Exploring Workplace Motivation from the Lens of Generation Z

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Abstract

As members of Generation Z continue entering the workforce, organizational leaders who develop a deeper understanding of the unique traits and work-life expectations among these group members can provide more effective leadership for their organizations. This qualitative descriptive study focused on enhancing understanding of how members of Generation Z describe their workplace motivations and their perceptions of psychological safety and how these perceptions influence the culture of a non-profit organization. The research process used a series of interviews with Generation Z employees in a nonprofit organization as the primary data collection method. By deploying a phenomenological research method, the data and analysis helped to offer insights necessary to develop a narrative describing the lived experiences, mindset, and feelings of a Generation Z population in workplace settings.

Building on previous research, the study found several themes that answered the research questions. The findings centered around patterns found among Generation Z employees emphasizing the importance of purpose, flexibility, and growth among these workers. Additionally, the findings revealed the importance of how Generation Z employees perceive interpersonal relationships among colleagues and organizational leaders and the influence on perceptions of psychological safety. The findings from the study help to illustrate important, practical context and action items for organizational leaders as they continue to navigate changes in the workforce with increases in the number of Generation Z members. The conclusions from this study can better equip organizational leaders with a strengthened ability to develop a renewed strategy that will enable them to effectively lead Generation Z employees and their organizations.

Keywords: Generation Z, organizational culture, psychological safety, motivation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

Chapter I: Introduction

Over the past two decades, the populations that make up educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and corporations have grown more diverse and interconnected than ever. Using Census data, the Pew Research Centers reports that black Americans, Asians, Hispanics and other racial minorities will make up a majority of the population by the year 2050 (Parker et al., 2019). To illustrate this change, the Census Bureau calculates a Diversity Index to measure the probability that two people chosen at random will be from different racial and ethnic groups. Census data shows that using the same Diversity Index calculation for 2020 and 2010 data, the chance that two people chosen at random will be from different racial or ethnic groups has increased to 61.1% in 2020 from 54.9% in 2010 (Jensen et al., 2021). As American society becomes more racially, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse, educational and organizational leaders must learn and recognize how to build and sustain environments that maximize the potential of each stakeholder (Roberson, 2019). Organizations depend on healthy professional interactions and positive relationships among team members.

By developing an understanding of similarities and differences between workers in different generations, researchers and scholars can use a more informed lens to more effectively shape organizational policies as well as recruitment, retention, and worker engagement efforts. While some characteristics may overlap between generations and factors beyond age may also influence how employees perceive various work dynamics, exploring the unique traits relevant to a generation of workers can help leaders better recognize changes over time and understand important nuances and distinctions related to expectations, areas of emphasis, and priorities among different workers (Pew, 2015). Using this new knowledge, leaders can adapt their

leadership style accordingly to align with the needs and perceptions of particular team members, which helps these leaders better identify strategies and tactics to motivate team members and promote positive perceptions of an organization's culture.

As members of Generation Z continue entering the workforce, leaders must understand the unique traits and work-life expectations among group members (Chillakuri & Mahanandia, 2018). In many industries and organizational contexts, particularly those that are educational and social impact-driven, creativity is necessary to develop new solutions to old problems and to deploy existing solutions to new problems. These efforts depend upon the effective collaboration of a diverse range of team members (Sawyer, 2017). As a result, organizational leaders must develop an understanding not only of techniques to help build positive relationships and discover what motivates team members, but also formulate a deeper awareness and knowledge of why cultivating positive, supportive working environments plays a vital role in healthy, vibrant organizations.

Organizational culture and its essential relationship with motivation and psychological safety cannot simply be viewed as occasional activities that team members perceive as unrelated with little connection to other areas of work (Culwell, 2018). Instead, team development can be defined as a holistic and consistent process that helps to offer opportunities for group members to unify and build mutual respect and trust (Agovino, 2021). This holistic viewpoint of team interaction directly contributes to the environment of an organization and helps to define a team member's relationship with colleagues and leaders (Allas & Schaninger, 2020). Therefore, organizational culture represents a broad perception of how team members interpret appropriate actions and behaviors at multiple levels. Organizational culture must also be viewed through the lens of motivation and how it influences individual team members and groups. Team members

both reflect and reinforce elements of a working culture (Sull & Sull, 2021). Organizational

leaders who are responsible for group productivity must pay attention and take time to learn the

relevance of culture, motivation, and psychological safety to their organizations (Word & Park,

2015). Practitioners must make a commitment to identify and develop meaningful culture-

building opportunities for group members through a lens of motivation and psychological safety.

Organizational leaders who understand the purpose and importance of building healthy

relationships among their teams can maximize their potential and overall effectiveness (Gallup,

2022).

Organizational leaders must understand why and how organizational culture, motivation,

and psychological safety play an essential role in virtually all areas of an organization

particularly among members of Generation Z. Organizations such as Pantagonia and Zappos

have also been the focus points of significant research and observation (O'Malley, 2019).

Although they still have many challenges, each of these organizations has built reputable and

desirable cultures within their organizations (Perschel, 2010). These organizations place a high

value on the relationships forged among their team members and provide healthy environments

and frequent learning, professional growth, and teambuilding opportunities that have contributed

to positive interaction and collaboration among individuals and groups (Coleman, 2017).

Consequently, these organizations have been recognized as some of the most successful in terms

of not only their financial bottom lines but other human resource centric metrics (Sainju et al.,

2021). All organizations ranging from governmental agencies, large multinational corporations,

universities, nonprofit groups, and businesses are impacted by the condition of the relationships

among group members as they work towards advancing the mission and goals of the

organization (Seppälä & McNichols, 2022).

Leaders must also understand the role of motivation among their team members. Although individuals can be motivated by several factors, recent evidence has emerged showing the vital importance of intrinsic motivation and its connection to facilitating team member autonomy and choice (Kuvaas et al., 2017). Even as external incentives and rewards may still play an important role in organizations, leaders must also understand the potential limitations and unexpected consequences to the culture of an organization by solely relying upon external factors (Lepper & Greene, 2015). Internal factors including cultivating and maintaining a sense of purpose among team members along with opportunities for independence and growth also play an essential role for individuals (Wharton, 2021). Opportunities that leverage internal motivation represent a sustainable approach where leaders can support the building of a positive culture that leads to stronger results and impact. Leaders who appreciate this dynamic can take action that reflects a holistic understanding of personal motivation and how to make the best use of that motivation to maximize individual and group performance (Pink, 2011).

As leaders take steps to assess and understand the culture that is perceived to exist within their organizations, they must consider core elements that contribute to a team member's relationship with the organization. Team members must feel a sense of freedom to openly express opinions, ask questions, and raise objections to processes and decision-making criteria (Fletcher et al., 2023). Team members who feel high levels of "psychological safety" can help to strengthen the decision-making abilities of teams and organizations enhancing the culture of an organization (Grant, 2021). Eventually, this can mitigate the negative impact of groupthink and help to prevent potential major mistakes that may have profound consequences for the organization and its stakeholders from children in educational contexts to individuals who depend upon social service agencies. In some cases, team members with high levels of

psychological safety can express potential concerns that could have life or death ramifications for individuals and communities (Epstein, 2019).

Practitioners and researchers need to understand the potential benefits and consequences to organizations that do and do not prioritize or understand the development of organizational culture (Belias, 2014; Langer & LeRoux, 2017). Leaders must understand how their role can help to prevent conflict, address potential challenges, and provide positive opportunities for cooperation and trust to grow in the most sustainable way possible. With a lens toward members of Generation Z, organizational leaders and other stakeholders must understand the role of motivation and psychological safety as part of the bigger picture of overall productivity and organizational health when charting the course their organizations and their people will follow (Bassous, 2014; Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). Ultimately, organizational leaders, researchers, and all educational practitioners must be aware of how organizational culture and its key components can dramatically impact and help determine team member morale, retention, efficiency, effectiveness of group processes, and overall organizational performance (Langer & LeRoux, 2017). This research explored organizational culture by examining the intersection of motivation and psychological safety through the lenses of Generation Z workers and describe real world experiences that support and strengthen the need for continued discovery.

Statement of Problem

Generation Z serves as one of the main forces of change in the modern workplace. By 2030, members of Generation Z will constitute about 30% of the workforce (Kumar, 2023). With the advancement of technological resources helping to make education and remote work a routine part of the lives of Generation Z members, organizational leaders need to prepare for the increases in Generation Z members entering the workforce (Pichler et al., 2021). Recent

data shows that Generation Z workers are feeling challenged with engagement at work. Pendell and Helm (2022) report that 54% of Gen Z employees, slightly higher than any other generation, are ambivalent or not engaged at work. As the demographics of work environments evolve and the related needs and expectations of employees, researchers and organizational leaders must develop their understandings of how Generation Z employees perceive organizational culture and what expectations they bring to a workplace (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). This enhanced knowledge will better prepare organizational officials to enhance recruitment and retention efforts of Generation Z employees. Leaders must also cultivate their knowledge and better recognize the interconnected nature of organizational culture, motivation, and psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018). With this understanding, leaders can better guide Generation Z members and better support their needs related to technology, work-life balance, and mental health (Fernandez et al., 2023). This enhanced support can lead to stronger performance and the ability to advance organizational mission and goals (Tian et al., 2018). In this study, the perceptions of Generation Z workers were considered using Self Determination Theory as a framework.

A limited number of studies have been published that discuss the interconnectedness of organizational culture, motivation, and psychological safety within the context of Generation Z team members, particularly in nonprofit organizations. The primary focus of this study was to explore the intersection of organizational culture, motivation, and psychological safety in a nonprofit organizational by examining the perceptions of key elements of workplace culture through the lens of Generation Z members This study adds depth and clarity of understanding to existing knowledge around these topics and offers a new perspective by deploying a lens towards understanding these issues within the context of Generation Z. Using a qualitative research

approach, this study provides data that allows the researcher to investigate the nuances and complexities of organizational culture, motivation, and psychological safety. Through a series of interviews with employees of a nonprofit organization belonging to Generation Z, the study strengthened existing knowledge of these topics and helps to shape the direction of future needed research that will better inform how organizational stewards lead their team members and their organizations.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study focused on enhancing understanding of how members of Generation Z describe their motivations and perceptions of psychological safety and how these perceptions influence the culture of a non-profit organization. The gap that this qualitative study addresses is that it was not known how Generation Z workers describe how their motivations and perceptions of psychological safety influence the culture of a non-profit organization. This study offered insights and guidance to organizational leaders and may help to impact how leaders consider and approach contemporary leadership. The study also described how non-profit leaders can more effectively build and sustain positive working environments. In addition, the study added to the body of knowledge on organizational culture and leadership to better inform future research on improving practices. The study identified key components of organizational culture and examines how Generation Z team member perceptions of motivation and psychological safety reflect and reinforce employee perceptions of workplace cultures. The research helped to fill a gap in the literature understanding organizational culture components through the lens of Generation Z workers.

What role does motivation and psychological safety play in influencing employee perceptions of organizational culture? How do members of Generation Z perceive these dynamics, and what lessons can leaders internalize to better inform their leadership approach? Research on these topics, viewed holistically, is limited. This study added knowledge by exploring the interconnectedness of these concepts in a nonprofit, mission-driven organizational context. The new knowledge helps researchers and practitioners better identify and recognize effective leadership strategies by incorporating a holistic view of organizational culture, motivation, and psychological safety into their leadership approach and mindset.

Qualitative research helps to add depth and a more nuanced approach to understanding problems (Tenny, 2022). This deeper understanding of experience and perceptions adds important context to how researchers explore these concepts and how practitioners handle leadership responsibilities (Wright & Austin, 2015). This study is intended to deepen understandings of organizational culture at the intersection of motivation and psychological safety. This project contributes to existing research discussed in Chapter Two and offers a new perspective for researchers and practitioners to consider when leading organizations and developing future research. The researcher offers implications for leaders that can enhance leadership practice and lead to stronger results and the advancement of organizational missions.

Research Questions

The qualitative research study presented within this dissertation was intended to deepen understandings of organizational culture at the dynamics of motivation and psychological safety. The research questions include:

- How do members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?

- How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?

Research Design

The study contributed to existing research discussed in Chapter Two and offered a new perspective for researchers and practitioners to consider when leading organizations and developing future research. Because of the complex nature of these concepts, a qualitative research methodology offered a deeper analysis into the nuanced factors that influence and shape these dynamics for individuals and organizational leaders. The research helped to fill a gap in the existing literature describing the intersection of organizational culture, motivation, and psychological safety among members of Generation Z. The study presented helped to describe the lived experiences and perspectives of the individuals studied to help sharpen understanding of organizational culture, team dynamics, psychological safety, mindsets, and motivation among employees particularly focusing on members of Generation Z.

By deploying a phenomenological research method, the analysis and data helped to offer insights to develop a narrative describing the lived experiences, mindset, and feelings of a Generation Z population in workplace settings. The research process used a series of interviews as the primary data collection sources. Wilson (2015) wrote that, "The objective of phenomenology is to understand human experience" (p. 38). This research method helped to show the unique perspectives of the sample population. A phenomenological approach helps to provide richer data that will help to explain the complexity and lived experiences of the targeted population being explored. By using a strategy of triangulated data collection, the study was designed to strengthen validity of the data and research process (Renz et al., 2018). The

researcher, working with the organization's human resources staff, developed inclusion criteria for the study. The core inclusion criteria was age to ensure that all participants are members of the Generation Z target population. From that list, a minimum of five employees were randomly selected to participate in the study. All participants in the study must have met the primary eligibility criteria of being born during or after 1997 to meet the age cut-off point designated by the Pew Research Center (2019). All participants in the study were current employees of the non-profit. Participants included a mixture of genders and work in various organizational departments. The research study utilized a purposeful sampling method to collect data. The data collection strategy allows researchers to build a population sample that is most useful for the research purpose using clearly described and consistent selection criteria. (Palinkas et al., 2013). The main goal of purposive sampling is to identify individuals who are the most effective fit in helping to answer specific research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The findings from this research offered several practical benefits for organizations that recognize the growing importance of effectively engaging all employees, particularly the Generation Z population. Stakeholders who benefit from this research include organizational leadership researchers, human resource professionals, unit managers, and organizational leaders.

Significance of the Study

In the introduction and review of literature, the researcher outlined central principles of why and how organizational leaders can help to build and promote positive and supportive working environments to reinforce the development of effective teams and culture. Patterns in the literature illustrate common language and ideas focused on the importance of culture, motivation, and psychological safety that can maximize elements of team member effectiveness (Sarooghi et al., 2015). The problem that this qualitative study addressed is that it is not known

how members of Generation Z describe how their motivations and perceptions of psychological safety influence the culture of a non-profit organization. By exploring key components of developing healthy work environments and interpersonal relations, the literature highlighted the essential value of organizational culture and its related components in high performing organizational systems.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management (n.d.), leaders who developed an awareness of organizational culture-building processes and the factors that strengthen and weaken its development can have a meaningful and sustained impact helping improve the culture of an organization and strengthen the performance of an organization. The literature showed that educational and all organizational leaders must design, develop, implement, and continually evaluate comprehensive strategies to help team members improve communication, build trust, become more motivated, understand and appreciate the value of diversity, and help cultivate leadership potential (Holt et al., 2018). Evidence shows that these developmental programs can help to engage team members and lead to improved organizational culture and overall organizational performance (Longenecker & Insch, 2018). However, for team building and cultural improvements to provide potential benefits and maximum return on investments, regular follow-up from organizational leaders is a necessary component. For maximum effectiveness, organizational culture assessments and follow up actions should be fundamental parts of any organization's continuous improvement strategy (Warrick, 2017). Organizational leaders and facilitators of groups must consider how they can better develop motivation and psychological safety sustaining tactics that can reinforce a positive culture and create a system for leadership and team development (Bassous, 2014). Motivation and related decisions that influence psychological safety have an impact on performance (Edmondson,

2018). Organizational leaders across industries must understand the perspectives of Generation Z members to better serve their team members and lead their organizations.

The research questions and processes used in this study will help to inform future research and help to uncover deeper perspectives about important dimensions of organizational culture at the intersection of motivation and psychological safety among members of Generation Z. Ultimately, organizational leaders and facilitators of groups must understand the importance of culture to maximize their organizations and their team members' potential to flourish.

Role of the Researcher and Research Assumptions

At the time of the research design development and implementation, I served as an employee at the research site, the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank. I served as the Health Innovations Manager where I oversee the Food Bank's health and nutrition related strategy, partnerships, and programs. I have served in this role since January 2019. Although I interact with a broad range of staff members, managers, and executive leaders within the organization, I predominantly work in an independent organizational unit reporting to the Executive Director. I also help to lead the Workplace Engagement Team that helps to design and develop strategies that can support a positive working culture for employees, including those who work in remote settings, hybrid settings, and fully-in person at one of the Food Bank's two physical warehouse and office hubs within the service territory located in Harrisburg and Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Although I have some type of relationship with potential participants, which is helpful as part of establishing necessary trust, I did not work in the same organizational department and do not have any type of supervisory relationship with them. Because I am a current employee, I had an internal perspective and four years of historical context that shapes my own personal perceptions, reactions, and opinions regarding organizational priorities, goals,

and daily management decisions and actions. This perspective was helpful in understanding the nuances of this organization and broader characteristics of the charitable food ecosystem. Because of this experience, I have the perspective that gives me credibility as a researcher and facilitator in understanding the data collected.

I also had nearly five years of professional experience outside of the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank that strengthens my ability to understand and evaluate the data. My external and internal experience helped in identifying patterns and analyzing common themes that emerge from the interview data collection process. I recognized that because I hold an internal perspective, I needed to be fully aware of my own limitations compared with the perspective of an outsider new to the organization. I took deliberate steps including ensuring confidentiality to ensure that the data collection process has the utmost integrity in promoting the accuracy of the data and the analysis process.

My role as the investigator in this research project involved organizing and facilitating interviews with the participants. My role then shifted to analyzing and interpreting the data to identify patterns and themes that emerge to help answer the research questions. Although the study design had its limitations, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, the results from this study help to enhance the existing research and fill the gaps in how researchers and organizational leaders understand employee motivation, psychological safety, and mindsets, particularly among members of Gen Z. These dynamics intersect to shape organizational culture, which has a direct impact on team member performance and the ability of organizations to advance their mission and achieve their goals (Knapp et al., 2017).

Definition of Terms

The research presented discusses several core concepts including motivation, psychological safety, and organizational culture. Although definitions of these concepts can vary, the working definitions discussed below are intended to capture the key ideas of each topic. The descriptions offered are also reflective of employee perceptions, expectations, and priorities related to these definitions. The following section offers definitions of key terms used operationally for this study to help promote understanding and future research.

Organizational culture: The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, n.d.) described organizational culture and offered a working definition that aligns with the intent and spirit of the definition for this study:

> An organization's culture defines the proper way to behave within the organization. This culture consists of shared beliefs and values established by leaders and then communicated and reinforced through various methods, ultimately shaping employee perceptions, behaviors and understanding. Organizational culture sets the context for everything an enterprise does. Organizational culture can manifest itself in a variety of ways and many factors shape an organization's culture. An organization's customs, traditions, rituals, behavioral norms, symbols and general way of doing things are the visible manifestation of its culture. (p. 2)

Motivation: "Motivation refers to the process by which a person's efforts are energized, directed, and sustained toward attaining a goal" (p. 8). This definition has three key elements: energy, direction, and persistence (Bushi, 2021). Motivation can have a significant impact, both

positive or negative, on many dimensions of performance and engagement. Motivation can be viewed through intrinsic and extrinsic lenses (Turner, 2017).

Psychological Safety: "A shared belief amongst individuals as to whether it is safe to engage in interpersonal risk-taking in the workplace" (Edmondson & Lei, 2014, p. 23).

Participant: An employee of a nonprofit organization with an age below 27 at the time of the participant selection. This selection criteria aligns with the definition of Generation Z as shown below (Dimock, 2019).

Generation Z: This study uses the generational definition as proposed by the Pew Research Center that anyone born from 1997 and onward is a member of this generation (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Interview: For this study, an interview consisted of a direct 1:1 dialogue between the researcher and the participant for a target length of 1 hour.

Nudges: An intervention that gently steers individuals towards a desired action. A nudge is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives (Thaler & Sunstein, 2012).

Organization of the Dissertation

The following section describes the organization of the research study by outlining the content of each chapter. In Chapter One, the research begins by introducing the purpose and problem that the study addresses. This chapter describes the key research questions, methodological approach, significance of the study, the role of the researcher, and operational definitions. Next, Chapter Two offers a broad review of the literature that helps to put this study into broader context and helps readers understand the current state of available knowledge. In

addition, Chapter Three explains the research questions, data collection methods, the research design, participant selection, the role of the researcher, interview protocol and procedures, interview questions, data analysis, validity, ethical considerations, and study limitations. Chapter Four discusses the study results and related analysis of the data. Finally, Chapter Five reviews the results and considers implications for scholars and practitioners, the impact on future research, and offers a conclusion to the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the research to discover the success factors and impact of motivation and psychological safety on organizational culture. The literature review will explore why and how organizational leaders can help to build healthy work environments for team members. When discussing organizational leaders, this section will follow the definition set forth by Northouse (2015), who expressed that leadership is a process where an individual influences other people to achieve a common goal using a process framework of leadership. This examination will help to identify patterns and divergent points of view in the literature while identifying important gaps that present opportunities for additional inquiry. The section will also offer conclusions from synthesizing research studies and theories. In addition, the work presented will analyze and assess existing knowledge to offer a perspective on culture at the intersection of motivation and psychological safety and how leaders most effectively offer meaningful opportunities for positive team relationships. The review is intended to deepen understanding of organizational culture, motivation, and psychological safety through the lens of Generation Z. Ultimately, the review evaluates the current state of knowledge on organizational culture, explore the contributing role of motivation and team development, and discuss future directions for research.

Culture

Chatman and O'Reilly (2016) wrote, "Organizational culture research, while widely explored, has been based on different definitions of the construct, drawn on different theories, and used different measures" (p. 220). D.D. Warrick (2017) of the University of Colorado synthesized the literature and defined organizational culture as, "In practical terms, organizational culture describes the environment in which people work and the influence it has

on how they think, act, and experience work" (p. 396). Although these definitions capture

common themes found in a review of the literature, it is important to note that a spirited debate

exists on an exact definition of organizational culture. Research also points to different

explanations for how it develops and the role of behavior in influencing its creation and

continued evolution within educational, mission-driven, and other organizations (Schneider et

al., 2013). Regardless of the lack of one definition, the literature shows that it is vital to

understand culture and the role of team development and motivation so that leaders can build

systems, processes, and other structures to preserve or transform cultures (Hartnell et al., 2019;

(Heskett, 2022). Additionally, Warrwick (2017) wrote that:

> Especially in the late 1980s and thereafter, studies on organizational culture began to
>
> provide convincing evidence that culture can have a significant influence on
>
> performance, morale, job satisfaction, employee engagement and loyalty, employee
>
> attitudes and motivation, turnover, commitment to the organization, and efforts to attract
>
> and retain talented employees. (p. 396)

When exploring the concept of organizational culture, some debate exists among researchers and

practitioners on the evolution of organizational culture. Some argued that culture determines, or

at least significantly impacts, how an organization is run and can be used strategically to leverage

performance (Page et al., 2021). Other views reflect the theme that organizational practices and

related interpersonal dynamics among team members impact or determine the culture of an

organization (Lorsh & McTague, 2016). Although it may be a challenge to empirically test each

hypothesis, it is clear that culture serves as an essential element when examining overall

organizational performance (Jiao et al., 2020). Evidence also makes it clear that the actions of

leaders play a vital role and shape how team members perform, interact, and collaborate with each other (Shier & Handy, 2016).

Culture and leadership are interconnected concepts that influence each other. Groysberg et al. (2018) explained, "Over time an organization's leaders can also shape culture, through both conscious and unconscious actions (sometimes with unintended consequences)" (p. 46). Leaders must understand the full range of how their actions and messages influence the performance, morale, and motivation of individuals. In addition to individual interpretations and relationships between people and organizations, interpersonal dynamics and the increasing demand for teamwork and collaboration must also be explored so that leaders can develop holistic perspectives and make informed decisions that influence the culture of their organizations (Haas & Mortensen, 2016). Finally, leaders must identify ways to increase their awareness of the unique traits and expectations that Generation Z members bring to the workplace in order to lead them effectively (Schroth, 2019).

Organizational Culture through the Lens of Team Development

As modern work becomes increasingly complex with a heightened need for creative approaches to solving problems, organizational leaders must recognize how advances in technology and increased collaboration will require continuous adjustments to leadership strategies (Day, 2020). Many of these changes in technology led to the automation of jobs and tasks once left fulfilled by humans (Fine & Kanter, 2021). Whether developing new approaches to teaching, learning, or advancing a social impact mission, organizations increasingly depended on teams of people to develop solutions to challenges (Reimer et al., 2017). These teams often captured the power of diversity, breadth of experience and viewpoints, and interdisciplinary

connections in cultivating new solutions and approaches to solve problems and increase potential impacts.

Before exploring the development of teams, it is important to summarize the definition of teams within the literature. Shuffler et al. (2018) wrote, "Teams are defined as two or more individuals interacting dynamically, interdependently, and adaptively toward a common goal, with each member having a specific role to fill within the boundary of the team" (p. 688). Although the exact language may be different, this definition reflects a consistent pattern of team definition in the literature. Because teams play such an essential role in organizational performance, those in leadership roles must first understand key dimensions that help to define leadership. Fullan (2020) described five key components of leadership that include moral purpose, understanding change, building relationships, creating and sharing knowledge, and making coherence. Collectively, these components offer leaders a framework for approaching decision-making, collaboration, and effective organizational governance while guiding decisions that can positively impact team motivation.

Shuffler et al. (2011) explored the role of teams within organizations and effective development strategies. The authors discovered that teams play an essential role in a diverse range of work settings and social interactions. The researchers expressed the critical roles teams played in tackling difficult, complex, and evolving tasks and how different team development strategies can produce drastically different results.

Advances in technology have made remote work a reality for millions more people compared to just a few years ago (Gifford, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated changes showing the possibility of remote and hybrid style work for millions of workers across multiple industries (Lund et al., 2020). The pandemic also contributed to changes in how many people

view work and their expectations and need for flexibility (Parker et al., 2022). Fluctuations in the workforce contributed to millions of people quitting jobs, changing jobs, or starting new ventures (Ozimek, 2020). These rapidly changing contextual factors led many organizational leaders to rethink organizational structures that best supported team members and that enabled team members to advance the missions of their organizations (Krishnamoorthy, 2022; Maslach & Leiter, 2022). Consequently, leaders needed to change job roles and job descriptions, rethink promotion plans, prioritize learning and collaboration, and rewrite organizational goals Kirby, 2020). All of these changes, and their related processes of how they happened, had a major impact on employee motivations, the culture of organizations, and ultimately what the organization achieved (Brown, 2021; Moss, 2023).

Organizations increasingly adopted the use of teams for collaboration as a part of their organizational structures to advance projects (Chai & Park, 2022). Groups of interconnected individuals must work together to share, analyze, and connect information to achieve a common purpose. These teams can be viewed in a variety of forms, from large groups working collaboratively across the globe to a smaller group located within the same physical space (Shuffler et al., 2020). They can include top leadership of an organization, a mixture of middle managers, or virtually any combination of employees and organizational leaders. Therefore, leaders hold an important role and responsibility within groups and organizations to understand how their actions impact team member motivation (Meinert, 2023). These leaders have a responsibility to help build an environment where interaction among members can be positive and productive (Kremer et al., 2019).

Motivation

The study of motivation within an organizational context serves an important role in supporting a positive culture that encourages higher levels of engagement among team members and stakeholders of an organization. Generation Z brings some common traits to motivation and some differences with older generations (Mahmoud et al., 2020). However, more research is needed. Researchers and practitioners must understand the historical context and implications of foundational motivational research and practice. Theories of motivation have evolved over time and have often taken contradictory views. The research of Richard Ryan and Edward Deci developed the Self-Determination Theory of Motivation (O'Hara, 2017). This theory shifted the dominant belief that the best way to get human beings to perform tasks is to reinforce their behavior with rewards. While they argue that rewards do have a time, place, and role in modern organizational environments, their research shows that rewards as motivational tools are often demotivating, and leaders should instead shift their focus and prioritize developing environments that cultivate and take advantage of factors that intrinsically motivate people.

Self-determination theory suggests that people are motivated to grow and change by three innate and universal psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2012). These needs include competence, autonomy, and relatedness. They explain autonomy as the feeling that someone has choice. They define competence as the feeling of mastery and capability to achieve a task. Further, they explain relatedness as the need to feel connected and a sense of belonging with other people. A key lesson from self-determination theory emphasizes that humans have a need for growth and mastery of challenges that drive behavior. Leaders must understand this dynamic as more members of Generation Z enter the workforce (Fernandez et al., 2023). In addition, another key lesson from the theory focuses on autonomous motivation, which focuses primarily on internal

sources of motivation, such as a need to gain knowledge or independence (Howard et al., 2016). Using self-determination theory as a conceptual framework, Bidee et al. (2012) demonstrated the relationship between the motivation of volunteers and their self-reported work effort. The results showed a positive link between volunteers' autonomous motivation and work effort. This work shows the importance of leaders deepening their knowledge and practice of autonomous motivation to effectively engage and retain a range of stakeholders from needed volunteers to full-time team members.

Ntoumanis et al. (2020) and Vasconcellos et al. (2020) show that self-determination theory and autonomous motivation have been examined in multiple contexts ranging from healthcare to education and show that leaders who have the ability to influence environments must understand the implications of this research to effectively design work tasks and organizational cultures while sharpening team members' connection with each other and a core purpose. They also warn of the consequences of extrinsic motivation centric work environments. Their work has served as a powerful foundation and framework for future researchers in diverse fields from education, psychology, and economics.

When exploring self-determination theory, scholars must also understand the historical context and evolution of the understanding of motivation and recognize patterns that connect the importance of the relationship between individuals and their social and environmental context. In the 1940s, Abraham Maslow developed a "hierarchy of needs" that he believed illustrated what motivated people and how leaders in organizations could respond to the needs of their team members. Maslow's model is hierarchical and although it is met with some disagreement among current organizational psychologists, it is still widely considered a foundation within theories of organizational motivation and leadership. Maslow theorized that the human brain is driven by a

basic instinct to survive with biological needs like food, water, and shelter. The second level is made up of the safety needs. The third level in Maslow's model comprises social needs and sense of belonging like family, romantic relationships, work groups, and sense of community. The fourth level describes the personal needs of achievement, responsibility, and reputation. And finally, at the top is self-actualization, which has clear implications for motivation research, particularly the study of intrinsic motivation theory. Maslow's work remains a cornerstone and encouraged further and more developed research that has influenced organizational leadership theory (Abulof, 2017).

Additionally, Frederick Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene theory written in "The Motivation to Work" is widely considered leading work in the study of organizational motivation (Alshmemri et al., 2017). Herzberg theory explains that worker motivation is an internal process. His theory showed that there are five main factors of job satisfaction that impact a worker's sense of motivation. These factors include achievement, recognition, nature of the work, responsibility, and advancement opportunities. They are considered connected to the job content. Herzberg also summarized five factors of job dissatisfaction related to the environment, which are independent of the satisfaction variables. They include company policy and administration, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions. Douglas McGregor is also considered a founding father of organizational human behavior (Aithal & Kumar, 2016). He summarized that a manager's assumptions about human behavior predetermined administrative style. In Theory X, managers assume that people have an inherent dislike of work. They are guided by the threat of punishment and wish to avoid responsibility. In Theory Y, there is an assumption that employees like work, are creative, seek responsibility, and can be self-directed with work. This research has powerful implications for leaders in

developing organizational structures that can facilitate the positive effects of a culture and working environment that leverages intrinsic motivation. The theories discussed above illustrate the foundation of contemporary motivation theory within an organizational context.

Lisa Legault (2016) summarizes the definitions of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. She writes that intrinsic motivation involves performing a task because it's personally rewarding to you. Extrinsic motivation involves completing a task or exhibiting a behavior because of outside causes, such as avoiding punishment or receiving a reward. The main difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is that intrinsic motivation comes from within, and extrinsic motivation comes from outside. While both types of motivation are important, research shows they have different effects on how team members perform. In recent years, a consensus has emerged in the literature showing the long-term positive impact of intrinsic motivation and the limitations and dangers of leaders exclusively relying on extrinsic motivators. Buch et al. (2017) conducted three studies across industries testing hypotheses related to motivation. They summarized their results as follows:

> We found a negative association between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in all three studies. We also consistently found that intrinsic motivation was positively associated with positive outcomes (work performance and affective organizational commitment) and negatively associated with negative outcomes (continuance commitment, turnover intention, burnout, and work–family conflict). Extrinsic motivation, by contrast, was negatively related or unrelated to positive outcomes and was consistently positively associated with negative outcomes (p. 251)

In addition, Ariely has conducted several experiments showing the limitations of extrinsic motivation through the lens of pay for performance. He suggests that monetary rewards can

undermine motivation and worsen performance on cognitively complex and intrinsically

rewarding work. In one review, Ariely, Himmelstein, and Woolhandler (2014) describe a large

study involving more than 200 high-needs New York City schools employing more than 20,000

teachers offered incentives of up to $3,000 per teacher based on students' test scores, graduation

and attendance rates, and results of learning environment surveys. They write, "Yet, . . .

incentives . . . did not increase student achievement in any meaningful way. If anything, student

achievement declined" (p. 210). The researchers found similar results studying pay for

performance as a motivator across industries. While further research is warranted, evidence is

becoming clear that intrinsic motivation and an understanding of purpose serves as a reliable

long-term approach for organizational leaders to consider when designing plans and developing

structures that support team member engagement and performance (Sinek, 2011). While there

are occasions where external rewards may play a useful role in encouraging a desired behavior,

this approach often comes with unintended consequences. Intrinsic motivation that cultivates a

team member's innate desire for independence, growth and mastery, and connection to a broader

purpose serve as important sources of motivation that all organizational leaders must consider

and incorporate into their management and leadership philosophies and tactical approaches

(Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). Research exploring employee motivation must discover what

factors team members identify when exploring what motivates them in a work context.

Furthermore, related to Maslow's Hierarchy, McClelland's Theory of Needs has also

helped shape contemporary interpretations of human motivation. Unlike Maslow, this theory

does not include a progression from one categorical level to another. McClelland's Theory of

Needs describes three key needs that help to determine an individual's decisions and behaviors

(Andersen, 2018). McClelland's Theory can be summarized by highlighting that every individual

is motivated by three needs, including affiliation, achievement, or power, with one trait often taking a dominant role relative to the situational context (McClelland & Burnham, 2017). He argued that a manager's comprehensive profile and relative strength are the most important considerations within this Theory. The affiliation motivator centers on human connections and can be defined as the personal desire to build and maintain friendly relationships with other people and where people value acceptance from others and consider their feelings. With the achievement need, people are motivated by the desire to succeed and pursue forms of accomplishment and completion of tasks. McClelland found that high-need achievers have a strong desire to receive constructive performance feedback while taking personal responsibility for performing a task and for finding solutions to problems. With the need for power, individuals are motivated by making an impact on others and demonstrating leadership abilities and decision making. People with a high need for power generally seek to influence and shape others. McClelland's Needs Theory serves as an important framework for scholars to explore motivation.

Vroom's Theory of Expectancy also offers a window into motivation theory. Vroom's expectancy theory explains effort (expectancy), performance (instrumentality) and perceived value of outcomes (valence), while Maslow and Herzberg focus on the relationship between internal needs and behavior. Lloyd and Mertens (2018) write that expectancy theory suggests people make choices and decisions based on how they think those actions can lead to desirable outcomes. As a cognitive theory, it connects and explains a relationship between effort, performance, and reward. The theory suggests that motivation is a result of the value an individual places on an outcome connected to the individual's perception of the effort and performance necessary to achieve that outcome aiming to maximize pleasure and minimize

painful outcomes. However, other theorists like Porter and Lawler counter that this theory does not consider situational context and suggests that theory considers people to be fully rational beings. The core belief of the Porter Lawler Motivation Theory (Arkhipova et al., 2019) focuses on that belief that increased effort leads to better performance and includes considerations for effort, performance, rewards and their perceived value, perceived effort and reward probability, and satisfaction. Their model hypothesized that the performance and motivation of an employee is guided by multiple factors that include personality, skills, experience, knowledge, and abilities. They contend that motivation cannot be viewed as a straightforward cause and effect relationship but as a more complex concept.

In addition, Adams' equity theory of motivation also discusses the role of incentives in shaping motivation and can be viewed through the framework of self-determination theory. This theory describes the relationship between an individual's contributions, also known as inputs; and their rewards, also known as benefits (Grant & Shin, 2012). Inputs can include a team member's time, effort, knowledge, and enthusiasm. Benefits include what an individual receives from the organization including financial compensation, recognition, and responsibility. Adams' Equity Theory of Motivation integrates the concept of fairness and the idea of comparison as factors that impact motivation. This theory of motivation says that when individuals perceive that they are not fairly rewarded for their contributions they will feel a sense of distress. An individual's perceptions of the balance of these factors contribute to their sense of fairness, equity, and motivation. For leaders to build cultures that encourage and facilitate autonomous motivation, they must understand the role of equity in their actions and how these actions are perceived by team members to promote transparency.

Psychological Safety

When leaders build workgroups and teams, they must understand how interpersonal relationships and the subsequent dynamic that exists within the team will have a direct impact on group performance and how well the team interacts, collaborates, and communicates. Harvard's Amy Edmondson (1999) created the term "psychological safety" when she explored its relationship to team learning, motivation, and performance. Grant (2021) defines psychological safety as "a culture of respect, trust, and openness in which people can raise concerns and suggestions without fear of reprisal. It's the foundation of a learning culture" (p. 209). In work cultures that prioritize the development of psychological safety, team members see mistakes as opportunities to learn and are more willing to take risks and fail. Individuals are also more likely to openly share concerns in meetings and cultivate mutual trust among teammates and supervisors (Frazier et al., 2016). Additional research is needed to examine the implications and perceptions of psychological safety among members of Generation Z. To support high-performing teams, creating psychologically safe work environments is critical to maximize productivity, positive results, recruitment, and retention of top potential team members.

At its heart, effective leadership represents a dynamic process that includes several essential components built around service to others (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). These elements represent necessary components for leaders to cultivate higher levels of psychological safety. Core elements of leadership focus on creating a vision, motivating and inspiring action, and helping an organization and individuals grow, evolve, and adapt to maximize individual and organizational potential (Covey, 2022). These elements require leaders to act with an ethical lens to effectively model behavior that is necessary to build and sustain an ethics driven organization where team members feel safe to share diverse perspectives (Schulman, 2006). Effective ethical

leadership is built upon strong values that emphasize serving individuals and organizations first and authentically inspiring others with that motivation (Bass, 2018). Professional ethics serve as guidelines that help to shape professional relationships, influence how leaders experience opportunities and challenges, and impact decision-making. Organizational ethics reflects core values and guide team member decisions that collectively influence the culture and norms of behavior within an organization. Starratt's ethical leadership framework (2008) and five domains of responsibility offers leaders a framework for how to identify core values and professional ethics. His framework focuses on proactive responsibility, personal and professional authenticity, and an encouraging presence. Ethical leadership must incorporate ethical forms of governance at various levels of the institution to ensure leaders act with an ethic of justice, care, and moral integrity. This framework can inform how those in leadership roles can lead more ethically and better role model organizational values (Starratt, 2008, p.124-133). Ethical leadership has a deep impact on organizational culture and influences an organization's internal management and external reputation (Razack, 2021). Effective leaders model a commitment to ethics in daily practice, interactions, and decisions. These behaviors ultimately contribute to an organization's values and norms of behavior and encourage higher levels of psychological safety among team members.

As society and modern work environments across industries have developed a stronger awareness and recognition of the impact of diversity, equity, and inclusivity embedded within their cultures, psychological safety is a concept that all organizational leaders must understand. Just like other aspects of organizational culture, creating psychological safety must be something that leaders work to integrate over the long-term. Over the past few decades, the people that make up schools, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and corporations have grown

more diverse and interconnected than ever before (Frey, 2020). As American society becomes more racially, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse, educational and organizational leaders must learn and recognize how to build and sustain environments that can maximize the potential of each stakeholder (Syron et al., 2021). Evidence shows the important need for leaders to develop an intentionally inclusive leadership mindset and approach when identifying key organizational priorities, values, and strategic plans (Ryan, 2006). Johnson (2014) shows that this culturally responsive leadership framework can help to empower individuals and facilitate collaboration and inclusiveness in the workplace. When leaders build workgroups and teams and shape organizational priorities and strategies, they must prioritize their understanding of how diverse identities and points of view are represented including diversity of race, gender, religion, lived experience, and ability.

Organizational leaders must develop a broader understanding of how their actions, inactions, and decisions can be strengthened by applying an equity lens that assesses these decisions for multicultural and cultural responsiveness. Khan et. al (2020) shows the important relationship between psychological safety and inclusive leadership. When leaders commit to action that truly encourages honest reflection and humility, they can help team members build authentic relationships while incorporating an equity lens into organizational priorities, goals, and decision-making processes. These stronger relationships can help to strengthen the psychological safety team members feel (Shore & Chung, 2021). Organizational leaders must acknowledge systematic bias, racism, and the evolution of injustice and inequality of opportunity in society and within their own organizations. This recognition can help leaders formulate a deeper awareness of advantages and disadvantages and enhance the knowledge among team

members of why cultivating cultural awareness and an inclusive culture plays a vital role in healthy, vibrant organizations.

Dixon-Fyle et al. (2020) show that to effectively facilitate an inclusive workplace with high levels of psychological safety needed for authentic employee motivation, leaders must strengthen their understanding of how historic and modern injustices and inequities have contributed to increased and sustained disparities in educational, economic, and health opportunities for members of certain social groups. Pedulla (2020) expresses that leaders who enhance their understanding of inequities within the organization and broader society can help to bring this essential knowledge and perspective to their team members who in turn can engage in meaningful learning opportunities that help individuals recognize their own earned and unearned advantages and disadvantages. This additional knowledge can help leaders and team members incorporate intentional inclusiveness into their daily work and management tasks.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts and their essential relationship with organizational culture, motivation, and psychological safety cannot simply be viewed as occasional activities that team members perceive as an additional "add-on" with little connection to other areas of work. Instead, DEI can be defined as holistic in all practices and a consistent priority that helps to inform and guide strategic, structural, and programmatic analysis and decision making. DEI efforts should offer opportunities for group members to unify and build mutual respect and trust among each other (Agovino, 2021). This holistic view of inclusion and cultural responsiveness directly contributes to the environment of an organization and helps to strengthen a team member's relationship with colleagues and leaders.

Psychological safety has become an essential element for organizations to cultivate as inappropriate behaviors and abuse of power dynamics that once were kept quiet are now

illuminated and increasingly not tolerated in organizations. Walker et al. emphasize this point, "A primary reason that people do not report SH (sexual harassment) and other forms of unethical behavior is because they fear retaliation from their organization, or they believe that nothing will be done as a result of the reporting. One way to increase SH reporting is to increase an organization's psychological safety climate" (p. 106). In addition, as more organizations develop remote work and hybrid work arrangements and team members may have less in person interaction with peers and organizational leaders, leaders must make intentional efforts to cultivate and sustain this dynamic.

In addition to significant enhancements related to the cultivation of ethical cultures and promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion priorities, psychological safety has a direct relationship with productivity. A 2017 report from Gallup found that if organizations increase psychological safety, it makes employees more engaged in their work and can lead to a 12 percent increase in productivity. High levels of psychological safety within an organization help to increase team member engagement, foster inclusivity, and facilitate creativity (Herway, 2017). Leaders can facilitate this by modeling openness and normalizing vulnerability. Laura Delizonna (2017) summarizes the immense value of psychological safety:

> 'There's no team without trust,' says Paul Santagata, Head of Industry at Google. He knows the results of the tech giant's massive two-year study on team performance, which revealed that the highest-performing teams have one thing in common: psychological safety, the belief that you won't be punished when you make a mistake. (p. 2)

Newman et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review of psychological safety literature, examining 83 different studies to capture the antecedents and outcomes of psychological safety at the individual, team, and organizational levels. The analysis found that at the individual and

team level, psychological safety facilitates better communication outcomes and more interpersonal communication. The analysis also found positive associations among employee perceptions of psychological safety and learning behaviors, creativity levels, more positive employee attitudes. The authors also found greater knowledge sharing among team members. The evidence shows the effects of supportive leadership behaviors on work outcomes through psychological safety. Just like other aspects of organizational culture, creating psychological safety must be something that leaders work to integrate over the long-term to encourage active open-mindedness among team members (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). As society and modern work environments across industries have developed a stronger awareness and recognition of the impact of diversity, equity, and inclusivity embedded within their cultures, psychological safety is a concept that's even more valuable in work environments.

McEwan et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of teamwork interventions that studied the effects of team training on team performance. A literature search returned 16,849 unique articles. The meta-analysis was ultimately conducted on 51 articles, comprising 72 unique interventions, and 8,439 participants. The authors found positive and significant medium-sized effects were found for teamwork interventions on both teamwork and team performance, which had a direct impact on employee motivation and the resulting culture. This evidence showed that team-oriented training is positively related to various outcomes of team effectiveness. Naber et al. (2014) explain that team training can focus on individual or collective team outcomes. They go on to say that team training can also focus on the team as an "aggregate unit performing a singular task" (p. 163). Using a sample of student teams to explore how interaction anxiety impacts team training, they found that interaction anxiety inhibits the social activities of team training, and consequently, team training effectiveness. Working groups

are often thwarted by interpersonal conflict, trust issues, and disagreement about goals and processes. This conflict reinforces the idea that organizations that do not prioritize team development in the context of culture often face consequences that could impact effectiveness. High levels of mistrust among and between team members and supervisors contribute to weaker relationships and often prevent groups from developing a deep understanding of a challenge or opportunity because of a fear of conflict. To understand how groups can function more effectively, team facilitators and organizational leaders must develop a working knowledge of psychological safety and the factors for individual and team cohesion.

Delizonna (2017) explained five key themes that leaders can take to grow psychological safety in their organizations. These include approaching conflict as a collaborator, not an adversary, speaking human to human, anticipating reactions and planning countermoves, replacing blame with curiosity, asking for feedback on delivery, and measuring psychological safety. When team members don't feel safe, they adjust their behaviors and responses and create a less effective team. These responses by team members ultimately add up and become more embedded within the culture. Therefore, leaders must work to build their own awareness of how much psychological safety exists among team members within their organizations. Edmonson (1999) developed a 7-item scale to measure team psychological safety. This measure includes items that capture shared perceptions amongst team members as to whether they believe that others will not reject members for being themselves, team members care about each other as individuals, team members have positive intentions for one another, and team members respect the competence of others. In their systematic review of the literature related to psychological safety, Newman, Donohue, and Eva (2017) explain the importance of leaders taking action to measure psychological safety and various constructs researchers have developed. They write,

"we also call on researchers to investigate factors that influence psychological safety strength (i.e., the degree of consensus or agreement of individuals' perceptions of psychological safety within a team or organization)" (p. 531). While quantitative metrics offer significant value, they conclude that a balance and blend of quantitative and qualitative data will likely give leaders the most accurate snapshot and assessment of psychological safety within their organizations. Leaders can also leverage emerging evidence showing the impact of behavioral nudges to facilitate the cultivation and sustainability of psychological safety (Lagan, 2019). The evidence reviewed shows that organizational leaders across all industries must understand the concept of psychological safety and its presence in their specific organization as well as its relationship to performance and productivity.

Intersection of Culture, Motivation, and Psychological Safety: Nudge Theory

When exploring the relationship between motivation, psychological safety, and organizational culture, the literature points to an approach that leaders can utilize to guide and inform their actions to cultivate and sustain employee engagement. Nobel Prize winning professor Richard Thaler and Harvard Law professor Cass Sunstein introduced the idea of "nudges" as both a tool to influence and improve human decision making and as a framework for policymakers, public health professionals, educators, and leaders in other industries to positively influence individual and team decision making (Thaler & Sunstein, 2021). This framework focuses on the idea of intentionally designing "choice architecture" to subtly improve the environment where important organizational decisions are considered and ultimately decided. Research illustrates the role and the surprisingly major impact the environment can play in influencing how people make decisions (Johnson et al., 2012). They show that small adjustments in the environment where decisions are made and how they are presented can lead to major

differences in outcomes in a range of organizational contexts (Güntner et al., 2017). Their research is built upon the idea that humans do not always act as perfectly rational actors and are susceptible to cognitive biases that lead to errors in judgement and decisions.

Recently, management and leadership scholars have begun to examine Nudge Management as an approach that applies understandings from behavioral science to influence and develop organizational contexts that maximize the positive sides of human decision making while considering our unconscious intuitions and cognitive biases that influence the thinking and behavior of team members (Ebert & Freibichler, 2017). This approach has important implications for leaders to consider as they intentionally explore the development and maintenance of organizational cultures with high levels of motivation and psychological safety among team members. This theory is important in education, human service, and other organizational environments.

Educational leadership researchers and organizational leaders who seek to build their understanding of the structure and mechanisms that contribute to individual and team motivation and psychological safety must also develop an understanding of how people make judgements and decisions (Beshears et al., 2015). Human decision making represents a fundamental component of how people make sense of their environments and how they act in those environments. Kahneman (2012) research offers leaders powerful and surprising insights into how people make decisions and interpret information. His research shows that people are not always rational and logical thinkers but instead often experience cognitive biases that directly or indirectly influence how people process information. This influence can have a strong and often unseen effect that can shape decision making processes. Kahneman argues that people have two selves. One of the selves he calls System 1 that acts fast and helps to make quick, intuitive

decisions. The second is what he calls System 2 that is slower, more intentional, and uses multiple data points to make informed decisions. While both systems are critical to daily functioning, System 1 thinking, while generally leading our thoughts and actions appropriately, can also often lead to poor decisions because of the strong influence of potential biases and external factors that alter how to understand information (Battaglio et al., 2018). Leaders who understand this dynamic and the influences of framing, overconfidence, confirmation bias, status quo bias, planning fallacies, illusions of understanding and validity, cognitive associations, reference points, and inside-out/outside-in views can design policies and institutions to mitigate some of the negative effects of System 1 thinking while leveraging the advantages of System 2 thinking (Kahneman et al., 2022). Kahneman's research and the research of other scholars outlining how people learn and use information offer organizational leaders powerful insights and tools that ultimately can help them facilitate positive cultures that strengthen team member motivation and psychological safety.

Kahneman's research is built around several key ideas essential for leaders to understand as they seek to build strong cultures that are built upon strong foundations of psychological safety and sustained motivation. One foundational part of his work centers around what he introduced as Prospect Theory (Barberis, 2012). Prospect theory is a model of behavioral economics that shows how people make decisions between alternatives that involve risk and uncertainty. It demonstrates that people think in terms of expected utility relative to a reference point rather than absolute outcomes. Kahneman (2012) also differentiates between probabilities and how those probabilities translate into decision weights for individuals. The role of reference points offers leaders a powerful lesson in how to introduce and share information with team members. Kahneman's Prospect Theory also highlights the role of losses and risk in influencing

decision-making processes (Barberis, 2012). People become risk-seeking when all options are bad and risk-averse when faced with risky choices potentially leading to gains. People are more sensitive to losses than to gains and become loss-averse in these situations. This dynamic that shapes our thinking can contribute to status quo bias that can harm needed organizational change initiatives and have a negative impact on the working culture (University of Pennsylvania, 2022). Hameduddin (2021) shows that leaders who understand that their team members performance and motivation are heavily influenced by their real and perceived environment can better make decisions and design an environment that can maximize the positive effects and minimize negative effects like confirmation bias, emotionally based decisions, and planning errors. Prospect theory and an understanding of the existence of cognitive biases that shape our interpretations and decisions have important implications for leaders to understand how people think in various scenarios and how leaders can build structures and environments that incorporate this understanding to better facilitate team member motivation and psychological safety (Campbell et al., 2009).

Organizational leaders are responsible for understanding and facilitating the environment where decisions are made (Koziol-Nadolna & Beyer, 2021). Teams are often better than individuals when it comes to avoiding errors because of typically slower decision making and established procedures. Leaders who understand how their team members learn and interpret information can frame problems, shape the collection of relevant information, guide action, encourage reflection, and instill cultures of collaboration, learning, and evaluation (Dobrygowski, 2018). Akdere and Egan (2020) showed that show a clear link between strong employee learning cultures, job satisfaction, and organizational performance. Leaders who understand the synthesis of motivation and factors that contribute to decision making can design

opportunities to evaluate and strengthen decision making processes and "decision products" (Kahneman, 2012, p. 418). While an understanding of traditional motivational theories is essential, leaders must integrate the lessons of those theories with an understanding of how people think and interpret information (MacLean, 2022). This comprehensive view offers leaders a more holistic awareness of how their team members process and interpret information and how those interpretations impact individual motivation and collective organizational culture.

Nudge theory is built around the idea of libertarian paternalism (Thaler & Sunstein, 2021). This idea theorizes that institutions and organizations have legitimate reasons and needs to alter human behavior and decisions. It is also built on the idea of maintaining individual choice. Thaler and Sunstein write that Nudge Theory is built around six key principles. First, incentives play an important role in enabling effective decision making. Second, mapping is important for people to better understand the consequences of different decision points. Next, defaults play a vital role in how people make decisions and can be used to lead people to act. Fourth, giving feedback is central to nudges to help people improve performance. The fifth element of Nudge Theory considers that humans are prone to errors. With this understanding, systems and processes can be better understood to prevent or mitigate the effects of these errors. Finally, the sixth element of Nudge Theory that leaders must understand is to structure complex choices to help simplify challenging situations by developing choice architecture that facilitates easier cognition and understanding. The nudge principles outlined above can be used by organizational leaders to improve their own and the decision-making processes of their team members. By developing a deeper awareness of how people think, act, and make decisions, leaders can better influence and design organizational environments that facilitate better decisions, maintain the needed sense of autonomy among team members, achieve organizational

goals, and ultimately nourish a culture that supports team member growth and improve performance (Simon & Tagliabue, 2018).

In the context of Hertzberg's Motivation Hygiene Theory, McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, and Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory, and ideas of psychological safety, Miller et al. (2018) show that nudge management theory represents a potentially powerful new framework for organizational leaders to incorporate into their management and leadership approaches. This leadership approach incorporates key concepts of human motivation, such as the need for autonomy in contemporary organizations, and offers leaders strategic and tactical methods to positively impact decisions that can lead to better organizational outcomes while preserving the independence and autonomy demanded by a growing number of today's workers. By adjusting basic choice architecture in an organization, leaders can improve an individual's and a team's decision-making and performance (Gunter et al., 2019). Nudge theory can be applied in many parts of an organization, from improving meetings, planning, task efficiency, and knowledge sharing. Finally, Nudge Management offers leaders a path of little resistance because it maintains individual control over decision making and minimizes the potential consequences of more intrusive change efforts. Nudge management offers a new opportunity to improve worker productivity by focusing on and enhancing the organizational context that influences thinking to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and motivation (Miller et al., 2018).

Mindset Theory

For educational and organizational leaders exploring the intersection of motivation, psychological safety, and the connection to organizational culture, research and evolution of Mindset Theory offers a powerful insight that helps to explain differences in how people respond to various challenges and opportunities that shape workplace engagement (Keating & Heslin,

2015). Leaders who have a stronger understanding of why some individuals react positively to changes and perceived setbacks while other team members have difficulty recovering from similar setbacks and challenges can better leverage the unique talents and skills of their team and provide meaningful professional development opportunities to their teams enhancing motivation and psychological safety (Khan, 2012). The research of Dweck (2016) on Mindset Theory integrates aspects of developmental psychology, social psychology, and personality psychology. Leaders who understand the differences in mindsets among their team members can better understand how to build productive working environments and support their team members in a way that can most successfully facilitate positive organizational culture while strengthening individual motivation and increasing psychological safety (Canning et al., 2019).

This section will explore the components of Mindset Theory, summarize the two key elements, and offer insights into how this theory can be put into practice among organizational leaders. The section will also explain this theory in the broader context of other motivational theories that can give the most comprehensive perspective to inform leadership practice. Mindset Theory reinforces the idea that conscious and unconscious thoughts and biases impact how people think, interpret situations, and ultimately act. These dynamics have significant implications for leaders who cultivate cultures of high psychological safety and highly motivated team members (Osterweil, 2022). The theory shows how seemingly small environmental changes like wording and framing can have a powerful impact on how people perceive actions and make decisions. The theory shows the potential impact of mindset nudges in the workplace (O'Meara et al., 2022). Dweck's research also reinforces lessons from Kahneman, Thaler, and Sunstein described earlier, whose research also helps to explain factors that influence our thinking and decision-making processes and ultimately motivation and psychological safety.

Dweck's Mindset Theory is built around the idea that people can have two mindsets that guide their thinking and behavior (Dweck, 2016). The first is a fixed mindset that believes that character, intelligence, and creative ability are static. This view often leads people with this mindset to avoid challenges, give up easily when facing obstacles, see effort as pointless or even counterproductive, ignore useful performance feedback, and feel threatened by the success of others. This can add up to a view that undermines a person's ability to maximize his or her own potential. On the other hand, a growth mindset believes that intelligence and other abilities can be developed and are a foundation for growth. This view leads people with a desire to learn and improve. This mindset can lead people to embrace challenges, persist when facing problems, see effort as a pathway to mastery, appreciate feedback and constructive criticism, and centers around the idea of free will to chart and influence one's own life path (Murphy & Reeves, 2019). Dweck explains that while many people will primarily have one type of mindset, some people in various contexts will display characteristics of both mindsets.

Evidence shows that a growth mindset offers numerous advantages at personal and organizational levels (Han & Stieha, 2020). Some of these include a cultivation of a lifelong desire for learning, improved interpersonal relationships, persistence, and improved career success. Some of the dangers of a fixed mindset include weakened self-esteem, lack of growth, and reduced resilience. When leaders understand the characteristics of these mindsets, they can help to develop their team members and contribute to an organizational wide learning and growth culture. Leaders and managers must also work to develop their own self-awareness around their own mindset orientation. Kouzes and Posner (2019) show that growth-minded leaders consistently displayed more frequent use of leadership behaviors than did their fixed mindset counterparts. Leaders who encourage reflection, instill a sense of purpose, build

persistence, appreciate the value of constructive feedback, and instill the idea that setbacks are learning opportunities can help to cultivate a growth mindset in all team members (Dweck, 2021). Dweck and other collaborators conducted a survey of a range of employees at Fortune 1000 companies and found that growth-mindset organizations tend to have happier employees and a more innovative, risk-taking culture (HBR Editors, 2021). While more research is needed to explore the relationship between growth-minded organizations and financial returns and measures of productivity, the early research suggests that these organizations will experience numerous benefits in the long-term regarding increased motivation and psychological safety among team members.

Research by McKinsey & Company (2021) shows that with rapid growth in technological advancements and changes in the American workforce, organizational leaders must continue to evolve and strengthen their understanding of motivation, psychological safety, and how to better facilitate creativity, innovation, and the development of new ideas and approaches that can lead to stronger work outcomes. To effectively develop a culture of innovation and a growth mindset, leaders and their teams must enhance their sense of self-awareness to accurately assess opportunities and challenges and embrace new ideas and perspectives that encourage motivation, and positive attitudes towards work (Athota, 2021). Leaders may not be able to influence every decision in an organization, but they do have the clear ability to positively impact decision making and thinking processes and the approach to how their teams examine issues and identify solutions (Tierney, 2016). This enhanced collaboration and culture of learning helps to strengthen the organization and maximize creativity and the unique perspectives, lived experiences, and talents of a diverse range of team members. This shift in culture to one that emphasizes continuous learning presents a significant opportunity for innovation and a renewed

focus on motivation while maximizing the potential of each team member (Athota, 2021).

Therefore, organizational leaders must identify specific steps they can take to build reflection,

learning, and a growth mindset into daily routines, related organizational strategies, and as a

fundamental part of the culture of the organization (Chanani & Wibowo, 2019).

Generational Considerations

Scholars debate the value and importance of studying generational differences. Some of

these debates are reflective of the value of examining generational differences in various

contexts (Rudolph et al., 2020). One of the more meaningful ways generational-focused

scholarship informs scholars and organizational leaders focuses on strengthening understanding

of the progression, values, similarities, differences, and expectations in organizational-based

relationships between generations in organizational contexts (Odukoya, 2022). A common

challenge researchers face centers on the importance of stressing that generational characteristics

are not necessarily static and can evolve over time reflective of broader changes in workplaces

and society and that certain generational cut-off lines may be arbitrary when discussing traits

within and between generations (Campbell et al., 2017). Twenge (2023) writes that technological

advancements have also served as a major factor influencing these changes over time among

different generations. Differences and individual considerations within generations also exist

when identifying common patterns around worker perceptions, expectations, needs, wants, and

priorities (National Academies Press, 2020). Finally, research is emerging that helps to offer a

new paradigm for considering generational based research in professional contexts through a

differentiated lifespan developmental perspective (Rudolph & Zacher, 2016) that "aims to

describe and explain stability and change in experiences and behavior across time, and to

optimize developmental processes." With a recognition that nuance exists within generations and

that characteristics may not be universally applied, the table below offers a helpful summary of common characteristics of different generations that helps to inform the state of organizational culture themed generational research and practice (Hansen & Leuty, 2011; Kumar, 2023; (Ng et al., 2018; Urick, 2022).

Figure 1
Generational Characteristics: Historical Context and Traits

	Baby Boomers	Gen X	Gen Y (Millennials)	Generation Z
Generation Characteristics	-Born 1946-1964 -Raised in post-World War Two/Great Depression economy. Influenced by Vietnam War era and Civil Rights era -Achievement and professional status are earned through effort and sacrifice -18.6% of the American workforce as of 2020 (Kumar, 2023)	-Born 1965-1980 -Influenced by Cold War era political dynamics -Early technology advances and development of the Internet -Work/life balance and priority of self-sufficiency at work and independence -34.8% of the American workforce as of 2020 (Kumar, 2023)	-Born 1981-1996 -Impacted by 9/11/01 attacks and the continued advancement of technology resources -Value professional learning and challenge -Value organizational social responsibility efforts -38.6% of the American workforce as of 2020 (Kumar, 2023)	-Born 1997-2012 -Influenced by 2008 "Great Recession" and access to advanced technological resources at young ages -Early life transitions impacted by COVID pandemic -Value diversity, political activism, identity, and individuality -Mental health prioritization -6.1% of the American workforce as of 2020 (Kumar, 2023)

Summary and Conclusions

The literature review has outlined central principles explaining the definition, nature, and scope of organizational culture while also identifying gaps that provide opportunities for further exploration and analysis. The review synthesized pertinent literature, allowing readers to deepen their understanding of organizational culture through the connective lens of psychological safety, motivation, nudge theory, and mindset theory. By examining patterns in the literature, the review illustrates the need for a common language and ideas focused on strengthening how researchers and practitioners approach organizational culture and the need to examine the concept through the lens of Generation Z. The review also demonstrates how readers can recognize the necessary approach for leaders to build productive organizational processes and systems informed by motivation theory. By exploring key components of developing healthy team environments and interpersonal relations, the literature highlights the value of organizational culture, psychological safety, and the connection with motivation research. Although the literature review made an intentional effort to exclude discussing teambuilding, team development, and culture building techniques, the evidence presented suggests various tactics leaders can design and implement. It is vital that leaders develop techniques that are built upon the theoretical foundation directly addressed in the literature review. The absence of trust and fear of conflict can have a significant negative effect on organizational performance. Organizational leaders have a responsibility to help their people and the entire organization overcome these hurdles to be successful. Ultimately, organizational leaders must understand the importance of culture and its essential elements to maximize their organizations and their team members' potential.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The qualitative research study presented within this dissertation is intended to deepen understanding of organizational culture at the intersection of the dynamics of motivation and psychological safety. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to understand how members of Generation Z describe how their motivations and perceptions of psychological safety influence the culture of a non-profit organization. The research questions include:

- How do members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?

- How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?

This methodology chapter contributes to existing research discussed in Chapter Two and offers a new perspective for researchers and practitioners to consider when leading organizations and developing future research. Because of the complex nature of these concepts, a qualitative research methodology helped to offer deeper insights into the nuanced factors that influence and shape these dynamics for individuals and organizational leaders from the perspectives of Generation Z workers. The research helped to fill a gap in the existing literature describing perspectives on organizational cultures, motivations, and psychological safety among members of Generation Z. The study described the lived experiences and perspectives of study participants to help sharpen understandings of organizational culture, team dynamics, psychological safety, mindsets, and motivation among Generation Z employees.

The purpose of this research was to explore the role, function, variables, and context that explains the role of motivation, psychological safety, and organizational culture in the Generation Z population. The purpose of this study focused on deepening understanding of how

members of Generation Z describe how their motivations and perceptions of psychological safety influence the culture of a non-profit organization. By applying phenomenological methods, the study described lived experiences, mindsets, and feelings of a Generation Z population in workplace settings. The primary data collection method for this study was one-to-one interviews with Generation Z members in a non-profit organization. Wilson (2015) wrote that, "The objective of phenomenology is to understand human experience" (p. 38). This research method helped to show the unique perspectives of the sample population. A phenomenological approach helps provide rich data that help to explain the complexity and lived experiences of the targeted population. The findings from this research offer several practical benefits for organizations that recognize the growing importance of effectively engaging all employees, particularly the Generation Z population. Stakeholders who may benefit from this research include human resource professionals, unit managers, and organizational leaders. Ultimately, the chapter is intended to offer a detailed overview of the research questions, describe the research design, explain the study participants and researcher's role, discuss the data collection and analysis processes, demonstrate validity, and offer ethical implications.

Research Method

The author of the study used a qualitative, phenomenological case study methods designed to gather in-depth feedback on the perspectives and views of the research participants. This research method allows the researcher to collect detailed and nuanced data that brings new light to the complex subjects of organizational culture, motivation, and psychological safety from the perspectives of Generation Z workers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research took place at a non-profit organization that covers twenty-seven counties in central Pennsylvania from the New York to the Maryland borders. The organization employs over 130 full-time team members

and offers the researcher access to the population needed for this study. In partnership with the organization's Human Resource staff, participants who met the selection criteria were randomly selected for inclusion. Participants were asked to engage in an up to one-hour interview with the researcher, who uses a question battery designed to generate feedback and dialogue. The interview process produced valuable data that will help the researcher discover themes and patterns, offering new insights and awareness of the research topic.

Participants

This research project described was designed to explore the experiences, perspectives, mindsets, and behavioral patterns of members of Generation Z, particularly within a social impact driven nonprofit organization. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand how members of Generation Z describe how their motivations and perceptions of psychological safety influence the culture of a non-profit organization. The qualitative research approach obtains data to help to explore individual experiences and group norms through an open-ended, semi-structured interviews. The researcher, working with the organization's human resources staff, received from the researcher a list of inclusion criteria for the study. From that list, a minimum of five employees were randomly selected to participate in the study. The intention of this sampling approach was to achieve a point of data saturation from a diverse range of perspectives and maintain a practical interview load. Saunders et al. (2017) write that in qualitative research, the definition of data saturation is defined within the literature in a variety of ways that do not all necessarily align and reflect different approaches related to theoretical saturation and data saturation. The researchers conclude that, "when and how saturation may be judged to have been reached will differ depending on the type of study." Hennick and Kaiser (2022) write, "When used in the broader context, saturation refers to the point in data collection

when no additional issues or insights are identified and data begin to repeat so that further data collection is redundant, signifying that an adequate sample size is reached." Because this study was designed to develop a depth of knowledge around Generation Z worker perceptions related to organizational culture, a sample population of five participants supported the researcher's intention to reach a point of saturation involving the specific population of Generation Z workers examined in this study. The researcher recognized that the process of semi-structured interviews joined with existing literature helped to provide rich data that determined the study's findings and related conclusions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The employees who were selected received a written communication from the researcher inquiring about their interest in participating, detailing their roles and responsibilities, and explaining the purpose of the study. If any selected participants chose not to participate for any reason, a process existed to ensure another selection from the human resources generated list occurred until a minimum of five participants had been selected for inclusion. All participants in the study met the primary eligibility criteria of being born during or after 1997 to meet the age cut-off point designated by the Pew Research Center (2019).

All participants in the study were current employees of the non-profit with less than four years of full-time professional experience who are between the ages of 23 and 26, thus qualifying as members of Generation Z. Most were working in their first professional full-time positions and had entry level or early career roles within the organization, including associates and coordinators. Potential participants included a mixture of males and females. Participants have obtained bachelor's degrees. The employees worked in various departments, including Development, Advocacy/Policy Analysis, Logistics, and Partner Agency Services.

The research study utilized a purposeful sampling method to collect data. The data collection strategy allows researchers to build a population sample that is most useful for the research purpose using clearly described and consistent selection criteria. (Palinkas et al., 2013). The main goal of purposive sampling is to identify individuals who are the most effective fit in helping to answer specific research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Purposive sampling methods provide researchers with the necessary tools to gather data to better understand the complexities around many social and behavioral topics (Palinkas et al., 2013). The resulting data help better inform practice and lead to more effective implementation of policies, procedures, and programs that can strengthen communities and organizations while maximizing individual potential and performance for members of Generation Z in non-profit organizations.

Role of Researcher

At the time of the research design development and implementation, I served as an employee at the research site. I serve as the Health Innovations Manager, where I help lead the organization's health and nutrition related strategies, partnerships, and programs. I have served in this role since January 2019. Although I interact with a broad range of staff members, managers, and executive leaders within the organization, I predominantly work in an independent organizational unit reporting to the Executive Director. I also help to lead a workplace team that helps design and develop strategies that support a positive working culture for employees, including those who work in remote settings, hybrid settings, and fully-in person at physical warehouses and office hubs within the service territory. I do not work in the same organizational department and do not have any types of supervisory relationships with any prospective participants. Because I have been an employee for several years, I had a perspective inclusive of the historical context that shapes my own personal perceptions, reactions, and

opinions regarding organizational priorities, goals, and daily management decisions and actions. This perspective is helpful in understanding the nuances of the organization and broader characteristics of the non-profit. Because of these experiences, I had credibility as a researcher and facilitator in understanding the data collected. I also had nearly five years of professional experience outside of the non-profit that strengthens my ability to understand and evaluate the data. My external and internal experiences helped in identifying patterns and analyzing common themes that emerge from the data collection processes. I also recognize that because I hold an internal perspective, I needed to be fully aware of my own limitations compared with the perspective of an outsider new to the organization. I took deliberate steps, including ensuring confidentiality in data collection processes while promoting the accuracy of the data.

My role as the investigator in this research project included organizing and facilitating interviews with the participants. My role then shifted to analyzing and interpreting the data to identify patterns and themes that emerged to help answer the research questions. Although the study design has its limitations as discussed below, the results from this study help to enhance the existing research and fill the gaps in how researchers and organizational leaders understand employee motivation, psychological safety, and mindsets from the perspectives of Generation Z. These dynamics intersect to shape organizational culture, which has a direct impact on team member performance and the ability of organizations to advance their mission and achieve their goals (Edmonson, 2018).

Data Collection

The research process outlined within this chapter involved the use of a triangulated data collection strategy. The strategy involves the use of multiple data collection sources to help answer specific research questions (Carter et al., 2014). Nightingale (2020) stated that

triangulation helps to promote a more comprehensive understanding of a research question by allowing for the consideration of multiple perspectives. She wrote that triangulation works to "enhance validity, to create a more in-depth picture of a research problem, and to interrogate different ways of understanding a research problem" (p. 477). Triangulation helps to reduce potential biases and increase validity while ensuring high-quality data (Fusch et al., 2018). As stated above, this research project focused on exploring the experiences, perspectives, mindsets, and behavioral patterns of members of Generation Z to add depth and clarity when researchers and practitioners consider key questions and make decisions that influence organizational culture. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study has been to understand how members of Generation Z describe how their motivations and perceptions of psychological safety influence the culture of a non-profit organization.

The researcher of the study used a sampling method designed to capture a diverse participant audience within the study parameters so that results can be more generalizable to a broader population (Maxwell, 2021). In addition, because organizational culture represents a complex and nuanced concept that can be viewed from a range of perspectives, this research project utilized a triangulated data collection lens to help explore organizational culture from multiple viewpoints (Carter et al., 2014).

The interview questions and protocol written for this project reflect identified best practices, as discussed in Chapter Two, to generate the richest data possible (McGrath et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2020). This open-ended, semi-structured framework and interview protocol were designed to enable different forms of data triangulation to allow for the construction, convergence and overlap of complimentary results to facilitate a deeper understanding of the data that will inform and guide individuals in leadership roles along with influencing future

research (Kallio et al., 2016). Additionally, the interview questions emerged from initial

literature review categories that included organizational culture, motivation, psychological

safety, mindset theory, and behavioral analysis techniques from a Generation Z perspective.

Viewed holistically, literature review categories, research questions and related interview

questions will generate data that help to inform, advise, and interpret the study's data.

<div align="center">**Interview Protocol and Procedures**</div>

All participants completed an informed-consent form and a basic introductory survey to

help the researcher prepare for the interviews. Interviews were the central method of data

collection for this research project. The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review

Board of Youngstown State University and in consultation with approved faculty members of the

Beeghly College of Education.

The interview protocol used in this study utilized a semi-structured interview approach

with open-ended questions to help build a positive relationship and trust between the interviewer

and study participants. The rapport built was essential for candid conversation allowed for

follow-up questions to encourage the necessary deep inquiry (Gabbert et al., 2020). The

approach used for these interviews allows for flexibility so that the researcher can dig deeply to

help encourage the participants to share their full perspective to help capture the fullest story and

construct meaning from the interview data.

To effectively discover answers to the central research questions in this study, a list of

interview questions was generated to guide the dialogue between the researcher and participants.

The questions were built upon the main themes of this project that is designed to guide new

understandings around the study of these topics and the practical leadership practices that impact

organizational culture, motivation, psychological safety from the lens of a specific generational

age group. Many of the questions were adapted from publicly available question inventories from the Center for Self-Determination and Edmonson's Psychological Safety Assessment (2014). The questions are listed below and are grouped based on the central themes outlined above.

Theme 1: Motivation

1) Why do you do your work?

    A. Why do you work at [this non-profit organization]?

    B. What do you like about your role and responsibilities?

    C. What do you dislike about your role and responsibilities?

    D. What energizes you with your work?

    E. What takes away your sense of energy with your work?

    F. What role do feedback and expectations play in your work?

2) What are your professional aspirations?

    A. How important is this to you?

    B. How likely is it that this will happen in your future?

    C. How much have you already attained this goal?

3) Describe the role that initiative and choice play in the things you undertake at work.

    A. Do you feel you can make the decisions you want about how you do your job?

    B. Describe your relationships with your co-workers.

    C. Do you feel confident that you can do things well in your job?

Theme 2: Psychological Safety

4) Do you feel you can make mistakes without fear that my coworkers will hold it against you? Why or why not?

5) Do you feel that your co-workers welcome opinions different from their own? Why or why not?

6) Do you feel your direct manager values my ideas, and we have mutual trust? Why or why not?

7) Do you feel members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues? Why or why not?

8) Do you feel it is easy to ask other members of this team for help? Why or why not?

9) Do you feel that when working with members of this team, your unique skills and talents are valued and utilized? Why or why not?

Theme 3: Generation Z Motivation and Culture

10) How would you compare and contrast how you are motivated at work compared with long-term employees?

11) How would you describe how you interpret and experience the culture of the organization as compared with long-term employees?

What job characteristics are most important to you?

12) How do you feel you are perceived as a younger employee of this organization?

13) Why would you leave this organization? What would keep you with this organization?

The following procedure provided a framework for the interview process and guided each individual interview. I began by thanking each participant. I restated the purpose of the interview and assured them that all responses were confidential and would only be used in an aggregated format to protect their privacy and help to ensure the participant can honestly and fully answer the questions. This helped allow for any necessary follow-up questions that could occur during the interview. I then asked for final consent for the interview audio to be recorded. At the end of each question, where practical, I asked each participant if there was anything additional that they would like to add. Although I engaged with periodic nonverbal and verbal responses, my intention was to limit my role as much as possible while maintaining the integrity of the interview and the feeling of safety for participants. At the end of the interview, I asked the participant one final time if there is anything else they would like to voice. I then thanked the participants one more time and offered to share a transcript of the interview. At the conclusion of all interviews, a process of review began to analyze the data looking for common themes, patterns, and reactions that was an essential component of the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

After conducting the interview process constructed to gather rich data to explore the research questions, I began the process of analyzing and evaluating the data to draw conclusions that will help to bring new light to these important topics that will better inform future research and practice. As a guiding principle, the purpose of qualitative data analysis focuses on identifying themes and patterns from the collected data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data analysis process featured various important stages, including intentionally organizing, analyzing, and evaluating the data. Ultimately, this process led to a synthesis of the data and the ability to draw thematic conclusions from the research process to support understanding and explanation.

For this study, I used a thematic data analysis technique using the constant-comparative method as originally developed by Glaser (1965). The constant-comparative method can be used to cultivate meaning from the collected data by using open-coding to initially sort the information and then establish patterns from the data categories through axial coding. Kolb (2012) summarized the value of the constant-comparative method writing, "The benefit of using this method is that the research begins with raw data; through constant comparisons a substantive theory will emerge" (p. 83). This method followed a procedure of collecting the data, coding the data into themes relative to the themes established in the interview protocol, identifying patterns, relationships, and connections to categorize the data, and finally interpreting the data and offering implications for practice. As part of this research approach, I analyzed data as I was collecting it and categorized it into relevant themes related to the central research categories discussed in this study including organizational culture, motivation, and psychological safety. The constant-comparative method facilitated the research process by effectively offering a framework that fit my qualitative data that was collected based on the interview protocol. Finally, my analytic process involved a spirit of flexibility and openness so that my existing research categories could evolve to reflect key learnings and ensure the potential for new categories that may develop as a result of the collected data.

Validity

By using a strategy of triangulated data collection, the study was designed to strengthen validity of the data and research process. Trochim et al. (2016) expressed that validity focuses on accuracy and helps ensure that the results from data are truly measuring what they are intended to measure in the context of existing theory and knowledge. Scholars can help ensure validity by choosing proper sampling methods and data collection tools that operate with adherence to

accepted theory and already validated measures. Reinforcing the ideas from Trochim et al. (2016), Olywatayo (2012) took a deeper dive into different types of validity including face validity, content validity, and construct validity as important concepts in understanding the definition and nuances of validity. The study used a process of member checking to increase validity. This process involved assessing the research findings with the research participants (Birt et al., 2016). In addition, Mueller and Knapp (2018) emphasized the importance of validity and reliability and describe how these concepts are context-specific in practice. They pointed out that researchers must also consider the potential limitations and the importance of appreciating some of the challenges involving both reliability and validity in the research process.

Limitations

As with most research studies, the research presented has limitations to consider. As a qualitative researcher, I recognized potential biases that are obvious and some that are more subtle and influence my lens for analyzing the data. As someone who is a staff member of the organization studied, I may have had biases that could impact how I perceive participant feedback. Because I am also someone who generationally would be described as a younger millennial, my perspective may also be shaped by my own personal professional history, experiences, and relationships. All efforts were made to minimize these potential biases and ensure valid and reliable data. As described above, to mitigate potential risk and increase credibility, I used a system of member checking and triangulation to promote the validity of this study. While the study has limitations, ultimately, the data collected will help to bring new insights and a deeper awareness into existing research that explores the relationship of organizational culture with motivation and psychological safety.

Ethical Considerations

The nature of this research study involves direct interaction with human subjects through interviews. Therefore, the researcher has an essential responsibility to minimize risks and follow established protocols set forth by the Institutional Review Board of Youngstown State University and have approval for the study by the IRB. By using a voluntary opt-in design with an informed consent process and the commitment to the confidentiality of personally identifiable data, the researcher minimized potential risk to participants. The informed consent form included information highlighting the data security measures that have been taken to promote confidentiality and privacy. The measures included a commitment that no other person will be allowed access to personal identifiable interview data. The interview transcripts and recordings were kept on a secure, password protected electronic platform that no other employee of the research site had access to view. When prospective participants were identified they were told the purpose, scope, and method for how the data would be collected. Interview participants signed an informed consent form showing that they acknowledged that they could withdraw from the research at any point. As an additional layer of privacy protection, all interview participants were only referred to as Participant 1, 2, 3, etc. By explaining the background and purpose, timing needs, research design, data collection and analysis procedures, methods, measures, risks, informed consent, confidentiality, and benefits of the research, this research study carefully considered each of the necessary elements of a strong research design and process and has been designed to ensure credibility and generate meaningful data to add insights that help to answer the central research questions.

Summary

This chapter has been guided by the purpose of explaining the methodology of the research project. The material presented discussed how a qualitative research approach using a phenomenological case study method provides additional depth and clarity to the research study questions and results. By describing key traits of participants within this study along with the role of the researcher and the data collection process, readers gain a deeper understanding of the scope of the study and can better interpret the collected data, related implications, and recognize the limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter described a data analysis process using the constant-comparative method while incorporating a lens of member checking and triangulated data collection to promote data validity and ensure a strong ethical approach to the research process.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand how members of Generation Z describe how their motivations and perceptions of psychological safety impact the culture of a non-profit organization. This chapter is a presentation of the findings of the qualitative case study conducted to answer the research questions posed in Chapter One:

- How do members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?

- How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?

By deploying a phenomenological research method, the analysis and data presented offered insights describing the lived experiences and perceptions of a Generation Z population in workplace settings. The research process used a series of interviews as the data collection source. This chapter includes a presentation of the analyzed data culminating in findings that will help to inform future research and guide organizational leaders in how they approach leadership behaviors with members of Generation Z. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the collected data supports the categories. The initial categories in this research remained constant from their original form. Through analysis of the data as described in Chapter 3, this research produced the following categorical findings that bring additional clarity to the research questions involving Generation Z members and organizational culture:

- Motivation
- Psychological Safety
- Nudge Theory

Data Collection Process—Interviews

As discussed in Chapter 3, the central data collection process for this study involved participant interviews. This research method helped to show the unique perspectives of the sample population to help answer the research question. Participants engaged in an approximately one-hour interview with the researcher, who used a question battery designed to generate feedback and dialogue. The interview process produced valuable data that helped the researcher discover themes and patterns of the research topic.

Organization Profile and Background

Founded in 1982, the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank is a nonprofit organization whose mission focuses on fighting hunger, improving lives, and strengthening communities. With one in 11 people in central Pennsylvania facing food insecurity, including one in 10 children, the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank has demonstrated a commitment to ending hunger in 27 counties across central Pennsylvania. An affiliate of Feeding Pennsylvania and Feeding America, the organization works with more than 1,100 local agencies and programs and serves more than 202,500 people in need each month through two Healthy Food Hubs located in Harrisburg and Williamsport, Pennsylvania. The organization's executive leadership has put forth a vision that states, "By 2025, our collaborative network will provide access to enough nutritious food for everyone struggling with hunger in each of the 27 counties we serve, and we will convene and nurture partnerships to make progress toward ending hunger" (CPFB, 2023). The organization has designed a variety of programs to help meet food insecurity. In addition to supporting a diverse network of neighborhood food pantries, specialty programs emphasize serving youth populations, senior citizens, and veterans. The organization has also developed innovative partnerships with healthcare stakeholders to design interventions around the idea of using food as

medicine and improved nutrition security along with SNAP enrollment assistance and strategic advocacy related efforts.

Participant Profiles

Due to the relatively small number of interview participants in the sample, specific profiles are discussed in a manner so that no participant can be individually identified. All personal and demographic information is discussed in generalized terms to protect the confidentiality of each interview participant. The information presented in the profiles helps to give clarity and additional understanding of the attitudes and perceptions of each participant. The participants described below are all members of Generation Z based on their age and have worked with the organization for at least one calendar year. Each participant holds a bachelor's degree. The interview participants represented a diverse range of employees from different organizational departments and personal backgrounds. Interview participants shared their perspectives related to their lived experiences, roles, responsibilities, perceptions of organizational culture, and their thoughts regarding the necessary environments and resources needed to maximize their potential. Each name listed has been changed in the description below to protect individual identity.

Profile 1

Interview Participant 1 began the interview by offering important background information about his upbringing, lived experiences, and how that shaped and influenced his professional career desires. He discussed growing up in an area of high poverty and how that impacts health and career prospects. He stated that his central career goal was to be able to help people like his friends and neighbors from his hometown. He shared that his college major exposed him to government and the nonprofit sector. He further described how the mission of the Food Bank energizes him and how he values being in a position with autonomy and trust, which

enables him to more effectively promote and advocate for programs and policies that support hunger relief. He emphasized the importance of career development and feeling a sense of independence with his work while also discussing the importance of building and maintaining relationships within the organization. Participant 1 also spoke of his preferred style of management that can best facilitate his professional success.

Profile 2

Interview Participant 2 began by offering introductory thoughts related to her personal and professional background. She described her education and longstanding interest in food and health as a career priority. Participant 2 discussed her longstanding passion for nutrition and using food to promote better health. She described how she approached her work systematically and emphasized how important the organization's mission of addressing food insecurity is for her. Furthermore, Participant 2 then elaborated on her job responsibilities and explained how she works to strengthen health and nutrition efforts. This interviewee also shared how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted her perceptions and preferences for a working environment that can best fit her needs. Participant 2's voice reflected a strong enthusiasm for her work because of the impact she can make in helping people live healthier lives. Participant 2 discussed how seeing various team members address food insecurity from various perspectives energizes her and shares the importance of the issue for society. Participant 2 emphasized how important it is to her to finish her workday, feeling that she helped to make an impact and contribute to the mission of addressing hunger to improve health. Participant 2 explained that she feels shared values are a fundamental part of working at the Food Bank. She shared that she wants to stay in this type of work long-term.

Profile 3

Participant 3 also conveyed her perspective and her perceptions of her job responsibilities as a window demonstrating her work motivation, psychological safety, and the influence on organizational culture. Participant 3's role is split between two distinct functions. One focuses on warehouse support of physically moving and prepping food to be sent out for distribution to the network of hundreds of partner agencies. The other focus of Participant 3's role involves serving as a volunteer coordinator for the many groups of volunteers who serve at the Food Bank on a regular basis. She expressed that this is one of the "most fun" elements of her job and that she loves interacting with volunteers.

Participant 3 described how she greeted each volunteer as they arrived, aimed to welcome them to the Food Bank, and described their responsibilities for their volunteer shift. She also expressed her genuine appreciation for having the opportunity to lead volunteers and the pride she takes in explaining how the volunteers' work ultimately helps address food insecurity for people in the community. She demonstrated a lively and energetic attitude and voiced that she asks volunteers why they wanted to volunteer, indicating her intention to connect others with the organizational mission. In addition, Participant 3 expressed her enjoyment and sense of purpose she feels by her ability to independently manage volunteers while also expressing the impact the group's efforts have benefiting the community.

Participant 4

Participant 4 brings a different lens to her role as she has held more than one role with the organization. She expressed that she had served as an AmeriCorps member a few years prior, which helped to reflect her strong desire to serve others and make a positive impact helping her community. Participant 4 has worked in a program coordination role and now in a data collection

and analysis focused role. She described how this perspective is relatively unique among employees and has given her a stronger connection to the organization by helping her gain a more holistic perspective by combining her previous ground level work with her current bigger picture role she now has. She expressed her appreciation for the organization's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion practices. She also expressed how much she values the various professional development and leadership development opportunities available to team members. This participant also described her involvement with organizational committees and volunteer roles. She explained how she values the mentorship she received from her former supervisor and the trust he put in her, which helped her grow in her skills, abilities, and confidence to handle additional responsibilities and more autonomy with various projects.

Participant 5

Similar to the other interview participants, Participant 5 shared information related to his personal, academic, and professional background, which provided helpful context for understanding his responses. Participant 5 started with the organization through an internship opportunity, which gives him a unique lens on his current full-time role. In addition, unlike the other interview participants who all had some type of professional career-oriented role with other organizations preceding their employment with the Food Bank, Participant 5's entire professional career-oriented experience has been with the organization. This participant served as the youngest person within the interview cohort. The interviewee shared how he navigates his first full time career-focused opportunity and the expectations he has for organizational leaders and described the working environment where he felt he could be most successful. This participant also shared how the COVID-19 pandemic has helped to shape his expectations, priorities, and preferences as it relates to his professional identity and organizational culture.

Participant 5's perspective helped bring additional insight in helping to gain deeper understanding of the research questions.

Findings

In the section below, the researcher reports the findings from the data collection interview process. The findings are triangulated and themes that emerged from the research process are presented below. The data collected from the Generation Z interview participants helped to contribute to the existing literature while also offering a new perspective to help strengthen the available scholarly research related to the research questions.

Coding and Category Development

Data was collected through a holistic interview process. Participants were interviewed for approximately 45-60 minutes through an electronic meeting platform. The interviews were facilitated in a manner that maximized participant confidentiality. Field notes were taken, and an electronic transcript was generated through the interview platform in an effort to promote the accuracy of the interview responses. After facilitating the interviews and collecting the interview data, my next step focused on coding the data and generating themes and categories. The constant-comparative method was used to cultivate meaning from the collected data by using open-coding to initially sort the information and then establish patterns from the data categories through axial coding. The researcher used a color-coding system to identify the themes apparent in the interview transcripts and field notes. The researcher used a member-checking process by sharing the key takeaways of the interview with the respective participant to help ensure that the spirit and content of what was conveyed by the participant to the researcher matched the intent of what the participant intended to convey.

Each of the themes below is reflective of patterns that emerged during the interview process. The themes are then synthesized to offer implications for overall organizational culture, which are discussed as the central research questions. The intention of this process focuses on increasing validity and accurately representing participant comments. The chart summarizes how themes were coded within the transcript notes and analysis process. The researcher developed these codes after reviewing the interview data and organizing comments into thematic categories. The researcher then color coded the comments to be able to identify patterns and commonalities as reflected in the theme/coding chart below.

Research question 1: How do members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?

Figure 2

Research Question 1, Finding 1 Summary

Research Question 1	Finding 1
How do members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?	Theme: Purpose
Common thematic elements discovered through the interview-based data collection process	Purpose reflected in Orientation Period
	Purpose reflected in Communications
	Purpose reflected in Responsibilities and Tasks

Collectively, a clear sense of purpose as reflected in a variety of organizational activities, direct and indirect behaviors from individuals in formal leadership roles, perceptions of organization norms, and daily tasks served as a core finding from the collected and analyzed interview data. The Generation Z members highlighted that they feel renewed energy for their work when they have a clear understanding of why it matters and how it fits within the organization. Participants discussed how they value learning about the interconnected nature of different departments and different initiatives within the Food Bank. Some participants also spoke of the importance of having opportunities to learn about how the work of the Food Bank fits within the broad charitable food network at a statewide and national level. Participants use this information to gain a deeper appreciation for their own core work tasks while strengthening their understanding of the strategic direction and identified priorities where the organization is investing time, money, and other resources.

According to the interviewees, this increased sense of commitment helps to reinforce and renew their desire to advance the mission of the organization and feel that they are respected, valued, and essential parts of the organization, which has important implications for organizational leaders as they take actions that strongly influence employee perceptions of the culture of the organization. Participant 1 shared a feeling that effectively illustrates the common thread that connected the interview participants and their common desire to feel a sense of purpose with their work. The participant stated, "I feel motivated and can persevere through tough times as long as I get the bigger picture of why the task matters and why it's worth the time. Even if I don't love it, as long as I get why it matters and that it helps someone, I can feel that I am doing something valuable." The sentiment expressed by the participant articulates why organizational leaders must understand that showing and describing why a task matters to team members represents a vital leadership task. These leaders who understand this finding can better identify opportunities to share stories and data that reinforces the purpose of tasks, which can increase Generation Z worker motivation and help to build a more purposeful organizational culture that reflects the needs and desires of Generation Z employees. The interviews discussed the value of purpose in three core work functions shared below.

Purpose Reflected in Orientation Period

The interview participants commonly shared the importance of orientation periods as an opportunity to begin to develop a close relationship with the mission of the organization. This critical time in the team member's first initial days, weeks, and months represents a time when Generation Z employees form an initial impression of the organization's culture and norms of behavior. Participant 5 expressed, "The first impression of the organization and the people was so essential. It sets the tone right away and gave me a sense of what was normal here and how I

fit." The interview data shows that organizational leaders must intentionally consider this period as an opportunity to identify programs, training, and other initiatives that can help to engage Generation Z employees and help them cultivate a sense of purpose in the work and a pathway for ongoing engagement that helps these employees understand the interrelated nature of their work as part of the mission and strategic priorities of the organization. For example, two interview participants described how their supervisors organized a trip to a local food pantry that serves as a partner agency along with a ride-along opportunity with a delivery driver. The Generation Z employees expressed how these trips helped them cultivate a better understanding and a closer connection with the mission by allowing them to better expand their knowledge of organization processes. They also elaborated on how these learning opportunities helped them cultivate a deeper recognition that clients are at the heart of the organization. By providing these team members with the opportunity to interact with clients, the Generation Z employees expressed that these learning-focused trips were important early steps in their careers with the organization that helped them develop a more nuanced and complex understanding of clients. The participant reported that this enhanced perspective has helped inform their work and allowed them to better design programming, strategy, and conversation with their colleagues. As described by the participants, the learning opportunities presented during their orientation periods helped lead to a stronger sense of purpose for these Generation Z employees that they report has remained with them longer-term.

Purpose Reflected in Communications

All the interview participants who participated in this study discussed the importance of communication. Participant 2 expressed feelings on the importance of communication this way:

Communication is one of the most important things, whether it's the Food Bank or any

other company I have had experience in an internship or job. Employees need to know

what is happening and why. I get that not everything can be discussed, but generally, the

more openness and communication the better.

The Generation Z team members interviewed shared their perceptions of how both internal and

external communication along with formal and informal means of communication have played

an influential role affecting their sense of motivation. Interview participants shared specific

examples of both strategic and tactical means for communicating core organizational messages

that serve as directional guidance. Some additional examples include internal and external

newsletters; emails from supervisors, Human Resources staff, and the chief executive officer; an

employee engagement survey, and an anonymous suggestion box available to all employees. The

data shows that Generation Z members value consistency in messaging that is aligned with key

actions of those in leadership roles and explanations for various organizational wide decisions

that can impact a department or the entire organization. The employees referenced examples of

communication from Feeding America, the national association, along with updates on local,

statewide, and federal legislative activity that could impact the organization even if not them

directly in their day-to-day work. Enhanced purpose in communication appears to reinforce a

sense of purpose and shared responsibility among Generation Z employees.

In addition, the interview participants generally expressed an appreciation for open chains

of communication to express potentially controversial opinions and perspectives. They also

stressed that a culture of openness, collegiality, and respect between themselves and supervisors

and with colleagues for a range of diverse backgrounds and thoughts are essential ingredients as

part of the organizational culture that are necessary for an environment of open communication

that reinforces their sense of purpose and motivation. Furthermore, two of the participants described their positive experience involving a diversity, equity, and inclusion workgroup. They expressed their feelings that this workgroup has been empowered to help bring an equity lens to a variety of organization communications and core activities that align with the mission of the organization. The data from the research process shows the important value that Generation Z employees place on organizational committees and related groups as places for leadership development and where they can influence the governance of the organization and how they can communicate with colleagues and supervisors. These opportunities to develop strong pathways for communication help to strengthen generation Z perceptions of their work motivation by giving them platforms to advocate for their perspectives, which contributes to the development of a stronger sense of purpose and commitment to the organization and its mission.

Purpose Reflected in Responsibilities and Tasks

Interview participants commonly expressed the need to feel a sense of connection between their daily work tasks and responsibilities with the broader mission and vision of the organization. Participant 3 described this need, which reinforced a common pattern during the interviews:

> I do my best work when I understand why it matters and who it actually impacts. I really like when my supervisor takes the time to explain how a certain project or action team or process, or whatever it is; matters and how all the pieces fit together. I feel more motivated when I understand the why behind it.

Interview participants shared how their sense of motivation is enhanced by frequent opportunities to learn more about the organization and develop a more holistic awareness of the organization. This enhanced knowledge helps these Generation Z members better understand

why and how executive level decisions are made, which helps to fuel their motivation, sense of

shared governance and responsibility for the health of the organization, and overall commitment

to the organization. While several of the participants acknowledged that they felt that it was not

possible for every possible work task to always feel engaging, they expressed that they needed to

understand the general purpose and potential benefit of their work related to specific tasks in

order to more effectively maximize their engagement with the task. The Generation Z team

members interviewed frequently expressed how important they felt it was to their motivation to

understand the broader ecosystem in which decisions are made and how their work fits into that

ecosystem. This sentiment became a common pattern discovered during the interview process

and has important implications for those in management and leadership roles as they enhance

their knowledge of how to most effectively guide and supervise Generation Z team members.

Figure 3

Research Question 1, Finding 2 Summary

Research Question 1	Finding 2
How do members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?	Theme: Flexibility and Trust
Common thematic elements discovered through the interview-based data collection process	Flexibility reflected in time management
	Flexibility reflected in hybrid and remote work

A second important theme discovered during the research process that helps to explain how members of Generation Z describe their workplace motivations influence the culture of an organization involves worker perceptions of job flexibility. Throughout the interview process, the interview participants articulated a strong desire for flexible work environments. This theme was captured in a common sentiment among the Generation Z team members that while they all viewed their work and professional identity as important parts of their lives, they also expressed a belief that work was just one component of their identities and lives. Several interview participants described a shift in their personal work expectations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. All of the interview participants now work either fully remotely or in a hybrid type of setup where they split time between the organization's office and home offices. This new

dynamic has influenced how these Generation Z members perceive their engagement and relationship to their organization and to their work lives in general.

Flexibility Reflected in Time Management

As the interview participants shared their perceptions and definitions of what work flexibility means for them, a common pattern emerged that they perceived flexibility as an essential element of organizational leaders creating the environments where these young workers could grow and maximize their potential. The participants spoke of the desire for leaders to recognize them as individuals with unique needs and preferences and for these organizational leaders to display a sense of caring about their team members not just as employees but also supporting their individual well-being. One participant voiced that, "I want to be recognized as a full person with a life and interests outside of work. I want supported that way and because it helps with work." In addition, several interviewees also described the important role of trust in the workplace, particularly with direct supervisors. The Generation Z members discussed their renewed energy resulting from high-trust relationships where they are given the necessary resources and environment that empowers these team members to then work in a way that best fits them. Participant 4 shared that they had a highly effective supervisor who, "cared a lot about the things that mattered and did not care about the things that don't matter." The sentiment reflected a strong preference among these team members for supervisors to focus on work-related results and successful efforts from these employees above what Generation Z employees described as micro-management, which puts too much focus on exactly how, where, and when tasks are completed. The employees interviewed also expressed that they understood and agreed that some boundaries around work flexibility are necessary. The team members expressed a priority centered around feeling a sense of autonomy and independence in their work allowing

them to feel a greater sense of purpose, responsibility, creativity, and accountability while also feeling that senior organizational leaders also cared about their well-being.

Flexibility Reflected in Hybrid and Remote Work

Furthermore, the employees expressed two other components of work flexibility. The first focused on the desire to have flexibility around work times. Participant 3 explained:

> After COVID and seeing some of the good things about remote work, it made me reframe things. Sometimes you need a balance between work and home and other stuff that you need to do. I really like having some flexibility and trust that I don't need to be micromanaged, and that I will get my stuff done.

Many interview participants expressed a preference for an environment where, unless it is necessary for the core responsibilities of the job, they had a voice in their daily start and end times. The interviewees voiced that having a schedule with some flexibility was important for their mental health wellness and aligned with a results-over-process oriented working environment. They expressed that they felt more motivation when they had some degree of choice in their schedule that would allow them to have more balance with other commitments and time needs. For these employees, they expressed how having trust-based flexibility encourages their productivity and deeper sense of engagement with the organization. Additionally, the participants described a second component of work flexibility centered on location. These Generation Z participants expressed a similar desire as with time for flexibility involving the location of where they work. Several of the team members expressed favorable attitudes towards remote or hybrid work arrangements with several stating that these arrangements encourage their ability to focus and make progress on various job tasks. The participants expressed that these flexible work schedules and structures help to ensure that their

personal needs and the needs of the organization are met. They also expressed that a spirit of

flexibility from senior leaders shows that these leaders care about their team members in a

holistic manner, which helps to reflect the type of culture that senior leaders are cultivating that

puts a strong emphasis on employee wellness in support of advancing the organizational mission

and goals.

Figure 4

Research Question 1, Finding 3 Summary

Research Question 1	Finding 3
How do members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?	Theme: Growth and Development
Common thematic elements discovered through the interview-based data collection process	Learning Structure and Format
	Professional Development Content

The interview participants also reported learning, growth, and professional development

as another essential element in shaping their motivation in the workplace and expectations

around organizational culture. The interview data suggests that Generation Z members prioritize

the availability of formal, informal, structured, and unstructured learning and growth

opportunities in the workplace. Interviewees described the availability of learning opportunities

as important signals from senior leadership that these executives value their team members and invest in their ongoing training and development. The Generation Z members described how these investments in their growth contribute to their sense of engagement and commitment to the organization along with their likelihood of remaining with the organization long-term. The section below expands on how Generation Z members perceive key attributes of organizational learning. Organizational leaders who understand these perceptions and expectations can more effectively design and facilitate learning and professional growth opportunities for Generation Z employees, which can help organizations successfully advance their missions and priorities.

Learning Structure and Format

The data suggests that Generation Z members expect to have access to a variety of learning opportunities in the workplace. Some of the opportunities include mentorship from senior leaders, the ability to attend relevant conferences, support for their participation in graduate degrees programs and certificates, and practical-focused training related to leadership, technology tools, and project management. Most of the interview participants emphasized that while they appreciate all learning opportunities, they are most interested in options that they perceive as practical. Participant 4 voiced this sentiment that reflected a common thread discussed by saying, "When I think about learning at work, I want stuff to be applicable and practical. I want it to be meaningful." They also stressed how much they value support for self-directed learning where they have a voice in deciding on training and development programs and initiatives. In addition, several of the Generation Z members interviewed shared how they connect the availability of trainings and other learning opportunities with leadership development and clear advancement pathways within their organizations. The participants described how importantly they felt that organization leaders show employees transparent

standards and paths for promotions and provide the necessary support to these employees to develop the required skills, knowledge, and abilities to effectively hold management and senior leadership roles.

In addition, the interviews also suggest that organizational leaders sharpen their awareness of how they can best support unstructured learning and professional growth for Generation Z employees. For example, one participant explained how he took a leadership role in organizing an event that serves as a traditional, large scale organizational gathering. Although this responsibility was not directly related to his formal role, he expressed that it served as an opportunity to learn and display leadership potential in project management and guiding other team members to successfully implement the event. This example reflects that leaders who take a more holistic approach towards professional development can better encourage Generation Z employee professional growth by identifying a variety of formal and informal initiatives where these team members can benefit from mentorship and practical leadership experience. The example also illustrates the importance of organizational leaders setting a tone within the organization that prioritizes learning and provides the needed resources to team members. The example also underscores the importance of leaders taking the necessary actions to support relationship development among Generation Z employees, managers, and senior executives.

Intentional relationship development can help to encourage formal and informal mentorship for Generation Z members and ensure that senior leaders benefit from their perspective when making a variety of organizational decisions. The feelings expressed by the Generation Z interview participants centered around the importance of professional growth and development show that organizational leaders must build and sustain cultures of learning. These leaders must identify and evaluate the needs of Generation Z team members to effectively

design, develop, and offer valuable learning opportunities that align with the strategic goals and needs of the organization. Leaders should provide pathways for Generation Z employees to provide feedback and take an active role in their professional development and growth. Ultimately, leaders who want to build stronger cultures reflective of the needs of Generation Z employees must build their recognition that Generation Z team members prioritize learning and growth and can take steps to identify how best they can strategically approach employee learning and development in their organizations.

Professional Development Content

In addition to the format and structure of professional learning and development opportunities, the Generation Z interview participants expressed that the content of learning opportunities was as important as the structure of professional growth initiatives. They described the type of content they feel is most valuable for their ongoing development with an emphasis on opportunities where they feel a sense of ownership and choice. The interview data shows an opportunity for leaders to connect and align learning opportunities with the needs and strategic plans of the organization in such a manner that benefits all stakeholders. Below are categories generated from the data of professional development content that Generation Z members seek in the workplace.

Cost Sharing/Reimbursement for Certificates, Graduate Programs: Several of the Generation Z employees interviewed described self-identified formal learning programs like graduate certificates and degrees as important components of professional development Employees explained that these programs offer them a chance to develop and enhance skills that can benefit them in their current roles and prepare them for senior management and leadership roles. They discussed benefits from these programs including a strong academic foundation,

networking opportunities with professionals in other organizations also in the degree program, and the opportunity to better cultivate habits of mind and systems thinking that is often necessary for effectiveness in senior roles by learning how to approach various organizational challenges and opportunities along with vital functions like strategic planning, communications, and financial management. Participants described the mutual benefit to their personal growth and the benefits to the organization in the present and the future by having the support through a financial commitment and encouragement from senior executives to complete these formal degree programs.

Professional Conferences: Many of the interview contributors also discussed their perceptions involving attending professional conferences. The Generation Z employees expressed a positive sentiment about attending conferences and several have had the opportunity to participate in at least one conference related to their core job functions. One participant said, "I really enjoyed going to a conference recently and appreciated the organization sending me. I came away feeling like I learned a lot and feeling more energized." They described learning from organized sessions along with benefiting from networking opportunities to connect with colleagues from peer organizations regionally and nationally. In addition, several of the interviewees highlighted how they left conferences feeling more motivated and with a renewed sense of purpose and engagement with their role. They described feeling more creative and with fresh ideas for new approaches to managing programs, advocacy work, and health and nutrition. The employees expressed their gratitude for having the opportunity to participate and for the organization encouraging their involvement with the hosting organization.

Professional Association Membership, Certifications, and Events: Finally, the Generation Z interview group explained that they also see membership in professional associations and

certifications tailored for specific job functions as important elements of professional development that they seek from their employers. The specific certifications mentioned varied greatly among the participants, but the general tone reflected relatively quick to completion, practical, and credential-based programs that these employees value. One participant mentioned low-cost credentials from open, online credentialing bodies including Google and local community leadership development programs for young professionals often sponsored by local chambers of commerce. Furthermore, some participants cited the availability of language courses as helpful to be better equipped to communicate with a more diverse range of community members. While content preferences varied, the interviews make clear that Generation Z employees deeply value professional learning and describe it as a core component of workplace culture. Organizational leaders should take a holistic view when considering how to approach Generation Z employee professional development and growth and ensure that they have a wide lens when developing budgets and plans for Generation Z employee development that captures the needs and learning desires of these employees.

Figure 5

Research Question 1, Findings Summary

Research Question 1	Findings
	Common thematic elements discovered through the interview-based data collection process.
How do members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?	Theme 1: Purpose Theme 2: Flexibility Theme 3: Growth and Development

Research question 2: How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?

Figure 6

Research Question 2, Finding 1 Summary

Research Question 1	Finding 1
How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?	Theme: Psychological Safety through Interpersonal Relationships
Common thematic elements discovered through the interview-based data collection process	Psychological Safety reflected in relationships with supervisors.
	Psychological Safety reflected in relationships among colleagues.

Generation Z employees interviewed through the research process voiced their opinions and perceptions that reflected the importance of psychological safety in the workplace. While not all participants were familiar with the academic label of psychological safety, each of the interview participants described key attributes of the concept that can have a significant impact shaping the development of an organizational culture and how Generation Z employees perceive and experience a workplace culture. The interviewees highlighted that they feel trust is an essential element that helps to form the foundation of their professional relationships with

colleagues, supervisors, and senior level executives within the organization. Most of the participants emphasized the importance of trust between themselves and their direct supervisors that they expressed is necessary to be able to communicate clearly and effectively, share progress updates, express dissenting opinions on potentially controversial decisions, and ask questions and clarifications on project tasks. Finally, a pattern emerged in the interviews which illustrates that Generation Z employee perceptions of trust with supervisors plays an important role in an employee's sense of engagement with the organization and how they describe organizational culture.

Psychological Safety Reflected in Relationships with Supervisors

"I have had bosses where I felt I walked on eggshells most days. I was frequently criticized and felt that each day was just a constant cycle of being treated like a little kid. How and why would I ever go out of my way to talk to that person." The sentiment expressed in this quote from a participant reflected a common attitude pattern among the interview participants as they reflected on their work histories. The participants shared stories of supervisors who led by using fear and punishment as a primary means of motivation. The participants voiced that while in the short term that behavior may have influenced their actions, it was counterproductive to the development of healthy professional relationships between them and supervisors. The participants reported feelings of fear and a primary goal of avoiding problems as the motivator in those work settings. Under this type of dynamic with supervisors, they reported often avoiding asking questions, seeking help, sharing ideas for new processes, or providing their perspective out of a fear of being reprimanded. Within these types of environments, the interview participants reported feeling less engaged from working in a culture and work environment they perceived employees were viewed as, in the words of Participant 3, as being a "part in an

assembly line that could easily be replaced." Employees felt little trust and felt they did not have meaningful or trusting relationships with a supervisor or other organizational leaders. The participants, therefore, viewed their relationship with those organizations as mostly transactional where the Generation Z members felt little loyalty to the organization or engagement with the work and looked for opportunities where they could develop better trust-based relationships with supervisors and colleagues as well as environments where they felt they could learn, grow, and feel a deeper sense of purpose and engagement.

In contrast to the negative feelings expressed and the resulting perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in settings with poor relationships between the Generation Z members and organizational leaders, the general pattern during the interviews reflected employees who now felt they had positive working relationships of varying levels with their supervisors. The employees described many benefits resulting from these relationships both on a personal level and collective level when considering how they experience and perceive the organization's culture. When asked to describe fundamental elements that helped to make these relationships different, the participants expressed that their supervisors, "cared about them as a person" and "wanted them to learn and grow in their jobs." The most frequently cited sentiment though included a strong element of trust in their relationship with their supervisor. Participant 5 summarized a common emotion expressed during the interviews by saying:

> Even though it's not always 100% perfect, I would not be able to do my job to the best of my best ability if I didn't feel my manager and I had strong mutual trust where I could be open and honest about things. I am really lucky to have that, and it helps me want to do my best and stay with the Food Bank.

The Generation Z participants explained some of the benefits that they felt resulted from these positive relationships including a feeling of safety in asking questions, expressing a dissenting opinion, and sharing their perspective about processes, policies, and program development. The interviewees expressed that they felt that they could make a mistake without an extreme fear of punishment or ridicule, which made them feel more confident in their work and less likely to make major mistakes. The Generation Z employees also discussed an increased feeling of freedom in taking risks to explore new initiatives or processes in their work tasks and the ability to creatively look at problems and potential solutions. Furthermore, some participants expressed that their positive relationship with their supervisor built upon trust and honest communication without fear of significant punishment increased the likelihood they would want to stay with the organization and look for professional development opportunities to help them advance within the organization. This sentiment has important implications for leaders when considering how to strengthen Generation Z employee retention by supporting unit managers in their understanding of how to build psychologically safe relationships with Generation Z employees that can enhance how these team members view this element of their organization's culture and expectations.

Additionally, the Generation Z members discussed that, while with still some room for improvement in some cases, they could bring up potentially difficult topics and problems with supervisors, peers, and other organizational leaders without a major fear of reprisal. Some interview participants emphasized that they felt it was especially important for senior leaders in the organization to explain decisions in a transparent manner to help strengthen this dynamic not just within smaller work units but across the organization. Some of the participants used their employer's recently renewed commitment to strengthening equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging efforts as an example of a potentially controversial issue where they felt they had an

open channel of communication with their supervisor to express themselves and feel safe sharing their viewpoints and lived experiences and how those influenced their perspective for various work tasks and policies. The interview data shows that to promote Generation Z worker engagement and maximize their talents, leaders must work intentionally to identify a strategic and tactical approach for helping to build psychologically safe environments and relationships between Generation Z employees and supervisors that reinforce positive and desired elements of an organization's culture.

Psychological Safety Reflected in Relationships with Colleagues

The interview participants also discussed a component of psychological safety that can support the cultivation of psychological safety with supervisors but can also be viewed and examined independently. Participant 2 explicitly stated that, "my relationships with co-workers have a huge impact on my work and my motivation. It is a great feeling working in a place where I consider some of them to be friends." Generation Z members interviewed expressed that they value the feeling of a positive dynamic between themselves and their colleagues regardless of their colleagues' ages. The interview participants shared that having high levels of trust between them and their colleagues helps them feel more empowered to share creative and innovative ideas, discuss positive and constructive negative feedback, ask questions, take sensible risks, and acknowledge mistakes without fear. An important element of psychological safety discussed by the Generation Z members reflected that they perceive that psychological safety strengthening and weakening happens both at an individual level and a collective work team, department, and organizational level. They also expressed the value they see in formal and informal recognition from supervisors resulting in increases in their productivity and enjoyment of their work. Participant 1 expressed the following feeling that illustrates this assessment:

Recognition from my boss is important because it lets me know that I'm doing the right thing and being effective in my role. This motivates me to do more and continue doing what I'm doing. Especially in a role like mine where I'm the only person doing this work, public recognition signals to the rest of the company that I'm a valuable team member and that my work is an important part of the food bank.

At the individual level, they described perceptions of psychological safety as the product of individual, one on one relationships. At the collective level, they expressed that high trust and open, honest communication interactions become a shared belief and expectation within their broader work teams and departments. Participants expressed the value that they perceived in increased organizational awareness of the ability to share a diverse range of thoughts and feelings that can cultivate more empathy, vulnerability, and compassion. Together, the sense of shared expectations and recognition at different levels of the organization can influence the culture of the entire organization by establishing norms for behavior and interpersonal interactions.

Figure 7

Research Question 2, Finding 2 Summary

Research Question 1	Finding 2
How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?	Theme: Psychological Safety through Organizational Encouragement and Recognition
Common thematic elements discovered through the interview-based data collection process	

During the interviews with Generation Z employees, another important theme emerged that helps to bring additional clarity to one of the core research questions that seeks to answer how members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence organizational culture. When asked to elaborate on the type of environment where they feel could thrive and maximize their potential, the interview participants collectively described a culture that reflected positivity, encouragement from various sources, and recognition from direct supervisors and other organizational leaders. They described feeling more productive working in this type of environment and that this type of environment helped to cultivate and maintain trust between them and supervisors and that trust, genuine encourage, and recognition were all inherently interconnected. Participant 3 said:

> I want to be part of an organization that allows me to be human and have thoughts, opinions, successes, and failures. Personal and professional growth doesn't happen if you're not able to share your ideas and feel safe that they will be considered with

thoughtfulness and kindness. I don't want to be the cliché cog in the machine who is only

valued based on quantitative data and the bottom line. I want to be valued for what I

bring to the table as an individual. I am very fortunate that my manager and director

encourage me to be creative and try things that may or may not work. When a new

strategy doesn't work, I'm offered support to learn from the experience instead of being

reprimanded for my mistake. I am someone that has long struggled with imposter

syndrome. I was always hesitant to share my ideas for fear that they would be seen as

stupid or risky and fail. Now, I feel confident in my knowledge and openly share my

ideas, no matter how wild they may be. I feel safe that my performance isn't strictly

measured on the numbers I can produce but the creativity, passion, and dedication I bring

to work every day.

The Generation Z members also expressed that they feel more productive by having encouraging

managers and directors who would frequently express praise, reassurance, and meaningful

feedback. In addition, the participants expressed that they did not expect frequent large moments

of positivity. This feeling helps to signal that organizational leaders need only to identify small

but meaningful ways to encourage their team members to increase Generation Z perceptions of

psychological safety and its contribution to their perception of their organization's culture.

Some of the interview participants mentioned the existence of a Workplace Engagement

Team that focuses on creating events and other initiatives that show employees that they are

valued and appreciated, which could reinforce high level of psychological safety in Generation Z

relationships with direct supervisors. Many of the interview participants also expressed that they

valued some of the fun-focused events that the Workplace Engagement Team offers including

themed lunches free to employees reflective of various holiday celebrations. One of the interview

participants expressed a comment that underscores the foundation of why Generation Z employees value encouragement, appreciation, and recognition along with how these perceptions shape how they evaluate levels of psychological safety and the impact on an organization's culture and norms of behavior:

> One thing that I learned (from previous experiences) is I don't want to be a number. I need to be somewhere where I am a person. I want a manager who is somebody that understands that I'm a human and that outside of work has a life and with that comes challenges and celebrations. So having a culture that really is open to recognizing people and encouraging that has been super important. And I feel that also being able to ask questions, any kind of questions matters. I can be an overthinker so it's really important to me.

The interview participants made clear that their perceptions of psychological safety with their direct supervisors, senior leaders, and their colleagues are strongly influenced by the broader working environment in which they perform their daily core work tasks. The interview data suggests that Generation Z members take a holistic and interconnected view when considering how they both emotionally experience and cognitively evaluate elements of psychological safety such as trust and risk taking without fear of punishment in the organization particularly with supervisors and colleagues, openness in communication, and the frequency and style of encouragement and recognition from leaders. These perceptions help to influence and shape organizational culture. Managers and leaders who shape organization policies and whose behavior serves as an example throughout the organization should recognize these Generation Z member perceptions to lead these employees and their organization more effectively.

Figure 8

Research Question 2, Findings Summary

Research Question 2	Findings
How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?	Common thematic elements discovered through the interview-based data collection process.
How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?	Theme 1: Psychological Safety through Interpersonal Relationships Theme 2: Psychological Safety through Organizational Encouragement and Recognition

Summary

The data presented in this chapter helps to bring additional clarity and understanding to the central research questions posed at the heart of this study. After conducting a series of highly informative interviews with Generation Z employees, the research has revealed that Generation Z members describe their workplace motivation through with a clear relationship to organizational culture through a lens of purpose, flexibility, as well as growth and development. Additionally, Generation Z members interviewed described how their perceptions of psychological safety influence organizational culture by highlighting psychological safety components in interpersonal relationships and through broader organizational recognition efforts. Viewed holistically, the data help presented helps to answer the research questions and provide practitioners with valuable information and resources to effectively lead this population. Chapter 5 offers a more detailed discussion and implications for practitioners and future research.

The following table summarizes the core research findings discovered through the Generation Z interview process. The table summarizes each core research question. The table then identifies the essential themes discovered in the interview data as they relate to the research questions.

Figure 9

Research Questions, Findings Summary

Research Question	*Finding 1*	*Finding 2*	*Finding 3*
-How do members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?	Theme 1: Purpose	Theme 2: Flexibility	Theme 3: Growth and Development
- How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?	Theme 1: Psychological Safety through Interpersonal Relationships	Theme 2: Psychological Safety through Organizational Encouragement and Recognition	

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to deepen our understanding of how members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations and perceptions of psychological safety impact the culture of a non-profit organization. This chapter summarizes the findings discovered through an interview process that was conducted to answer the research questions posed in Chapter One:

- How do members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?

- How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?

By using a phenomenological research method, the data and subsequent analysis presented in this chapter offers insights helping to explain the lived experiences and perceptions of a Generation Z population in workplace settings. The research findings help to offer a more informed view of how organizational leaders can shape their organization's culture by understanding how members of Generation Z describe their sense of motivation and psychological safety in the workplace.

This chapter is organized into subsections including a summary of findings, discussion, significance of the findings for practitioners and scholars, recommendations, and conclusion. The chapter will use these insights to describe the significance of these findings to better inform those in practitioner roles and settings. The chapter will also explain the significance of the data to advise researchers for future study and exploration. Finally, the chapter will offer a set of recommendations for organizational leaders, members of Generation Z newly joining the

workforce, and future researchers who will continue strengthening available knowledge that can guide these populations as they make decisions that will impact organizational culture and other key organizational priorities.

Summary of Findings

In the section below, the researcher describes key findings discovered from the data collection interview process and data analysis. The sample included five Generation Z employees randomly selected from a nonprofit organization in Pennsylvania. The study provided insights into how members of Generation Z describe their workplace responsibilities, interpersonal dynamics, workplace successes, and professional challenges that influence their perceptions of motivation, psychological safety, and the ultimate impact on organizational culture. The data collected from the Generation Z-focused interview participants guided the discovery and development of the findings below. The findings based on the research data help to contribute to existing literature related to the central research questions. The findings also offer a new perspective to help enhance how organizational leaders approach questions and develop decision making processes that are reflective of the new knowledge gained from the research, bringing additional insight into how these leaders approach Generation Z worker motivation, psychological safety perceptions, and organizational culture.

Research Question 1 focused on three key themes. These themes included Generation Z employee perceptions of purpose, flexibility, and growth. Research Question 2 focused on two core themes that included perceptions of psychological safety through workplace interpersonal relationships and perceptions of psychological safety through organizational encouragement and recognition. Below, the researcher takes these themes discovered in the interview data and data analysis and draws a clearer picture of practical implications and findings. The data reveals key

steps that leaders can take, both short-term and long-term to create a working environment and organizational culture necessary to maximize the potential of Generation Z team members.

Research Question 1: How do members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?

Upon completing the research interviews and analyzing the data, the researcher identified themes and considered the findings in the context of existing literature. In the following section, the findings are related to the first research question and are explored with a connection to the research.

Important Finding One: Cultivating a Sense of Purpose

Generation Z employees appear to be more motivated when they feel a sense of purpose. This sense of purpose is reflected in a variety of short-term and long-term organizational practices and through interpersonal relationships and interactions. Generation Z employees who feel a clear sense of purpose in their role and in much of their daily tasks report feeling more empowered and energized, which helps to fuel their performance and maximize their potential. This finding is also supported by existing research from Csikszentmihalyi on the concept of flow where a person becomes fully immersed in an activity and contributes to heightened productivity (Beard, 2014). The data revealed that Generation Z employee perceptions of motivation directly impact their perceptions of their organization's culture. For these employees, motivation and perceptions of culture are inherently interconnected. This finding is connected to self-determination theory and existing research on meaningful work that emphasizes the need and value of cultivating opportunities for employees to develop a sense of purpose in their work to increase productivity and engagement (Bailey & Madden, 2016; Martela et al., 2021).

Orientation periods represented a critical time for these employees to engage with the organization and help to define and shape how these team members perceive organizational norms and practices. The interview participants showed that their orientation periods played an essential role in influencing the tone they perceived within the organization. By having access to early and ongoing opportunities to build their sense of purpose and connection with the organizational mission, these employees felt a deeper link and felt they better understood how their role contributed to a mission and vision that they believed in and supported. While all the interview participants were generally early in their tenures with the organization, they commonly reported that this early connection to the vision and mission of the organization has helped sustain their motivation well past the initial orientation period. This finding is connected to transformational leadership theory, which focuses on how leaders inspire and empower followers to achieve success, align personal and organizational goals, and grow their abilities (Riggio & Bass, 2006). The Generation Z employees spoke of their desire to continue learning and having additional opportunities for leadership that can further sustain their sense of purpose. This dynamic suggests a return on investment when these employees indicated a desire to grow and remain with the organization. In addition, the Generation Z employees explained the importance of both daily and long-term oriented communication from supervisors, colleagues, and executive leaders that aligned with the organization's core values.

Generation Z employees appear to closely watch the actions and words of those in leadership roles and desire consistency from these individuals. This finding is supported by research related to the concept and importance of leaders leading by example (Schrage, 2017). The data from the interviews indicates that the behaviors of organizational leaders influence the motivation and perception of culture among Generation Z employees. These behaviors should

align with identified goals, priorities, employee professional development plans, decision making processes, and other key actions/words from these leaders to better support and sustain positive feelings and perceptions of Generation Z team members.

Viewed holistically, the data shows a clear finding that as Generation Z members continue to join the workforce and represent a larger population of employees in many organizations, organizational leaders should work to understand these macro trends while also building their knowledge of local dynamics and local workforce characteristics related to Generation Z employees. These officials can view renewed and expanded commitments to strengthening employee orientation, education, and connection as investments that can contribute to enhanced performance, engagement, and retention. Leaders should identify early and continuing opportunities that can facilitate the development and maintenance of strong employee perceptions of purpose that will contribute to enhanced feelings of motivation and more positive perceptions of organizational culture.

Important Finding Two: Flexibility in Tine Management

The interview data shows another important finding that helps to address the first core research question, which focuses on Generation Z employee perceptions of work flexibility. These perceptions, expectations, and attitudes towards flexibility centered on day-to-day time management and access to remote/hybrid work schedules. The interview participants clearly showed that organizational leaders must consider how to effectively design, develop, and implement flexible work policies that can provide these team members with the conditions and environment that they feel can successfully facilitate their performance. The interview data illustrates that Generation Z team members consider work as part of a holistic definition of their identity. These employees emphasized both their need and their expectation that work

supervisors support them in a comprehensive manner and recognize their other life commitments that can influence their relationship with work.

Furthermore, the Generation Z interview data also makes clear that these employees generally embrace technology resources that can enable them to complete many work responsibilities and don't require them to be in a traditional office environment on a daily basis. While some of the interview participants articulated that they did not necessarily have strong negative feelings towards being in a physical office environment, they most valued the choice and having a say in their daily work environment. The data suggests that Generation Z employees focus more on the successful completion of tasks and projects more so than physically being present in an office environment. Therefore, organizational leaders must work to recognize that for many jobs that do not inherently require in-person daily office attendance, Generation Z employees deeply value flexibility in their work schedules and environments, which can strongly influence their sense of motivation and perception towards the culture of the organization. Leaders who can offer flexible working arrangements may be more effective when recruiting, retaining, and engaging a quickly growing Generation Z population entering the workforce. Generation Z employees appear to feel more motivated and engaged with their work when they have a say in their work environment and when leaders prioritize results and performance above the physical location where the employee spends their work time. Leaders must work to recognize this dynamic and develop plans for how to effectively support this expectation and balance the needs of the organization.

Important Finding Three: Growth and Development

The interview data shows that Generation Z employees in organizational settings deeply value learning and opportunities for ongoing professional growth and development. By placing a
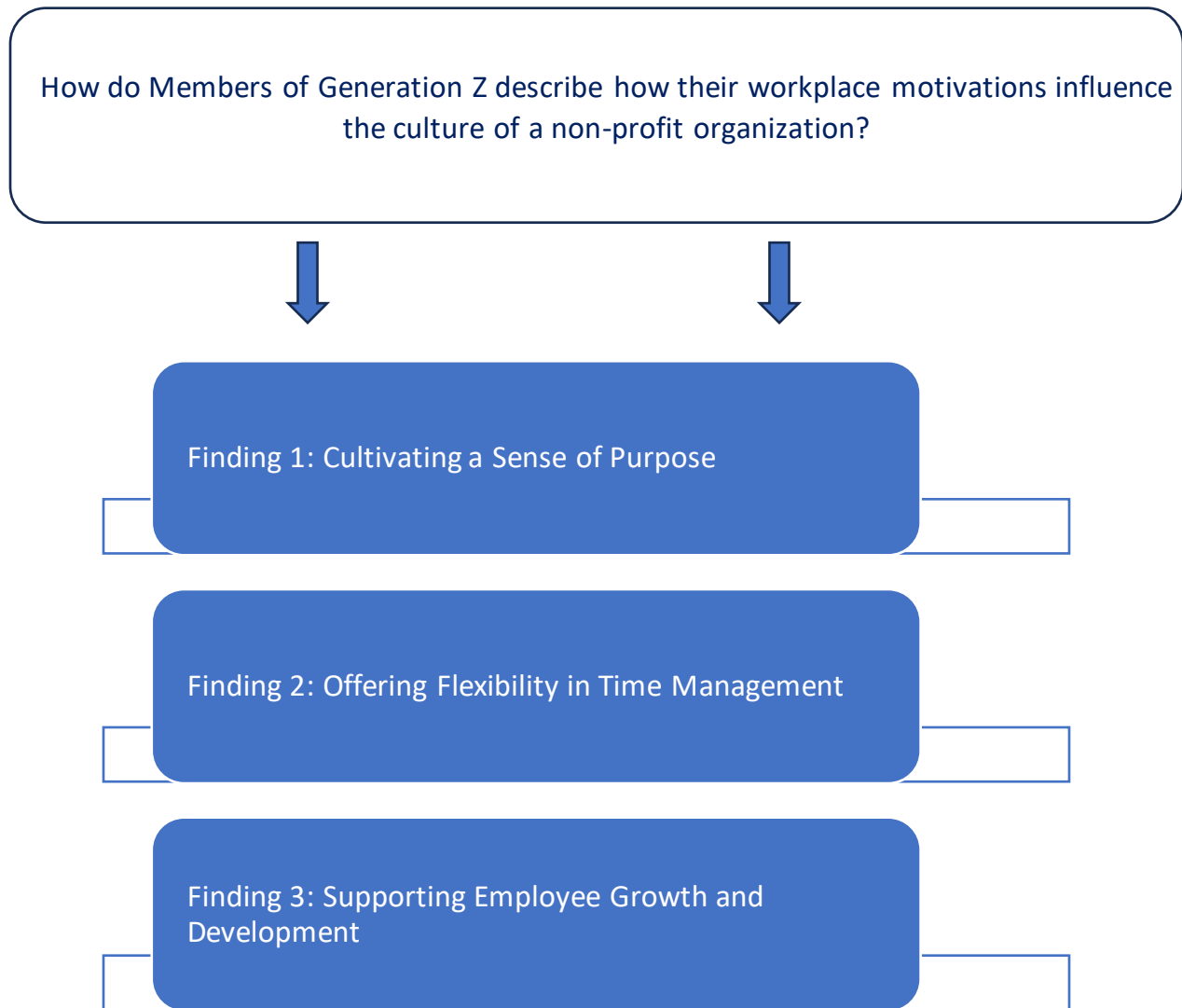
strong emphasis on having access to regular professional development opportunities, while also feeling supported by senior leaders in these pursuits, Generation Z employees connect their perceptions of an organization's professional development approach with their perceptions of an organization's culture. The data suggests that Generation Z team members in an organization see professional development as having an essential role as part of a commitment to building a culture of learning and continuous improvement. Leaders must recognize that continuous learning and continuous improvement represent an essential component of organizational leadership and positive culture building. This finding is reinforced by the key principles of andragogy, adult learning theory, and constructivism learning theory (Mukhalalati & Taylor, 2019; Wozniak, 2020). Adult learning theory highlights the importance of neuroplasticity and emphasizes that adults are self-directed, desire relevance, utilize experience, and require autonomy.

The finding has important implications for leaders. Leaders need to recognize that evaluation and the strategic collection, analysis, and use of quantitative and qualitative data about employee knowledge, skills, and abilities can help these leaders build continuous learning cultures. The interview data suggests that leaders who develop these systems of assessment also support organizational improvement while promoting employee learning and development. Senge (2006) reinforces this finding when discussing the importance of systems thinking in building cultures of effective organizational learning. Additionally, two-way feedback and the development of intentional learning opportunities provide a systematic approach for leaders to promote the professional capacity of their team members. Double loop learning theory as a strategy to approach learning in organizations supports this finding (Basten & Haamann, 2018). Based upon the research findings, when leaders consider professional development, they should

use a wide lens to capture a holistic perspective mindful of key adult learning practices that ensures employee learning opportunities are meaningful and intentional. The study shows that Generation Z employees value learning opportunities offered in a variety of structures and formats. Organizational leaders should consider the availability of formal, informal, structured, and unstructured learning and growth opportunities in the workplace that can promote human, social, and decisional capital capacity of team members. This finding is reinforced by microlearning theory, which emphasizes the use of a variety of learning platforms to deliver skill and competency-based learning in small amounts (Torgerson, 2020). This finding in the context of microlearning can help leaders approach and design organizational learning opportunities that are effective and meet the needs and learning preferences of Generation Z workers. In addition, organizational leaders that take appropriate action to show that they respect and value the unique needs, perspectives, and potential of all their team members can help maintain cultures that promote better retention, engagement, and stronger motivation because they have helped to cultivate and maintain an environment of high psychological safety among team members. This increased psychological safety among employees can then help to create more trust and openness enhancing collaboration, dialogue, and learning. This finding on psychological safety can be viewed through the lens of relationship leadership theory and leader-member exchange theory. Relationship leadership theory describes an approach to leadership where leaders are mainly concerned about their interaction with their followers and creating a positive working environment. Relationship-focused leaders are often able to create an environment that can help maximize team member potential and performance (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This responsive practice approach helps to ensure that the professional development strategy and all training and learning opportunities for employees are relevant, meaningful, and engaging.

The study indicated that Generation Z workers value a culture of learning where resources are available to support employee growth and increased social capital among team members, which can help to strengthen an organization's ability to advance its goals. Leaders with a philosophy that emphasizes continuous improvement and professional development can better recognize, grow, and connect the knowledge, skills, abilities, and lived experience perspectives of a diverse range of stakeholders into organizational priorities and other critical leadership actions. Generation Z employees reported that learning, growth, and professional development serve as core elements in shaping their motivation in the workplace and expectations around organizational culture. Ultimately, leaders who show a commitment to strengthening the professional capabilities of team members positively influence Generation Z worker motivation and enhance how team members perceive organizational culture.

Figure 10: Research Question 1 Findings Summary

How do Members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?

Finding 1: Cultivating a Sense of Purpose

Finding 2: Offering Flexibility in Time Management

Finding 3: Supporting Employee Growth and Development

Research Question 2: How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?

Upon completing the research interviews and analyzing the data, the researcher identified themes and considered the findings in the context of existing literature. In the following section, the findings are related to the first research question and are explored with a connection to the research.

Important Finding One: Psychological Safety as Reflected in Relationships with Supervisors

Generation Z employees report feeling more motivated and engaged with their organization when they feel high levels of trust and psychological safety with those individuals they directly report to in an organizational hierarchy along with other organizational leaders. The evidence from the study shows that leaders must work to build their understanding of why psychological safety plays a pivotal role for Generation Z employees. Fernandez et al. (2023) strengthen this finding with their recommendations for leading Generation Z employees, emphasizing creating community, connection, and ongoing support to team members. Beyond understanding why, individuals who lead Generation Z members in an organizational setting must also work to recognize how their words, intentional actions, and unintentional behaviors can influence how these employees perceive their ability to take risks, speak up, disagree, and voice perspectives without fear of negative consequences. These perceptions of psychological safety held by members of Generation Z in their workplaces influence how they describe, influence, and relate to the organization's culture by shaping their sense of engagement and expectations for their work and relationship with the organization.

As leaders enhance their recognition of the priority that Generation Z workers put on high levels of psychological safety in the workplace and the connection with employee motivation, they should cultivate an open-minded, growth mindset that allows them to understand how to build organizational cultures that Generation Z members perceive to have high levels of psychological safety. In addition to the macro level organization-wide culture, organizational leaders must also work to create the conditions that facilitate high levels of psychological safety at a more micro team level where Generation Z employees often work on daily tasks and

projects. The study data showed that some of these conditions include environments where team members feel high levels of trust and support for each other and where conditions exist for open dialogue. Additionally, Generation Z employees describe a team dynamic where they feel high levels of respect exists for a range of perspectives and lived experiences as well as team members who show humility as core conditions to cultivate high levels of psychological safety. The interview data shows a wide range of possible ways that leaders can foster and sustain this dynamic and tone. While the data does not show a one-size-fits-all approach with specific tactics, the data does show that leaders who spend time building meaningful relationships with Generation Z employees are better able to cultivate stronger perceptions of high psychological safety throughout an organization.

Generation Z interviewees described the importance of trust in their relationships with supervisors as well as the importance of feeling that their supervisors care about them in a holistic manner both at work and in their broader lives. Leaders can internalize the implications of this finding and work to identify ongoing relationship development methods with Generation Z employees that are personalized and genuine to help develop strong perceptions of psychological safety among this cohort of team members. Leaders should work to identify a specific strategy they can use to effectively cultivate trust and demonstrate their authentic sense of caring for their team members. Executive leaders looking to identify a pipeline of future leaders can consider how to effectively identify and develop individuals who demonstrate empathy and who may serve as effective managers and leaders, particularly when leading Generation Z team members. By deploying a relationship-focused approach to their leadership roles and related tasks, supervisors in leadership roles can maximize the benefits of a Generation

Z workforce that feels high levels of psychological safety, leading to more motivated employees who have favorable views on their working environments.

Important Finding Two: Psychological Safety Reflected in Relationships with Colleagues
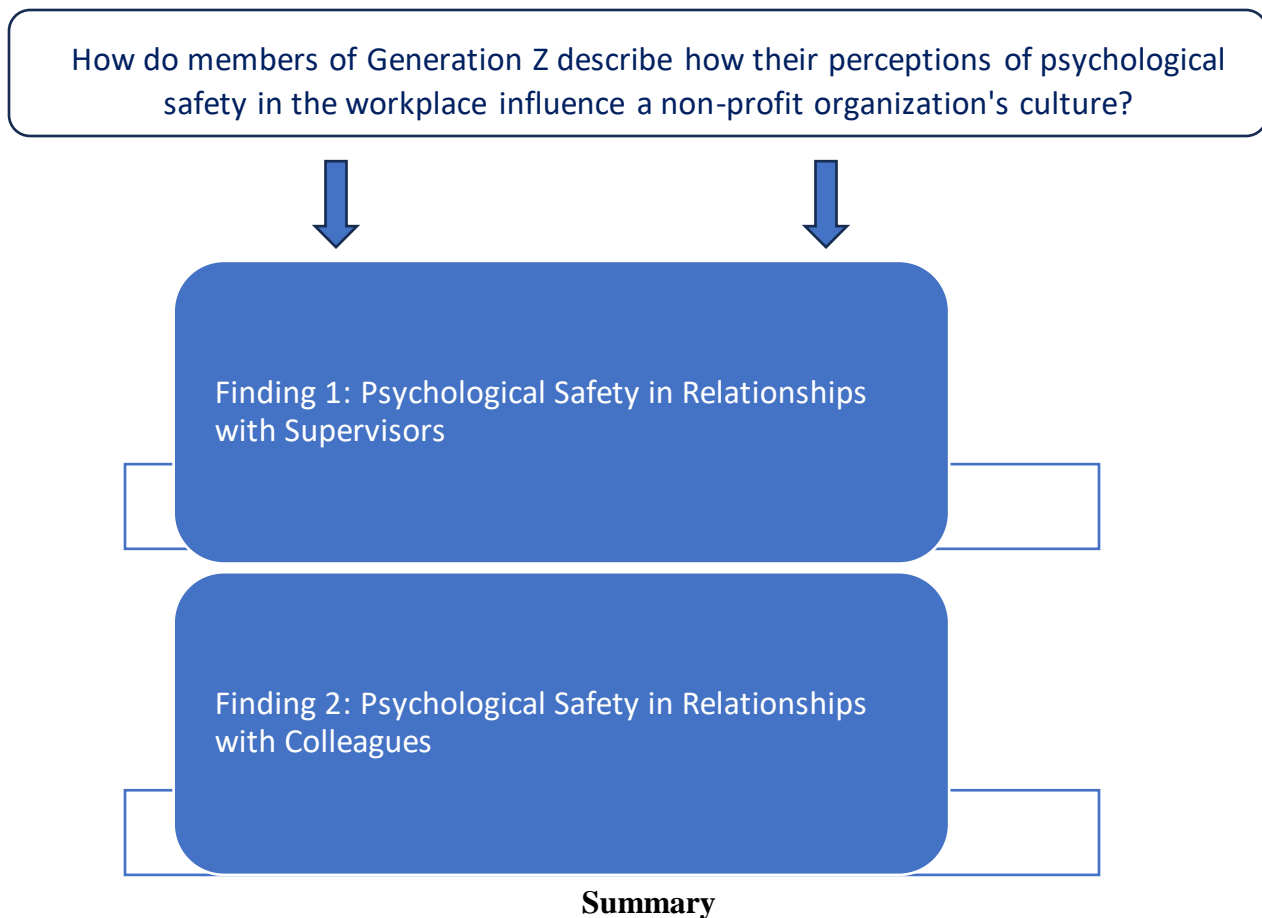
In addition to the importance of psychological safety in Generation Z employee relationships with supervisors, the data from the study also shows that Generation Z employees consider this dynamic in their interactions with their colleagues, which ultimately influences their feelings of motivation and perceptions of organizational culture. The interview process illustrated that Generation Z team members value their relationships with co-workers and seek to build positive connections that emphasize trust, authenticity, and open communication. Leaders in organizations should recognize that the data in this study viewed through the perspective of psychological safety theory shows that when Generation Z workers feel that they have strong positive interactions with colleagues, they feel higher levels of psychological safety and feel secure in taking measured risks and sharing their perspectives related to various work tasks and projects (Edmonson, 2018). The young employees reported feeling more secure asking questions and seeking growth opportunities while also feeling more challenged to push themselves to perform their current responsibilities well and seek additional ways that they can contribute their abilities to help the organization.

Furthermore, managers and supervisors who lead teams with Generation Z employees can recognize that these employees also described feeling more creative and more willing to support new program models that could incorporate strategic and intentional cross-departmental collaboration opportunities when they felt that their working environment included high levels of psychological safety with their colleagues. High level of psychological safety can also empower team members to voice opinions and share perspectives that can help teams avoid the negative

consequences of groupthink by promoting an environment for more authentic communication and collaboration (Grant, 2016). They also reported feeling more willing to try new processes and innovative approaches to their way of working while working in a culture where they feel supported by positive interpersonal dynamics. The data also shows that Generation Z workers who report having high levels of psychological safety with their colleagues can handle difficult situations in a more effective manner by seeing challenges as learning opportunities. Therefore, leaders must work to build their knowledge and actively seek opportunities where they can grow and maintain an environment that authentically supports positive team member interaction and relationship development. These leaders must also recognize that Generation Z employees seek meaningful interactions that build trust, rapport, and enhance communication in a sustainable manner. The data should caution leaders that while Generation Z employees may value strong social cohesion with their colleagues, they want these connections to feel genuine and not a result of forced icebreaker style activities that do little to build true long-term and trust-based connections. Leaders should work to identify a philosophy, strategy, and tactics that can enhance the environment that support strong social cohesion and high-quality links among their team members particularly teams with numerous Generation Z employees. Leaders can use this study to understand that the better Generation Z employees feel about their relationships with colleagues, the more productive and effective these relationships will be in supporting organizational goals.

Figure 11: Research Question 2 Findings Summary

How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?

Finding 1: Psychological Safety in Relationships with Supervisors

Finding 2: Psychological Safety in Relationships with Colleagues

Summary

The findings and conclusions presented help to illustrate the importance of this study both for future academic exploration and for practitioners. Through the research process, key findings were discovered that have important implications for the direction of future exploration and findings that can strengthen how organizational leaders approach their leadership practice. The important findings in this study were supported by discoveries and themes from the literature review. A summary of findings is discussed below. The following figure highlights each of the important findings from the study and the relationship in how they relate to existing literature. Each of the findings confirms what has been found in the supporting literature now applied in a Generation Z context. In the next section, the researcher elaborates on the significance of this research and offer several recommendations based on the conclusions.

Figure 12: Findings Summary A

	Finding 1	**Finding 2**	**Finding 3**	**Connection to Literature**
Research Question 1 How do members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization?	Cultivating a Sense of Purpose Participant Supporting Quotes: "I feel motivated and can persevere through tough times as long as I get the bigger picture of why the task matters and why it's worth the time." "I feel more motivated when I understand the why."	Flexibility in Tine Management Participant Supporting Quotes: "I want to be recognized as a full person with a life and interests outside of work. I want supported that way and because it helps with work." Effective supervisors "care a lot about the things that matter and did not care about the things that don't matter." "I really like having some flexibility and trust that I don't need to be micromanaged, and that I will get my stuff done."	Growth and Development Participant Supporting Quotes: "When I think about learning at work, I want stuff to be applicable and practical. I want it to be meaningful." "I really enjoyed going to a conference recently and appreciated the organization sending me. I came away feeling like I learned a lot and feeling more energized."	Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow where a person becomes fully immersed in an activity and contributes to heightened productivity (Beard, 2014). Self-determination theory supports cultivating opportunities for employees to cultivate a sense of purpose in their work to increase productivity and engagement (Bailey & Madden, 2016; Martela et al., 2021). Importance of leaders leading by example (Schrage, 2017). Adult learning theory highlights the importance of neuroplasticity and emphasizes that adults are self-directed, desire relevance, utilize experience, and require autonomy (Wozniak, 2020) Double loop learning theory as a strategy to approach learning in organizations supports this finding (Basten & Haamann, 2018).

Figure 13: Findings Summary B

	Finding 1	Findings 2	Connection to Literature
Research Question 2 How do members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture?	Psychological Safety as Reflected in Relationships with Supervisors Participant Supporting Quotes: "I have had bosses where I felt I walked on eggshells most days. I was frequently criticized and felt that each day was just a constant cycle of being treated like a little kid. How and why would I ever go out of my way to talk to that person." Even though it's not always 100% perfect, I would not be able to do my job to the best of my best ability if I didn't feel my manager and I had strong mutual trust where I could be open and honest about things.	Psychological Safety Reflected in Relationships with Colleagues Participant Supporting Quotes: "My relationships with co-workers have a huge impact on my work and my motivation. It is a great feeling working in a place where I consider some of them to be friends." "I want to be part of an organization that allows me to be human and have thoughts, opinions, successes, and failures. Personal and professional growth doesn't happen if you're not able to share your ideas and feel safe that they will be considered with thoughtfulness and kindness."	Fernandez et al. (2023) strengthens this finding with their recommendations for leading Generation Z employees emphasizing creating community, connection, and ongoing support to team members. High level of psychological safety can also empower team members to voice opinions and share perspectives that can help teams avoid the negative consequences of groupthink by promoting an environment for more authentic communication and collaboration (Grant, 2016). Leaders can take specific steps to encourage the growth of a supportive culture (Newman & Ford, 2021).

Discussion

Upon analyzing each of the findings discussed above within the context of the research questions and the connected literature, the researcher has identified five key conclusions that are designed to help inform future research and how organizational leaders can approach organizational culture, motivation, and psychological safety through the lens of Generation Z employees. Each conclusion will be explored in the follow section.

Purpose-Driven work motivates Generation Z employees

Starting with orientation periods and the first few days of an employee's tenure with an organization, leaders must work to identify intentional ways that they can help their Generation Z employees cultivate and sustain a strong sense of purpose in their work. Leaders need to work strategically to offer opportunities where these employees can better understand how their role fits into an organization and the impact their work has related to the organization's mission. This finding is reinforced by the research of Achor (2018), who described the concept of job crafting whereby employees reframe job tasks to align with personal skills and values to boost feelings of meaningfulness and engagement. Leaders should work to align opportunities starting with a Generation Z employee's early interaction with their organization and that continue throughout their time employed by the organization. These opportunities should be designed to offer Generation Z employees meaningful engagements joined with intentional reflection that can help these team members develop a deeper and more thorough understanding of the organization's mission, vision, and strategic priorities. By providing opportunities for Generation Z employees to frequently understand why they do their work, these employees express more positive sentiments regarding the culture of their organization.

Perceptions of time management among Generation Z employees influence feelings of motivation and attitudes towards the culture of an organization

The organization studied during this research process offers leaders of other nonprofit organizations the opportunity to see the positive impact flexible time management and scheduling arrangements can have on Generation Z employee attitudes towards how they describe their organization's culture. The data showed that perceptions of time management and flexibility were strongly connected to employee sentiment regarding if they felt their supervisors cared about them as people. Gurchiek (2023) reinforces this point and connects the importance of perceptions of flexibility with Generation Z worker engagement and mental health support. This perception of a sense of caring strongly contributed to how Generation Z employees expressed their opinions and feelings related to their organization's practices, values, and underlying assumptions connected to norms of behavior, which had a strong influence on how these team members felt about organizational culture. This finding is supported by the model of organizational culture framework outlined by Schein (1984). Generation Z employees seek flexible work arrangements that can allow them to balance other needs and priorities in their lives while also preventing feelings of burnout and boredom while encouraging feelings of engagement and stronger work performance.

Generation Z employees have a strong desire to grow and develop professionally

Generation Z employees expressed a strong desire to have opportunities that allow them to experience professional growth and development. Growth opportunities can come in many forms ranging from structured in-person conferences, online engagements with communities of practice, local leadership development programs, and formal academic learning programs including certificates and graduate degrees. The data showed that Generation Z employees

strongly value learning opportunities for skill building and leadership development that they feel are personal, meaningful, and offer practical application. This finding is strengthened by Deichler (2021) who describes research showing Generation Z workers seek a variety of professional development and learning opportunities at work. Generation Z employees expressed that they feel an organization that invests in their continued education values them as employees and encourages their ongoing desire to remain with their organization. In addition, the data showed that Generation Z employees feel that an organization that values professional development reinforces an environment that also strengthens their relationships with their colleagues and encourages sensible risk-taking, innovation, creativity, and collaboration. All of these feelings play an important role in how Generation Z employees perceive and contribute to an organization's culture.

Relationships between Generation Z employees and supervisors play an essential role in how these employees perceive an organization's culture

One of the most significant ways that Generation Z employees connect their role and presence with their organization to the organization's culture focuses on how these employees relate to and describe their relationships with their supervisors. Using a lens of leader-member exchange theory, which uses a relationship-based approach to leadership, London et al. (2023) highlight the importance of listening and two-way feedback in the leader and follower relationship. When applied to a Generation Z population, this theory helps to support the findings presented in this study. Generation Z employees prioritize having trust-based relationships with their supervisors where they feel they can take risks, speak openly, disagree respectfully, and bring problems forward without a fear of punishment. Generation Z employees feel a strong connection between psychological safety and how inclusive they feel their

organization is to a diverse range of team members with different backgrounds and experiences.

Furthermore, Generation Z employees feel that their relationships with supervisors that feature

high levels of psychological safety also contribute to a culture where learning is prioritized,

failures are framed as growth opportunities, and the decision-making process is more

collaborative with open dialogue. Therefore, senior executives in organizations must work to

offer opportunities for Generation Z employees to build strong, high-trust relationships with their

supervisors. These executives can work to model positive behaviors in relationships with their

direct reports while offering managers training and learning opportunities that can strengthen

their conflict resolution and management skills. By investing in relationship management skills,

practices, and opportunities, leaders can create an environment where their Generation Z

employees can feel high levels of psychological safety with their supervisor that contributes to

more overall positive feelings of organizational culture.

Relationships between Generation Z employees and their colleagues play an essential role in shaping attitudes and opinions about an organization's culture

Generation Z employees expressed a strong desire to have positive relationships with

their colleagues based on trust and genuine support for each other. The data showed that having

strong relationships with colleagues helped these employees feel more engaged, collaborative,

and productive. This data is in line with other research that examines the importance of positive

workplace relationships (Seppälä & McNichols, 2022). These styles of relationships and the

broader dynamic of a team environment helps to contribute to stronger feelings of psychological

safety among Generation Z employees that fuel more effective problem solving, organic

learning, increased capacity for change, wellness, and engagement. Once this dynamic exists,

leaders must work to consistently reinforce and support it in order to sustain these positive

perceptions and their contribution to organizational culture. Leaders should work to strategically connect a strategy and specific efforts that can continuously renew positive learning and working environments and relationships between Generation Z employees and their colleagues. and relationships between Generation Z employees and their colleagues.

The phenomenological research study has offered new and valuable insights that help to explain how Generation Z employees perceive their work motivation and feelings of psychological safety. The study has shown that both dynamics influence how these employees perceive, relate to, and interpret organizational culture. The findings and related conclusions presented in this chapter have been supported by existing literature while also helping to expand available knowledge related to the research questions. With the ongoing growth of Generation Z members entering the workforce, organizational leaders can take these findings to enhance how they lead their teams and organizations. This enhanced knowledge will help to prepare these leaders to more effectively guide their organizations.

The findings and conclusions offered can also be considered part of a broader understanding of the historical progression and differences in work priorities, expectations, and perceptions among and between different generations. The figure below helps to summarize the study's findings within the context of considering traits among different generations.

Figure 14

Generational Characteristics: Historical Context and Traits

	Baby Boomers	Gen X	Gen Y (Millennials)	Generation Z	Generation Z (Study Findings)
Generation Characteristics	-Born 1946-1964 -Raised in post-WW II/Great Depression economy. Influenced by Vietnam War and Civil Rights eras -Achievement and professional status are earned through effort and sacrifice -18.6% of the American workforce as of 2020 (Kumar, 2023)	-Born 1965-1980 -Influenced by Cold War era political dynamics -Early technology advances and development of the Internet -Work/life balance and priority of self-sufficiency at work and independence -34.8% of the American workforce as of 2020 (Kumar, 2023)	-Born 1981-1996 -Impacted by 9/11/01 attacks and the continued advancement of technology resources -Value professional learning and challenge -Value organizational social responsibility efforts -38.6% of the American workforce as of 2020 (Kumar, 2023)	-Born 1997-2012 -Influenced by 2008 "Great Recession" and access to advanced technological resources at young ages -Early life transitions impacted by COVID pandemic -Value diversity, political activism, identity, and individuality -Mental health prioritization -6.1% of the American workforce as of 2020 (Kumar, 2023)	"I grew up in a home with computer in it. I had a cell phone at a young age. I even had a smartphone at a fairly young age. So I think me and many other Gen. Z employees that have recently joined the workforce, we are used to and expect this technology that we've grown up with since children." "I finished college online due to COVID. It was really stressful dealing with the uncertainty and missing out on those big life experiences." "It's important to me to be fair to everyone and respect people's individuality, ideas, and rights." "People have to prioritize their mental health. It impacts work and regular life and how well they can do their work. Leaders need to get that."

Generation Z and Individualism

While this study has focused on the unique traits of employees belonging to Generation Z, this study also shows that although there is broad consensus around perceptions related to organizational culture, psychological safety, and motivation among these workers, there is some degree of nuance among these workers as well. Although there was broad agreement among the participants reflected within the study's findings and conclusions, some interview participants had different points of emphasis and expressed different feelings of intensity in their responses to the interview questions. Dimock (2019) offers a potential explanation for these nuances found in this study's data by writing, " the views of this generation are not fully formed and could change considerably as they age, and as national and global events intervene. It is more than likely that the technologies, debates and events that will shape Generation Z are still yet to be known." This ongoing evolution of national and global context will likely continue to influence Generation Z member perceptions and contribute to varying shades of focus for these workers. In addition, generation-based research should also consider how the differences between younger and older extremes of an age cohort can also influence how these team members perceive and prioritize a variety of workplace dynamics. Costanza et al. (2023) reinforce this idea writing, "People's attitudes, values, beliefs, and perceptions of the world change, often remarkably so, and they are not perfectly consistent over time. The question is, what causes those changes." Additionally, King et al. (2019) summarize this important consideration and offer a perspective that helps to strengthen how researchers and practitioners can interpret the static stature of Generation Z workers and workers of other generations. They write, "Not every employee within the same age group will have the same experiences at the same exact time." Future research can further explore these individual considerations as well as sub-group demographic dynamics and

complexities as more Generation Z workers enter the workforce and new patterns and differences may emerge from among Generation Z employees.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study offer several benefits for individuals who lead teams and organizations with Generation Z members. The study will also benefit a variety of organizational leaders as they develop strategic plans to recruit, retain, and engage a quickly growing population of Generation Z workers. These strategic plans that intentionally incorporate the new insights on Generation Z employee perceptions and expectations of workplace motivation, psychological safety, and organizational culture will allow organizational leaders to cultivate the workforce necessary to leverage organizational strengths, effectively manage challenges, and maximize emerging opportunities. These findings are reinforced by McClelland's Theory of Needs (1961), which states that employees have a need for affiliation with a group and a need for achievement. With an emphasis on cultivating Generation Z employee sense of purpose and growth along with opportunities to enhance perceptions of holistic psychological safety in work teams, practitioners can use the knowledge presented in this study to springboard growth and to ensure their organizations have the necessary structures, incentives, policies, and resources to facilitate strong performance in the short and long term. This implication described is reinforced by the evidence on locus of control research for better understanding employee behavior (Padmanabhan, 2021). The new insights gained from this study that provides leaders with a stronger understanding of Generation Z workers joined with existing literature will also guide leaders as they approach likely growing movements related to technology/artificial intelligence, cultural diversity/equity, and will give them more of the knowledge needed to accelerate growth and maximize stakeholder impact in their organization settings.

The study also provides mission-driven organizational leaders with a clearer lens for how they can effectively adapt to other emerging changes in their workforces ahead and shift their leadership appropriately. The study's findings synthesized with an awareness for coming changes in the broader environment in the years ahead help inform leaders as they work to identify goals and workplans. This interpretation can also be viewed through the lens of Situational Leadership Theory that emphasizes that the type of leadership needed should match the circumstances of a task and that effective leaders are flexible and are able to effectively adapt to a situation or particular group (Yukl, 2019). Some of the changes that leaders need to prepare for include ensuring necessary staffing capacity and resources, formation of innovative and cross-sector partnerships, potential consolidation of organizations, flexible work arrangements, and continued emphasis on data-informed decision making to align organizational resources and organizational priorities (Forbes Nonprofit Council, 2023). Leaders who take the time to recognize coming changes to their workforces with the growth of Generation Z workers will be better prepared to create organizational environments that can grow and maximize human, social, and decisional capital in their organizations. Furthermore, individuals who do not currently serve in formal leadership roles but who recognize the value of these findings will be better prepared to assume leadership roles and will be better able to guide their teams with Generation Z members. These organizational leaders will then be better prepared to effectively handle these workforce changes and ensure they can advance their missions. The research within this study aims to provide current and future organizational leaders with key insights describing Generation Z worker thoughts and feeling so that these leaders can approach a range of essential decisions with a lens towards long-term sustainability and success.

Recommendations for Organizational Leaders

In addition to the key findings that help to explain how organizational leaders can effectively lead Generation Z employees by better understanding their perceptions of motivation, psychological safety, and their effects on organizational culture, leaders can also benefit from connecting this renewed understanding with a practical management approach. While the findings on their own can help to guide leaders, viewed holistically leaders can look to discover how to implement a strategy and tactics that can fuel the practical application of this new knowledge discovered by the research study. Whether part of a broader organizational change effort or part of a smaller individual team-level intervention, a nudge management approach offers leaders an opportunity to experiment with new programming and ideas to effectively implement the findings in a workplace setting (Ebert & Freibichler, 2017). As change initiatives can often become a major challenge in organizations particularly depending on circumstances such as uncertainty around broad leadership support, available resources, resistance to the need for change, and status quo bias, nudge management offers leaders a pathway to grow momentum for a change and energize incremental progress.

One of the important implicit findings in the data shows that Generation Z employees feel that one of the key responsibilities for organizational leaders focuses on the need to create environments that can encourage employee success both in-person and virtually. Reinforcing this point, leaders can take specific steps to encourage the growth of a supportive culture (Newman & Ford, 2021). From small changes to a physical environment that can encourage more employee interaction or private focus time to intentional guidelines for the length of meetings, leaders can use a nudge management lens to encourage behaviors that can increase motivation and psychological safety. As described by Ebert & Freibichler (2017), this approach offers leaders

simple, flexible, and relatively quick options to try new ideas. Additionally, a nudge

management approach helps to generate small wins that can demonstrate positive results helping

to generate additional support. As leaders look to implement initiatives that are mindful of the

key findings in this study, they can leverage behavioral economics principles including the

intentional use of incentives and defaults options to build choice architecture and environments

that supports Generation Z workers and offers benefits to the organization. These benefits can

include increased productivity, strengthened decision making, and enhanced Generation Z

worker engagement and satisfaction.

In addition, leaders must intentionally consider their leadership style and the perceptions

of that style among Generation Z employees. Leaders can use this study to understand how to

cultivate and sustain positive and visionary working environments that grow a sense of purpose

in their Generation Z team members. The data has shown the importance of a leadership style

that emphasizes the positive impact of high-trust, productive relationships between leaders and

Generation Z followers where these team members feel cared for and supported in a holistic

manner. Senior executives should consider the importance of these relationships and how these

relationships are built when they evaluate promotional opportunities and identify team members

for formal leadership roles.

Recommendations for Generation Z Members

While the research findings presented in this study have mostly been intended to support

organizational leaders and enhance the available knowledge on the core research questions, the

findings also can help Generation Z workers as they continue to enter the workforce. The data

from the Generation Z interview participants can help show a path for younger Generation Z

workers that can help them strengthen how they evaluate organizational strengths and

developmental opportunities while considering their potential role in organizations that they are

considering joining. Person-Environment Fit Theory offers Generation Z members a helpful

framework for considering how their personal values align with environmental factors in an

organizational setting (Van Vianen, 2018). Generation Z workers new to full-time career-focused

work can use the findings presented in this study to ask seek information about an organization's

culture and ask intentional questions in an interview process to assess an organizational fit and if

a prospective organization is likely to offer the type of environment these workers may need to

facilitate their motivation, engagement, and success. This enhanced understanding and

recognition of organizational and personal fit can have mutual benefits to all stakeholders

including stronger retention and increased Generation Z employee satisfaction.

Limitations

All research studies include some type of limitations to their design and findings.

Because of the relatively small sample size involving five participants used in this study, the

findings may be limited to the population of Generation Z workers that the researcher

interviewed. The sample size may contribute to limited generalizability of the data. Because of

the relatively small sample size used in this study due to the qualitative approach used, the

findings may be limited to the population of Generation Z workers that the researcher

interviewed. A broader sample size may have produced different results. Due to the nature of the

study involving a small sample size because of practical concerns and the need to maintain a

feasible number of interview participants and to ensure the confidentiality of participants, the

results may be limited in generalizability to this specific population and organizational setting

studied. A broader sample size may have produced different results. A sample that includes a

wider population of Generation Z workers including more representation from diverse

communities could have shown different results. Additionally, a population of Generation Z workers in different fields or in very different work contexts may also influence the results and contribute to other findings. The organization used in this study and its organizational profile may also not be representative of all nonprofit organizations when considering geographic location, financial resources, reputation, and existing staff leadership capacity. Because of this dynamic and the wide range of diverse traits among Generation Z members, the Generation Z participants in this study may not be entirely representative of all Generation Z workers, which could impact further extrapolation of the findings. While the experiences, perspectives, and perceptions of the Generation Z workers included in this study may not necessarily be able to be generalized to all Generation Z employees, the findings presented can provide current and emerging nonprofit organizational leaders with a clear lens in which they can more effectively lead Generation Z workers. These leaders can use the implications discovered from this research to inform decisions, identify a strategy, and build meaningful engagement opportunities that can maximize individual and collective Generation Z potential in their organizations. Ultimately, nonprofit organization leaders can use this study to more effectively motivate their Generation Z employees, increase positive views and feelings of psychological safety in the workplace, and sustain positive perceptions of organizational culture.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study and its findings offer researchers a valuable foundation to shape future research questions and direction around the intersection of Generation Z employee perceptions of work motivation, psychological safety, and their influence on organizational culture. As Generation Z workers continue to grow their presence in the workplace, researchers will need to continue to deepen society's understanding of these workers. Researchers can develop future

paths of inquiry while recognizing the need to be mindful that Generation Z worker attitudes and perceptions may evolve over time as these workers age and future generations eventually join the workforce. Future research questions can explore the continued effect of technology capabilities, staff development strategies, staff capacity needs, and environmental changes to investigate how these dynamics impact Generation Z interpersonal relationships, perceptions of their workplace purpose, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and impact on organizational culture (Agovino, 2024).

During the data collection and analysis processes of this study, new questions began to emerge that can inform future research priorities on this topic. The interview participants generally reflected office-based professional workers. Future research could examine differences in feelings and perceptions among a more diverse range of workers whose responsibilities require them to work in different settings including in an office, warehouse, remotely, or another context. Future researchers could also investigate potential similarities and differences between Generation Z workers in nonprofit, mission-centric organizations and traditional for-profit companies and organizations. Moreover, future research could explore the relationship between Generation Z employees and employees in other generations to assess the impact of intergenerational dynamics in organizations (Waldman, 2021). While this study touched on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, future research could also make these topics more of a centerpiece to be examined. Because professional development and growth emerged as a core theme in the findings, additional research may supplement this study by exploring the role of mentorship in the workplace for Generation Z employees. Finally, because this study used qualitative methods to understand the experiences of the interview participants, mixed methods or quantitative lines of inquiry could add additional depth and understanding to the findings

discovered in the study that could help enhance available knowledge on how to effectively engage Generation Z workers.

Additionally, future research can also work to explore how the emerging trends identified above that are likely to be experienced in the nonprofit sector over the next several years will influence current understanding of how to effectively engage Generation Z workers. Future research can also look to deepen understanding of Generation Z workers in a more diverse range of geographic locations and in a wider range of organizations of various sizes to explore the potential influence of geography or organizational size on the findings of this study. Organizational leaders would also benefit from further inquiry examining how Generation Z worker attitudes towards workplace learning evolve from their very early careers through other career phases and differences that emerge from within this generation (Leslie et al., 2021). Future research can also better inform how leaders approach Generation Z employee expectations, needs, and desires involving relationships with leaders as well as with colleagues (Seamon, 2022). This enhanced recognition will continue to strengthen understanding of these workers' perceptions around psychological safety and how these perceptions both shape and reflect an organization's culture. Finally, because attitudes and opinions involving workplace dynamics can change quickly and over periods of time, leaders would benefit from a continuous improvement mindset and ongoing research efforts to evaluate the impact of practices designed to help build Generation Z worker motivation, psychological safety, and their impact on organizational culture.

Conclusion

The qualitative research study presented helps to deepen understanding of organizational culture at the intersection of the dynamics of motivation and psychological safety. The problem

that this qualitative study addressed helped to bridge a gap and improve understanding of how members of Generation Z describe how their motivations and perceptions of psychological safety influence the culture of a non-profit organization. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study has focused on understanding how members of Generation Z describe how their motivations and perceptions of psychological safety influence the culture of a non-profit organization. The study has helped to answer both core research questions including how members of Generation Z describe how their workplace motivations influence the culture of a non-profit organization and how members of Generation Z describe how their perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace influence a non-profit organization's culture.

The population studied involved five Generation Z nonprofit employees. The research study utilized a purposeful sampling method to collect data. Using a phenomenological research approach, the data collection strategy that has used a purposeful sampling method has allowed the researcher to identify a population sample that was most useful for the research purpose using clearly described and consistent selection criteria. The study found several themes that answered the research questions. The findings centered around patterns found among Generation Z employees emphasizing the importance of purpose, flexibility, and growth among these workers. Additionally, the findings revealed the importance of how Generation Z employees perceive interpersonal relationships among colleagues and organizational leaders and the influence on perceptions of psychological safety.

The findings from the study help to illustrate important conclusions for organizational leaders as they continue to navigate changes in the workforce with increases in the number of Generation Z members employed. The study provided the data to show that purpose-driven work motivates Generation Z employees. In addition, perceptions of time management among

Generation Z employees influence feelings of motivation and attitudes towards the culture of an organization. Additionally, the data leads to a clear conclusion that Generation Z employees have a strong desire to grow and develop professionally. Finally, the results of the study provided a clear foundation that shows that relationships between Generation Z employees and supervisors play an essential role in how these employees perceive an organization's culture and relationships between Generation Z employees and their colleagues play an essential role in shaping attitudes and opinions about an organization's culture. As members of Generation Z continue entering the workforce, leaders must understand the unique traits, perceptions, and expectations among these employees and how they can build structures, processes, and nudges to effectively support these team members. Organizational leaders must understand why and how motivation and psychological safety play an essential role impacting the culture of an organization. Ultimately, using the findings and conclusions from this study, organizational leaders have the ability to develop a renewed and refreshed approach and strategy that will enable them to effectively lead Generation Z employees.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval

Jan 11, 2024 9:42:36 AM EST

Rodney Rock
Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Re: Modification - 2024-13 Exploring Workplace Motivation from the Lens of Generation Z

Dear Dr. Rodney Rock:

Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for Exploring Workplace Motivation from the Lens of Generation Z

Decision: Exempt

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,
Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board

Appendix B: Interview—Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

I am a doctoral student from Youngstown State University. I am conducting a study to investigate organizational culture at the intersection of the dynamics of motivation and psychological safety. In this study, you will be asked to participate in a direct one on one interview with the researcher. I will also need to collect information to describe you such as age, race, and gender. You will meet with me for 1 session and your participation should take about 45-60 minutes.

You may be at risk of harm because of this research. By participating in this study, you will benefit by contributing to knowledge that better informs researchers and practitioners by exploring the experiences, perspectives, mindsets, and behavioral patterns of members of Generation Z to add depth and clarity when researchers and practitioners consider key questions and make decisions that influence organizational culture. Although the researcher will take every precaution to protect your confidentiality, it is possible that your responses may identify you which may lead to various risks including adverse social and employment consequences. As such, please only share information you feel comfortable sharing. The likelihood that you will be harmed is minimized because you will not be identified by name in any reports or publications.

Your privacy is important, and I will handle all information collected about you in a confidential manner. While interviews may be recorded for review purposes only, I will report the results of the project in a way that will not identify you. I will keep all data in a password protected file on a password protected computer, which only the researcher can access. I will keep all data for three years, after which I will destroy the data.

You do not have to be in this study. If you don't want to, you can say no without losing any benefits that you are entitled to. If you do agree, you can stop participating at any time. If you wish to withdraw, just tell me that you no longer wish to participate.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research project, you may contact the Office of Research Services at YSU (330-941-2377) or at YSUIRB@ysu.edu. If you have questions about the research process, please contact the researcher, Andy Dessel, at adessel@centralpafoodbank.org or via phone at 717.724.3184.

I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of this consent document. I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Theme 1: Motivation

1) Why do you do your work?

   G. Why do you work at [this non-profit organization]?

   H. What do you like about your role and responsibilities?

   I. What do you dislike about your role and responsibilities?

   J. What energizes you with your work?

   K. What takes away your sense of energy with your work?

   L. What role do feedback and expectations play in your work?

2) What are your professional aspirations?

   A. How important is this to you?

   B. How likely is it that this will happen in your future?

   C. How much have you already attained this goal?

3) Describe the role that initiative and choice play in the things you undertake at work.

   A. Do you feel you can make the decisions you want about how you do your job?

   B. Describe your relationships with your co-workers.

   C. Do you feel confident that you can do things well in your job?

Theme 2: Psychological Safety

4) Do you feel you can make mistakes without fear that my coworkers will hold it against you? Why or why not?

5) Do you feel that your co-workers welcome opinions different from their own? Why or why not?

6) Do you feel your direct manager values my ideas, and we have mutual trust? Why or why not?

7) Do you feel members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues? Why or why not?

8) Do you feel it is easy to ask other members of this team for help? Why or why not?

9) Do you feel that when working with members of this team, your unique skills and talents are valued and utilized? Why or why not?

Theme 3: Generation Z Motivation and Culture

10) How would you compare and contrast how you are motivated at work compared with long-term employees?

11) How would you describe how you interpret and experience the culture of the organization as compared with long-term employees?

What job characteristics are most important to you?

12) How do you feel you are perceived as a younger employee of this organization?

13) Why would you leave this organization? What would keep you with this organization?

Appendix D: CITI

Completion Date 25-Oct-2022
Expiration Date 24-Oct-2025
Record ID 52309847

This is to certify that:

Andy Dessel

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of
certification through CME.

Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research
(Course Learner Group)
1 - RCR
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Youngstown State University

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US
www.citiprogram.org

Generated on 08-Apr-2024. Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w6a8e13f6-e416-49de-b52d-15cc458b08c9-52309847

Appendix E: Interview Procedures Summary

Title of Study: Exploring Workplace Motivation from the Lens of Generation Z	
Researcher	Andy Dessel
Interview Participant	
Interview Time and Date:	

Interview Framework
 	
1) Introduction
 	
    a. Purpose
    b. Research Process
 	
2) Informed Consent Confirmation of Written Document
 	
3) Interview Questions
 	
4) Closing
	
	• My name and Brief Bio
	• Thank You to Participants
	• Describe Purpose of Study
	• Explain Interview Participant Role
	
	• 45-60 Minute Interview Length
	• Meeting Recording Agreement
	• Sharing of Transcript
	• Confidentiality of Interview Content
	• Participant Choice to Answer Questions
	• Ask for Questions
	• Describe Research Questions
	• Begin Interview Questions
	
	• Thank you
	• Next Steps: Transcript Sharing