be uncomfortable speaking their minds freely. Therefore, looking at the relational component of the leader-follower dynamic through Hollander’s (1992) lens presents particular challenges for leaders with an authoritarian leadership style. To create effective work environments, leaders should be striving to stimulate honest, constructive dissent, and the failure to do so may have devastating consequences for leaders and the organizations they serve (Roberto, 2005).

Danish author Hans Christian Andersen felicitously depicted this concept in his literary folktale, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, where a vain emperor gets exposed in front of his subjects because no one dares to offer him honest feedback. This anecdotal illustration depicts two weavers promising an emperor a new suit of clothes, which they promise to be invisible to those who are stupid or incompetent. In reality, they make no clothes while making everyone believe the clothes are invisible to them (Senge, 1990). When the emperor parades in front of his subjects in his new clothes, no one dares to share with him that he is completely exposed, fearing that they will be viewed as stupid and incompetent.



Senge (1990), a systems theorist, argued that a leader's inability to build effective relationships with employees and to receive candid feedback, leads to "unexamined mental models" (p. 166). He defined mental models as "deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting" (p. 163). According to Senge (1990), leaders who remain unaware of their mental models do not seek to examine them; unexamined mental models remain unchanged and eventually lead to counterproductive actions. He argued that one way to break these mental models is to create feedback loops—a reciprocal flow of influence that leaders can master through creating an environment of "reciprocal inquiry" (p. 184). Senge (1990) suggested that everyone in the organization, including and especially the leader, should make his or her thinking "explicit and subject to public examination" (p. 184). Such leaders are often credited with the ability to create organizational cultures where followers are transformed into the highly engaged and loyal evangelists for the leader and the leader's cause (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999).

### ***Transformational Leadership***

Burns's (1978) theory of transformational leadership is yet another traditional relational leadership approach, as it roots itself in relational interdependencies between leaders and followers. Even though he first introduced the transformational leadership theory in his research on political leaders, it is currently widely used across multiple disciplines. Transformational leadership is a process in which leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher-level motivation and morality. Burns (1978) claimed, "Leadership is relational, collective, and purposeful" (p. 12). He delineated the concept of leadership from leaders having power over subordinates, claiming, "We must see power—and leadership—as not a thing but as relationships" (p. 11). This reciprocal benefit sharing through leader-follower exchanges is what

is particularly noteworthy in the transformational leadership theory within the context of the relational approach.

Burns (1978) contended that not all human influences are necessarily coercive and exploitative and “most powerful in influences consist of deeply human relationships in which two or more persons engage with one another” (p. 11). Still, he distinguishes between transformational and transactional leadership by arguing that these two concepts are mutually exclusive. According to Burns (1978), transformational leaders uplift morale and motivation in their followers, and through this process, “both leader and follower are raised to higher levels of motivation and morality” (p. 20). On the other hand, transactional leaders cater to their followers’ immediate self-interest (Bass, 1999). Despite the lower perceived value of transactional leadership, it is noteworthy that all leader-follow exchanges have a transactional component in them (Bass, 1985, 1999; Hollander 1992). Bass (1985), who built his work on Burns’s (1978) theory, differed from Burns’s perspective that transformational and transactional leadership concepts are mutually exclusive. Bass (1985) argued that transactional and transformational leadership are separate but complementary concepts coexisting on a single leadership continuum. He further claimed that the best leaders are transformational and transactional in style (Bass, 1985, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

While transactional leadership emphasizes the exchange between leaders and followers, transformational leadership raises this dynamic to the next level (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders inspire followers to commit to an organization’s shared vision and goals and “motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 4). These types of leaders empower their

employees by paying attention to their individual needs and personal development while helping them to reach their leadership potential (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Because “transformational leaders can be directive or participative, authoritarian or democratic” (Bass, 1999, p. 13), Bass (1999) offered a new term, pseudotransformational leadership, to separate from the transformational concept those leaders who are self-consumed, exploitive, and power-oriented, with warped moral values (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Some of the examples of such leaders are Hitler, Stalin, Pinochet, to name a few. Pseudotransformational leaders focus on their interests rather than followers (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999); therefore, this research excludes pseudotransformational leadership from the relational leadership construct.

### ***Components of Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leadership motivates followers to go beyond expectations by focusing on idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). Idealized influence, which is also referred to as charisma, and inspirational leadership are displayed when the leader “envisions a desirable future, articulates how it can be reached, sets an example to be followed, sets high standards of performance, and shows determination and confidence” (Bass, 1999, p. 11). Such leaders engage followers to share their vision and dedicate themselves to the cause (Bass, 1999). Leaders display intellectual stimulation when helping followers become more creative to support the cause. Last, leaders display individualized consideration by paying attention to the followers’ developmental needs and emotional support. Followers often get rewarded by various opportunities that help them realize their potential as leaders.

The critics of transformational leadership theory argue that it lacks conceptual clarity because it covers a wide range of leadership characteristics, such as charisma, vision creation,

employee motivation through tapping into their emotional and intellectual needs, to name a few (Tracey & Hinkin, 1998). Additionally, there is skepticism in research about whether the transformational leadership approach creates long-term change in individuals and organizations (Bass, 1999; Bryman, 1993). Yukl (1999) argued that similar to early leadership theories that focused on traits of leaders, transformational leadership theory reflects an implicit assumption of the “heroic leadership” (p. 292) stereotype.

### ***Relational Leadership Through Service Versus Charisma***

Leadership studies have recently moved away from a strong focus on transformational and charismatic leadership approaches, toward a stronger emphasis on a shared, relational, and global perspective, where the leader-follower interactions and relation building are focal points (Avolio et al., 2009; Graham, 1991). While transformational and charismatic leadership models focus on transcendent and far-reaching ideas and goals (Antonakis, 2012), servant leadership incorporates social responsibility (Avolio et al., 2009; Graham, 1991), which may be of particular relevance in today’s era (Van Dierendonck, 2011). While charismatic and transformational models approach leadership from the leader’s perspective, servant leadership’s focal point is the followers’ well-being (Antonakis, 2012; Avolio, et al., 2009; Bass, 1985, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; House, 1976; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Despite their fundamental differences, these models concentrate on the interactions between leaders and followers and, therefore, are part of the traditional perspective of the relational leadership theory.

### ***Servant Leadership***

Greenleaf’s (1977) servant leadership theory has a strong presence in this relatively new field of positive organizational behavior that focuses on employees and social responsibility (Van Dierendonck, 2011). It fits well within the relational leadership perspective and emphasizes

the leader's focus on the followers, development, empowerment, and well-being (Greenleaf, 1977).

Greenleaf (1977) credited his work in servant leadership theory to a novel by Hermann Hess (1956), *The Journey to the East*. Hess (1956) told the story of a group of men on a mystical journey accompanied by a servant named Leo, who performs menial chores and provides spiritual encouragement to the group. After Leo suddenly disappears, the group falls in disarray and abandons the journey. Later, one of the journeymen is asked to appear in front of the high throne to be judged by the officials of the league who sponsored the journey. At that moment, he identifies Leo as the titled leader of the league. Hess (1956) was inspired by this novel and focused his work on the concept of Leo being primarily a servant, even though he was also a leader.

According to Greenleaf (1977), "The great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness" (p. 27). He contended that the concept of servant first versus Leader first is on the opposite side of the spectrum of leadership. Even though both types aspire to lead, the servant-first leader puts the follower's needs as the highest priority above all (Greenleaf, 1977). He offered additional qualifications for the definition of servant leadership by asking if those who are served grow as leaders, if they become "healthier wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 27). Greenleaf (1977) also questioned the impact servant leadership has on the society at large and on those who are least privileged. He asked, "Will they benefit, or, at least not be further deprived?" (p. 27).

Greenleaf (1977) argued that to test the effectiveness of servant leadership is difficult. Because "servant leaders exhibit love in numerous ways" (Patterson, 2003, p. 3), there is simply a multitude of variables to identify and measure (Avolio et al., 2009). Despite Greenleaf (1977)

introducing the theory more than 40 years ago, followed by various researchers offering numerous theoretical models, “there is still no consensus about a definition and theoretical framework of servant leadership” (Van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1229).

One servant leadership model, among many, is by Coetzer et al. (2017), who offered eight characteristics of a servant leader:

- Authenticity—leaders showing their true identity;
- Humility—leaders being modest with high self-awareness;
- Compassion—leaders caring for others;
- Accountability—leaders being accountable and transparent;
- Courage—leaders standing up for what is morally right;
- Altruism—leaders being selfless and focused on others;
- Integrity—leaders being honest, fair, and ethical; and
- Listening—leaders listening actively and respectfully.

Unfortunately, while most writings on servant leadership and its characteristics are aspirational, focusing on what servant leadership should ideally be, there is a little agreement among researchers on characteristics and normative principles of the servant leadership model (Block, 2006; Coetzer et al., 2017; Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone, 2002; Spears, 2010; Van Dierendonck, 2011).

### ***Charismatic Leadership***

While the theory of charismatic leadership is widely associated with Weber (1947), Aristotle wrote in the *Rhetoric* that a leader must gain the followers’ confidence by using creative rhetorical means to rouse follower emotions, provide a moral direction, and use reasoning. In this context, the concept of charismatic leadership can be dated back to the days of

Aristotle (Antonikis, 2012). Weber (1947) suggested three types of authority: the traditional, the rational-legal, and the charismatic. The first two concepts of authority are legitimated by the sanctity of tradition (traditional authority) and legal order (rational-legal; Weber, 1947).

Arguably, the most distinctive type of authority rests upon charisma. Weber (1947) argued that charismatic leaders possess an extraordinary gift, which enables leaders to have “profound and extraordinary effects on followers” (House, 1976, p. 4). House (1976) contended that this gift is a complex set of behaviors from the leader, characteristics of the followers, and situational factors surrounding specific interactions.

To identify better charisma or charismatic leaders, Tucker (1968) and House (1976) proposed first to define it in terms of its effects on followers. House (1976) suggested that researchers can identify charismatic leadership only after impacting others. He offered several potential effects charismatic leaders have on followers:

Followers trust in the correctness of the leader’s beliefs, the similarity of followers’ beliefs to those of the leader, unquestioning acceptance of the leader, affection for the leader, willing obedience to the leader, identification with and emulation of the leader, emotional involvement of the follower in the mission, heightened goals of the follower, and the feeling on the part of followers that they will be able to accomplish or contribute to the accomplishment of the mission. (House, 1976, p. 7)

However, Tucker (1968) cautioned not to confuse charisma with power because “power is a source of phenomena that resembles the effects of charisma without actually being such” (p. 740). He supported this argument by pointing out the example of Stalin in 1940s Russia and claimed that his people did not worship Stalin in the way foreign visitors perceived based on what they saw and heard from his followers when Stalin was in power. Tucker (1968) offered to examine leaders’ impact on the followers before the leader achieves office and becomes politically powerful. Therefore, the “pre-power stage of a leader’s career is of critical significance” (Tucker, 1968, p. 740).

Charismatic leadership is often attributed to three personal characteristics of leaders who have charismatic effects: extremely high level of self-confidence, dominance, and strong conviction in their beliefs (House, 1976). However, what is intriguing is House's (1976) argument that while charismatic leaders present themselves highly confident with moral righteousness, it is possible that they do not indeed believe in either themselves or their beliefs. To mitigate this, "some leaders may thus have charismatic effects because of their ability to act as though they have such confidence and convictions" (p. 10). Still, according to Weber (1947), charismatic leaders are accepted by followers because they perceive the leader as possessing extraordinary powers. One thing that most researchers agree on is that charismatic leadership has an emotional component to it, which then inspires followers to give the leader devotion, loyalty, and commitment (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; House, 1976; Tucker, 1968; Weber, 1947). According to Weber (1947), the followers' relationship with the charismatic leader resembles a disciple to the master, where the leader is revered and admired. Tucker (1968) added to this argument by claiming that followers do not follow leaders "out of fear or monetary inducement, but out of love, passionate devotion, enthusiasm" (p. 735). Furthermore, what is typical to the followers' response to a charismatic leader is "not absolute obedience toward the leader, but simply the fact that by virtue of extraordinary qualities he exercises a kind of 'domination' (as Weber puts it) over the followers" (p. 736).

Weber's (1947) theory on charismatic leadership is not without critique. Friedrich (1961) argued that Weber's (1947) notion of authority identified with legitimacy, specifically from followers' conformity, confused different situational factors. Some of the followers' conformity legitimizing the leader's authority could stem from the leader's personality traits, such as self-confidence, dominance, and self-rightness, and others from a simple positional power, such as



the “head of Christendom or the Grand Llama” (Friedrich, 1961, p. 13). He stressed that even though several of these factors may be present concurrently, it is not permissible to confuse them. One of the biggest criticisms is around Weber’s (1947) remark that charisma is a “crude swindle”—meaning, it can be used for good or bad, and regardless of the ethical considerations, what is most important when understanding this leadership concept is how it is valued by those who are ruled charismatically. Friedrich (1961) warned readers by saying, “We have here a striking instance of where the concern with being ‘value-free’ can lead eventually” (p. 15). He pointed out the dichotomy of the leadership impact of Hitler and Jesus Christ, Mussolini and Moses, arguably all charismatic leaders, and emphasized that lumping all of them together is vastly misleading (Friedrich, 1961). Therefore, researchers suggested (Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976; Tucker, 1968) that future exploration should focus on the impact on the followers when evaluating the effectiveness of leader-follower relationships.

Consistent with transformational and charismatic leadership theories, leadership behaviors transform followers from self-focused to mission-focused (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; House, 1976; Shamir et al., 1993; Tucker, 1968; Weber, 1947). However, Shamir et al. (1993) argued, “There is no motivational explanation to account for the profound effects of such leaders, some of which are difficult to explain within currently dominant models of motivation” (p. 578). They contend that charismatic leadership theory does not delineate the process by which leadership enables profound effects on followers (Shamir et al., 1993). Therefore, examining self-concepts, specifically, a closer look at how charismatic leaders activate self-concepts related to followers’ motivations, are critical components of relational leadership theory (Shamir et al., 1993).

### *Relational and Collective Self*

Substantial research has been added to the entity perspective of the relational-leadership theory by exploring the self-concept (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Hogg, 2001; Knippenberg et al., 2005; Uhl-Bien, 2006). It consists of two fundamental self-representations: the individual self and the collective self. The individual self includes those components of the self-concept that differentiate the self from all others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). These components include those unique individual traits and characteristics that distinguish an individual in a social context. On the other hand, the work on the concept of the collective or social self, which Brewer and Gardner (1996) defined as “those aspects of the self-concept that reflect assimilation to others or significant social groups” (p. 83), highlights two distinct themes: relational and collective self.

Relational self stems from interpersonal relationships and interdependencies with significant others (Andersen & Chen, 2002). These relationships include interpersonal bonds such as parent-child relationships, friendship or romantic relationships, and specific role relationships within the leader-follower context. On the other hand, the collective self is based on identity with a collective group (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This form of self does not require personal relationships with others. It is derived from relationship and interdependence from group membership in larger, more impersonal collectivities (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). This self-concept is accentuated by differentiating the in-group one belongs to with out-groups, further emphasizing the sense of belonging (Hogg, 2001). Integrating the individual self-concept with the two social extensions of the self, relational and collective, brings additional focus to various theories that further shed light on how individuals define themselves in terms of their relationships with others and social groups (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

**The Relational Self—An Interpersonal Social-Cognitive Theory.** Andersen and Chen (2002) built their interpersonal social-cognitive theory on the existing work by Andersen and Glassman (1996), which explored how past experiences with significant individuals affect relationships with new people. Andersen and Chen (2002) claimed that the self is fundamentally relational and interdependent with experiences people develop with significant others in their lives. They defined the term significant others as “any individual who is or has been deeply influential in one’s life and in whom one is or once was emotionally invested” (Andersen & Chen, 2002, p. 619).

The self-concept is shaped by relationships with others, whether these individuals are present physically or symbolically (Baldwin et al., 1990). Baldwin et al. (1990) suggested that self-evaluation involves a reflected appraisal process, where an individual assesses self, based on how significant others would likely think of them. Baldwin and Holmes (1987) conducted a study on undergraduate women subjects by asking some of them to visualize their parents’ faces and others to visualize the faces of their friends on campus. Then, under a guise of a separate study, the subjects were asked to rate the enjoyableness of a written passage that presented a fairly permissive attitude toward sexuality. The study showed that those women who had been primed to first experience themselves with their parents rated the story as significantly less enjoyable than those who visualized their friends from campus (Baldwin & Holmes, 1987). This experiment demonstrated that individuals’ memories with significant others could affect their sense of self, ultimately impacting their thoughts and behaviors (Baldwin & Holmes, 1987).

Andersen and Chen (2002) stipulated, “self-knowledge is extensive and well-organized in memory” (p. 623), but given the extensive amount of knowledge one has about the self, one’s entire body of self-knowledge cannot be cognitively accessible at once. Therefore, individuals

can only access a subset of the total memory at any given moment, which Andersen and Chen (2002) called a working self-concept. They argued that it is this working self-concept that guides individual cognition and behavior. Furthermore, because it is assumed that individuals have multiple significant others, there may also be a great deal of variability in how individuals visualize and experience self-concept with different significant others (Andersen & Chen, 2002). Last, the self-concept is constructed based on a specific context. For example, a work environment may elicit one's "professional-self," whereas a party setting may prompt the "partying-self" concept (p. 623).

The central theme of Andersen's and Chen's (2002) interpersonal social-cognitive theory is that the "self is relational" (p. 619), intertwined with significant others. An individual's comprehensive collection of relational selves, stemming from all relationships, is a significant source of interpersonal exchanges in the individual's everyday life.

**The Collective Self—The Social Identity Theory of Leadership.** Tajfel (1972) introduced the concept of social identity by theorizing how people see themselves within a group context. He pointed out three components of this process: categorization, identification, and comparison. Categorization refers to how individuals establish themselves by visual observation of people and groups around them. Identification is the way individuals self-establish their unique identities. Last, comparison refers to the validation process to make one's identity obvious to in-group members and others (Tajfel, 1972).

Hogg's (2001) work in the social identity theory of leadership focuses on the collective self to examine leadership as a group process. According to Hogg (2001), while most researchers agree that "leadership is a relational property within groups" (p. 185), there is scant academic analysis done on how leadership emerges through social cognitive processes associated with

belonging to a group. Supporting this argument, an experiment conducted by Smith and Henry (1996) demonstrated that when a particular social identity is salient, individuals in a group are more likely to believe to possess the same characteristic of that social group. Hogg (2001) believed that leadership is a “structural feature of in-groups” (Hogg, 2001, p. 186) and that “leaders and followers are interdependent roles embedded within a social system bounded by common group or category membership” (p. 186). His work on the group membership-oriented analysis of leadership promotes the idea that leaders can emerge from in-groups, maintain their positions, and affect followers and organizations as a result of social cognitive processes that cause people (a) to form their self-perceptions in terms of the defining attributes of an in-group, (b) to assimilate cognitively and behaviorally themselves to these in-group attributes (perceptions, attitudes, feelings), and (c) to perceive others not as unique individuals but in comparison to the in-group stereotypes (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Hogg, 2001; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Hogg (2001) introduced prototypicality, which refers to how leaders are perceived to match or embody the group characteristics. He argued that people categorize social contexts in terms of prototypes, which are readily accessible in individuals’ memories. Hogg (2001) proposed that three factors operate concurrently “to make prototypicality an increasing influential basis of leadership processes as a function of increasing social identity salience” (p. 188).

The first factor is prototypicality. Hogg (2001) contended that as group members identify more strongly with the in-group, “prototypicality becomes an increasingly influential basis for leadership perceptions” (p. 189). These perceptions affect how leader-followers interact and form relationships (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Hogg (2001) claimed

that people are susceptible to prototypicality within in-groups, because it is the basis of perception and evaluation of self and other group members.

The second factor is a social attraction within in-group dynamics, which refers to the phenomenon that people are more likely to agree or comply with someone if they like the individual (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). Hogg (2001) stated, “Leadership is a more than passively being a prototypical group member” (p. 189) and argued that leaders occupying prototypical positions, who are also socially attractive, are “able to exercise leadership by having his or her ideas accepted more readily and more widely than ideas suggested by others” (p. 189).

The third factor is attribution and information processing, which works with prototypicality and social attraction and helps individuals understand others’ behaviors. According to Hogg (2001), “When group membership is salient, people are sensitive to prototypicality” (p. 190), and those group members who are most highly prototypical are considered more important. Therefore, these individuals attract more attention from others within a group context and, consequently, are considered subjectively important. Hogg (2001) argued that in stable groups over time, the behavior of a highly prototypical member is often attributed to the individual’s personality traits rather than prototypicality. This tendency eventually results in viewing these individuals as charismatic, which further distinguishes them from the rest of the group and gives them legitimacy as a leader (Hogg, 2001).

Hogg’s (2001) social identity of leadership theory is fitting with the entity perspective of the relational leadership construct because exchanges among the group members occur in the collective dynamic that shapes perceptions and behaviors of leaders and followers (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Accompanying the relational conceptions of leadership theory is a growing interest in utilizing social network approaches to understand better how leaders’ and followers’ perceptions

and behaviors are formed and ultimately shaped from relational exchanges (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005; Carter et al., 2015; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

### *Social Networks*

In an attempt to integrate social network theory and leadership, Balkundi and Kilduff (2005) described social networks' vital role in influencing leaders within organizations. They proposed that perceptions and behaviors of followers are often manipulated by what they called informal leaders within social networks, who can exercise social influence on the group members. Leaders who do not understand the social structure and fail to anticipate its consequences leave their organizations vulnerable to the influences of these "skilled political entrepreneurs" (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005, p. 942).

To be an effective leader of a social unit is to be aware of: (a) the relations between actors in the unit; (b) the extent to which such relationships involve embedded ties, including kinship and friendship; (c) the extent to which social entrepreneurs are extracting value from their networks to facilitate or frustrate organizational goals; and (d) the extent to which the social structure of the unit includes cleavages between different factions. (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005, p. 946)

To illustrate this argument, Balkundi and Kilduff (2005) described an example of a manufacturing company that experienced vandalism and many other disruptive acts, which threatened the organization's future. Eventually, the management team discovered that these disruptive acts were conducted by the followers of a lower-ranked manager in the organization, who systemically recruited friends and family members throughout 30 years. The followers felt loyalty to this informal leader, thus creating a social network in the organization that was actively sabotaging the leadership team. This story demonstrates how "informal leaders who may lack formal authority can emerge to frustrate organizational functioning through the manipulation of network structures and the exercise of a social influence" (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005, p. 941).

Social networks theory merges individual cognitive systems and complex structures of relationships consistent with the LMX and LMX-MMX theories (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005; Carter et al., 2015; Lord & Emrich, 2001; Uhl-Bien, 2006). The cognitive approach in individuals' minds draws attention to the central importance of cognitive structures—schema, which is a mental framework that helps individuals organize and interpret information and shape leadership perceptions and behaviors (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005). Lord and Emrich (2001) emphasized the difference between individual and collective schemas, offering that collective cognition “reflects a socially constructed understanding of the world derived from social exchanges and interactions among multiple individuals in the group or organization” (Lord & Emrich, 2001, p. 552). Cognitive systems theories, such as LMX and LMX-MMX, emphasize the importance of relations, particularly social structures and exchanges between leaders and followers (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005). By linking together social cognitions and social structures, Balkundi and Kilduff (2005) claimed to “forge a distinctive network approach to leadership that builds upon previous work in both the network and leadership realms” (p. 942).

At a glance, the social network approach appears to fit more within the relational perspective because it considers relationships in the larger social and organizational context. However, it is still a part of the entity perspective because it approaches leadership from the individual perspective, their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

### **Leadership Impact on Organizations**

In today's highly competitive business environment, organizations need the right kind of leadership to survive and thrive (Galoji & Jibrin, 2016). Katz and Miller (2014) claimed that there is an urgency for leaders to be different, to connect and inspire people, to help them connect work to the organization's purpose, and “to create a sense of safety so that people can



bring their best selves to work” (p. 40). Katz and Miller (2014) argued that there is a paradigm shift in today’s organizations, where the concept of the all-knowing, all-powerful leader is absolute. They contended that relationship-oriented leaders with high EI can create collaborative and inclusive work environments. By doing so, they differentiate their organizations from those that do not adapt to this new leadership paradigm and subsequently fail.

Carter et al. (2015) presented a similar case for leadership as a foundational topic of organizational success, claiming that leadership is fundamentally relational. However, they added that leadership enables organizations to function by “directing, inspiring, and coordinating the efforts of individuals, teams, and organizations toward the realization of collective goals” (Carter et al., 2015, p. 597). In other words, in addition to the perceived value of the relational approach, the emphasis is placed on leaders’ effectiveness related to the achievement of collective organizational goals. Effective leadership is often viewed as the foundation for organizational performance (Bass, 1985; Galoji & Jibrin, 2016; Katzenbach & Smith, 1999). Hence, “Organizations that fail to have effective leadership may likely fail to meet performance expectations” (Galoji & Jibrin, 2016, p. 157).

Although the two perspectives mentioned above are similar in context, they touch on two distinct themes: relational leaders affecting organizations through self-efficacy and EI. Both themes fit well within the entity perspective of the RLT as they deal with the cognitive and emotional abilities of a leader as an individual entity. The following section explores these two topics.

### ***Self-Efficacy***

There is substantial evidence through the works of various researchers for the strong connection between self-efficacy and human performance (Anderson et al., 2008; Galoji &

Jibrin, 2016; Judge et al., 2007; Semadar et al., 2006; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Bandura (1977, 1978) claimed that individuals acquire, regulate, and retain new behavior patterns through cognitive processes. He defined these cognitive processes as “thinking processes involved in the acquisition, organization, and use of information” (Bandura, 1977, p. 71). Contending that these cognitive processes influence human learning and motivation, he offered the theory of self-efficacy, which is an individual’s belief in self-capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura 1977, 1978).

In elaborating on the relationship between self-efficacy and performance, Bandura (1977) distinguished a concept of efficacy expectation, which he defined as “a person’s estimate that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes” (p. 193). In this context, the outcome is differentiated from efficacy expectation. While individuals may believe that a particular course of action may lead to a specific outcome, such information does not influence their behavior if they doubt their abilities to perform the necessary activities will reach their ultimate goal (Bandura, 1977). This concept can be illustrated by describing a common understanding of exercise and diet leading to weight loss. While it is widely accepted that exercise and diet lead to weight loss, such information may be disregarded by individuals who believe they may not be able to cope with dieting or exercising. Bandura (1977) stated that people tend to engage in situations they believe they can handle and avoid others that intimidate them. Therefore, self-belief, or in this context, efficacy expectation, is a crucial determinant of performance.

Bandura and Jourden (1991) argued that self-belief of efficacy is a fundamental driver in individuals’ decision-making. Individuals with the strong self-belief of efficacy set higher goals for themselves while exhibiting a higher level of commitment toward attaining those goals

(Bandura & Jourden, 1991; Latham & Locke, 1991, E. A. Locke & Latham, 1990; Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Bandura (1977) elaborated on the relationship between efficacy expectancy and performance, stating, “In most studies, the measures of expectations are mainly concerned with people’s hopes for favorable outcomes rather than with their sense of personal mastery” (p. 194). He argued that efficacy expectations differ in several ways. Magnitude is one dimension of variability, and it refers to the degree of difficulty an individual feels is required to perform a particular task. While some experiences create specific mastery expectations, others instill a more generalized sense of efficacy beyond a specific situation. Bandura (1977) referred to this dimension as a generality. Finally, expectancies vary in strength. Individuals who possess a strong expectation of mastery will persevere through negative experiences. Bandura (1977) suggested that both performance and efficacy expectations should be observed closely to assess their reciprocal effects because “mastery expectations influence performance and are, in turn, altered by cumulative effects of one’s efforts” (p. 194).

Shavelson and Bolus (1982) claimed that self-perceptions of competence are integral components of self-concepts. Consistent with this view, Bandura (1977, n.d.) offered four primary sources of influence for people’s beliefs about their efficacy. According to Bandura (1977, n.d.), the most effective way to create a strong self-efficacy is through experiencing success. The old maxim of success breeds more success fits well within this concept. Furthermore, Bandura (1977) proposed that after individuals build strong self-efficacy through repeated success, the impact on self-efficacy from a negative experience or an occasional failure is significantly low. Bandura (1977) also warned that repeated failures could lower self-efficacy. The impact of early and repeated success and failure on self-efficacy and collective-efficacy

(Pajares, 1997) is especially noteworthy within the leadership context because the accountability shifts on leaders' ability to create environments where their followers engage in positive experiences (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; Katz & Miller, 2014; Senge, 1990).

The second way to create strong self-belief is through “the vicarious experiences provided by social models” (Bandura, n.d., p. 2). Seeing others perform a task successfully builds certain self-expectations in individuals. Bandura (1977) further claimed, “Seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences can generate expectations in observers that they too will improve if they intensify and persist in their efforts” (p. 197). A fitting illustration of this concept is Roger Bannister’s 1954 record of running a mile less than 4 minutes. Before Bannister broke this record, running a mile in less than 4 minutes was considered impossible (Bannister, 2014). While Bannister’s new world record was a significant historical event in middle-distance running, what is equally noteworthy is that within 2 months after Bannister’s new record, two more athletes ran 1 mile in less than 4 minutes. In the 67 years after Bannister broke the 4-minute barrier, 1,400 athletes ran 1 mile less than 4 minutes, and Bannister’s record was lowered by almost 17 seconds.

According to Bandura (1977), the remaining two factors that build self-efficacy are social persuasion and emotional arousal. Self-efficacy through social persuasion occurs when individuals are verbally persuaded that they possess the capabilities to master a particular task. Authentic suggestions that enable the recipients to believe “they can cope successfully with what has overwhelmed them in the past” (Bandura, 1977, p. 198) positively impact self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1977), authentic suggestions are rooted in emotional arousal. While eliciting fear can create a stressful situation and debilitate one’s self-belief, positive and authentic

encouragements can lead individuals to a higher self-efficacy (Lick & Bootzin, 1975; Moore, 1965; Paul, 1966). Bandura (1977) claimed that in stressful situations, especially with negative feedback, individuals with low self-efficacy exude a significantly lower effort toward a task that is perceived to be difficult. Alternatively, individuals with high self-efficacy will persist in mastering the challenge during stressful situations, even if their feedback is negative. Based on the above evidence, emotional intelligence (EI) plays a crucial role in leaders' understanding of their own emotions and motivations and those around them. A leader with a high EI will diagnose and manage personal emotions and recognize and moderate emotional disturbances in others, which ultimately has a positive effect on individual and organizational performance (Seipp, 1991). The following section closely examines the role of EI in the RL context.

### ***EI***

In exploring the role emotions play in people's daily life, Bradberry and Greaves (2009) found that only 36% of the 500,000 people they surveyed could accurately identify their emotions as they were experiencing them. Reflecting on these findings, Bradberry and Greaves (2009) stated, "Two-thirds of us are typically controlled by our emotions and are not yet skilled at spotting them and using them to our benefit" (p. 13). The implications of this survey are staggering, especially in the context of relational leadership.

While the contemporary theory of EI was first introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and later popularized by Goleman (1995), the concept of EI has been evolving for more than a century. To find a widely accepted practical definition for human intelligence, Thorndike (1920) offered three distinct concepts: (a) mechanical intelligence, which he defined as the ability to learn about and manage everyday things and mechanisms, such as a knife and a fork, or an automobile and a lawn mower; (b) abstract intelligence, which refers to a human being's ability

to comprehend, communicate, and utilize ideas and symbols, such as words and numbers; and (c) social intelligence, which he referred to as the “ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls—to act wisely in human relations” (Thorndike, 1920, p. 228).

Building on Thorndike’s (1920) work, various researchers offered different constructs on human intelligence (Chapin, 1942; Doll, 1935; Moss & Hunt, 1927; Wechsler, 1943, 1958). Eventually, the attention shifted from assessing social intelligence to understanding interpersonal behavior and its role in human effectiveness (Bar-On, 2006; Goleman, 1995; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Moss and Hunt (1927) argued, “people neither born equal, live equal, nor die equal” (p. 108), claiming the main differentiator is the ability to get along with others. Wechsler (1958) referred to this type of intelligence as “the capacity of the individual to act purposefully” (p. 7).

In their seminal work, Salovey and Mayer (1990) described EI as the individual’s ability to perceive emotions, manage emotions, understand emotions, and facilitate using emotions. Salovey and Mayer (1990) viewed EI and social intelligence as two parts of the same construct. However, Goleman (1998) saw social intelligence as a “threshold capability” (p. 2), claiming that IQ and technical skills are more like “the entry-level requirements for executive positions” (p. 2). Goleman (1998) claimed that most effective leaders have one thing in common, “they have a high degree of what has come to be known as emotional intelligence” (p. 1). Goleman (1998) claimed that EI not only distinguishes superior leaders but it also leads to solid performance. In the article “What Makes a Leader,” Goleman (1998) pointed out the results of McClelland’s (1966, as cited in Goleman, 1998) study of a global food and beverage company, which demonstrated that “when senior managers had a critical mass of emotional intelligence capabilities, their divisions outperformed yearly earnings goals by 20%” (Goleman, 1998, p. 2).

According to Goleman and Boyatzis (2017), EI has four dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Though different researchers refer to them by different names (Gardner, 1983; Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997), the four dimensions are shared by most EI theories. In providing further clarity on the construct, Goleman (1998) offered five components of EI, which he refers to as “learned and learnable capabilities that allow outstanding performance at work or as a leader” (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017, p. 3).

Goleman (1998) claimed that one of the most critical components of EI is self-awareness, which means “having a deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives” (p. 3). Individuals with high self-awareness not only identify their own emotions in a given moment, but they also recognize how their emotions affect others. Highly self-aware individuals are conscious about their emotional triggers that elicit negative or positive reactions. They can speak about their emotions “accurately and openly—although not necessarily effusively or confessionally” (Goleman, 1998, p. 5). Because self-reflection is a critical component of self-awareness (Bolman & Deal, 2017), leaders must continuously challenge their own beliefs that limit them to familiar ways of thinking (Senge, 1990). Self-reflection helps leaders increase self-understanding, reduce self-consciousness, and increase awareness of one’s priorities (Lanaj et al., 2019).

The second component of EI is self-regulation (Goleman, 1995, 1998). Recognizing one’s emotions is not sufficient to be an effective leader; self-regulation to manage one’s emotions is equally critical (Goleman, 1995). Goleman (1998) claimed that individuals who can self-regulate feelings can build an environment of trust and fairness. He argued that organizations with such cultures can attract and retain top talent. Furthermore, Goleman (1998) claimed that in today’s ever-changing business environment, where ambiguity is a norm,

organizations that have leaders who have high self-regulation can “roll with the changes” (p. 6) and bring their employees along. Goleman (1995, 1998) contended that the signs of high emotional self-regulation are as follows: “a propensity for reflection and thoughtfulness; comfort with ambiguity and change; and integrity—an ability to say no to impulsive urges” (Goleman, 1998, p. 6).

Goleman (1998) claimed that motivation is another component of high EI. He proposed that motivation is one trait that all leaders have and that “they display an unflagging energy to do things better” (p. 7). Individuals with high motivation remain positive in the face of adversity. Additionally, they can transfer this disposition to their peers and followers, positively affecting organizational performance.

The third component of EI is empathy, which Goleman (1998) claimed to be the most recognizable dimension. Empathetic leaders carefully consider their employees’ feelings and other factors and make sound decisions. In the era of globalization, cross-cultural interactions sometimes could lead to miscommunications, which can destabilize a team and the organization. Goleman (1998) contended that “empathy is an antidote” (p. 8) to such issues. Highly empathetic leaders can read the nonverbal cues and connect with individuals on a deeper level.

According to Goleman (1995, 1998), the last and, arguably, most complex component of EI is social skills. Along with empathy, social skills help individuals manage relationships with others (Goleman, 1998). According to Goleman (1998), social skills are not the same as being simply friendly. He claimed:

Socially skilled people tend to have a wide circle of acquaintances, and they have a knack for finding common ground with people of all kinds—a knack for building rapport. That does not mean they socialize continually; it means they work according to their assumption that nothing important gets done alone. Such people have a network in place when the time of action comes. (Goleman, 1998, p. 9)



EI is consistent with the entity perspective of relational leadership. It focuses on individuals as stand-alone entities and their abilities to understand and manage personal and other's feelings. The relational component is rooted in the works of Goleman (1995, 1998, 2004) because leaders with high EI can forge relationships with others to make better decisions and solve complex problems (Yukl, 2010). Such leaders are highly counted on in the organizations because they are "exquisitely sensitive to the impact they are having on others and seamlessly adjust their styles to get the best results" (Goleman, 2004, p. 87).

### ***Summary of Entity Perspective***

The entity perspective views relational leadership from the standpoint of individual perceptions, behaviors, and exchanges. It focuses on traits and characteristics of leaders and followers and views leadership from the lenses of manager-subordinate, leader-follower exchanges influencing one another (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bass, 1999; Block, 2006; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016; Hogg, 2001; Hollander, 1992; Uhl-Bien, 2006). However, emerging work in relational leadership theory builds on the entity perspective and approaches leadership from the standpoint of a process, engaged by many participants in a nonstatic, evolving social and organizational context (Uhl-Bien, 2006). The following section highlights this approach, framing it from a relational perspective.

### **The Relational Perspective and Associated Theories**

Traditional relational leadership research is rooted in exploring what leaders do or ought to do to create relational environments and what leadership characteristics or styles help create relational processes (e.g., Bass, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Block, 2006; Burns, 1978; Drath, 1990; House, 1976). While leadership process concepts extended to dyads or leader-follow

exchanges, such as LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), individual leader-centric contracts are central with entitative perspective theories.

In contrast to the theories composing the entity perspective, relational perspective promotes that attention should be switched from leaders, as individuals, and from their actions to leadership, as a dynamic social process, created by equally valued and empowered players (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a; Hosking, 1988; Uhl-Bien, 2006). The key focus of this approach is to seek the understanding of the process of leadership creation, which Uhl-Bien (2006) defined as “the influential acts of organizing that contribute to the structuring of interactions and relationships” (p. 662). The following section explores this social process and delineates postentity perspective models.

### ***Relational Constructionism—Multiple Reality***

The most prominent work on relational perspectives of the RLT is that of Hosking, Dachler, and colleagues (Brown & Hosking, 1986; Dachler & Hosking, 1995a; Hosking, 1988; Hosking & Pluut, 2010). Dachler and Hosking (1995a) claimed that to understand better the underlying epistemology of the relational perspective, it is best to contrast it with the epistemological assumptions of the entity approach. They suggested that entity perspective, which they call possessive individualism, has two epistemological themes. The first assumption is that the “knowing individual, in principle, is understood as an entity” (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a, p. 2). Consistent with Cartesian philosophy, under this assumption, an individual is endowed with a knowing mind, and knowledge is viewed as the individual’s property. Following this logic, individuals are understood to possess properties such as personality traits, characteristics, and expert knowledge (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a). The second assumption stems from the first one; Specifically, individual possessions, including interests and goals, act as

the control mechanisms of internal and external nature, which includes other people (Dachler & Hosking, 1995b; Gergen, 1994; von Glasersfeld, 1985). To summarize, according to the possessive individualism construct, knowing entities utilize their possessions to influence and control the internal and external nature around them (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a). Consistent with these assumptions, Dachler and Hosking (1995a) proposed that social relations are viewed as subject-object relationships since people are integral to external nature.

Dachler and Hosking (1995a) claimed that entity perspective-oriented theories imply such context in which leaders are understood as subjects set apart from the objects, including followers, followers' tasks, and organizations. Furthermore, in this context of seeing relationships as subject-object exchanges, a leader's "goals and interests are privileged relative to those of the objects of leadership" (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a, p. 8), and leader is the "architect and controller of the internal and external order" (p. 2) within the array of individual possessions—his followers. By implication, subordinates, as objects of leadership, are less knowledgeable about the privileged goals and interests of the leader, and, therefore, they cannot be as self-developed and self-responsible as the leader. Instead, leaders are the activators and organizers of the followers' motivations, compliance, and success (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a).

While some entity perspective-oriented theories may appear to be less individualistic (e.g., LMX), the implicit assumptions highlighted above remain. However, within relational epistemology, the traits and attributes of leaders and their ability to influence followers do not matter. From the relational perspective, the question is how particular communally agreed-upon leadership enactments are created (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a). Dachler and Hosking (1995a) offered that such types of communally enacted leadership concepts are not the same as when a leader, who thinks it motivates followers, asks for suggestions from subordinates and then

integrates some of the recommendations into action. These types of actions would reflect the entitative perspective. Instead, relational perspective promotes a partnership model for leadership where there is no inference of self as subject, and others, as objects. Dachler and Hosking (1995a) proposed, “The partnership model can only make sense by reference to the fundamental epistemological assumptions of the relational perspective” (p. 9).

### ***Knowledge and Meaning Making***

Von Glasersfeld (1989) defined knowledge as a commodity that is fundamentally different from objective representation. He argued that human beings construct their subjective reality and claimed that for constructivists, knowledge is a “conceptual structure that epistemic agents, given the range of present experience within their tradition of thought and language, consider viable” (Von Glasersfeld, 1989, p. 124). For Von Glasersfeld (1989), constructivism is a “form of pragmatism and shared with it the attitudes toward knowledge and truth” (p. 124).

Knowledge is one area that the relational perspective views as socially contracted and socially distributed instead of individual possession, consistent with the entitative perspective. Dachler and Hosking (1995a) suggested that in the philosophical tradition of hermeneutics and in various studies on interpreting the meaning of literature, whose authors are no longer available for a conversation, text refers to written document from which knowledge is gleaned. However, they argued that these texts in themselves are equivocal, and they acquire meaning “only to the extent that they can be related, through narration and conversations, with ongoing stories in the social/cultural context” (p. 5). In contrast, with the entitative perspective, which views knowledge as an individual possession, Dachler and Hosking (1995a) proposed that knowledge and knowing “is always a process of relating and meaning making” (p. 5). Therefore, within the context of knowledge making and knowledge sharing, Dachler and Hosking (1995a) rejected the

concept of one entity being in a superior position over others. The argument is that exchanges of ideas and conversations about facts, texts, and events create ongoing relational constructions (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a; Hosking & Pluut, 2010).

### ***Coordination of Action***

In the entity perspective, coordination of action is a social process in which the leader's voice is one among many, and the responsibility for enacting relational processes is equally distributed among leaders and followers (Brown & Hosking, 1986; Dachler & Hosking, 1995a; Gronn, 2009; Hosking & Pluut, 2010). Gronn (2009) viewed the concept of equal responsibility as distributed leadership. He claimed that leadership should be viewed as a holistic entity, fluid, and emergent rather than a fixed phenomenon. Calling such process of leadership "concertive action" (p. 252), Gronn illustrated his argument with three different forms of engagement: (a) spontaneous collaboration, (b) intuitive working relationships, and (c) institutionalized practices. Spontaneous collaboration is when leadership practice arises in response to a particular issue or a set of circumstances, requiring participants with various skills and knowledge to work together (Gronn, 2009). In this scenario, the collaboration may cease as soon as the problem is solved. However, it can set in motion future collaboration opportunities (Gronn, 2009; Thorpe et al., 2011). Intuitive working relationships are formed when at least two participants mutually rely on each other, where mutual trust is crucial. In this scenario, participants intuitively discover the benefits of distributive leadership and followership (Thorpe et al., 2011). Last, institutionalized practice occurs when learning from spontaneous collaboration and intuitive working practices are formalized as organizational knowledge (Gronn, 2009). The concept of institutionalized practice is also thoroughly documented in the works of Kotter (1990, 1995, 1996), who viewed institutionalization as the last step in his uroboros 8-step organizational change model.

Dachler and Hosking's (1995a) model of coordination of action, while analogous to Gronn's (2009) concertive action construct, acts as a prerequisite for the relational leadership process. According to Dachler and Hosking (1995a):

The relational epistemology, by recognizing knowledge as socially distributed and truth as socially certified, does not privilege any particular knowledge claim as more true....Multiple realities, in the sense of multiple meanings, descriptions of knowledge claims are a part of the local ontology in the process of being narrated....Reality is no longer viewed as a singular fact of nature but as multiple and socially constructed. (p. 6)

According to Dachler and Hosking (1995a), for coordination of action, all parties need to agree that knowledge can only be discovered collectively and that no one individual can be the sovereign author of it. Dachler and Hosking (1995a) suggested that knowledge is a process of relating and can only be discovered through multiloguing—a term they coined to describe the process of speaking of many, concerning many contexts in the relational perspective. Drath (2001) aligned with the concept of multiloguing by proposing that leadership is a relational dialogue—a process in which leaders and followers exchange ideas to construct what Senge (1990) called the learning organizations.

### ***Sociocultural Limits***

A key concept in relational epistemology is that multiloguing dramatically broadens the possibilities of meaning making (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a). However, certain sociocultural elements may ignore and restrict particular perspectives and label them as undesirable or wrong if they do not fit the accepted narrative. Relational epistemology ignores these sociocultural contexts by focusing on the fact that knowledge is discovered only through many voices participating in a social process (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a). An example of this conflict is historically subdued feminine voices in social, organizational, and world affairs in the context of masculine cultures. Gilligan (1982) pointed out that the problem with understanding women's

points of view stems from the differences observed in how men and women experience relationships. Gilligan (1982) started her theory by pointing out Freud's (1914, as cited in Gilligan, 1982) essay "On Narcissism," where he discussed the concept of capacity to love by contrasting love for the mother and love for the self. Calling this dichotomy "dividing the world of love into narcissism and object relationships" (p. 24). According to Gilligan (1982), Freud found that "while men's development becomes clearer, women's becomes increasingly opaque" (as cited in Gilligan, 1982, p. 24). The problem, Gilligan (1982) claimed, arises because contrasting love between mother and self yields two different images of relationships. She stated, "Relying on the imagery of men's lives in charting the course of human growth, Freud is unable to trace in women the development of relationships, morality, or a clear sense of self" (p. 24). Freud's deep-rooted prejudices about women and his infamous comment of the dark continent of psychology regarding women's sexuality are consistent with the issue highlighted by Dachler and Hosking (1995a) that certain perspectives may be ignored because of the inability to understand within a certain sociocultural context.

### **Central Themes of Relational Leadership**

An extensive literature review conducted on relational leadership highlighted many authors who pointed out distinctions that correspond to a relational leader's characteristics as culture creators (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006), influencers (Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; House, 1976) and inclusive (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a, Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016), and engaging (Antonakis, 2012; Carter et al., 2015; Chia, 1995; Dewar et al., 2020; Fiol et al., 1999; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Katz & Miller, 2014). These characteristics are defined as follows:

- **Culture creators:** Individuals who lead with values and who inspire others around them to do the same. These leaders are able to inspire others around them, leaders and followers alike, to help each other advance to a higher-level of motivation (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006).
- **Influencer:** Leaders who, in addition to strong professional and charismatic capabilities, possess high levels of social and relational connectivity with others (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bass, 1985, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976).
- **Inclusive:** Leaders who are intentional with welcoming a diverse set of individuals to participate in utilizing all available resources in the organization, and to be included in the decision-making process (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bass, 1985, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976; Tan, 2019).
- **Engaging:** Leaders who inspire followers to get involved in the organization's success, and to be enthusiastic and committed to their work and workplace (Antonakis, 2012; Carter et al., 2015; Chia, 1995; Dewar et al., 2020; Fiol et al., 1999; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Katz & Miller, 2014).

Table 1 reflects these four relational leadership themes and highlights various authors whose work contributed to the body of knowledge of relational leadership.

**Table 1**

*Central Themes of Relational Leadership and Authors*

Culture Creators	Influencers	Inclusive	Engaging
Antonakis (2012)	Andersen & Chen (2002)	Antonakis (2012)	Andersen & Chen (2002)
Bandura (1977, 1994)	Anderson et al.	Balkundi & Kilduff (2005)	Andersen &
Bar-On (2006)			



Culture Creators	Influencers	Inclusive	Engaging
Bass (1985, 1999)	(2008)	Bandura (1978)	Glassman (1996)
Bass & Riggio (2006)	Antonakis (2012)	Bar-On (2006)	Avolio et al. (2009)
Bass & Steidlmeier (1999)	Bandura (1994)	Bass (1999)	Baldwin et al. (1990)
Beverly (2016)	Bandura & Jourden (1991)	Bass & Steidlmeier (1999)	Baldwin & Holmes (1987)
Block (2006)	Bannister (2014)	Beverly (2016)	Balkundi & Kilduff (2005)
Bolman & Deal (2017)	Bass (1985, 1995a, 1999)	Block (2006)	Bass (1985)
Bryman (1993)	Bass & Riggio (2006)	Brower et al. (2000)	Beverly (2016)
Burns (1978)	Berscheid & Reis (1998)	Brown & Hosking (1986)	Brewer & Gardner (1996)
Carter et al. (2015)	Bryman (1993)	Chia (1995)	Brower et al. (2000)
Dachler & Hosking (1995a)	Burns (1978)	Coetzer et al. (2017)	Burns (1978)
Dansereau et al. (1975)	Coetzer et al. (2017)	Dachler & Hosking (1995a)	Carter et al. (2015)
Dewar et al. (2020)	Fiol et al. (1999)	Dansereau et al. (1975)	Chia (1995)
Drath (1990)	French & Raven (1959)	Dewar et al. (2020)	Dachler & Hosking (1995a)
Fiol et al. (1999)	Friedrich (1961)	Fiol et al. (1999)	Dansereau et al. (1975)
Gajendran & Aparna (2012)	Galoji & Jibrin (2016)	Gajendran & Aparna (2012)	Dewar et al. (2020)
Greenleaf (1977)	Goleman (1995)	Goleman (1995)	Drath (1990)
Hollander (1992, 2010)	Hogg (2001)	Graen (2016)	Fiol et al. (1999)
House (1976)	House (1976)	Greenleaf (1977)	Friedrich (1961)
Katz & Miller (2014)	Judge et al. (2007)	Hogg (2001)	Gajendran & Aparna (2012)
Kirkpatrick & Locke (1991)	Katz & Miller (2014)	Katz & Miller (2014)	Galoji & Jibrin (2016)
Kotter (1995)	Katzenbach & Smith (1999)	Lick & Bootzin (1975)	Goleman (1995, 1998)
Lewin (1947)	Lanaj et al. (2019)	McCall et al. (1988)	Graen (2016)
Murrell (1997)	Latham & Locke (1991)	Moore (1965)	Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995)
Patterson (2003)	Lewin (1947)	Pajares (1997)	Graham (1991)
Power (2013)	Lord & Emrich (2001)	Paul (1966)	Greenleaf (1977)
Roberto (2005)	Lunenburg (2010)	Power (2013)	Hogg (2001)
Rockstuhl (2012)	McCall et al. (1988)	Roberto (2005)	Hollander (1992, 2010)
Russell & Stone (2002)	Moss & Hunt (1927)	Rockstuhl (2012)	Hosking (1988)
Salovey & Mayer (1990)	Roberto (2005)	Russell & Stone (2002)	Hosking & Pluut (2010)
Schyns & Day (2010)	Rockstuhl (2012)	Senge (1990)	Katz & Miller (2014)
Senge (1990)	Seipp (1991)	Shamir et al. (1993)	Knippenberg et al. (2005)
Shamir et al. (1993)	Senge (1990)	Smith & Henry (1996)	Lord & Emrich (2001)
Spears (2010)	Shamir et al. (1993)	Tajfel (1972)	
Thorpe et al. (2011)	Stajkovic & Luthans (1998)	Uhl-Bien (2006)	
Tracey & Hinkin (1998)	Tucker (1968)	Van Dierendonck (2011)	
	Weber (1947)		

Culture Creators	Influencers	Inclusive	Engaging
Uhl-Bien (2006) Van Dierendonck (2011)	Yukl (1999)		Mayer & Salovey (1997) Patterson (2003) Power (2013) Salovey & Mayer (1990) Thorndike (1920) Thorpe et al. (2011) Tracey & Hinkin (1998)

Through these characteristics, relational leaders create organizational cultures where leaders and followers alike bring their best versions of themselves and build collective relational dynamics that help each other and the organizations thrive.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, there are multiple realities at work in entitative and relational approaches of the RLT, each having a legitimate place in creating a relational environment. While both perspectives emphasize relationships, how they view and pursue building relationships differ significantly. While the entity perspective draws from the individual perspective, with the leader as a focal point, the relational perspective views leadership as a shared social process, where leaders' and followers' effects on each other are equally valued. In this construct, "what is and how we know it" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 663) is an ongoing process of discovery, where knowledge is not centered as more or less subjective or objective in one individual's mind (Hosking & Pluut, 2010). The ontology is given to relational processes and the local realities they create. The term "local" is employed here as a process through which relational realities are made and remade (Hosking & Pluut, 2010). What is real in this postentity perspective is emergent relational interactions that continuously change and evolve. To borrow Chia's (1995) words,

relational constructionism assumes an “ontology of becoming” rather than the “ontology of being” (p. 581).

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This is a qualitative study using narrative methods. It is classified as a non-human subjects research as noted in the Pepperdine University's IRB Website (Pepperdine University Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board, Summary of New Common Rule Changes, 2019). The study focuses on leaders in the banking industry, who are employed by U.S.-based banks. Banking leaders in this study are described as those who hold leadership or management positions with a senior-level title. Leadership strategies are gathered from various publicly available and accessible sources, such as, books, websites, journals, and news articles.

#### **Background**

The COVID-19 pandemic created massive challenges in the U.S. Organizations across the country experienced an unprecedented disruption in the availability of a healthy workforce, causing many employers to transition into working remotely. Remote work environments created unforeseen challenges with how employees interacted with their leaders and each other, and how organizational cultures were created and maintained.

As one of the nation's top employers (Financial Institutions, n.d., Number of employees section), the banking sector was not immune to these challenges. Banking leaders were called upon to make tough decisions, such as, how to minimize the spread of the virus in their organizations while maintaining a high degree of employee engagement and focus (Katz & Miller, 2014). Banking organizations understood more than ever before that much of their success depended upon their leaders' ability to connect with employees and to create inclusive and engaging quality workplace environments (Katz & Miller, 2014). The quality work environment is defined in this study as a workplace where individual differences are nurtured; information is not suppressed or spun, but instead openly shared with all associates; and where

employees feel the company adds value to them, rather than only expecting it from them (Goffee & Jones; 2013; Katz & Miller, 2014; Tan, 2019).

While many factors could lead to a high level of inclusivity and employee engagement, this study contends that leaders who practice a relational style create quality workplace environments. Their ability to connect with employees enables them to navigate their organizations through the challenging business climate in the postpandemic era (Katz & Miller, 2014). This study aims to understand how banking leaders employ relational leadership in practice to create and sustain quality workplace environments.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain a deeper understanding of the relational leadership strategies banking leaders currently practice to foster quality workplace environments. There is a significant amount of literature available on relational leadership (Bass, 1985, 1999; Brown & Hosking, 1986; Burns, 1978; Dachler & Hosking, 1995a; Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010; Hosking, 1988; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Weber, 1947). A review of literature produced a list of four central themes for relational leaders as:

- **Culture creators:** Individuals who lead with values and who inspire others around them to do the same. These leaders are able to inspire others around them, leaders and followers alike, to help each other advance to a higher-level of motivation (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006).
- **Influencer:** Leaders who, in addition to strong professional and charismatic capabilities, possess high levels of social and relational connectivity with others

- (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bass, 1985, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976).
- **Inclusive:** Leaders who are intentional with welcoming a diverse set of individuals to participate in utilizing all available resources in the organization, and to be included in the decision-making process (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bass, 1985, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976; Tan, 2019).
  - **Engaging:** Leaders who inspire followers to get involved in the organization's success, and to be enthusiastic and committed to their work and workplace (Antonakis, 2012; Carter et al., 2015; Chia, 1995; Dewar et al., 2020; Fiol et al., 1999; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Katz & Miller, 2014).

While there is an existing theoretical framework on relational leadership, there is limited literature on how leaders utilize this leadership style, specifically in the banking industry. By gaining a deeper understanding of relational leadership and its potential positive benefits on creating quality workplace environments, banking leaders will be better equipped to lead their teams and navigate their organizations in the postpandemic era.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching question for this study is: What are the relational leadership strategies commonly practiced by banking leaders to foster quality workplace environments?

The following subquestions stem from the theoretical framework of this study:

- **Research Question 1:** What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create quality organizational cultures?
- **Research Question 2:** What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to influence others?

- Research Question 3: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create inclusivity?
- Research Question 4: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create high employee and organizational engagement?

### **Methodological Approach and Study Design**

This study employs Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership model as the foundation for the theoretical framework to explore what relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to foster quality workplace environments. The study employs a qualitative design utilizing narratives in the data collection process. A choice for the qualitative approach was substantiated by the scant amount of research related to how leaders in banking industry employ relational leadership style to create quality workplace environments. Narrative inquiry provides a method to discover leadership approaches as researched in the study. Narratives gathered through publicly available and accessible sources are collected and analyzed in relation to the study purpose. The themes gleaned from the data are reviewed for alignment to the key characteristics of relational leaders uncovered during the extensive review of literature: culture creators (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006), influencers (Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; House, 1976), inclusive (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a, Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016), and engaging (Antonakis, 2012; Carter et al., 2015; Chia, 1995; Dewar et al., 2020; Fiol et al., 1999; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Katz & Miller, 2014).

## Data Sources and Data Gathering Procedures

This study met the federal guidelines as non-human subjects research as approved by the Pepperdine University IRB. All data for this study were gathered from publicly available and accessible texts. There was no interaction with human subjects.

The researcher's goal in establishing data gathering procedures is to yield a clear and precise document to allow readers to understand the step-by-step process employed in the study (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). This document could also assist other researchers in replicating the study.

In order to obtain a diverse data, the researcher utilized various publicly available and accessible sources, including books, websites, journals, and news articles. The number of sources obtained was believed to be sufficient to allow the researcher to discover "rich descriptions of the participant's experiences" (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 148).

Creswell (2013) stated that in a narrative study, one method with which researchers obtain information is through documents. This study used a purposeful criterion sampling approach to obtain publicly available and accessible documents and data to research the subject matter of this dissertation in an attempt to answer the research questions. Purposeful, criterion-based research increased the likelihood for relevant information that produces an understanding of the study problem and illuminates the phenomenon associated with the research (Creswell, 2013).

The following was applied:

- Banking leaders who hold a leadership or management positions;
- Employed by banks headquartered in the U.S.; and
- Fluent in the English language.



## **Limitations**

Limitations can involve areas over which a researcher has little or no control, and they may affect the researcher's ability to generalize the findings (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The sample population of this study was limited to the leaders employed by U.S.-based institutions. Consequently, the sample population did not include diverse perspectives and practices from banking leaders worldwide, resulting in the researcher's inability to draw universalizable conclusions from the study's findings.

Additionally, because the participants involved in the study were working with U.S.-based banking institutions, the study's findings may have an inherent cultural bias. Relational leadership in U.S.-based organizations may have different connotations and implications than in other cultures (Power, 2013; Rockstuhl, 2012). For example, studies in Scottish and Indian business organizations demonstrated followers' propensity to favor a highly depersonalized leadership style, where leaders were recognized for practicing less favoritism and regarded as fairer and more equitable (Power, 2013).

The study utilized a qualitative method with a narrative process, where the researcher conveyed the findings gleaned from qualitative data obtained from publicly available and accessible sources. Further studies on this topic could employ quantitative or mixed-methods methodologies to explore the subject matter further.

## **Credibility and Dependability**

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), validity in qualitative research means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing specific procedures. On the other hand, qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and projects (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The term *credibility* is often

utilized in qualitative research to describe the concept of validity, and the term *dependability* refers to reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Patton, 2015).

Credibility in qualitative research indicates the degree to which an instrument truly measures what it intends to measure (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019), while the dependability factor enables the reader to trust the data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Multiple publicly available and accessible sources were utilized to substantiate the consistency of the findings. Triangulating the evidence gleaned from different data sources added a layer of credibility to the research. To establish the dependability of the identified themes, a second reviewer was utilized to examine independently the responses for consistency using the same coding process as the researcher. The second reviewer was invited to offer additional themes independently gleaned from the data, other than what the researcher offered, and discuss the differences. The researcher and the second reviewer manually compared the data with the codes independently to avoid drift in the definitions. Once completed, they compared the notes from the analysis to ensure the credibility and dependability of the coding process. Hyatt's (2017) detailed 10-step process was employed to establish interreviewers' working process and further support this study's credibility and dependability.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Rigorous research incorporating sound methods and demonstrating high-ethical principles are the primary responsibilities of a researcher (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). When it comes to research, the following areas are critical for ethical consideration: protection of the data sources, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, respect for the research site, and disseminating the research (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). As part of the preparation process and to

gain further research training in processes, the researcher successfully completed the CITI program's Human Subjects Training course (see Appendix A).

A central ethical consideration in this study was to maintain the anonymity of the researched individuals. For this purpose, the researcher did not use the individual names, their titles or organizations' names. This process ensured that researched individuals stayed anonymous. Instead, the researcher referred to the researched individuals throughout the study as banking leaders. In this study, banking leaders were described as those people who hold leadership or management positions with a senior-level title.

### ***Beneficence***

The principle of beneficence incorporates an ethical approach to study participants and ensures efforts to secure their well-being. The study incorporated actions to minimize risks for participants by pointing out precise steps to protect the anonymity of any identifiable information. The researcher obfuscated the obtained data from publicly available and accessible sources by assigning a numeric number to each researched leader. For example, the first source utilized for the first research question was notated as A1, the second source as A2, the third as A3, and so on. Only the researcher held the list of obtained sources in an electronic folder, saved in the private, password-protected computer, which was stored in a locked cabinet when unused and destroyed upon completion of the study.

### ***Justice***

The primary question addressed by the justice principle relates to who receives the benefits of research and bears its burdens. In relating the concept of justice toward subjects, researchers need to consider that participants are selected equitably based on factors relevant to the studied problems (Hicks, 2004). Furthermore, researchers also need to consider an equitable

distribution of advantages to research participants and others who could potentially benefit from the knowledge gained by the research (Gostin, 1991).

To ensure that the selection process of subjects is equitable, the researcher drew candidates from a large pool of nationwide leaders from multiple publicly available and accessible sources, including published books, websites, journals, and news articles. Each research question was substantiated with a minimum of seven sources.

The study's findings are intended to add to the body of knowledge on relational leadership theory, specifically to how leaders in the banking industry practice this leadership style to foster a quality workplace environment. By bringing theory and practice together, the researcher aimed to add to the body of knowledge for relational leadership in the banking industry.

### **Data Analysis Processes**

The data analysis process intended to make sense out of text and data gathered during the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The following steps were followed for data analysis following Creswell and Creswell's (2018) five-step model:

- Organize and prepare the data for analysis. This step involves organizing, transcribing, and cataloging all researched data. Written memos are included as a narrative in the final report.
- Read and review all the data. This step is designed to evaluate the general idea that researched leaders are sharing. Observational notes in the margins of transcripts are captured.

- Coding the data. This step involves taking text data from researched sources and segmenting specific sentences and paragraphs from selected leaders' answers into categories. Each category is assigned a specific describing name as a code.
- Generate descriptions and themes. Because the text data is expected to be dense, not all information can be used in a qualitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this reason, the researcher will aggregate data into a small number of themes. Diverse quotations from researched sources support each theme.
- Representing the description and themes. Using a narrative passage, the findings of the analysis are conveyed. Themes are described in detail with specific illustrations from researched leaders' narration. Interconnecting themes using data tables are presented.

### **Means to Ensure Internal Study Dependability**

Following a review of the data by the researcher to ensure anonymity, a detailed record of any written notes from the research was documented, reviewed, and shared with the second reviewer. According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), dependability in qualitative studies “demonstrates support for the conclusions” (p. 149). Hyatt’s (2017) 10-step process was applied to establish interreviewer dependability and support the trustworthiness of this study:

1. The primary researcher analyzes the data and then meets with the second reviewer to review the coding process for identifying themes.
2. The primary researcher selects a transcript to familiarize the reviewer with the coding process.
3. The researcher maintains the highlighted, analyzed version of the transcript.
4. The reviewer is provided with a clean (noncoded) copy of the selected transcript.

5. Prior to analysis, the researcher and reviewer will read the transcript to familiarize the reviewer with the data from the transcripts and answer any questions about the transcript.
6. The researcher assists the reviewer in completing the analysis of one selected transcript by bracketing for reduction, horizontalization, and synthesis of the text for structural descriptions and conclusions.
7. Meaning units are entered in the left margin. Structural descriptions and conclusions are entered into the right margin. This completes the analysis of the transcript.
8. The additional reviewer applies the same process to the remaining transcripts independent of the primary researcher.
9. After completing all transcripts, the primary researcher and reviewer reconvene. The primary researcher and the reviewer review their identified findings, discuss differences, and agree on the conclusions. An analysis categorizing form may be created to identify the agreed-upon themes.
10. Generally, criteria for significant themes are met when most participants provide supportive data for the themes.

### **Researcher and Reflexivity**

“Qualitative research is interpretative research” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 182), where the researcher is typically involved in sustained and intensive review of data. This level of involvement introduces a range of potential personal biases in the process (L. F. Locke et al., 2013). With these concerns in mind, researchers need to identify and clearly state their “biases, values, and personal background...that shape their interpretations formed during a study” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 182).

The focus of the study is relational leadership. The goal is to understand the relational leadership practices banking leaders employ to foster a quality workplace environment. It is noteworthy that the researcher's interest in the subject matter may potentially shape the interpretations of the gathered data. To minimize the risk of bias associated with the researcher's interest in the subject matter and interpret the data objectively, Srivastava and Hopwood's (2009) framework for reflexivity was adopted. The process involves three steps: (a) What does the data tell the researcher? —to sharpen the objective focus; (b) What does the researcher want to know? —to refine the point of interest; (c) What is the dialectical relationship between what the data is showing and what the researcher wants to know? —to identify a potential bias (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). The ongoing reflection and analysis of these steps were implemented throughout the data collection process.

Combating potential biases requires an ongoing examination of oneself as a researcher in the process and the personal relationship to the topic of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To incorporate reflexive thinking into the study, the researcher kept notes throughout the data collection process and evaluated how personal experiences potentially shaped the interpretations of the data. A methodical and thoughtful self-evaluation was employed throughout the research.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 presented a review of the qualitative research methodology utilized in the study. Following the outline of the problem statement, research questions, and the methodological approach, the following sections were outlined: Data sources and data gathering procedures, limitations, credibility and dependability, ethical considerations, proposed data analysis processes, means to ensure internal study dependability, and researcher reflexivity.

The next chapter describes the findings of the study, followed by Chapter 5, which elaborates on the conclusions and implications of the study, and highlights recommendations for future study.



## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

This qualitative case study was designed to explore banking leaders' relational leadership practices to create quality workplace environments. A quality work environment was defined in this study as a workplace where individual differences are nurtured, information is not suppressed or spun but instead openly shared with all associates, and where employees feel the company adds value to them, rather than only expecting it from them (Goffee & Jones; 2013; Katz & Miller, 2014; Tan, 2019). Banking leaders in this study were described as those who hold leadership or management positions with a senior-level title. The overarching question of this study was: What are the relational leadership strategies commonly practiced by banking executives to foster quality workplace environments? Uhl-Bien's (2006) Relational Leadership theory was employed as the foundation for the study, with the two distinct perspectives of the relational approach: the entity perspective, focusing on individual leaders; and the relational perspective, which focuses on the collective dynamic of leadership creation.

A thorough review of the literature on relational leadership revealed many authors who pointed out distinctions that correspond to several characteristics of relational leaders, which served as the theoretical framework for this study. These characteristics were: culture creators (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006), influencers (Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; House, 1976), inclusive (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a, Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016), and engaging (Antonakis, 2012; Carter et al., 2015; Chia, 1995; Dewar et al., 2020; Fiol et al., 1999; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Katz & Miller, 2014). Table 1 in Chapter 2 showcased the authors found during the literature review who support these concepts.

The following research questions were developed based on the theoretical framework:

- RQ 1: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking executives to create quality organizational cultures?
- RQ 2: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by bank executives to influence others?
- RQ 3: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by bank executives to create inclusivity?
- RQ 4: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by bank executives to create employee and organizational engagement?

The study employed a qualitative design utilizing narratives in the data collection process. A choice for the qualitative approach was substantiated by the limited amount of research on how leaders in the banking industry employ relational leadership styles to create quality workplace environments. Narrative inquiry provided a method to discover leadership approaches investigated based on the four research questions. Narratives were gathered through publicly available and accessible sources. Data were collected and analyzed in relation to the study purpose, and central themes were developed for the strategies banking leaders employ in practice to create quality workplace environments.

### **Chapter Structure**

Chapter 4 presents the discussion on the data analysis and the study results. This chapter first restated the purpose, the methodological approach, and the research questions for the study. Next, the data sources and data gathering procedures are summarized. Additionally, the data analysis procedures and the methods for verification and trustworthiness are highlighted. Finally,

the research findings are presented based on the research questions, followed by the chapter summary at the end.

### **Data Sources and Data Gathering Procedures**

All data for this study were gathered from publicly available and accessible sources, such as published books, websites, journals, and news articles. There was no interaction with human subjects in this study, and, therefore, this study qualified as nonhuman subjects research.

This study used a purposeful criterion sampling approach to obtain publicly available and accessible documents and data to research the subject matter of this dissertation is an attempt to answer the research questions. The following criteria were applied when selecting the sources:

- Banking leaders who hold leadership or management positions;
- Employed by banks headquartered in the U.S.; and
- Fluent in the English language.

Because one of the ethical considerations in this study was to maintain the anonymity specific to data, no identifiers were used. This process ensured that data remain anonymous referring only to banking leaders with leadership or management positions with a senior-level title.

Nine points of data from publicly available and accessible-sources were used to supply the information for each research question. To protect the anonymity of any identifiable information, the researcher obfuscated the data by changing the wording of the obtained content without materially altering the meaning, and by assigning a numeric number and an alphabetical letter to each data content.

## **Limitations**

The leaders' data for this study were limited to those representing U.S.-based institutions. Because data gained in this study focused on U.S.-based banking institutions, the study's findings may have an inherent cultural bias. Relational leadership in U.S.-based organizations may have different connotations and implications than in other countries (Power, 2013; Rockstuhl, 2012).

Because this research was conducted as a nonhuman subject's study, the researcher was limited to a static text uncovered in publicly accessible and available sources. Subsequent clarifications on the data were not possible. Therefore, the researcher relied on the sourced data to interpret intended messages. To mitigate this limitation, an interviewer was utilized to increase the reliability of the data analysis.

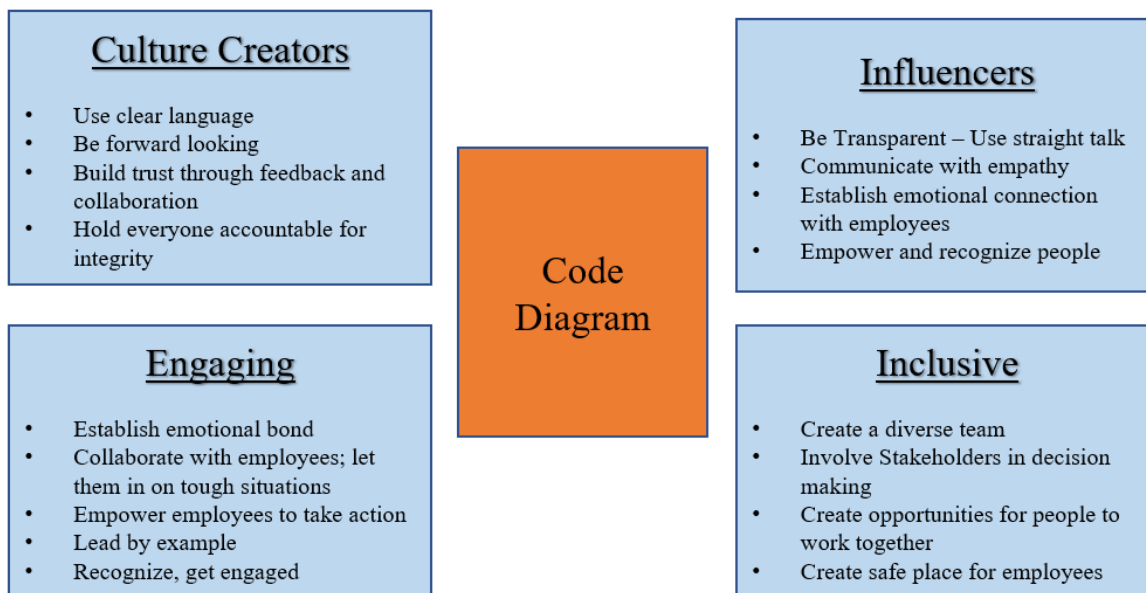
## **Data Analysis**

The following steps were utilized for data analysis following Creswell and Creswell's (2018) five-step model:

- Organize and prepare the data for analysis;
- Read and review all the data;
- Coding the data;
- Generate descriptions and themes; and
- Representing the description and themes.

During the data coding process, a deductive approach was applied to the process, which is a method of "testing or verifying a theory rather than developing it" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 56).

To assist the researcher to demonstrate which codes were identified for each theme, a code diagram was created (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1***Code Diagram for Relational Leadership Strategies*

The inductive coding approach was also utilized to engage in “building from the data to broad themes to generalized model or theory” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 63). These categories developed into broader themes, which Braun and Clarke (2006) called recurring patterns across a data set, grouped around a central idea. Theme definitions were created based on the data content obtained through research. However, in some cases, the researcher formed the definitions based on the literature review while balancing them with the interpretation of the data content. While the most obtained data touched on four central themes for relational leaders, not all leaders offered specific strategies. For the purpose of this study, the criteria for significant themes were met when most content from the websites supported data for the themes.

### **Methods for Verification and Trustworthiness**

To increase the credibility and dependability of the data, this study involved an interviewer in the coding process. The interviewer was familiar with leadership theories and practices, how to conduct qualitative research studies and the coding process. Hyatt’s (2017) 10-

step process was applied to establish interreviewer dependability and support the trustworthiness of this study.

1. The primary researcher analyzed the data and then met with the second reviewer to review the coding process.
2. The primary researcher selected a transcript to familiarize the reviewer with the coding process.
3. The researcher maintained the highlighted, analyzed version of the transcript.
4. The second reviewer was provided with a clean (noncoded) copy of the selected transcript.
5. Prior to analysis, the researcher and reviewer read the transcript to familiarize the reviewer with the data from the transcripts and answer any questions.
6. The researcher assisted the reviewer in completing the analysis of one selected transcript by reading the text, deciphering the general idea, assessing the fit for the research question, and identifying a relevant and appropriate theme.
7. The researcher and reviewer engaged in the coding process independently from each other, utilizing the collectively completed transcript as a guide to increase coding consistency among coders. An interreviewer comparison sheet was created on a shared Excel sheet by the researcher. The codes were entered under the researcher's and reviewer's separate columns.
8. The additional reviewer applied the same process to the remaining transcripts independently of the primary researcher.
9. After completing all transcripts, the primary researcher and reviewer reconvened and reviewed identified findings, discussed differences, and agreed on the conclusions.

Conclusions of agreement or disagreement between the researcher and reviewer were entered into the right column. In case of a dissent, agreed-upon codes were finalized and entered into the last column of the document.

10. Criteria for significant themes were agreed upon when most participants provided supportive data for the themes.

Table 2 shows an example of interviewer collaboration through the coding process.

**Table 2**

*Interviewer Comparison Sheet*

Leader	Primary Coder	Second Coder	Agreement	Disagreement	Final Subtheme
A1	Intentional	Intentional	1		Intentional
A2	Forward Looking	Focus		1	Forward Looking
A3	Lead with Integrity	Accountability		1	Lead with Integrity
A4	Reputation & Trust	Reputation & Trust	1		Reputation & Trust
A5	Focus	Focus	1		Focus
A6	Accountability	Culture		1	Culture
A7	Obtain Feedback	Obtain feedback	1		Obtain Feedback
A8	Trust & Collaboration	Teamwork		1	Trust & Collaboration
A9	Transparency	Transparency	1		Transparency

Following these interviewer discussions, to promote the transparency of the coding process and increase the trustworthiness of the analysis, the transcripts' intercoder reliability (ICR) was calculated. "ICR is a numerical measure of the agreement between different coders regarding how the same data should be coded" (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020, p. 2). While there are many ways of calculating ICR, the most common method is simply reporting the percentage of data units the coders agree (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). While there is no universally agreed upon

threshold for what is considered an acceptable ICR percentage, Landis and Koch (1977) recommended the agreement between coders to be measured through ICR percentages as follows: slight agreement when between 0 and .20, fair between .21 and .40, moderate between .41 and .60, substantial between .61 and .80, and perfect agreement between .81 and 1.

After the researcher and the secondary coder had the opportunity to review the data together and compare their analysis, the themes were agreed upon and finalized. Subsequently, the ICR rate for the entire transcript increased to .81, which further increased the reliability and trustworthiness of the coding process.

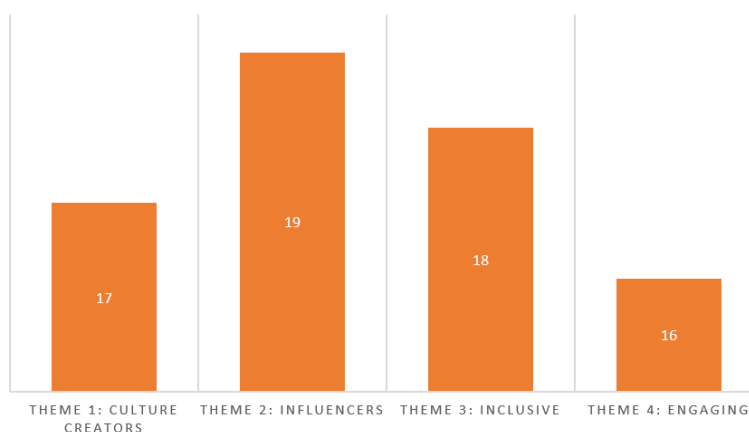
### **Research Results**

The study's central research goal was to explore how banking leaders practice the relational leadership style. The overarching question was: What are the relational leadership strategies commonly practiced by banking leaders to foster quality workplace environments? The study sought to investigate this objective by establishing four research questions. From the data analysis, 70 themes were discovered to indicate various relational strategies, which were then analyzed against the central themes of relational leaders: culture creators, influencers, inclusive, and engaging.



**Figure 2**

*Number of Initial Themes for Each Research Question*



### ***Research Question 1 and Corresponding Data***

Research Question 1 was: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create quality organizational cultures? This research question correlates to the theme of relational leaders as culture creators. For the purpose of this study, culture creators are defined as those who lead with values and inspire others around them, leaders and followers alike, to help each other advance to a higher level of motivation (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006). While 100% of the data points addressed the theme of Culture Creators, the majority of the leaders (six out of nine) offered specific strategies on culture creation. Here are some examples of the data that were captured in this category.

- If you don't worry about the culture, you will still have one. It'll be an unintentional culture. We did an employee survey and found 10 indicators of our highly unintentional culture. Examples like 'dump-and-blame' culture, or 'hair on fire' management. We had to regroup and define what culture we wanted to build. Leaders need to be intentional on the type of culture they want to build. (A1)

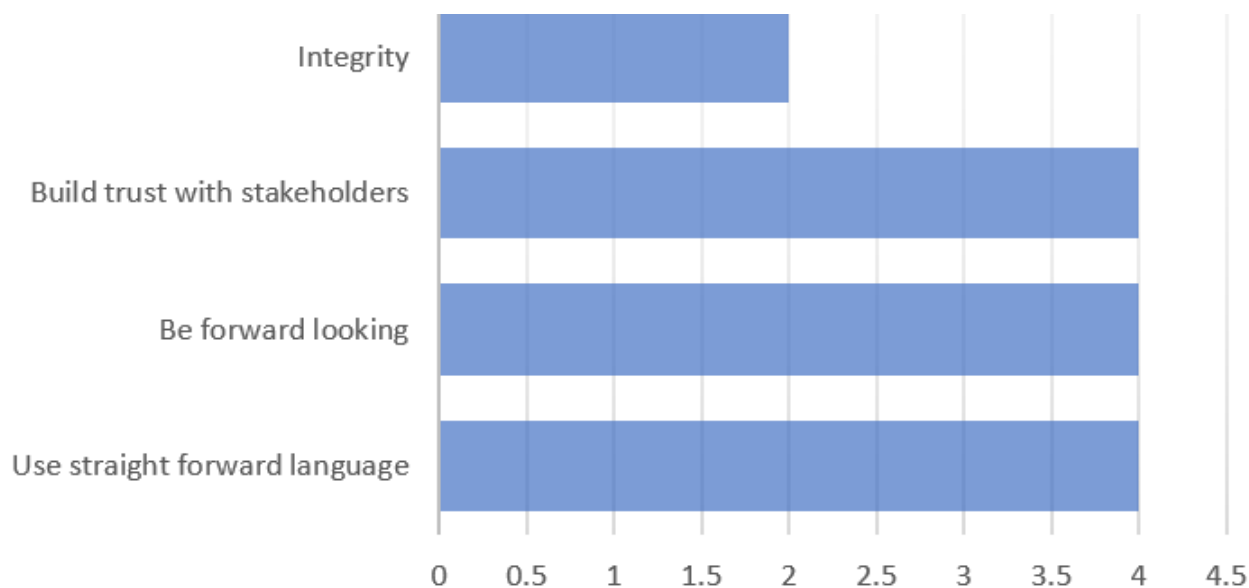
- We asked the leaders to use clear language to set the expectations on the type of culture we wanted to have and set clear examples. The key to our leadership model is that you can read one of two paragraphs of information and clearly know what we are asking for. It must be simple and to the point. (A2)
- Companies report earnings and are being evaluated on financial performance and words they use to move the markets...and that is appropriate. Would not be great too if there was intended added value to each of these companies that market trusts them, that they are sustainable because they are doing the right things and will be around next quarter, next year, next decade? (A3)
- Translating the corporate culture into internal practice begins with the leader. After gaining a strong overview of a particular business line or initiative, I like to dive into the trenches—frequently walking the branches to talk to employees and every few months offering a direct line to them in order to keep his ear to the ground. In so doing, I have learned to allow employees greater freedom to serve customers better. We need to have a culture where it's OK to make mistakes. (A7)
- Traditionally, our culture was based on expertise and products, but the landscape is changing quickly. Our culture has to adapt. We involved 700 employees in the process. Employees who enjoy a positive, supportive work culture will, in turn, transmit positivity to their customers. Improving the methods and tools for continuous employee feedback is the key to our cultural transformation and continuity. (A8)
- I think it is important that people can access and understand where the focus and priorities are. When you have had a very stable organization, it is important to step back and take a look to see if it still makes sense, particularly in a changing

environment. The key is to have a strategic clarity, starting with articulating the purpose for the organization. (A9)

Noteworthy patterns emerged when reviewing the data content. There were 17 original subthemes determined between the researcher and the interviewer derived from nine sources identified for the first research question. There were three significant subtheme categories where the majority of the data mapped into: (a) use straightforward language to articulate culture (four subthemes), (b) be forward-looking when setting the culture (four subthemes), (c) build trust with stakeholders through feedback and collaboration (four subthemes), and (d) Integrity (two subthemes).

### Figure 3

*Summary of the Subthemes Generated from RQ1*



### *Research Question 2 and Corresponding Data*

Research Question 2 was: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to influence others? This research question is correlated to the theme of relational leaders as influencers. For the purpose of this study, influencers are defined as those

who, in addition to strong professional and charismatic capabilities, possess high levels of social and relational connectivity with others (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bass, 1985, 1995b, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976; Tan, 2019). While 100% of the data points addressed the theme of influence, the majority of the leaders (seven out of nine) offered specific strategies on culture creation. Here are some examples of the data that were captured in this category.

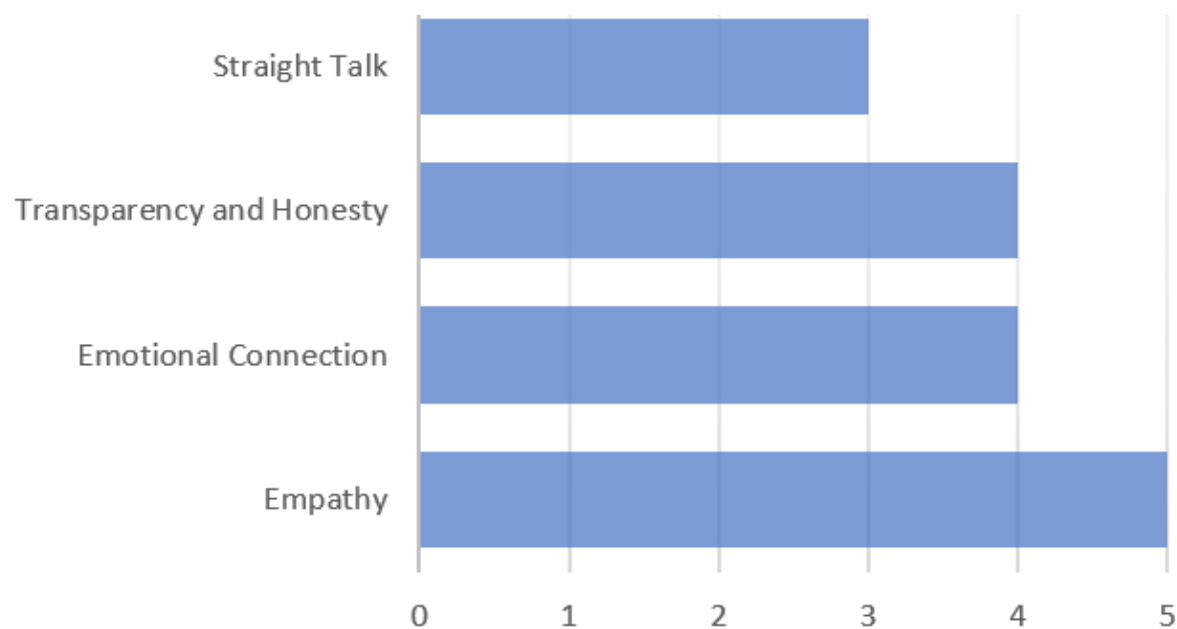
- I like straight talking. Transparency and authenticity are important. I don't like corporate speak. In my opinion, empathy is the way to bridge everything. I have learned the courage to talk straight but if you do it with empathy, you can be a straight talker without being an unpleasant person. (B1)
- Create connections with people is how you create a value to employees and customers. (B2)
- He is not a big talking, back-slapping individual, but rather he works in subtle, behind the scenes ways to make sure people understand the needs of the organization. He always stays in the shadows, like Wizard of Oz, pulling the cords and the buttons, but there is no question that he cares deeply about the people in the organization. What you see is what you get with him. (B3)
- Meetings are focused on deepening the emotional connection between the team members. The enemy is not the other person, but the negative cycle when sometimes communication is broken when the dialogue is not occurring. We do not, in corporate America, slow down ourselves enough to realize what triggers us and how that influences how we think, feel, and the way we look at the person in front of us. (B4)

- It is easy to talk a good game. People do what they see and not what they hear. Leading by example is the best way to lead. (B5)
- I have been very visible about asking for feedback. And even when it is tough feedback, being positive about it so that people do not feel like we are going to ever ‘shoot the messenger.’ We need to be more direct in talking with one another, use clear language and patience in hearing feedback. It puts people at ease to speak with you. (B6)
- Candor is critical in forming relationships and influencing others. It is a false kindness when you do not tell people where they stand or do not share the full picture. However, you have got to do it with empathy. People respect candor. (B8)

There were several noteworthy patterns that emerged when reviewing the data content. Nineteen subthemes from a total of nine sources were identified. The significant subtheme categories related to the theme of Culture Creators that emerged in the research were: (a) empathy (five subthemes), (b) emotional connection (four subthemes), (c) transparency and honesty (four subthemes), and (d) straight talk (three subthemes).

**Figure 4**

*Summary of the Subthemes Generated From RQ1*



***Research Question 3 and Corresponding Data***

Research Question 3 was: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create inclusivity? This research question is correlated to the theme of relational leaders as inclusive. For the purpose of this study, inclusivity refers to the intentional, ongoing practice of diverse people being welcomed to take part in all aspects of the work of an organization, including leadership positions and decision-making process (Tan, 2019, p. 31; see also Brower et al., 2000; Brown & Hosking, 1986; Dachler & Hosking, 1995a, Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016). Of the data points, 100% addressed the theme of inclusivity and offered specific strategies on building inclusivity in their organizations. Here are some examples of the data that were captured in this category.

- It makes you appreciate how different people with different ideas and backgrounds can come together and create great things together. With that diversity, you are a lot

better off, a lot stronger, and more innovative than if you are all out of the same mold. Leaders need to find ways to create such environments. (C1)

- Selfishly, you need to get the feedback from every possible source—in every which way you can: Survey Monkey, meeting with employees, 1:1's, client meetings...etc. Employees know best what the issue is with the company or a particular situation. To get the best feedback, you have got to surround yourself with the diverse talent and give everyone single one of them an opportunity to be heard. (C2)
- You have got to have a culture where there is no special club or a special class of citizens in the workplace. You need to have a culture where you are not only treated with respect, but you are able to speak up. (C3)
- We believe that achieving strong operating results starts with our employees, must reflect the diversity of the clients and communities we serve. Our diversity makes us stronger, and the value we deliver as a company is strengthened when we bring broad perspectives together to meet the needs of our diverse stakeholders. It starts from the top; leaders set the tone. (C4)
- It all starts with people. There has been a shift in our organization in growing talent and pulling them through. This internal mobility is a big focus for us. Things don't happen overnight. It's a long-term approach, as it takes a long time to develop people. And, it's a team approach. To develop people, it takes more than one person, one mentor, one coach. But this approach is rewarded by people feeling belonging and included. (C5)
- Developing a positive workplace has been instrumental in our bank. Our team did a lot to define our culture here, and they came up with five cultural cornerstones we

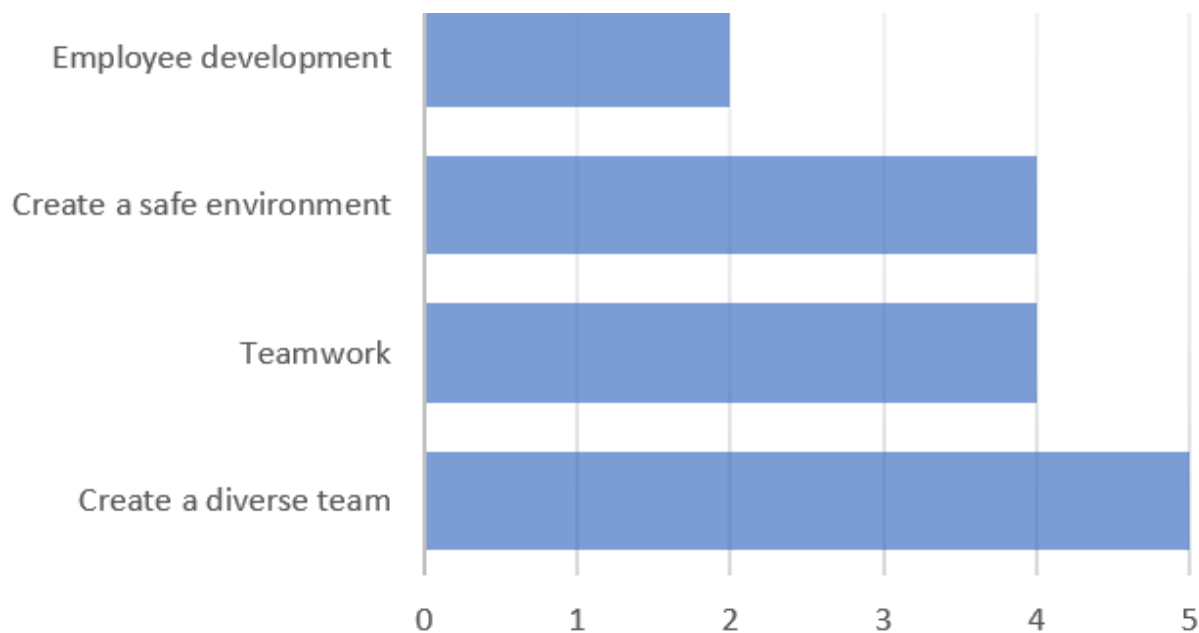
- live by today. The first and most important one is ‘better together.’ We all really believe that means something in our bank. Together is a keyword here. (C6)
- The nation’s changing demographics are an amazing force for good. The goal is to integrate various voices and minds in solving problems. It has to be purposeful, coordinated, and all are working toward the same objectives. (C7)
  - Diversity is a fact; inclusion is a choice. The board remains committed to increasing the representation of women in leadership positions. The bank’s voluntary goals for female representation remain unchanged and focus on the top three corporate titles (in headcount terms): managing director, director, and vice president. These goals form part of the key performance indicators on the ‘Balanced Scorecard’ for the organization. (C8)
  - Inclusivity is not just with employees but also clients. Everything we do is inspired by our clients. We adapt to their experiences and adjust to their lifestyles. (C9)

There were several noteworthy patterns that emerged when reviewing the data content. Eighteen subthemes from a total of nine sources were identified. The significant subtheme categories related to the theme of Influencers that emerged in the research were: (a) create a diverse team (five subthemes), (b) teamwork (four subthemes), (c) create a safe environment for employees (four subthemes), and (d) employee development (two subthemes).



**Figure 5**

*Summary of the Subthemes Generated from RQ1*



***Research Question 4 and Corresponding Data***

Research Question 4 was: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create employee and organizational engagement? This research question is correlated to the theme of relational leaders as engaging. For the purpose of this study, engagement describes the process where employees are involved in the organization's success, are enthusiastic, and committed to their work and workplace (Antonakis, 2012; Carter et al., 2015; Chia, 1995; Dewar et al., 2020; Fiol et al., 1999; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Katz & Miller, 2014). Of the data points, 100% addressed the theme of engagement and offered specific strategies on building engaging culture in their organizations. Here are some examples of the data that were captured in this category.

- Employers are desperate for engagement and loyalty from their employees. What we have to ask ourselves is this: What is that magic ingredient that creates loyalty and

engagement from employees? The answer is—experience. People want experience from their employers, from their leaders. They don't want just a salary. So, the question we as leaders need to ask ourselves when making decisions is how this particular decision impacts employees and their experience with their organization and the leaders. (D1)

- We listen, the management team is open. Our agenda is set by employees. If you work for me, I expect you to raise everything that's important, everything and anything, bureaucracies, challenges...etc. (D2)
- We have newly hired younger talent in the organization, as well as highly valued seasoned colleagues. What makes our secret source the best in class is the collaboration between these groups and between the groups and the management team. We still have some bonding to do as an organization—takes more discussion and focus. (D3)
- Companies often talk about doing one thing or another to increase employee engagement. But the question is never asked about what employees can do to get engaged. When JFK said, 'Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country,' the framework for engagement changed to personal accountability. Similarly, the leader's role in engaging employees is to create an environment where employees take responsibility to get engaged. (D4)
- People need to have fun. Help people to get excited about what they are doing, create an enjoyable work environment, have fun, and then recognize them publicly with a great fanfare with a job well done. When people are not having fun, and not recognized and no one says thanks, they become disengaged and feel unimportant.

- Recognition is corporate America's most underutilized tool. It is more important than compensation and benefits. (D5)
- Stress can get to you and others can see it. One thing I couldn't do to let my team see how concerned I was during stressful situations. And, they never knew. One way you can do this is by maintaining a sense of humor. During stressful situations, you are alone, by yourself, trying to stay focused. During stressful situations, I communicate 5–6 times a day so that people are informed, they know I don't trick them, they know where I stood and where they stand. (D6)
  - Be transparent, open, fact-based and treat people with respect—but also have high requirements on people delivering. It's important that they trust you. You can be firm, but fair. (D7)
  - The company is now unrelenting on its cultural values, ensuring that management leads by example. To help with this, these values were recently redefined and simplified to 'fun, family and empowerment.' This has included a focus on encouraging and supporting staff to grow personally and professionally. Our staff are my number one priority; Happy staff, happy clients. (D8)
  - Success is to create a culture where people say—I enjoy working here. Any organizations success depends on the team and how they pull together. I keep saying this to my team and it has become our motto. Employees know that if someone has an issue, they are in a family environment and people help each other. (D9)

There were several noteworthy patterns that emerged when reviewing the data content. Sixteen subthemes from the total of nine sources were identified. The significant subtheme categories related to the theme of Engagers that emerged in the research were: (a) employee

empowerment (five subthemes), (b) personal connections (four subthemes), and (c) collaboration and communication (four subthemes).

### Figure 6

*Summary of the Subthemes Generated from RQ1*

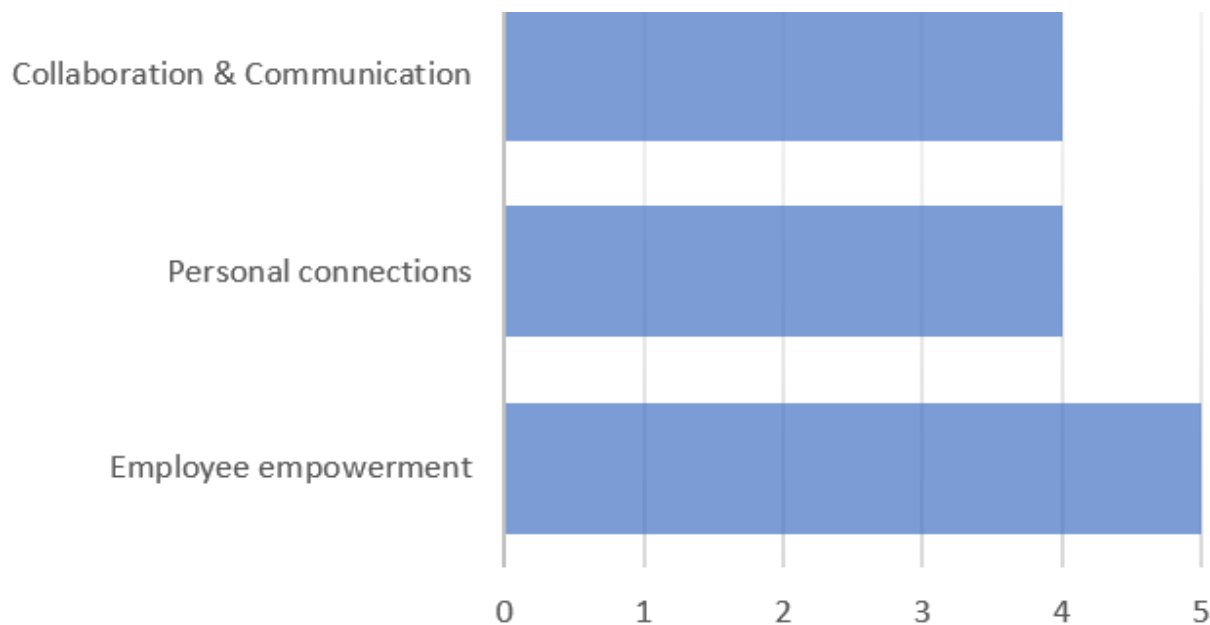


Table 3 summarizes significant subthemes uncovered from the data content related to each research question.

### Table 3

*Research Questions and Significant Subthemes*

Theme	Research Question	Subthemes
Culture Creators	RQ1: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking executives to create high-quality organizational cultures?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use clear language to articulate culture</li> <li>• Be forward-looking when setting the culture</li> <li>• Build trust with stakeholders through feedback and collaboration</li> <li>• Hold everyone accountable for integrity</li> </ul>
Influencer	RQ2: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate with empathy</li> <li>• Establish an emotional connection</li> </ul>

Theme	Research Question	Subthemes
	bank executives to influence others?	with employees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency and honesty</li> <li>• Use straight talk</li> </ul>
Inclusive	RQ3: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by bank executives to create inclusivity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a diverse team</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> <li>• Create a safe environment for employees</li> <li>• Employee development</li> </ul>
Engaging	RQ4: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by bank executives to create high employee and organizational engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee empowerment</li> <li>• Personal connection</li> <li>• Collaboration and communication</li> </ul>

## Summary

Chapter 4 presented the data analysis process and the study results to explore banking leaders' relational leadership practices to create quality workplace environments. Creswell and Creswell's (2018) five data analysis steps were followed as a general guideline in the data analysis process. To increase the reliability of the study, Hyatt's (2013) 10-step process for working with the interviewer was also utilized during the data analysis process. Additionally, to promote the coding process's transparency and increase the trustworthiness of the analysis, the transcripts ICR was calculated.

This chapter ended with research findings based on the research questions. Nine sources were uncovered for each research question from publicly available and accessible sources. The data analysis summarized relational leaders' practices as culture creators, influencers, inclusive, and engaging. Under these four main themes, central subthemes were developed. First, as culture creators, relational leaders use straightforward language to articulate culture; they are forward-looking when setting the culture; and build trust with stakeholders through feedback and collaboration. Second, to influence others, relational leaders transparently conduct themselves, they use straight talk, they communicate with empathy, establish emotional connections with

others, and empower and recognize people. Third, to create inclusivity, relational leaders intentionally create diverse teams, promote teamwork, and create safe work environments where people feel respected and free to speak up. Last, to create engagement, relational leaders empower people, they establish personal connections with employees, and create environments where employees engage in constant collaboration and communication. A discussion and summary of the key findings, conclusions, and implications are presented in the final chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Findings and Conclusions**

The COVID-19 pandemic created massive challenges in the U.S. Organizations across the country experienced an unprecedented disruption in the availability of a healthy workforce, causing many employers to transition into working remotely. Remote work environments created unforeseen challenges with how employees interacted with their leaders and each other, and how organizational cultures were created and maintained.

As the nation's one of the top employers (Financial Institutions, n.d., Number of employees section), the banking sector was not immune to these challenges. Banking leaders were called upon to make tough decisions, such as, how to minimize the spread of the virus in their organizations while maintaining a high degree of employee engagement and focus (Katz & Miller, 2014). Banking organizations understood more than ever before that much of their success depended upon their leaders' ability to connect with employees and to create inclusive and engaging quality workplace environments (Katz & Miller, 2014). The quality work environment is defined in this study as a workplace where individual differences are nurtured; information is not suppressed or spun, but instead openly shared with all associates; and where employees feel the company adds value to them, rather than only expecting it from them (Goffee & Jones; 2013; Katz & Miller, 2014; Tan, 2019).

### **Structure of the Chapter**

The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of the study's findings and conclusions. This chapter begins with the overview of the study, by restating the problem statement, purpose, theoretical framework, and research questions on which this study was focused. The study's design, methodology, and ethical considerations are reintroduced. Data analysis procedures are described before the study's findings, conclusions, and implications are

highlighted. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research, followed by the final summary.

## **Overview of the Study**

### ***Review of the Problem***

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. banks were already undergoing significant changes. With the increased rate of automation, banks started to reduce significantly their workforce and shrink their retail branch network (Hu et al., 2021). Between 2007 and 2018, the nation's four largest banks, which collectively managed 41% of the industry's total assets, reduced staff by a combined 300,000 positions (Brooks, 2021). Many banking employees found that leaders were expecting more from fewer resources. This paradigm shift negatively impacted employee morale and engagement, especially in large banking institutions (Katz & Miller, 2014).

The pandemic introduced a new set of complexities for banking executives. The state and regulatory restrictions and concern for the spread of the virus at the workplace forced executives to redeploy the vast majority of the employees to work remotely. Banking leaders had to lead a predominantly remote workforce, which was a drastic change from the historical norm. Banking leaders had to interact with employees via various teleconference media, which required a need for executives to be more intentional and compassionate with how they interacted with their employees (Katz & Miller, 2014).

There is currently an active dialogue among banking leaders on the topics such as employees' return to work, the effectiveness of the remote workforce, and the culture creation in the current unprecedented times (The Wall Street Journal, 2021). Unfortunately, there is limited dialogue on the concepts of leaders' roles and leadership during these transitional times (Katz & Miller, 2014). This study contends that the ability of banking leaders to connect with employees,



forge trust-based relationships, and build relational cultures together with their followers is drastically missing in the current discourse. This research intends to shed light on how banking leaders can create quality workplace environments and lead their organizations more effectively through relational leadership.

### **Restatement of Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain a deeper understanding of the relational leadership strategies banking leaders currently practice to foster quality workplace environments. While there is an existing theoretical framework on relational leadership, there is limited literature on how leaders utilize this leadership style, specifically in the banking industry. By gaining a deeper understanding of relational leadership and its potential positive benefits on creating quality workplace cultures, banking leaders will be better equipped to lead their teams and navigate their organizations in the postpandemic era.

### **Review of the Theoretical Framework**

Uhl-Bien's (2006) Relational Leadership theory provided the theoretical framework for this research study. A review of the literature produced many authors supporting Uhl-Bien's (2006) Relational Leadership theory and the two distinct perspectives of the relational approach: the entity perspective and the relational perspective.

The entity perspective, which can be considered a more traditional view, focuses on specific characteristics and behaviors of leaders as individuals (Bass, 1999; Burns, 1978; Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992; House, 1976; Weber, 1947). In contrast to the entity approach, the relational perspective shifts the focus toward the process of relational leadership creation, where leaders and followers are collectively responsible for ultimate results (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a). Uhl-Bien (2006) claimed that in the relational

perspective model, “leadership is not concentrated within certain individuals but is distributed throughout the social field” (p. 662). Contrary to many traditional leadership theories where the leader is a central figure in creating a trust-based, cohesive social and organizational environment, the relational perspective promotes that creating such relationship-based environments becomes a collective mission of all individuals involved in the process (Uhl-Bien, 2006). While the entity and relational perspectives approach leadership from a significantly contrasting point of view, the relational leadership theory draws from both methodologies.

An extensive literature review conducted on relational leadership highlighted many authors who pointed out distinctions that correspond to a relational leader’s characteristics as culture creators (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006), influencers (Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; House, 1976), inclusive (Dachler & Hosking, 1995a, Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 2016), and engaging (Antonakis, 2012; Carter et al., 2015; Chia, 1995; Dewar et al., 2020; Fiol et al., 1999; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Katz & Miller, 2014). These characteristics are defined as follows:

- Culture creators: Individuals who lead with values and who inspire others around them to do the same. These leaders are able to inspire others around them, leaders and followers alike, to help each other advance to a higher-level of motivation (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006).
- Influencer: Leaders who, in addition to strong professional and charismatic capabilities, possess high levels of social and relational connectivity with others (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bass, 1985, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976).

- **Inclusive:** Leaders who are intentional with welcoming a diverse set of individuals to participate in utilizing all available resources in the organization, and to be included in the decision-making process (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bass, 1985, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976; Tan, 2019).
- **Engaging:** Leaders who inspire followers to get involved in the organization's success, and to be enthusiastic and committed to their work and workplace (Antonakis, 2012; Carter et al., 2015; Chia, 1995; Dewar et al., 2020; Fiol et al., 1999; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Katz & Miller, 2014).

Table 4 summarizes these four relational leadership themes and highlights various authors whose work contributed to the body of knowledge for relational leadership.

**Table 4**

*Summary of Relational Leadership Themes and Authors*

Culture Creators	Influencers	Inclusive	Engaging
Antonakis (2012)	Andersen & Chen (2002)	Antonakis (2012)	Andersen & Chen (2002)
Bandura (1977, 1994)	Anderson et al. (2008)	Balkundi & Kilduff (2005)	Andersen & Glassman (1996)
Bar-On (2006)	Antonakis (2012)	Bandura (1978)	Avolio et al. (2009)
Bass (1985, 1999)	Bandura (1994)	Bar-On (2006)	Baldwin et al. (1990)
Bass & Riggio (2006)	Bandura & Jourden (1991)	Bass (1999)	Baldwin & Holmes (1987)
Bass & Steidlmeier (1999)	Bannister (2014)	Bass & Steidlmeier (1999)	Balkundi & Kilduff (2005)
Beverly (2016)	Bass (1985, 1995a, 1999)	Beverly (2016)	Bass (1985)
Block (2006)	Bass & Riggio (2006)	Block (2006)	Beverly (2016)
Bolman & Deal (2017)	Berscheid & Reis (1998)	Brower et al. (2000)	Brewer & Gardner (1996)
Bryman (1993)	Bryman (1993)	Brown & Hosking (1986)	Brower et al. (2000)
Burns (1978)	Burns (1978)	Chia (1995)	Burns (1978)
Carter et al. (2015)	Coetzer et al. (2017)	Coetzer et al. (2017)	Carter et al. (2015)
Dachler & Hosking (1995a)	Fiol et al. (1999)	Dachler & Hosking (1995a)	Chia (1995)
Dansereau et al. (1975)	French & Raven (1959)	Dansereau et al. (1975)	Dachler & Hosking (1995a)
Dewar et al. (2020)	Friedrich (1961)	Dewar et al. (2020)	Dansereau et al.
Drath (1990)		Fiol et al. (1999)	
Fiol et al. (1999)			

Culture Creators	Influencers	Inclusive	Engaging
Gajendran & Aparna (2012)	Galoji & Jibrin (2016)	Gajendran & Aparna (2012)	(1975) Dewar et al. (2020)
Greenleaf (1977)	Goleman (1995)	Goleman (1995)	Drath (1990)
Hollander (1992, 2010)	Hogg (2001)	Graen (2016)	Fiol et al. (1999)
House (1976)	House (1976)	Greenleaf (1977)	Friedrich (1961)
Katz & Miller (2014)	Judge et al. (2007)	Hogg (2001)	Gajendran & Aparna (2012)
Kirkpatrick & Locke (1991)	Katz & Miller (2014)	Katz & Miller (2014)	Galoji & Jibrin (2016)
Kotter (1995)	Katzenbach & Smith (1999)	Lick & Bootzin (1975)	Goleman (1995, 1998)
Lewin (1947)	Lanaj et al. (2019)	McCall et al. (1988)	Graen (2016)
Murrell (1997)	Latham & Locke (1991)	Moore (1965)	Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995)
Patterson (2003)	Lewin (1947)	Pajares (1997)	Graham (1991)
Power (2013)	Lord & Emrich (2001)	Paul (1966)	Greenleaf (1977)
Roberto (2005)	Lunenburg (2010)	Power (2013)	Hogg (2001)
Rockstuhl (2012)	McCall et al. (1988)	Roberto (2005)	Hollander (1992, 2010)
Russell & Stone (2002)	Moss & Hunt (1927)	Rockstuhl (2012)	Hosking (1988)
Salovey & Mayer (1990)	Roberto (2005)	Russell & Stone (2002)	Hosking & Pluut (2010)
Schyns & Day (2010)	Rockstuhl (2012)	Senge (1990)	Katz & Miller (2014)
Senge (1990)	Seipp (1991)	Shamir et al. (1993)	Knippenberg et al. (2005)
Shamir et al. (1993)	Seipp (1991)	Smith & Henry (1996)	Lord & Emrich (2001)
Spears (2010)	Senge (1990)	Tajfel (1972)	Mayer & Salovey (1997)
Thorpe et al. (2011)	Shamir et al. (1993)	Uhl-Bien (2006)	Patterson (2003)
Tracey & Hinkin (1998)	Stajkovic & Luthans (1998)	Van Dierendonck (2011)	Power (2013)
Uhl-Bien (2006)	Tucker (1968)		Salovey & Mayer (1990)
Van Dierendonck (2011)	Weber (1947)		Spears (2010)
	Yukl (1999)		Thorndike (1920)
			Thorpe et al. (2011)
			Tracey & Hinkin (1998)

The theories and authors listed in the study formed basis for the research questions.

## **Research Questions Corresponding to Reviewed Theories and Authors**

The overarching question for this study was: What are the relational leadership strategies commonly practiced by banking leaders to foster quality workplace environments?

The following subquestions were as follows:

- Research Question 1: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create quality organizational cultures?
- Research Question 2: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to influence others?
- Research Question 3: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create inclusivity?
- Research Question 4: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create high employee and organizational engagement?

## **Methods Overview**

The study focused on leaders in the banking industry, who were employed by U.S.-based banks. Banking leaders in this study are described as those who hold leadership or management positions with a senior-level title. The researcher studied leadership strategies through various publicly available and accessible sources. Examples of publicly available and accessible data used in this study include published books, websites, journals, and news articles.

This study employed a qualitative design utilizing narratives in the data collection process. A choice for the qualitative approach was substantiated by the scant amount of research related to how leaders in banking industry employ relational leadership style to create quality workplace environments. Narrative inquiry provided a method to discover leadership approaches as researched in the study. Narratives gathered through publicly available and accessible sources

were collected and analyzed in relation to the study purpose. The themes gleaned from the data are reviewed for alignment to the key characteristics of relational leaders uncovered during the extensive review of literature: culture creators, influencers, inclusive, and engaging.

### **Ethical Considerations Overview**

One of the central ethical considerations in this study was to maintain the anonymity specific to data. No identifiers were used. The researcher obfuscated the data from publicly available and accessible sources without materially altering the meaning, and by assigning a numeric number and an alphabetical letter to each data source. Only the researcher held the list of obtained sources in an electronic folder, saved in the private, password-protected computer, which was stored in a locked cabinet when unused and destroyed upon completion of the study. This process ensured that data remained anonymous.

### **Data Analysis Overview**

#### *Content Analysis*

The data analysis was completed by following Creswell and Creswell's (2018) five-step model:

- Organized and prepared the data for analysis;
- Read and reviewed all the data;
- Selected text data from researched sources and segmented specific words and sentences into similar categories;
- Generated descriptions and themes; and
- Conveyed the findings using narrative passages.

### ***Interviewer Reliability***

In this study, interviewer data analysis was achieved through the use of Hyatt's (2017) 10-step method, set forth in Chapters 3, and restated below:

1. The primary researcher analyzed the data and then met the second reviewer to review the coding process.
2. The primary researcher selected a transcript to familiarize the reviewer with the coding process.
3. The researcher maintained the highlighted, analyzed version of the transcript.
4. The reviewer was provided with a clean (noncoded) copy of the selected transcript.
5. Prior to analysis, the researcher and reviewer read the data to familiarize the reviewer.
6. The researcher assisted the reviewer in completing the analysis of one selected data source.
7. Meaning units and structural descriptions were captured.
8. The additional reviewer applied the same process to the remaining transcripts independently of the primary researcher.
9. After completing all transcripts, the primary researcher and reviewer reconvened, reviewed findings, and agreed on the conclusions.
10. Criteria for significant themes were met when a majority participants provided supportive data for the themes.

Additionally, to promote the transparency of the coding process and further increase the trustworthiness of the analysis, the ICR (Landis & Koch, 1977) was calculated at .81, which indicated that the agreement between the coders were substantial. The above steps were followed to highlight credibility and dependability of the data.

## **Key Findings**

### ***Conclusion 1***

Research Question 1 asked: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create quality organizational cultures? The major subthemes related to relational leaders as culture creators that emerged from the data were (a) use clear language to articulate culture, (b) be forward-looking when setting the culture, and (c) build trust with stakeholders through feedback and collaboration. The strategy of using clear language, being forward-looking, and building trust with stakeholders through feedback and collaboration were evident in six out of eight subthemes obtained from the data sources. Below are some examples of these strategies:

- Strategy (a): We asked the leaders to use clear language to set the expectations on the type of culture we wanted to have and set clear examples. The key to our leadership model is that you can read one of two paragraphs of information and clearly know what we are asking for. It must be simple and to the point. (A2)
- Strategy (b): When I went back and reviewed our success in the last three years and examined the reasons, we were successful, my concern was that it might not be sustainable. The circumstances that sustained our success in the past were not the same that we would be facing in the future. we needed more urgency and vision to take on more. (A2)
- Strategy (c): Traditionally, our culture was based on expertise and products, but the landscape is changing quickly. Our culture has to adapt. We involved 700 employees in the process. Employees who enjoy a positive, supportive work culture will, in turn,



transmit positivity to their customers. Improving the methods and tools for continuous employee feedback is the key to our cultural transformation and continuity. (A7)

### *Conclusion 2*

Research Question 2 asked: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to influence others? This research question is correlated to the theme of relational leaders as Influencers. The major subthemes related to relational leaders as influencers were (a) using empathy, (b) emotional connection, (c) transparency and honesty, and (d) straight talk. The strategies of using empathy, emotional connection, transparency and honesty, and straight talk were evident in seven out of nine subthemes obtained from the data sources. Below are some examples of these strategies:

- Strategy (a): In my opinion, empathy is the way to bridge everything. I have learned the courage to talk straight, but if you do it with empathy, you can be a straight talker without being an unpleasant person. (B1)
- Strategy (b): Meetings are focused on deepening the emotional connection between the team members. The enemy is not the other person, but the negative cycle when sometimes communication is broken when the dialogue is not occurring. We do not, in corporate America, slow down ourselves enough to realize what triggers us and how that influences how we think, feel, and the way we look at the person in front of us. (B4)
- Strategy (c): It is easy to talk a good game. People do what they see and not what they hear. Leading by example is the best way to lead. (B5)
- Strategy (d): I have been very visible about asking for feedback. And even when it is tough feedback, being positive about it so that people do not feel like we are going to

ever shoot the messenger. We need to be more direct in talking with one another, use clear language and patience in hearing feedback. It puts people at ease to speak with you. (B6)

### ***Conclusion 3***

Research Question 3 asked: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create inclusivity? This research question is correlated to the theme of relational leaders as inclusive. The major subthemes related to relational leaders as inclusive were (a) create a diverse team, (b) teamwork, (c) create safe environment for employees, (d) employee development. Relational leaders' strategies of building inclusivity through building diverse teams, creating teamwork and safe environments, while focusing on employee developments were evident in 100% of the subthemes obtained from the data sources. Below are some examples of these strategies:

- Strategy (a): We believe that achieving strong operating results starts with our employees, must reflect the diversity of the clients and communities we serve. Our diversity makes us stronger, and the value we deliver as a company is strengthened when we bring broad perspectives together to meet the needs of our diverse stakeholders. It starts from the top; leaders set the tone. (C4)
- Strategy (b): Developing a positive workplace has been instrumental in our bank. Our team did a lot to define our culture here, and they came up with five cultural cornerstones we live by today. The first and most important one is 'better together.' We all really believe that means something in our bank. Together is a keyword here. (C6)

- Strategy (c): You have got to have a culture where there is no special club or a special class of citizens in the workplace. You need to have a culture where you are not only treated with respect, but you are able to speak up. (C3)
- Strategy (d): It all starts with people. There has been a shift in our organization in growing talent and pulling them through. This internal mobility is a big focus for us. Things don't happen overnight. It's a long-term approach, as it takes a long time to develop people. And, it's a team approach. To develop people, it takes more than one person, one mentor, one coach. But this approach is rewarded by people feeling belonging and included. (C5)

#### ***Conclusion 4***

Research Question 4 asked: What relational leadership strategies are commonly practiced by banking leaders to create employee and organizational engagement? This research question is correlated to the theme of relational leaders as engagers. The major subthemes related to relational leaders as engagers were (a) employee empowerment, (b) personal connections, and (c) collaboration and communication. Relational leaders' strategies of building engagement through empowering people, establishing personal connections, and engaging in collaboration and communication were evident in 100% of the subthemes obtained from the data sources.

Below are some examples of these strategies:

- Strategy (a): Companies often talk about doing one thing or another to increase employee engagement. But the question is never asked about what employees can do to get engaged. When JFK said Americans should ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country, the framework for engagement changed to personal accountability. Similarly, the leader's role in engaging

- employees is to create an environment where employees take responsibility to get engaged. (D4)
- Strategy (b): Employers are desperate for engagement and loyalty from their employees. What we have to ask ourselves is this: What is that magic ingredient that creates loyalty and engagement from employees? The answer is—experience. People want experience from their employers, from their leaders. They don't want just a salary. So, the question we as leaders need to ask ourselves when making decisions is how this particular decision impacts employees and their experience with their organization and the leaders. (D1)
  - Strategy (c): During stressful situations, you are alone, by yourself, trying to stay focused. During stressful situations, I communicate 5–6 times a day so that people are informed, they know I don't trick them, they know where I stood and where they stand. (D6)

### **Overview of Results**

This study explored relational leadership strategies that create quality workplace environments, utilizing Uhl Bien's (2006) relational leadership theory. Through a qualitative narrative approach, data were electronically collected from publicly available and accessible sources and organized to correspond with the study's research questions. To increase credibility, the data were analyzed by the researcher and a second reviewer, following Hyatt's (2017) 10-step model. Major subthemes, established through a criterion of majority similarity, were identified for each research question with nine data sources obtained for each theme.

The data distinguished 14 strategies with 12 unique subthemes that relational leaders utilize to create quality workplace environments. The strategies identified for the theme of

Culture Creators were evident in six out of eight subthemes obtained from the data sources. Additionally, the strategies identified for the theme of Influencers were evident in seven out of nine subthemes from the data sources. Lastly, the strategies identified for the themes of Inclusive and Engaging, were evident in all nine subthemes from each of the respective data sources. These findings indicates that the majority of the data points agreed on the strategies identified for the four central themes of relational leaders. These strategies are highlighted in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Strategies Demonstrated by Relational Leaders Creating Quality Workplace Environments*

Culture Creators	Influencers	Inclusive	Engaging
Straight talk	Empathy	Create diverse team	Empowerment
Forward looking	Emotional connection	Teamwork	Personal connections
Build trust through feedback and collaboration	Transparency and honesty	Create safe environment	Communication & collaboration
	Straight talk	Develop people	

The emergent themes in this study indicate a direct connection between relational leaders' strategies of creating quality workplace environments and Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership theory. Consistent with the entity perspective model of Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership theory, which is focused on individual leaders, several strategies identified in the study demonstrate that focus on the leader's personal styles: Straight talk, forward looking, emotional connection, transparency, honestly, and empathy. In line with the relational perspective of Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership theory, several strategies gleaned from the study indicate how relational leaders shift the focus from individuals to a collective dynamic of leadership: building diverse teams, creating a safe space for employees to be able to speak up,

encouraging teamwork and collaboration, and establishing trust with stakeholders through reciprocal feedback. By engaging in these strategies, relational leaders promote the creation of quality workplace environments, which is a collective mission of all stakeholders involved in the process (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Consistent with Uhl-Bien's (2006) theory, while the leadership strategies discovered in the study, identified as part of either the entity or the relational perspectives, approach leadership from contrasting points of view, all strategies discovered through research add to creation of quality workplace environments.

Noteworthy patterns also emerged when reviewing the 14 relational strategies. Straight talk, which was explained in the data as using clear and direct method of communication to build quality workplace environments, correlated with the relational leaders' themes as culture creators as well as influencers. Similarly, establishing personally emotional connections with stakeholders showed up as a relational strategy to influence and engage others. By consolidating these two strategies across multiple themes, the original 14 relational strategies were reduced to 12. This consolidation indicates that some relational strategies contribute to building quality workplace environments in multiple ways.

Additionally, while researched data did not indicate where the leaders learned these strategies, it's important to draw attention to that fact that several of the strategies captured in Table 5 correlate with the existing leadership theories highlighted in the literature review. For example, when researching relational strategies of building inclusivity, one of the data contents reflected the following: You have got to have a culture where there is no special club or a special class of citizens in the workplace (3C). This statement is consistent with the LMX model by Dansereau et al. (1975), which contends that leaders who understand the significance of LMX recognize that they need to avoid creating out-groups wherever possible and maximize the size

of the in-group. Research shows that high-quality LMX produces more significant organizational commitment, better job attitudes, more attention and support from the leader, and greater engagement from employees (Beverly, 2016; Gajendran & Aparna, 2012; Graen, 2016; Lunenburg, 2010; Power, 2013; Rockstuhl, 2012).

Furthermore, leaders shared the strategy of establishing a personal and emotional connection with employees under the themes of influencers and engaging. One of the leaders stated: Creating connections with people is how you create a value to employees and customers (B2). Another leader stated: Meetings are focused on deepening emotional connection between the team members (B4). The benefits of establishing personal connections with employees and leading effectively—a concept that Goleman (1998) called EI—is well documented in theory. Salovey and Mayer (1990) described EI as the individual's ability to perceive emotions, manage emotions, understand emotions, and facilitate using emotions. Goleman (1998) claimed that most effective leaders have one thing in common, “they have a high degree of what has come to be known as emotional intelligence” (p. 1).

Last, several concepts on social constructionism highlighted during the literature review were also observed in the research data. In Chapter 1, relational constructionism was defined as a process where leadership voice is one of many, and knowledge is discovered collectively with many parties working together (Chia, 1995; Dachler & Hosking, 1995b; Hosking, 1988; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Grint (2005) claimed that leaders are not individual agents, able to manipulate the world around them, but rather part of the reality they create together with other stakeholders involved in the process. Consistent with this approach, one of the leaders in the researched stated:

Traditionally, our culture was based on expertise and products, but the landscape is changing quickly. Our culture has to adapt. We involved 700 employees in the process.

Employees who enjoy a positive, supportive work culture will, in turn, transmit positivity to their customers. Improving the methods and tools for continuous employee feedback is the key to our cultural transformation and continuity. (A8)

This quote points to the idea that relational leaders who strive to create quality workplace environments involve employees' feedback and ideas as strategic initiatives in their organizations. Another leader shared the strategy of intentionally creating diverse teams for the benefit of creating what Grint (2005) suggested to be many voices in the organization.

It makes you appreciate how different people with different ideas and backgrounds can come together and create great things together. With that diversity, you are a lot better off, a lot stronger, and more innovative than if you are all out of the same mold. Leaders need to find ways to create such environments. (C1)

### **Implications for the Study**

Research suggests that relational leaders are culture creators (Antonakis, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Hollander, 1992, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006), influencers (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bass, 1985, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976), inclusive (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bass, 1985, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Friedrich, 1961; House, 1976; Tan, 2019), and engaging (Antonakis, 2012; Carter et al., 2015; Chia, 1995; Dewar et al., 2020; Fiol et al., 1999; Hosking & Pluut, 2010; Katz & Miller, 2014). Through these practices, relational leaders create quality workplace environments where information is not suppressed or spun, but rather openly shared with all associates, and where employees feel the company adds value to them, rather than only expecting it from them (Goffee & Jones; 2013; Katz & Miller, 2014; Tan, 2019).

Conducted research highlighted several strategies that relational leaders practice to create quality workplace environments. To create quality culture, relational leaders use clear language when articulating culture; they are forward-looking when setting the culture; they build trust with all stakeholders through feedback and collaboration. To influence others, relational leaders use



empathy and emotional connection with people; they are honest and transparent and they use straight talk when communicating with others. To create inclusivity, relational leaders intentionally create diverse teams, they focus on teamwork, and they develop people and create psychological safety for their employees where employees feel they have the respect and ability to speak up. Finally, to create engagement, relational leaders empower employees to act; they establish personal connections with stakeholders and engage and encourage collaboration and communication. Banking leaders who intend to foster quality organizational cultures may apply these strategies in their organization.

The implications of these findings are compelling. The postpandemic business environment requires a new paradigm, "nothing less than admitting that the concept of the all-knowing, all-powerful leader is obsolete and that our entire image of leadership itself must change" (Katz & Miller, 2014, p. 40). "There is a leadership change in the air" (Katz & Miller, 2014, p. 40)—leaders are now expected to connect with people they have the privilege of leading, to inspire them, to move away from silos to freely sharing information and ideas equally with all employees, and "to create a sense of safety so that people can bring their best selves to work—all to foster an inclusive workplace in which collaboration can flourish" (Katz & Miller, 2014, p. 40). What Katz & Miller (2014) suggest is consistent with the entity and relational perspectives of Uhl-Bien's (2006) Relational Leadership theory and the findings of this study. Consistent with the entity perspective, the initial accountability to promote a quality workplace environment falls on a leader. It can be achieved by utilizing individual leadership strategies derived from this study, such as straight talk, emotional connection, transparency, honesty, and empathy. However, to create enduring workplace engagement and a quality workplace culture, the focus must shift to engaging all stakeholders in the process, consistent with the relational

perspective. In line with the study's findings, achieving such quality workplace environments can be accomplished by building diverse teams, creating a safe space for employees to speak up, encouraging teamwork and collaboration, and establishing trust with stakeholders through reciprocal feedback.

The existing federal regulations will likely continue to impact banks' profit margins in the upcoming years (Aiello & Tarbert, 2010). Banking leaders will need to focus on increasing operating efficiencies through higher employee performance and investing in automation, which in the past resulted in reduced employee ranks (Brooks, 2021). Historically, fewer resources and ever-increasing high expectations from leaders negatively impacted employee morale in the banking industry (Brooks, 2021). Moreover, while the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed how banking leaders and employees interact, build relationships, and create organizational cultures, future business disruptions may further complicate leader-employee dynamics, employee morale, and workplace cultures. Within the banking leaders' span of control is their own ability to learn, adapt and adopt new strategies to ensure that their organizational cultures sustain and continue to thrive regardless of the external factors that could influence the banking industry. This study provides factual and actionable strategies that will assist banking leaders in creating and sustaining resilient quality organizational cultures.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The literature review produced a theoretical framework consisting of four themes for relational leaders: culture creators, influencers, inclusive, and engaging. This study, using narrative inquiry, collected data from publicly available and accessible sources, and identified 12 unique strategies practiced by relational leaders to build quality workplace environments in their organizations.

Further research on actualizing some of these recommendations would likely to provide additional relevant insights. Furthermore, research including banking institutions outside the U.S. might also produce additional information on relational leadership strategies practiced worldwide. Last, because this research was a qualitative study, a quantitative or a mixed-methods study may also yield supplementary noteworthy data.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the relational leadership strategies banking leaders currently practice to foster quality workplace environments. While there is an existing theoretical framework on relational leadership, there is limited literature on how leaders utilize this leadership style, specifically in the banking industry. By gaining a deeper understanding of relational leadership and its potential positive benefits on creating quality workplace cultures, banking leaders are expected to be better equipped to lead their teams and navigate their organizations in the postpandemic era.

This study builds on Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership theory, incorporating the entity perspective (focused on individual leadership) and the relational perspective (focused on collective leadership), by identifying 12 unique relational strategies banking leaders can employ to create quality workplace environments. The results of this study also add to the existing body of literature on relational leadership in banking.

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## APPENDIX A

## CITI Program Completion Certification

**Human Subjects Training**

Completion Date 25-Jan-2022  
 Expiration Date 24-Jan-2025  
 Record ID 46725394

This is to certify that:

**Irakli Bandzeladze**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.
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**Graduate & Professional Schools HSR**

(Curriculum Group)

**Graduate & Professional Schools - Psychology Division Human Subjects Training**

(Course Learner Group)

**1 - Basic Course**

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**Pepperdine University**

**CITI**  
 Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative