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## How Employees View The Motivational Role Of Leaders During Covid-19

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Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics, College of Liberal and Professional Studies in the Graduate Division of the School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania  
Advisor: Dana Kaminstein, Ph.D.

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## How Employees View The Motivational Role Of Leaders During Covid-19

### Abstract

The purpose of this capstone is to examine how leaders influence the motivation of those they lead during times of uncertainty. Based on a review of the academic literature on motivation and leadership, I identified six categories of manager behavior linked to employee motivation: autonomy, building competence, communication, facilitating meaning, showing empathy and providing support. I sought to examine if there was a relationship between each category of behavior and employee self-reports of motivation. A mixed-methods approach was taken, gathering survey responses from 203 individuals, supplemented by a qualitative approach conducting 10 in depth interviews.

Based on statistical analysis of data from completed surveys and thematic coding of interview transcripts, I concluded that manager behavior can and does have a notable impact on employee motivation. Manager behavior that builds employee competence, facilitates the meaning of work, and provides pragmatic support is particularly influential in increasing or maintaining employee motivation. Manager behavior creating conditions of autonomy, demonstrating empathy, and entailing clear communication also positively impacts employees' motivation for work, although less consistently. It was notable that these manager behaviors did not appear to affect employees' perseverance or sense of immersion in their work. Additionally, manager behavior was more or less salient depending on situational factors for each employee. As such it contributed in different ways to employees' feeling of motivation for work.

### Keywords

Employees Experience During COVID-19, Management During COVID-19, Employee Autonomy, Building Employee Competence, Supporting Employees, Leader Empathy, Leaders Facilitating Meaning

### Comments

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COVID-19

by

Karen Walker

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College of Liberal and Professional Studies  
in the Graduate Division of the School of Arts and Sciences  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the  
University of Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Approved by:

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this capstone is to examine how leaders influence the motivation of those they lead during times of uncertainty. Based on a review of the academic literature on motivation and leadership, I identified six categories of manager behavior linked to employee motivation: autonomy, building competence, communication, facilitating meaning, showing empathy and providing support. I sought to examine if there was a relationship between each category of behavior and employee self-reports of motivation. A mixed-methods approach was taken, gathering survey responses from 203 individuals, supplemented by a qualitative approach conducting 10 in depth interviews.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

In 2020 societies across the globe were impacted by a global pandemic of the COVID-19 virus. The high rate of the virus' transmission, absence of proven drugs or vaccines to treat or prevent it, and the serious health implications for many of those contracting it resulted in the implementation of widespread government-led mitigation measures whose goal was to limit physical human contact (commonly referred to as social-distancing). The implications of these social-distancing requirements for organizations has been substantial (Koren & Pető, 2020). Businesses unable to adapt their models were forced to close or to reinvent themselves (for example fine dining restaurants offering takeout). However, even for organizations whose business models or resources did not inhibit transition to a home-based workforce, the upheaval of this transition has been significant, especially for employees (Anicich et al., 2020).

The majority of white-collar workers transitioned from regular face to face interaction with coworkers to complete physical isolation with all communication conducted virtually, while simultaneously having to share the same (often confined) work and living space around the clock with fellow household members. These adjustments were exacerbated by personal stressors including, but not limited to, health and economic concerns, restrictions on physical social interaction with friends and family, and, for many parents, a requirement to

simultaneously work and provide childcare (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020).

Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman famously declared that “people leave managers not companies” (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999, p.33). This insight underscores the influence of the direct line manager on the employee experience. Motivational literature similarly emphasizes the significant role of leaders, who “play an influential role in how employees experience their work and represent an important influence on worker happiness” (Tuckey et al., 2012, p.15). However, the motivational role of leaders during crisis situations remains relatively unexplored; for example, literature on leadership practices during crises focuses predominantly on leaders’ roles managing external stakeholders (Pearson & Clair, 1998; James et al., 2011). During COVID-19, employees’ fears for their health and job security, accompanied by stress navigating the adjustments in their personal and professional lives, undoubtedly affected motivation (Brody, 2020) and the specific impact the pandemic had on mental health was described as “extremely concerning” by the head of the World Health Organization (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). I believe that the role of leaders during this time is therefore particularly salient and worthy of further examination. Specifically, my research seeks to investigate leaders’ abilities to positively motivate employees and to buffer them against stressors that threatened to undermine motivation.

In this introductory chapter I outline the background of this topic and its significance to me and my work. I provide a high-level summary of the literature

on employee motivation, discuss how my research aligns with this work and share the gaps my study attempts to fill. I also discuss the assumptions I am making before describing my research methods, including the question I am attempting to answer, the methods I propose to employ, and my own role within the research. Finally, I outline what I hope to uncover in my research and the future implications for me and my work.

### Background

A 2001 Gallup survey estimated that disengaged employees cost their organizations between \$292 and \$355 billion annually (Gallup, 2001). Since then, interest in this topic from the business and academic world has not abated (Kumar & Pansari, 2015) as attempts have been made to understand and mitigate the costs of high turnover rates, employee burnout, poor manager/employee relations, and high utilization of remedial services such as employee assistance programs (Bogue & Bogue, 2019). Academic dialogue has simultaneously flourished through efforts to uncover the optimal environments, leadership styles, employee incentives, and conditions for employees to thrive (Arnold et al., 2007; Benson, 2004; Hansen, et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2018; Lesener et al., 2020; Spreitzer et al., 2005; Tuckey et al., 2012).

Three facets of the employee experience and engagement discussion that have appeared prominently in business and academic publications are:

- 1) Redefining the employee value proposition (EVP) to attract and retain the best workers (Keller & Meaney, 2017)

- 2) Understanding the optimum management and leadership behaviors to motivate and continually engage individuals and teams (Gagné et al., 2020)
- 3) The impact of standard HR processes and policies such as annual performance management cycles, work from home policies and traditional team structures (Bingham, 2017)

While the objective of my research is not to establish or propose specific recommendations regarding the above, perceptions of the role of the leader have implications for them all, underscoring the relevance of my research to ongoing developments regarding the employee experience.

For the purposes of my research I focus on the role that leaders, and specifically immediate line managers, have played in motivating employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. I confine my analysis to employees in organizations that successfully adapted their business models and whose workforces were able to work from home with little substantive change to tasks and processes. I examine how leadership behavior has helped meet employee psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, as defined by Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, I consider the motivational process outlined in the *Job Demands and Resources (JDR)* model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) to identify specific resources provided or facilitated by leaders that have contributed to employee engagement or specific leader behavior that has mitigated job demands.

## Review of Literature

Self-determination theory, as developed by Ryan and Deci (Ryan & Deci, 2000), acknowledges that there is no singular approach to motivation, as different people will be motivated differently (depending on whether the sources of the motivation are intrinsic or extrinsic) and different social contexts may act as catalysts (as certain situations, domains, and cultures will result in different levels of motivation). However, while recognizing these limitations, they outline three innate human psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness for employees that they deem as “essential for facilitating optimal functioning of the natural propensities for growth and integration, as well as for constructive social development and personal well-being” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p 68). Earlier work by Hackman and Oldham (1976) on the impact of job design similarly identified the power on employee psychology of “experienced meaningfulness”; “experienced responsibility”; and “knowledge of results” (Hackman & Oldham, 1976. p.255).

At the same time, the growing academic literature on leadership styles has attempted to pinpoint the salience of leader behavior in creating a positive climate for those they lead. Research on two styles of leadership, transformational and empowering leadership, appears to overlap in its examination of themes that are also identified in motivation literature. For example, in making a case for empowering leadership, Kim et al. (2018), underscore the value of leadership behavior that “promotes a working environment characterized by a higher degree of autonomy, participation,

personal development, and employees' positive psychological states" (Kim et al., 2018, p.268). They explain that "autonomy, feedback, and responsibility constitute elements of intrinsic motivation in job design and thus indirectly predict favorable outcomes" (Kim et al., 2018, p.257).

While specific terminology and definitions do not perfectly overlap, there appears to be consensus regarding the fact that leaders and organizations who want to motivate their employees should strive to provide them with a working environment and working practices that promote individual autonomy, opportunities for skill development and increased responsibility, and a feeling of connectedness and participation within a broader team and or mission.

The above speaks to conditions that leaders should strive to create to achieve the optimum environment for employee motivation. However, existing work does not necessarily specify what processes or behavior are required, and who should be leading them, in order to achieve such conditions. Indeed this was identified as a gap within the literature, for example Gillet et al. (2020) pointed out in their analysis of Self-Determination theory that further research was required "to expand our understanding of the motivational processes in the work area" (Gillet et al., 2020, p.33).

The work of Bakker and Demerouti (2007) provides a framework to examine such processes. Their Job Demands-Resources model categorizes different types of resources that have the potential to enhance the employee experience and different demands that have the ability to adversely affect it. The reasoning behind their "motivation process" is that specific resources may lead to



engagement, which in turn may lead to health and performance and job demands. As such, examining those resources that sit within the sphere of influence of leaders and identifying those demands that leaders have the power to remove or lessen is something I look to uncover within my research. For example, taking manager support as a resource, I examine whether leader behavior created a perception of support and, if so, what specific actions the employee experienced as supportive.

Another area of further examination is suggested by Lesener et al. (2020), who, in referencing the JDR model, performed a meta-analysis to ascertain the differing impact on job engagement of resources categorized as either organizational level, group-level or leader-level. Their conclusion is that organizational-level resources are more influential than either leader or group level resources. However, they also present strong evidence for the effectiveness of leader level resources in promoting employee engagement through leadership style, supervisor support, feedback, and fairness. They make specific mention of the role of social support from supervisors, feedback, and quality of leader-member exchange in its influence on employee engagement.

### Methods

The research question that this capstone attempts to answer is: *How did employees perceive the motivational role of leaders during COVID-19?*

To answer this question, I conducted my research in two primary ways. Firstly, I designed a survey. Using purposeful and snowball sampling I sent my survey to co-workers and personal contacts in the UK and US for them to

complete and to send to others in their networks. I used the survey to gather demographic information as well as data to determine respondents' perceptions of their leaders during COVID-19, the impact their leaders' actions have had on them and what, if any, change they had observed compared to previous behavior. At the end of the survey I asked respondents if they would be willing to be interviewed to find out more about their experiences. As my analysis is confined to employees who have been able to perform their jobs from home with little modification, I used questions at the start of the survey to determine what changes respondents had experienced in their work environments, and excluded from my analysis any surveys where individuals' jobs or responsibilities had significantly changed as a result of COVID-19.

I elected to use this quantitative approach to initially identify common perceptions and themes. By designing a survey that was relatively quick to complete and sending a link that could be easily shared, I hoped to obtain enough responses to ascertain if there were significant correlations as well to scrutinize potential relationships between demographic data and responses (for example if responses from male and female respondents revealed potentially different trends). I also designed my survey to guide the questions I would ask in subsequent interviews, to enable me to probe further in areas where the survey response data indicated a possible trend or theme.

For the second part of my research I conducted 10 qualitative interviews to gather more detailed information about individuals' experiences. I proposed this number to gain an overview from multiple individuals, while keeping the

sample size small enough to conduct each interview in sufficient depth. By using a selection of those completing the survey who indicated a willingness to be interviewed, I looked to gain insight from those who had reflected on their experiences during COVID-19 and who were open to sharing these experiences. I attempted to validate initial themes or trends identified in the survey and to ask how and why questions in order to gain a deeper insight of employee perceptions and the specific observations that had led to these perceptions.

I acknowledge that an inherent limitation of my work is my reliance on employee self-reporting, rather than a more objective measurement of performance or engagement. I do not believe this is a significant barrier as motivation, by its definition, refers to an individual psychological state, for which I think the best authority is the individual experiencing that state. However, I am conscious that my attempts to uncover management best practices were limited to those practices which were identified and valued by employees. I am also aware that by relying on employee perceptions, more subtle behaviors which have proved effective in driving motivation may have been overlooked if employees did not consciously perceive their impact.

### Assumptions

Based on my observations during COVID-19, I go into this capstone with assumptions that I am unsure my research will validate. I am also conscious of my own biases (conscious and unconscious) that have the potential to impact my approach.

In my experience, the majority of those who take on a leadership role consciously engage with their responsibilities and are intentional in how they interact with the employees they lead. Whether by attending training, reading books or through painstaking trial and error, many leaders seek to refine the way in which they lead and, by extension, impact others. I expected that managers would have perceived an important role for themselves during COVID-19 in setting the direction and tone for their team, providing information and demonstrating support.

My first assumption is that there has been a decrease in employee motivation for work during COVID-19 when compared to work before the COVID-19 pandemic.

My second assumption is that at least some employees will have perceived a noticeable motivational role played by leaders. I assume that even if this was not consistent, displays of empathy and support or actions that enhanced autonomy or created growth opportunities for employees will have produced some perceivable impact.

My third assumption is that at least some employees perceived changes compared to how leaders acted and interacted with them prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because the specific pressures employees have been under will have required leaders to adapt and display specific behaviors in order to bring out the best in their employees. I expect that situational awareness will have enabled at least some leaders to recognize and adapt to meet employee needs and that a shift was perceptible.

Fourthly I have some prior assumptions about the kinds of behavior that will have been positively received by employees with regard to motivation. I expect that managers who have delivered feedback, demonstrated empathy and emotional support, freely shared information, and continue to provide opportunities for growth will have more motivated employees.

Finally, I make the assumption that frameworks from the job motivation literature will prove a useful lens through which to interpret behavior, even though my research specifically gathers data about behavior within an environment of transition and stress where different skills and behaviors may be required.

#### Role of the Researcher

My role is as a researcher in the design of the survey, the analysis of survey data, and also as the interviewer as I conducted all of the qualitative interviews

In my professional life, as an HR Manager, I regularly advise managers and leaders as well as deliver coaching and training regarding leadership best practices. Once an employee has joined an organization, I believe the single greatest influence on their development and intention to remain with that organization is the support and coaching they receive from their line manager. Therefore, my research contributes to my growing understanding of the leadership behaviors that underpin employee motivation and that are vital to organizational success. Going into this work I have developed an anecdotal impression of how managers and employees have responded to stressors and adjustments during COVID-19 and what leader behavior has been positively

perceived by employees. However, I am unsure of the full impact of various actions and of how representative my impressions are of a broader employee experience. The understanding I derive from my research is directly applicable in my work and I hope to use it to guide colleagues within my organization.

### Conclusion

From my point of view, and based upon professional experience, the thesis of my work is that specific behavior by certain managers results in a higher level of motivation for those they manage. I believe this is the result of positive actions (such as showing empathy and building competence) as well as buffering employees against stressors that have threatened to undermine motivation during COVID-19. At the outset of this work I hope to uncover specific supportive behaviors that influenced employee perceptions of leaders as well as actions (large or small) that have created an environment conducive to motivation. As explained in the acknowledgment of my assumptions, I commenced this work with some initial pre-existing ideas of what I would uncover but conscious that these may not be validated in my research. Similarly, I am aware that it may not be possible to demonstrate conclusive evidence regarding the effectiveness of certain behavior that employees have experienced and that have positively contributed to their motivation. This is because employees may not have perceived this behavior or may not have recognized the way it had affected them.

I believe my research has implications for ascertaining the specific behaviors and practices which leaders should adopt to support and buffer

employees facing high levels of stress and uncertainty. I hope that identification of these behaviors and practices will allow integration with existing leadership best practices and may bring new insights as to how crisis impacts motivational models, and which elements of these models are most pertinent at times of crisis or heightened stress and uncertainty.

I would like my research to contribute to the existing body of motivational studies which examine leader-level resources and leader behavior that promote conditions conducive to motivation. I therefore seek to determine, in the context of COVID-19, which resources and behaviors have been most positively perceived by employees. In doing so, I hope to address a gap in the existing motivation literature as to how motivation best practices can be applied during times of crisis and upheaval.

In the following chapter (Review of Literature) I outline the literature I reviewed to build my knowledge in the fields of employee motivation and leadership styles, as well as of emerging best practices advocated by practitioners. In the subsequent chapters I go on to explain my methodology (Research Methodology) before outlining the results of my research (Research Results) and finally give my interpretation based on my results (Interpretation of Results and Conclusions).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

In this chapter I provide a summary of the literature pertaining to the role leaders play in motivating employees during times of crisis. I highlight some of the frameworks that have been developed to understand workplace motivation, as well as leadership and behavioral practices that have been studied with respect to their impact on employees. Finally, I review insights from the literature on crisis management regarding leadership as well as emerging practitioner insights into effective leadership practices witnessed during COVID-19.

I start by exploring some of the prevalent theories within, and the intersection between, two interrelated areas of research: workplace motivation and leadership styles. Academic and organizational research, particularly over the last 30 years, has provided greater understanding of the individual, social, and structural factors that underpin employee motivation and well-being. I underscore where this research overlaps with the burgeoning theory on leadership styles, and review what this reveals about how leaders can tap into the intrinsic motivation of their employees and buffer them from the stressors that threaten to undermine it.

I continue by examining learnings from the crisis management literature and the emerging themes from business and industry publications about the employee experience during COVID-19. I use these combined insights to



suggest areas worthy of further exploration, such as how employees perceive leaders' motivational role during times of heightened stress and uncertainty, and I use these as the basis for my research into how employees perceive the motivational role of leaders during COVID-19.

### Definitions

The below definitions provide the reader with clarity on key terms used within this capstone study.

#### *Motivation*

Motivation is a psychological state that is defined by Diefendorff and Chandler (2001), as “an unobservable force that directs, energizes, and sustains behavior over time and across changing circumstances” (Diefendorff & Chandler, 2001, p.66). The assertion that it is an unobservable force makes it difficult to definitively conclude when someone is motivated or not; however, as Ryan and Deci (2000) elaborate, the motivated state is generally characterized by behavior that is “proactive and engaged” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.68) whereas an absence of motivation or, as they label it, a state of “amotivation”, is characterized by that which is “passive and alienated”. (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.68).

Role is defined as “a function or part performed” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Motivational Role is therefore defined as a function assumed or part performed which impacts the psychological state of motivation of other people.

### Why Researchers are Interested in Motivation

Motivation has been studied extensively with respect to the impact it has on employee performance, and by extension organizational performance.

Pioneering work in the late 1970s by Hackman and Oldman (1976) reviewed the influence of job design and the mechanisms by which it impacted employee motivation. They concluded that under optimum conditions the result was “a self-perpetuating cycle of positive work motivation powered by self-generated rewards” (Hackman & Oldman, 1976, p.256). A more tangible link was established by Humphrey et al. (2007) in a meta-analysis, which examined the relationship between individual job design and outcomes, concluding that motivational characteristics explained 25% of variance in subjective performance, 34% in job satisfaction and 24% in organizational commitment.

More specifically, a distinction has been made between the impacts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with the former viewed as superior, emerging from the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2000). The founding principle of SDT is that individuals whose motivation is authentic, defined as “self-authored or endorsed” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.69) compared with those whose motivation is “merely externally controlled for an action” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.69) have more interest, excitement, and confidence. This authentic motivation manifests as enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Later studies have supported and expanded on SDT, including one by Gillet et al. (2020), which categorized employees working across different industries into distinct motivational profiles and examined links with work-related outcomes. They found support for their hypothesis that employees with profiles high in autonomous job motivation or global self-determination were more likely to have positive

outcomes, including higher performance and lower absenteeism, presenteeism and turnover intentions (Gillet et al., 2020). Researchers have, however, advanced differing ideas as to how underlying mechanisms of motivation work and which underlying factors are the most significant in driving employee motivation.

The growing evidence for the impact work motivation can have on organizational performance as well as on employee well-being mean it is likely that it will continue to be a popular area of research, attracting scholars from numerous disciplines. The complexity of factors that underpin motivation, as well as the wide variety of methods to measure outcomes, means that even those from the same discipline are unlikely to converge on a single theory of motivation at work. As the sophistication with which organizations gather and analyze data is enhanced, however, more opportunities will arise to expand our understanding of the variables within work settings that play a role in motivation. This will provide us with the opportunity to generate recommendations for conditions that should be facilitated or refined in order to achieve optimum employee performance.

### The Driving Forces of Motivation

Starting with the Hawthorne studies in the 1920s, industrial and organizational psychologists have sought to understand how employees respond to environmental factors and how this affects their performance (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1941). Hackman and Oldman's job characteristics theory, published in 1976, broke new ground, however, by detailing the psychological mechanisms

through which these different factors could influence employees' underlying motivation. They identified five factors of job design: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). They specified how skill variety, task identity and task significance contributed to a psychological state of "experienced meaningfulness"; autonomy engendered a state of "experienced responsibility"; and feedback provided employees with "knowledge of results" of their work (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, p.255). They explained that these three psychological states were linked to enhanced intrinsic motivation, with the highest level of motivation present when employees experienced all three states. At a similar time, Karasek (1979) developed his job strain model, the demands and control model (DCM). Like job characteristics theory, DCM reviewed the impact on employees of different job characteristics and elaborated on how employee control (experienced through exercising autonomy) increased motivation and mediated against the negative effect of job demands (Karasek, 1979).

Ideas from both models were incorporated in Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985) which detailed how commitment and authenticity, which were reflected through employees' intrinsic and integrated motivation, were most likely present when the psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness were met (Ryan, 1985). The need for autonomy, defined as "the feeling of volition that can accompany any act" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.74) was echoed both Karasek and Hackman and Oldman's work. The need for competence, defined as "one's ability or capacity to deal effectively with

his surroundings” (Deci, 1975, p.55) thus overlapped with the idea of “knowledge of results” as elaborated by Hackman and Oldman. The third item, relatedness, defined as “the need to feel belongingness and connectedness with others” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.73) was a new concept and specifically underscored the role of the broader social context—specifically connections with other people, and how they developed and reinforced motivation.

However, although Ryan and Deci (2000) included relatedness as the third need within their theory and emphasized the role of social contexts catalyzing differences in motivation and personal growth, the details of exactly how different factors within social contexts influenced the fulfillment of the psychological needs were not elaborated. Humphrey et al. (2007) identified this as a gap within theories that focused on motivating features of work, pointing out that existing research on job design focused on a narrow range of work features and neglected broader aspects, such as social environment and work context.

Based on the above theories, the driving forces of motivation at work, as articulated in prominent motivation theories, are the employee’s sense of autonomy or responsibility, their feeling of competence in carrying out their job, the feeling that their work is imbued with a sense of meaning and their experience of belongingness or connection with others. An exploration of leadership theory below complements the motivational analysis in providing a deeper understanding of leaders’ specific role in the motivational process.

## The Role of Leaders

The role of leaders is a prominent theme in research on employee well-being. Van Dierendonck et al. (2004) concluded that subordinates who felt better about themselves also reported that their manager had a more active and supportive leadership style. Humphrey et al.'s (2007) work that reviewed job design sought to identify the specific impacts of social support (including support from managers) and found evidence across studies for the link between higher support and lower levels of role ambiguity, role conflict, anxiety, and overload. The number of books and articles on effective leadership is such that it would be impossible to provide a comprehensive list of leadership models or frameworks that claim a positive link with employees' work experience. I have therefore focused my attention on a handful of leadership styles and frameworks that appear most prominently in academic studies linked with employee well-being or conditions in which employees thrive.

Hansen et al. (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on transformational leaders (defined as leaders who promote a vision, are supportive, and provide their employees with intellectual stimulation and personal recognition) on engagement. They concluded that transformational leadership behaviors engendered a positive work environment, which lowered job tension. Kim et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis of empowering leadership studies also uncovered a positive relationship with the development of employee motivation and resources and psychological empowerment. They defined empowering leadership as "giving subordinates a strong feeling of self-determination, trust,

goal focus, self-confidence, and development support” (Kim et al., 2018, p.258) and uncovered how leaders created psychological empowerment through promoting meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. A meta-analysis, by Lesener et al. (2020), reviewed the impact of different resources on engagement. They concluded that leader-level resources, including social support from supervisors, feedback, and quality of leader-member exchange, were all positively correlated with work engagement. Another study by Klein and House (1995) examined the impact of charismatic leadership and described how it created a two-way relationship between leaders and followers.

The two leadership styles that appear most prominently in work examining positive working conditions are empowering leadership (Hansen et al., 2013; Kim, et al., 2018; Tuckey et al., 2012) and transformational leadership (Arnold et al., 2007; Barling et al., 2004; Tuckey et al., 2012). While separate constructs, what they have in common is an emphasis on how leader behavior can influence the environment and psychological conditions in which their followers work. Hansen et al.’s (2013) study explained how empowering leadership and fairness synergistically combine. They specifically referenced key attributes of empowering leaders which enabled them to be impactful including vision, supportive leadership, intellectual stimulation, and personal recognition. Specifically, they described how in employing these attributes leaders could enhance the organizational identification and engagement of followers.

Tuckey et al.’s (2012) work touched on similar themes with respect to transformational leadership. They elaborated on how employees’ needs for self-

determination and control/mastery are met through empowering leaders who encourage followers to use self-rewards, facilitate follower self-leadership, engage in participative goal setting, and encourage both teamwork and independent action. Baring et al.'s (2004) study further specified how transformational leaders gain trust and build employee self-efficacy through the creation of meaning by acting as role models, being committed to employee needs, encouraging employees to think on their own, and motivating followers to achieve more. Arnold et al. (2007) and Nilsen et al. (2007) also identified the how the creation of meaning was a mechanism through which transformational leaders positively impacted followers' well-being.

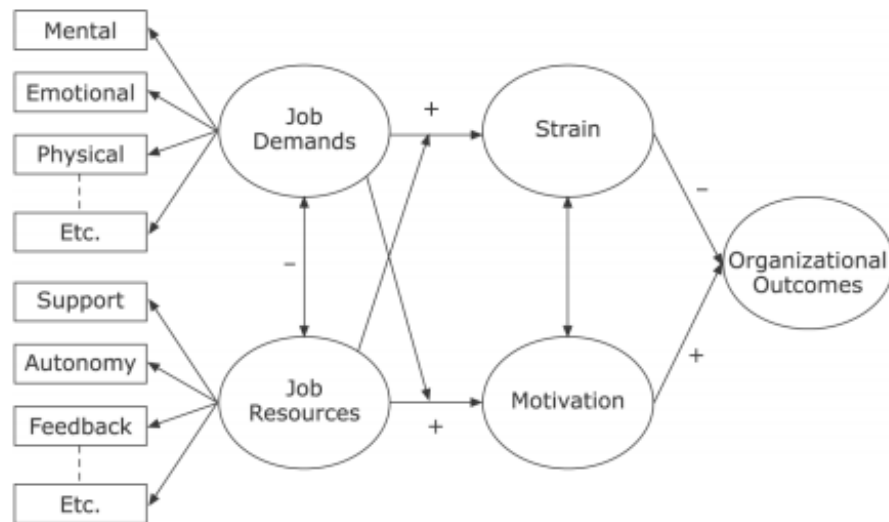
In summary, the ways in which leaders contribute to employee motivation, as well as employee well-being, are numerous and include: supporting learning and development, including intellectual stimulation; building competence and goal setting; providing feedback and recognition for work performed; helping followers see the impact of their work through sharing meaning and connecting to a vision; promoting self-leadership through increasing autonomy and facilitating conditions of self-determination and self-rewards; enhancing the quality of teamwork and of interaction between leader and followers; and demonstrating supportive behavior such as tackling the sources of role ambiguity, role conflict, role demands, and employee anxiety and stress.

A final model that proves useful in explaining work motivation is the job demands and resources (JDR) model. The model was developed by Bakker (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and was explored in several studies with co-authors.



It provides a useful framework to visualize the employee motivational experience (see Figure 1). Bakker and Demerouti (2007) explained how “job resources such as social support, performance feedback, and autonomy may instigate a motivational process leading to job-related learning, work engagement, and organizational commitment” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p.309). They defined resources as “physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are either/or: Functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p.312). Three principal resources they highlighted were autonomy, support and feedback. They explained how feedback fosters learning, thereby increasing job competence as well as improving communication between employee and supervisor. Additionally, higher levels of support and higher quality supervisor relationships decrease the level of strain experienced by employees when job demands (such as work overload or emotional and physical demands) are high. This is because, as Bakker et al. (2005) explained, leaders’ appreciation and support can help put demands in another perspective. This concept, known as *buffering*, is important in how it prevents or alleviates physical or psychological ill effects that may arise from the demands of work.

Figure 1. The Job Demands-Resources Model



From “The Job Demands-Resources model: state of the art” by Arnold B. Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti, 2007, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 22 No.3, p.313. Copyright 2007 by Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Leaders effectively buffer by protecting employees from or by lessening job demands. This could be done in a way that supports employees’ abilities to cope, helps sustain their performance in the face of stressors or helps protect them against ill health (Bakker et al., 2007). Benson’s (2004) work also reviewed the contribution of supervisor behavior in buffering, in his case reviewing the impact on employee psychological well-being. He specifically identified the role of the supervisor as he measured employee perceptions of the leader with respect to job control, leadership, communication, consideration, social support, group maintenance, organizing, and looking out for employees. He concluded that employees working for a supervisor who was perceived to frequently engage in positive behaviors and rarely in negative behaviors reported having better

psychological health. Work by Bordia et al. (2004), in the context of employee well-being during times of organizational change, also pointed to the role of control in mitigating against psychological strain and highlighted the process of participative decision making as way to short-circuit damaging effects of uncertainty by allowing employees to have a say, and instilling a sense of control over their circumstances. Gillet et al. (2020) pointed to the ability of resources that emanate from leaders to counter work overload, emotional demands, physical demands, and work-home interference and prevent burnout and exhaustion, and specifically referred to autonomy, feedback, social support or a high-quality relationship with one's supervisor.

In summary, the work across both motivation and leadership literature highlights the motivational role of the leader in five key aspects. First is the way in which leaders can facilitate the meaningfulness of work for their employees. This could be through creating a vision, providing context of how the work fits within the broader mission of the team or organization, or explaining the impact that it has. Secondly, leaders can play a motivational role in how they build the conscious competence of team members through providing feedback, development opportunities and work that intellectually stimulates employees, and encouraging them to achieve more. Thirdly, they can support an environment of autonomy, for example through involving employees in decision making and setting collective goals, demonstrating trust, and encouraging independent thought and action. Fourthly, they build strong two-way relationships with their employees through which they provide social support, the exchange of ideas,

and show recognition. Finally, they act as buffers in the way they take on one of the first four roles and shield employees from stressors that threaten to undermine meaning, competence, autonomy, or support, or by providing resources to help employees cope with job demands.

### The Impact of Situational Factors

While the motivation and leadership literature provides a strong blueprint for understanding leadership best practice for motivating employees and alludes frequently to the impact of the broader environment, it says little about how the leadership must vary in specific circumstances, or about how different facets of leadership or specific techniques may be more or less effective given the situational context. A key theme highlighted by Bordia et al. (2004), Gillet et al. (2020) and Tuckey et al. (2012) in the studies cited, as well as in a review of charismatic leadership by Klein and House (1995), is the salience of leader resources during times of heightened demands or stress. Gillet et al. (2020) posit that this is likely due to frustration of psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness at such times, while Bakker et al. (2005) explain that under stressful conditions, individuals are more likely to use resources as a coping mechanism or stress-reducing action. This would suggest that motivational frameworks and resources emanating from leaders are even more important during COVID-19 and prompts a review of the crisis management literature to gain further insight as to which resources are most significant and how.

In 1998 Pearson & Clair published a groundbreaking meta-analysis of the crisis management literature produced up until that point in time in order to identify prominent contributions and themes. However, their analysis makes no specific mention of behavior required to lead people during times of crisis other than alluding to Shrivasta's (1993) 4 C's (causes, consequences, caution and coping) and highlighting the final C, coping, which they defined as "cognitive readjustment to assumptive, behavioral, and emotional responses through organizational support systems" (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p.63). A review of Shrivasta's (1987) work reveals that the goal of the coping phase is "to draw a tight, narrow net around a crisis that has occurred" in order to "contain the crisis and prevent it from spreading either inside or outside the organization" (Mitroff, et al., 1987, p.291). However, despite providing numerous suggestions for effective crisis management actions across his work, including reviewing potential vulnerabilities and setting up crisis management response teams (Shrivasta & Mitroff, 1987), and alluding to the complexities and numerous impacts of crises (including on employees), nowhere does Shrivasta propose guidance for what leaders should do to support employees during crises.

James et al.'s more recent 2011 meta-analysis, published 13 years after that of Pearson & Clair, attempted to update and refresh their insights regarding the crisis management field. Their review of key findings, like that of Pearson & Clair, focused primarily on leaders' roles managing external stakeholders and managing internally at a broader organization level. However, they did add to earlier work by identifying an important contribution for leaders in promoting a

resilient mindset among employees (James et al., 2011). This idea was developed further by Stephanie Ducheck (2019) who reviewed resilience at an organization level. Framing her analysis around three successive resilience stages (anticipation, coping and adaptation), she emphasized the importance of “soft managerial practices such as effective communication and relationships within the organization” (Ducheck, 2020, p.232) in enhancing an organization’s resilience via its employees. This has parallels with the buffering discussed in the motivation literature, as leaders’ interactions with employees as well as resources they provide could support and help build resilience.

Review of a final meta-analysis in the crisis field, by Bundy et al. (2017), provides some further suggestions for the role of leaders during crises. They proposed a structure for categorizing studies on crises, dividing them between three stages of crisis (pre crisis prevention, crisis management, and post crisis outcomes) and two orientations (internal and external). The crisis management stage and internal orientation is the one that would encompass the role of leaders during crises, such as COVID-19, with respect to employees. In their review of existing studies, Bundy et al. described how effective leaders identify the opportunities that crisis situations present and that charisma and other personal characteristics “may influence internal cohesion during a crisis” (Bundy et al., 2017, p.1671). However, similar to Pearson & Clair (1998) and James et al. (2011), their analysis provides no concrete advice or framework for what leaders should do to influence the employee experience, such as what the charismatic behavior that would drive cohesion would look like.

Given the shortage of contributions from the crisis management field, a review of the growing practitioner literature provides some useful perspective in order to pinpoint more nuanced leadership behavior required to enhance motivation during crisis situations and provides some instructive links back to the key themes from the motivational and leadership areas.

#### Insights from Practitioner Articles Regarding Leader Behavior During COVID-19

A common theme across articles discussing effective leadership behavior during COVID-19 is the need for leaders and managers to show empathy and compassion. A Gallup article (Ratanjee & Gandhi, 2020) published in April 2020 proposed being present for employees and prioritizing well-being as two of three suggested strategies for leader effectiveness. A more in-depth analysis by Emmett et al. (2020) for McKinsey also cited focusing on well-being as a core strategy for leading and described how leaders should “focus on making a positive difference in people’s lives by demonstrating awareness, vulnerability, and empathy” (Emmett et al., 2020). A publication from KornFerry, which outlined strategies for managing during COVID-19, summarized eight steps that leaders should take. It highlighted empathy and compassion in its proposal that leaders “be empathetic” with specific guidance to acknowledge others’ stress and show that they care about people and not just the enterprise (KornFerry, 2020).

Communication was another theme that appeared across articles.

Ratanjee and Gandhi’s third suggested strategy for leaders during COVID-19 elaborated on the need to communicate a vision in order to “keep your team and your company anchored toward what truly endures - your purpose and your

values” (Ratanjee & Gandhi, 2020). KornFerry’s suggestions similarly incorporated communication strategies as they advised leaders to be calm, clear, and confident, and “communicate with realness, clarity, authenticity, and regularity” (KornFerry, 2020, p.14).

Echoing ideas from the motivational literature, Ratanjee & Gandhi, Emmett et al. and KornFerry all underlined leaders’ roles in facilitating meaning. Emmett et al. discussed how leaders should “connect people to something bigger than themselves and help them contribute” (Emmett et al., 2020, para. 15) and explained the particular importance of doing so during COVID-19 as “a sense of purpose can help employees navigate high levels of uncertainty and change” (Emmett et al., 2020, para.15). KornFerry’s eight leadership strategies incorporated similar ideas as they included “be purposeful” and “be inspiring” and proposed that leaders “remind people why it is so important that we exist” and “remember the purpose of the enterprise and rally people around it” (KornFerry, 2020, p.14). Ratanjee & Gandhi similarly advised leaders “find your calling to show your hope for the future and inspire it in your employees” (Ratanjee & Gandhi, 2020, para.12).

In summary, complementing the ideas already discussed from the motivation and leadership literature, the role of manager behavior demonstrating support and empathy seems to be particularly significant during COVID-19. Practitioners suggest that leaders do this through showing compassion and communicating as their employees face new sources of stress and uncertainty. The role of leaders in sharing and emphasizing the purpose and meaning of work



also appears important, whether through inspiring and rallying their teams or by helping employees find a greater sense of purpose as they navigate uncertainty.

### Limitations to Existing Studies

Despite the wealth of insights from motivation, leadership, and crisis management literature and emerging insights from practitioners, there remain numerous limitations to existing studies and research. Although the cited academic studies are rigorous in their methodology, several researchers have emphasized that many do not prove causation, even if strong correlation exists (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Benson, 2004; Hansen et al., 2013). An additional limitation, which is also highlighted by experts in the field, is the complexity of personalities and wealth of influencing factors which make it hard to determine the influence of any single factor. For example, Ryan and Deci (2000) explained in their work on SDT that contexts and personality differ over an individual's lifespan, and intrinsic motivation will be more likely to flourish in some contexts than others. With respect to personality, they also caveated that "people will be intrinsically motivated only for activities that hold intrinsic interest for them" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.71). As such it is difficult to draw any conclusions about what a leader should do to motivate an individual, as it may vary significantly from person to person. Langfred and Moyer (2004), in their work on autonomy, also raised the idea of differences between individuals and the difficulty of making overriding generalizations about effective motivational mechanisms. They underlined the importance of trait-based differences that differ across and within individual and shared that someone with task experience and skill would be more

likely to want more control than someone relatively inexperienced. As such, while the need for autonomy seems central to employee motivation, what level of autonomy is required and how a manager can create it can vary widely.

A further limitation which is referenced but not explored in the majority of motivation theories is the consideration of cultural factors in motivational processes and models. Diefendorff and Chandler (2001) and Kim et al. (2018) raised the fact that cultural differences will lead to variation in the experience individuals report. Diefendorff and Chandler explained, “culture is thought to shape the values and motives of individuals, which impact the particular goals individuals pursue when trying to satisfy their needs” (Diefendorff & Chandler, 2001 p.71). Kim et al. (2018) elaborated on “cultural moderators” such as the extent to which a certain culture is more individualistic vs collectivist, and how this can impact how employees may respond to different leadership styles and behaviors. While numerous examples are given of types of cultural moderators and possible impacts, none of them are explored in detail with respect to how motivational models would vary for different cultures and what this means for how leaders should interact with employees.

A final limitation that is also referenced in numerous studies, including those from Bakker and Demerouti (2007), Hansen et al. (2013) and Lesener et al. (2020) is the fact that many of the studies examining motivation rely solely on employee self-reporting. This is an inherent challenge across motivation and leadership studies, as collecting objective measures of motivation or leadership impact on motivation is complex and time consuming, and indeed there is no

standard measure or methodology for doing so. Using employee self-scores is not, in and of itself, a limitation, however, I think that questionnaires with items measured on a sliding scale are limited in the depth of information they can gather, as most do not ask individuals to explain what contributes to their score for each item. As such, while I see the use of surveys as a useful starting point for studying broad levels of employee motivation and trends, they are limited in their ability to determine the underlying causes of motivation (or demotivation) and benefit from being coupled with other research methods. To determine the role that leaders play on motivation, especially when compared with other factors, a more nuanced research approach, such as one that incorporates qualitative or mixed-methods techniques, is advantageous.

#### Gaps Worthy of Further Exploration

I believe that there is a noticeable gap in research that explores environmental factors, including the impact of leaders, that contribute to individuals' self-assessment of their motivation at work and specifically asks employees to attribute motivational sources. I believe a mixed-methods study that reviews results from self-reporting surveys (similar to those used in published studies) but combines them with qualitative interviews will be instructive. Understanding what contributes to individuals' scores will help to form a more detailed understanding of how environmental factors have consciously affected employees and may shed light on differences in personality, values and preferences, and specific manager behavior that may increase or decrease motivation. I also believe that many of the leadership techniques

proposed in the leadership literature may not be noticed by employees; as such a mixed-methods study will contribute to understanding not only employee perceptions of leaders' motivational role, but also how those perceptions have been formed.

A further gap I perceive is that there is little empirical research into effective management of people during times of crisis. The crisis literature presents strong frameworks for external stakeholder management and reshaping personal narratives (for example, seeing crisis as an opportunity) but makes a negligible contribution to the role of leaders regarding their internal followers (employees). The practitioner literature presents pragmatic and credible best practices which are rooted in experience and are consistent with principles from leadership and motivation literature, but many of these concepts and suggested behaviors remain untested in the environments of change and uncertainty at which they are directed. I hope to explore some of the suggested behaviors from emerging publications to understand whether employees have perceived these behaviors as well as the impact they have had on them, and to examine whether there are any statistically significant relationships between employee perceptions and demographic information (such as age, gender, nationality) and other characteristics (such as the size of the organization worked for). I hope to understand if further nuance can be uncovered regarding the specific motivational role that leaders have played.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

In this chapter I lay out the research methodology I elected to use, including my approach to collecting data, in order to answer my research question: *how do employees view the motivational role of leaders during COVID-19?* My goal was to understand more about what leaders, and more specifically what line managers, did during the COVID-19 pandemic that contributed to employees' motivation. I also wanted to gain a deeper insight into employees' motivation and work experience at this time in the face of the changes and stressors the pandemic created. I start by explaining my reasons for conducting both quantitative research and qualitative research, and what I hoped to gain from each approach. I then discuss how I designed and distributed my survey and how I analyzed survey response data. I follow this by outlining my qualitative research methods and the insights I hoped to gain from the interviews, including the design of my interview guide and selection of participants. Finally, I explain how I approached analyzing interview transcript data. At the end of this chapter, I discuss the implications of my overall approach and discuss how I identified and accounted for my own biases.

#### Mixed-Methods Approach

The objective of my capstone study was to discover if employees experienced a change in their personal motivation for work due to COVID-19, and if there was a relationship between the behavior of their manager and their

motivation for work. In order to do this, I decided to conduct a mixed-methods study, starting with a survey and followed by conducting 10 qualitative interviews with a subset of survey respondents.

#### Rationale for Quantitative Approach- Survey

As Doyle, Brady and Byrne highlighted in their 2009 overview, mixed-methods research emerged “in response to the limitations of the sole use of quantitative or qualitative methods” (Doyle et al., 2009, p.175). I believe that my approach allows me to combine concrete data from which I can infer potentially significant relationships with the more nuanced insight gained from qualitative interviews and thus incorporate and combine the benefits of each method. I designed my study so that the methods complemented each other in gaining a deeper and broader appreciation of the factors contributing to employee motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I conducted a survey to understand how employees rated different aspects of their motivation for work (for example their sense of pride in their work). Questions asked respondents to rate their level of motivation both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic using a 1-5 scale. My survey was designed in this way because my first objective in conducting quantitative research was to see if data suggested a decrease in any aspect of work motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second objective of my approach was to uncover whether there was support for some of the prevalent ideas from academic literature. Academic studies in the field of work motivation suggested there are several conditions (such as autonomy) that are conducive to promoting employee

motivation. My approach sought to identify whether employees observed their managers creating any of these conditions during COVID-19. My research approach was then structured to establish whether there was a statistical relationship between employees' observations of their managers' behavior (for example giving them autonomy) and their own level of motivation. The final objective of my survey approach was to gather data (via open text questions) about other aspects of relationships with managers or broader work experience during the COVID-19 pandemic that I had not considered in my initial research design.

The advantage using a quantitative survey was that it allowed me to gather information from a large number of individuals (giving me sufficient data from which to perform statistical analysis) in a time effective way. The survey only required between five and 10 minutes of respondents' time to complete and the link was easily distributed via email and text message. My survey questions enabled me to explore the prominent themes from academic literature on motivation by including 25 questions relating to six motivational categories.

#### Rationale for Qualitative Approach- Interviews

In conducting a series of qualitative interviews via a video platform (Zoom), after I had administered my survey, I was seeking to understand more about individual experiences during COVID-19 and to corroborate and explore ideas identified through analysis of my survey responses. While my survey sought to indicate what themes or categories of manager behavior might be the most significant, my interviews aimed to understand more about employee

perceptions of such behavior. For example, I could ask about how manager autonomy had been experienced, and if and why specific behavior had impacted the interviewee. I also wanted to follow up on any new themes identified through my review of responses to open text questions in the survey.

My interview approach allowed me to explore the nuances of themes identified from my analysis of survey responses as well as from my review of the academic literature. During each discussion I was able to probe more about the causal links between personal circumstances, the role of the manager, and motivation. For example, for individuals who shared that they struggled with motivation during COVID-19, I was able to ask whether childcare or other challenges or other personal stressors had contributed to their experience. I could also ask to what degree their motivation had been impacted by their individual expectations and by their manager; for example, some individuals may not have responded positively in the survey regarding their manager's behavior, but if they preferred to work autonomously without manager involvement this may have had little impact on their personal motivation. My interview questions were deliberately designed to help me to understand whether individuals were interpreting or responding to survey questions in the same way. For example, one question in the survey asked for individuals' assessment of the clarity of their managers' communication; my interviews allowed me to follow up and ask what communication individuals expected from their managers, and thus gain additional perspective as to how they defined and understood effective communication.



Another advantage of my interview approach was that it allowed me to observe interviewees' tone and nonverbal cues and to ask more detailed questions about their experiences and motivational state. This was especially insightful when I was able to uncover a story or experience which proved or disproved one of my own assumptions. For example, an individual could have an unusual or challenging relationship with their manager that may not have been revealed through their responses to the survey questions. My interviews provided the opportunity to gain additional information like this that helped me to form a fuller picture of their work experience and to understand underlying reasons for their responses to each question. Finally, in conducting a broad discussion on the topic of work and life experiences during COVID-19, I was able to cover a wide range of topics and to understand what factors had been significant in work and non-work experiences. I believe this was instrumental in interpreting my results.

#### Advantages of a Mixed-Methods Approach

The advantages of taking a mixed-methods research approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods are multiple (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Due to the order in which I completed my research, I was able to identify what appeared to be significant themes (by looking at survey data) and then establish if and why there was support for them (by asking interview questions). In the same way I could use probing questions in my interviews to test my initial research assumptions as well as any emerging interpretations I was forming. For example, an initial assumption from my research was that

employees would experience lower motivation during COVID-19. Survey data provided weak support for this assumption and I formed some hypotheses as to why this might be. Interview questions allowed me both to test my original assumption and my emerging interpretations by asking questions about what had changed in interviewees' motivation and what had contributed to any changes.

Another advantage of the mixed-methods approach was that it allowed me to triangulate by comparing perspectives gained from both the statistical analysis of my survey data and the review and thematic coding of my interview transcripts. For example, if a theme was prominent within survey data but did not seem important to my interviewees, I could consider why this was the case and question what the apparent disparity meant. I could do likewise for themes that did not appear significant based on analysis of survey data, but which emerged strongly when analyzing my interview transcripts. Finally, by reviewing the open text commentary from survey responses, I was able to identify new themes and ideas which I could explore by incorporating questions into my interview guide and form a fuller understanding of the different factors impacting employee experiences.

### Survey Design

My complete survey can be found in Appendix A. It was designed in five sections. Section 1 contained four questions asking participants whether during COVID-19 the main tasks and responsibilities of their job changed significantly, whether they encountered significant childcare challenges, and whether they or someone close to them experienced either health or financial challenges.

Section 2 asked respondents about their personal motivation for work. Respondents were asked to rate their degree of agreement with seven statements when thinking about their work experience both prior to and during COVID-19. Agreement was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Six of the seven questions were taken from the Utrecht Work Engagement Survey (Schaufeli et al., 2006), included in Appendix G, a respected academic instrument which measures employee engagement using three dimensions: vigor, dedication and absorption. Two questions were taken from each dimension and a final question was added asking whether respondents felt engaged with their work/job. The complete survey can be found in Appendix A. Note that the Utrecht Engagement Survey typically uses a frequency scale of 1-7; however, for consistency and comparability with the remainder of my survey I opted to use a 1-5 Likert scale with levels of agreement, and so I adjusted the wording of questions to adapt to this.

Section 3 of my survey asked respondents (using the same 1-5 Likert scale with levels of agreement) to comment on 25 statements in relation to their manager's behavior. Questions were clustered around six characteristics of manager behavior, identified via my review of academic literature. These were: empathy, autonomy, communication, building competence, facilitating the meaning of work, and demonstrating support. I drew on examples and anecdotes from literature on both motivation and leadership styles to design questions. Each question started "My manager"; for example, "*My manager lets me complete my work in the way I think best*"

Section 4 of the survey contained two open ended questions. The first asked if respondents' managers had related to them differently during COVID-19. The second asked if there was anything about their work experience during COVID-19 that the survey had not addressed that they thought was important. Finally, Section 5 of the survey asked for demographic information including gender, age, nationality, country of work and industry worked in. It also asked if respondents were willing to be interviewed about their responses and, if so, asked them to provide an email address.

### Survey Distribution

I entered my questions into the *Qualtrics* survey platform and produced a link that I could share via email and text message. I added an introduction to the survey explaining the purpose of the survey and the fact that all responses would be kept completely confidential. For Section 3 of the survey (employee observation of manager behavior) I opted for *Qualtrics* to display the order of questions randomly. This was because there were 25 questions under six categories, and I didn't want respondents to infer broader categories through the question order and answer all the questions in that category in the same way. I piloted my survey with two individuals to ensure that the questions were easily understandable, and the overall survey was clear. Based on their feedback I made some small wording changes to questions.

### Survey Sample Selection

In late October 2020 I used purposeful sampling (Coyne, 1997) in sending my survey link to individuals in my personal and professional network in the US

and UK. I also used snowball sampling (Coyne, 1997) to ask individuals to forward on to anyone else who they thought would be willing to complete it. Additionally I asked the *Organizational Dynamics* Program Coordinator to distribute the survey to a mail list of current and former students. In doing so I was able to solicit information from individuals across different age groups, nationalities, industries and organizational sizes. I kept the survey open for 10 days, during which time I collected 203 complete responses. I closed the survey and downloaded the data from these responses on the eleventh day, at which point I deleted any incomplete surveys.

My survey was also used to identify a sample for my qualitative interviews, as it included a question at the end that invited respondents to provide their email address if they were willing to be interviewed and share more about their experiences.

#### Approach to Survey Data Analysis

I analyzed my survey data in the following ways:

I used the first question (*During COVID-19 did the main tasks and responsibilities of your job change significantly?*) to identify surveys to remove from my sample for statistical analysis. This is because the purpose of my research was to understand how employees were motivated for their work and impacted by their manager's behavior during COVID-19. To do so I needed to remove from my analysis any data from respondents who were performing a substantially different job during the pandemic. Similarly, if anyone in this section or in later open-ended questions indicated that they changed jobs or managers

during or immediately prior to COVID-19, I also removed their data to help control for like for like work experience, impacted only by their experience of COVID-19 and the behavior of their manager.

Using this smaller sample of 163 completed surveys, I performed two separate analyses. Firstly, I reviewed responses to the seven questions within Section 2 (employee self-report of motivation). I reviewed change in score for each question to see if there was an increase or decrease during COVID-19. Secondly, I reviewed the situational factors shared in Part 1 of the survey and performed a further analysis on the motivation questions. Situational questions asked whether during COVID-19 individuals had experienced health or financial challenges in their household or close family, and whether they had experienced childcare challenges. For each situational question I identified two subgroups—those who had answered yes and those who had answered no—for example, those who had experienced childcare challenges during COVID-19 and those who hadn't. Using these subgroups, I reviewed the average change in motivation score for each motivation question using a t-test, effectively ascertaining how measures of motivation changed for those who had experienced a situational stressor and those who had not.

For my second analysis I performed a series of statistical regressions to determine the coefficients between any of the individual manager behaviors and any of the employee self-motivation questions, after controlling for demographic factors. For my final analysis, I reviewed the responses to open text questions to

understand any new themes shared by respondents, particularly where the same idea was shared by multiple respondents.

### Interview Design

My interview questions covered similar themes to the survey. Opening questions confirmed the interviewee's role/occupation, age range, educational level and asked them about their personal stressors, work, and motivation for work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviewees were then asked whether their manager had played a role motivating them and how they saw their manager's role. The interview was then structured around the six categories of manager behavior: autonomy, building competence, communication, facilitating meaning, empathy, and support. Interviewees were asked what role their manager had played in each of these regards. Finally, with respect to COVID-19, interviewees were asked whether their manager's role had changed at all, whether the divide between work and home had changed, and what changes they had experienced that they believed would continue. The full interview guide is included in Appendix B.

### Interviewee Sample Selection

Potential interviewees were selected from 63 survey respondents who had indicated that they were willing to share more about their experiences. Twenty individuals were selected who represented an equal mix of sexes and a variety of age ranges, industries and nationalities. All were contacted via email to explain the purpose and time commitment required and ask if they were willing to participate. Eleven of the 20 replied within a one-week period, of whom 10 were

selected. Those selected represented an equal mix of sexes and a range of age, nationalities and industries. Two individuals responded over two weeks after receiving the email, indicating their willingness to be interviewed, but the sample had already been selected and interviews scheduled by this time and they were therefore informed that their participation was not required.

### Conducting Interviews

10 interviews were conducted via Zoom over a two-week period during mid-November 2020. Demographic information for interviewees is included in Appendix E and in Chapter 4. Interviewees were assured at the time of scheduling and again at the start of each interview that their responses would remain confidential, and that any quotes or thoughts that were included in my research would not be attributed. Each interview was scheduled for one hour, although some were shorter if all questions had been answered and the interviewee confirmed there was nothing further that they wanted to share. Interviews were, with the interviewee's permission, recorded and were later transcribed. At the end of each interview I asked if there was anything that the interview had not covered that the interviewee felt was important to share regarding their work experiences during COVID-19.

### Interview Analysis

Interview transcripts were reviewed, and I used thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify the principal themes and subthemes that were discussed across all 10 interviews. A complete list of thematic codes can be found in Appendix F. Based on my coding, I aggregated examples and interview



excerpts under sub themes. This enabled me to conduct further analysis, for example to determine how many interviewees talked about each theme and to compare the variety of anecdotes and examples that were shared in relation to each of the respective themes.

### Combined Analysis

I used statistical analysis of survey responses to identify what were the most significant relationships between manager behavior and motivation. These relationships were cross referenced with examples under each of my thematic codes to discover to what degree such relationships were mentioned by interviewees, as well as if there were any other themes. Interview excerpts were also reviewed to gain a deeper understanding of stories and examples that underpinned themes and relationships. Themes from a review of open text responses to the survey were also reviewed alongside interview transcript data to identify ideas that had not been researched, and therefore not incorporated into survey questions, but appeared nonetheless important. Finally, both survey and interview data were reviewed for insights or anecdotes that were notable or appeared interesting but that had not been addressed elsewhere in my analysis.

### Consideration of Biases within Methodology

In Chapter 1 (Introduction) I summarized some of my potential biases. In order to mitigate against the influence of these, I did several things within my methodology. While the nature of my statistical survey data facilitated a higher level of objectivity, I also employed quantitative methods to analyze my more subjective interview data in order to limit the impact of my biases. I did this by

performing a thematic coding analysis of my transcripts, analyzing how many times a specific theme was mentioned, and categorizing interviewee responses to specific questions (for example, when asking if individuals' motivation had changed during COVID-19 my categories were: motivation was higher, motivation was lower, motivation was unchanged, and motivation was higher in some respects and lower in others). For insights gained predominantly from interviews, I analyzed the prevalence of a theme across interviewees as my primary test of its significance. In both my survey and interview, questions were designed to be open and not to lead the respondent or interviewee; for example, interviewees were asked if their manager gave them autonomy, not what autonomy their manager gave them.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I summarized the methodology I employed to answer my research question: *how do employees view the motivational role of leaders during COVID-19?* I elected to use a mixed-methods approach as it allowed me to gain a more detailed understanding of motivation during COVID-19 and to triangulate between quantitative survey and qualitative interview data. I designed a 54-item survey in order to test my assumptions about the impact of COVID-19 on employee motivation and the manager behaviors that had the strongest statistical relationship with employee motivation. I distributed my survey using purposeful and snowball sampling by sending to those in my network and asking them to forward to others in their own networks. I designed a qualitative interview

guide to understand what had contributed to individuals' responses to the survey and how they perceived their manager's role.

Using a subset of respondents to my survey (who had indicated within the survey that they were prepared to be interviewed) I then conducted 10 in-person interviews via Zoom. Interviewees were selected using demographic and work factors they had disclosed in the survey, in order to include a range of ages, nationalities, organizational sizes and industries and an equal balance of sexes. Statistical regressions were performed over the survey response data to determine which manager behavior had the strongest relationship with motivation as well as to analyze whether motivation had changed during COVID-19. Thematic coding was used with the interview transcripts to determine the most prevalent themes. Throughout I was conscious of potential biases and worked to ensure my methodology was objective in order to mitigate against these. In the following two chapters I discuss the results and implications of my findings.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH RESULTS

#### Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapters, the objective of my research is to answer the question: *How do employees perceive the motivational role of leaders during COVID-19?* In the previous chapter (Research Methodology) I explained the approach I elected to take and how I proposed to analyze data from both my survey responses and interviews. I now discuss the results from both parts of my research. I start by sharing the demographics of my survey respondents and interviewees before summarizing data and themes from my findings that did not appear to be significant, data and themes that appeared notable, and finally data and themes that appear the most significant. In the next and final chapter (Interpretation of Results and Conclusions) I discuss the conclusions I have drawn based on these results, further implications, and suggested areas for future study.

#### Survey Responses Used for Analysis

Before sharing my results, it is important to reiterate how I identified a subset of completed survey responses for the purposes of statistical analysis. In designing my survey, I wanted to understand how experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, including factors outside of work, had impacted work motivation. In order to do this, I included four questions in Section 1 of the survey to determine what personal changes individuals had experienced during

COVID-19. Two of these questions (questions 1 and 3) additionally asked respondents to elaborate on their answers. The questions were:

- 1) *During COVID-19 did the main tasks and responsibilities of your job change significantly? If yes, please specify*
- 2) *Did you/ a member of your household/ a close relative suffer significant health issues due to COVID-19?*
- 3) *Did you/ a member of your household/ a close relative suffer financial loss due to COVID-19 (for example reduced income, loss of job)? If yes, please specify*
- 4) *Did you encounter significant childcare challenges due to COVID-19?*

The purpose of asking these questions was twofold. Firstly, in gathering this data I was able to remove from my sample survey responses from individuals who were performing a substantially different job, and therefore whose job motivation may have been attributable to this rather than to the broader impacts of COVID-19. I identified the survey responses of those who had answered 'yes' to question 1 (*During COVID-19 did the main tasks and responsibilities of your job change significantly?*). For each person who had responded 'yes', I reviewed the additional comments they had provided regarding the nature of changes in their job. Some individuals indicated that they were working from home or interacting with colleagues virtually but mentioned no further changes; I kept responses for these respondents within my sample. Other respondents indicated that they were performing a very different job, for example one individual reported they were spending much of their time contact tracing for

their organization. I removed the data for these individuals as their responses suggested that their job was substantially different. I also reviewed responses provided to open text questions for all remaining respondents within the sample. I removed data for anyone who indicated in any response that they had changed jobs or changed managers either during the COVID-19 pandemic or immediately before. This left me with a sample for analysis of 163 completed surveys. Note that I used this reduced sample of 163 for the purposes of analyzing the impact of manager behavior on motivation. I used all 203 completed surveys to understand more about overall work experiences during COVID-19, such as in my review of responses to open text questions. Demographics of my sample are summarized later in this chapter.

The second purpose of gathering data about the personal impact of COVID-19 on individuals was to be able to identify relevant variables which I could analyze alongside the changes to motivation. Thus, I could also control for these variables in my statistical analysis calculating the correlation between responses to manager behavior and personal motivation questions.

#### Use of Interview Data to Determine Relationship Between Manager Behavior and Motivation

My interview questions were designed to gather further qualitative data and examples regarding manager behavior within each of the manager behavior categories, for example, *Is your manager empathetic?* While no specific questions asked interviewees what the impact of a specific manager behavior was on their motivation, follow up questions were used to uncover this

information. For example, if an interviewee responded that their manager was empathetic, a follow up question asked how this empathy was reflected in their manager's behavior, and a further follow up question asked what the impact of this specific manager behavior was on them.

### Demographics of Survey Respondents and Interviewees

As shared in Chapter 3 (Research Methodology), I used snowball and purposeful sampling in order to obtain responses to my survey, before selecting a sample of potential interviewees from those who had indicated they were open to this in the survey. In Tables 1-6 below I summarize the demographic characteristics of the survey sample over which I performed my analysis. This information is also included in Appendix D. Demographics of the total survey respondents, inclusive of those whose surveys were excluded for the purposes of statistical analysis, is included in Appendix C. Within Tables 7-12 I summarize demographic characteristics of my interviewees. This is also included in Appendix E. It was notable in the survey sample that 70% of respondents were female, over two thirds were American, and 32% worked in the Financial Services industry. Within my interview sample there was an equal balance of genders but, similar to the survey, a high proportion were American (seven of 10) and worked in the Financial Services Industry (four of 10). My interview sample was also dominated by those working for large organizations as eight of my 10 interviewees worked for organizations with between 5,000 and 50,000 employees.

Table 1. Gender of Survey Respondents

<b>Gender</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Female	113	69
Male	50	31

Table 2. Age of Survey Respondents

<b>Age Range</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
18-24	2	1
25-34	49	30
35-44	49	30
45-54	31	19
55-64	25	16
65+	7	4

Table 3. Nationality of Survey Respondents

<b>Nationality</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
United Kingdom	36	22
United States	107	66
Other	20	12

Table 4. Country of Work of Survey Respondents

<b>Country of Work</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
United Kingdom	37	23
United States	117	72
Other	9	5



Table 5. Industry of Work of Survey Respondent

<b>Industry</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Construction	4	2
Education	14	9
Financial Services	54	33
Healthcare/ health services	11	7
IT	3	2
Manufacturing	9	6
Not for profit	3	2
Pharmaceuticals	4	2
Professional services	29	18
Public services	2	1
Telecommunications	2	1
Transportation	3	2
Other	25	15

Table 6. Organization Size of Survey Respondents

<b># of Employees in Organization</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
0-100	17	11
10-500	15	9
500-5,000	30	18
5,000-50,000	80	49
50,000+	21	13

Table 7. Gender of Interviewees

<b>Gender</b>	<b># of Interviewees</b>	<b>% of Interviewees</b>
Female	5	50%
Male	5	50%

Table 8. Age of Interviewees

<b>Age Range</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
25-34	1	10
35-44	3	30
45-54	2	20
55-64	4	40

Table 9. Nationality of Interviewees

<b>Nationality</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
United Kingdom	2	20
United States	7	70
Other	1	10

Table 10. County of Work of Interviewees

<b>Country of Work</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
United Kingdom	2	20
United States	7	70
Other	1	10

Table 11. Industry of Work of Interviewees

<b>Industry</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Education	1	10
Financial Services	4	40
Healthcare or health services	1	10
IT	1	10
Professional services	1	10
Public services	1	10
Other	1	10

Table 12. Organization Size of Interviewees

<b># of Employees in Organization</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
0-100	1	10
100-500	0	0
500-5,000	0	0
5,000-50,000	8	80
50,000+	1	10

### Results Which Do Not Appear to be Significant

Result 1: Motivation for Work Did Not Appear to Change Significantly During COVID-19 or to Have Been Impacted Greatly by Experience of Personal Stressors

Survey Data for Change in Work Motivation. For the first part of my analysis I wanted to discover if survey respondents' motivation for work had changed during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to before. To do this I calculated the change in motivation (as measured by taking the motivation score during COVID-19 and subtracting the motivation prior to COVID-19 score) for each of the seven motivation questions. For example, if a respondent had a score of 4 prior to COVID-19 and a score of 3 during COVID-19, this would be reflected as -1.0 in the calculated change variable.

Table 13 summarizes the seven questions in my survey that related to motivation and the *Change Variable* column represents the difference in average score for each question from my sample of 163 respondents. For example, the score of -0.23 for the first question represents the drop in average respondent score from 4.03 to 3.8 comparing their degree of agreement with the statement reflecting on their work experience prior to COVID-19 compared to those during COVID-19.

Table 13. Change in Motivation Score During COVID-19

<b>Question</b>	<b>Change Variable</b>
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	-0.23
I persevere at my job, even when things are not going well	-0.18
I am proud of the work I do	-0.14
I find the work that I do meaningful and purposeful	-0.08
I feel like my work/job is worth putting effort in	-0.11
I am frequently immersed in my work	-0.12
I feel engaged with my work/job	-0.18

These results show that there was a reduction in average score for each motivation question when looking at work experiences prior to COVID-19

compared to work experiences during COVID-19. The largest decreases were for the first two questions: *When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work* and *I persevere at my job, even when things are not going well*. Both of these questions were taken from the Utrecht Work Engagement Survey questions designed to measure the degree of employee vigor, which is defined as “high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence in the face of difficulties” (Bakker et al., 2007, p.274). The next largest difference is for the question *I feel engaged with my work/job*.

Following this analysis of change variables, I then looked to identify if the average change in motivation was impacted by the personal stressors individuals experienced, as shared in the answers to questions in Section 1, and therefore to understand whether stressors outside of work had a bearing on work motivation. I performed an analysis based on the responses provided to questions about whether individuals had experienced a health issue, financial loss themselves or in their household, or immediate family, and the responses to the question about whether they had experienced childcare challenges. To do so, I performed t-tests on the subgroup means for each change variable, with the subgroups defined according to indicating “yes” or “no” to each personal stressor question, at the 95% confidence level. Results of the t-tests are provided in Tables 15-17. Questions have been abbreviated as explained in Table 14.

Table 14. Abbreviations for Questions used in Subsequent Tables

Question	Abbreviation
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	Feel like work
I persevere at my job, even when things are not going well	Persevere
I am proud of the work I do	Proud
I find the work that I do meaningful and purposeful	Meaningful
I feel like my work/job is worth putting effort in	Effort
I am frequently immersed in my work	Immersed
I feel engaged with my work/job	Engaged

Table 15. T-test for Question: Did You/ a Member of Your Household/ a Close  
Relative Suffer Significant Health Issues Due to COVID-19?

	Health issue		Diff	t-stat
	n=14 Yes	n=149 No		
Feel like work (chg)	-0.786	-0.181	0.605	2.315*
Persevere (chg)	-0.214	-0.174	0.040	0.279
Proud (chg)	-0.071	-0.148	-0.076	-0.456
Meaningful (chg)	-0.143	-0.074	0.058	0.412
Effort (chg)	-0.214	-0.101	0.114	0.797
Immersed (chg)	-0.214	-0.114	0.100	0.538
Engaged (chg)	-0.357	-0.168	0.189	0.820

\*p&lt;0.05

Table 16. T-test for question: Did you/ a Member of Your Household/ a Close  
Relative Suffer Financial Loss Due to COVID-19?

	Financial issue		Diff	t-stat
	n=54 Yes	n=109 No		
Feel like work (chg)	-0.278	-0.211	0.067	0.423
Persevere (chg)	-0.148	-0.193	-0.045	-0.525
Proud (chg)	0.130	-0.147	-0.276	-0.172
Meaningful (chg)	-0.204	-0.018	0.185	1.877
Effort (chg)	-0.130	-0.101	0.029	0.338
Immersed (chg)	-0.093	-0.138	-0.045	-0.406
Engaged (chg)	-0.278	-0.138	0.140	0.690

\*p&lt;0.05

Table 17. T-test for Question: Did you Encounter Significant Childcare Challenges Due to COVID-19?

	Childcare challenge		Diff	t-stat
	n=33 Yes	n=130 No		
Feel like work (chg)	-0.121	-0.262	-0.140	-0.760
Persevere (chg)	-0.152	-0.185	-0.033	-0.333
Proud (chg)	-0.152	-0.138	0.013	0.112
Meaningful (chg)	-0.061	-0.085	-0.024	-0.205
Effort (chg)	-0.121	-0.108	0.014	0.136
Immersed (chg)	-0.303	-0.077	0.226	1.757
Engaged (chg)	-0.273	-0.162	0.111	0.690

\*p<0.05

Although individuals appear to have experienced lower motivation during COVID-19, the tables above show that there seems to be a relatively weak relationship between those experiencing personal stressors (health, financial and childcare issues) and their change in motivation for work. The only statistically significant result (represented by \*) was in the relationship between those who had encountered a health issue as a result of COVID-19 in their household or immediate family and the inclination they had in the morning for going to work. However, given this analysis is based on a sample of only 14 individuals, more research would be required to support this finding.

Interview Data for Change in Work Motivation. Data from my interviews provided further context regarding the impact of COVID-19 on individual motivation. Each interviewee was asked whether their personal motivation for work was impacted during COVID-19. A summary of responses from my 10 interviewees is provided in Table 18.

Table 18. Interviewee Responses to Question About Change in Motivation  
During COVID-19

<b>Change to motivation</b>	<b>Number of Interviewees</b>
Motivation was lower	3
Motivation was the same	2
Motivation was lower in some respects and higher in others	3
Motivation was higher	2

While three of my sample indicated that motivation for work was noticeably lower, two reported no change, two reported higher motivation and three indicated that their motivation was higher in some respects and lower in others. The ways in which lower motivation change manifested itself were varied. For example, interviewee #3 spoke of a struggle to focus and shared, “I’ve really struggled with my motivation, it, just seems like some days I just really have to force myself to sit here and do the work. I just I haven’t, I feel like my focus has been lacking.”

The factors that contributed to negative motivation also varied by individual but five of 10 specifically referenced a feeling of fatigue or burnout, and four of 10 referenced changes in modes of interacting having an impact. For example, interviewee #10 explained, “The people that we’re used to seeing in the office on a regular basis, kind of, you know, where we used to rely on informal methods of communication. We had to formalize those. And that was a little tougher to do.”

Two interviewees shared that they felt more motivated by work and three felt more motivated in certain elements of their role. This increase in motivation seemed for most to relate to a greater sense of purpose or contribution; for

example, interviewee #9 commented, “I would say that my personal motivation was impacted in a good way. You know it kind of provided an opportunity to like double down and like carry some weight.”

## Result 2: The Relationship Between Manager Behavior and Employee

### Perseverance and Immersion Appeared to Be Weak

Survey Data for Perseverance and Immersion. For the second part of my analysis, I performed a series of statistical regressions to review the relationship between respondents’ observations of manager behavior (as measured by the 25 questions in Section 3) and self-reported motivation (as measured by the seven self-reported motivation questions in Section 2). Because Section 3 specifically asked for respondents to answer with respect to manager behavior during Covid-19, I only used data that pertained to motivation during Covid-19 and not prior. In performing my regressions, I controlled for both situational (personal stressors) and demographic variables (age, gender, nationality and country of work).

The statistical relationship between each manager behavior statement and each self-reported motivation question is indicated in the series of tables below. Each number represents the coefficient from my sample of 163 completed surveys between a single manager behavior statement (for example: *My manager acknowledges when I do good work*) and a single statement related to personal motivation (for example: *When I get up in the morning I feel like going to work*). The number denotes the regression coefficient, after controlling for demographic and situational factors (as determined by responses given to questions in Section 1 and Section 5 of the survey), between the responses for



each question. For example, the coefficient of 0.208 for the relationship between *My manager encourages me to take calculated risks* and *I am frequently immersed in my work* in the table below means that a one unit increase in manager allowance for taking calculated risks is associated with a 0.208 increase in the frequency of immersion response. Coefficients that are statistically significant are identified with \*\*\* (95% confidence level), followed by those marked \*\* (99% confidence level) and then those marked \* (99.9% confidence level).

The correlation between observations of manager behavior and two of the motivation questions appears relatively weak, especially when compared to the remaining motivation questions. These questions related to perseverance (*I persevere at my job, even when things are not going well*) and immersion (*I am frequently immersed in my work*). Table 19 quantifies the correlation between each manager behavior question and these two motivation questions. Questions have been abbreviated in the table headings to *Perseverance* and *Immersion*.

Table 19: Correlation Between Manager Behavior Questions and Motivation Questions Relating to Perseverance and Immersion

Question	Perseverance	Immersion
<b>Autonomy</b>		
My manager trusts me to think for myself and make my own decisions	0.102	0.172
My manager lets me complete my work in the way I think best	0.140*	0.0814
My manger does not micromanage me	0.077	0.038
My manager involves me in decision making that impacts my role and the role of the team	-0.022	0.088
My manager is open to new ideas from me and my colleagues	-0.007	0.0572
My manager encourages me to take calculated risks	0.093	0.208**
<b>Competence</b>		
My manager expresses confidence in me	0.105	0.009
My manager gives me feedback that helps me improve my performance	-0.028	0.034
My manager acknowledges when I do good work	0.076	0.041
My manager encourages me to stretch myself	0.091	0.132
My manager helps me to find development opportunities	0.033	0.023
<b>Meaning</b>		
My manager explains how my work fits in to the bigger picture	0.095	0.081
My manager makes me feel like I am part of something bigger than my own contribution	0.052	0.125
My manager makes me feel inspired by the purpose of my work	0.072	0.165**
<b>Communication</b>		
My manager shares information with me beyond essential facts required to do my job	-0.010	0.118
My manager communicates clearly	0.023	0.112
<b>Empathy</b>		
My manager asks me about my well-being	0.021	0.018
My manager listens when I tell him/her about my well-being	0.018	-0.051
My manager proactively reaches out to me	0.015	0.073
My manager makes time to speak with me beyond conversations about work	0.009	0.001
My manager is flexible when I face logistical challenges (e.g. childcare issues)	0.0582	0.029
<b>Support</b>		
My manager provides me with support when I need it	-0.012	0.049
My manager ensures I have the resources I need to do my job	0.033	0.014
My manager provides helpful responses when I share work issues/challenges with him/her	0.013	0.115
My manager sets a positive tone for the team	0.091	0.106

There are some notable correlations between managers who encouraged the taking of calculated risks and inspired employees with the purpose of their work and immersion in work. There are also correlations between managers who allow employees to complete their work in the way they think best and employees who consider themselves perseverant. However, these relationships are much smaller than most relationships to the other five motivation questions, as discussed below.

### Results Which are Notable

There was a significantly stronger relationship between manager behavior and the remaining five motivation questions. I will discuss the impact of the six categories of manager behavior on these five questions below, in increasing order of significance, starting with manager behavior that facilitated autonomy. In each section I will start by sharing the results from my analysis of survey data, followed by insights gained from the interviews.

#### Result 3: There Are Many Correlations Between Managers Who Facilitate Autonomy and Employee Motivation

Survey Data for Enabling Autonomy. The statistical relationships shown in Table 20 reveal that there are many strong correlations between employees' experiences of their manager creating conditions of autonomy and their motivation for work. The most significant relationships exist between those whose managers give them trust and autonomy to think for themselves and make their own decisions, those with managers who encourage them to take calculated risks, and those whose managers involve them in decision making.

While the relationships are less strong, there are also notable correlations between managers who do not micromanage and who are open to new ideas from their teams and the self-reported motivation of the employees who work for them. There appears to be a weaker link between managers who are open to new ideas from their teams and motivation. My subsequent interviews provided further insight into how employees' managers created autonomy for them.

Table 20. Relationship Between Questions Related to Manager Autonomy and Questions Relating to Employee Motivation

Question	Morning	Pride	Meaningful	Worth Effort	Engaged
My manager trusts me to think for myself and make my own decisions	0.329***	0.337***	0.355***	0.314***	0.307**
My manager lets me complete my work in the way I think best	0.267**	0.191*	0.282**	0.257**	0.323***
My manager does not micromanage me	0.239**	0.152*	0.192*	0.213**	0.180*
My manager involves me in decision making that impacts my role and the role of the team	0.216**	0.207***	0.192**	0.144*	0.225***
My manager is open to new ideas from me and my colleagues	0.165	0.152*	0.123	0.157*	0.166*
My manager encourages me to take calculated risks	0.339***	0.282***	0.351***	0.319***	0.329***

Interview Data for Enabling Autonomy. Of my interviewees, nine of 10 reported their managers granted them autonomy, and all interviewees cited positive examples of how this impacted their work experience. For example, interviewee #8 elaborated in the context of personal development, "One of the ways she tries to address that [the need for employee's own development] with

me I think is to really encourage me to, you know, take my own ideas and interests. Explore nontraditional ideas and opportunities, without her interference really.”

Other interviewees spoke about their manager giving them the space to work independently; for example, interviewee #6 described, “He trusts me to work on things independently, with little or no support in lots of cases.”

#### Result 4: There Are Many Correlations Between Responsive Manager Behavior and Employee Motivation

While the results above for autonomy indicate that those managers who proactively facilitate such conditions have more highly motivated employees, results suggest that manager responsiveness to their employees’ needs was also correlated with higher levels of motivation. Responsiveness is assessed through two categories of behavior: empathy and support. Empathy is manager behavior that responds to employees’ emotional needs, such as listening, asking about well-being, or showing flexibility in the face of personal needs and challenges. Support is manager behavior that responds to employees’ practical needs in order to get their job done, for example providing resources and being available to answer questions.

Survey Data for Empathy. Table 21 reveals many relationships between employees witnessing empathetic behavior by their manager and reporting higher motivation for work. However, these relationships are not as strong as for other categories of manager behavior explored in the survey. Manager behavior regarding flexibility and making time for non-work conversation had a relatively

low correlation with motivation. For managers who asked about a person's well-being, there was a slightly stronger relationship with motivation, especially on employees' feeling of pride in their work. However, only managers who listened during conversations about well-being showed consistent strong correlations with employee motivation. When examining the individual motivation questions, there appears to be relatively low correlation between manager empathy and employees' desire to go to work in the morning, as only one question (*My manager proactively reaches out to me*) seemed to have a notable link with this dimension of motivation (as showed by the \*). Interview data was more illuminating regarding manager empathy and the impact of this behavior on employees, as discussed below.

Table 21. Relationship Between Questions Related to Manager Empathy and Questions Relating to Employee Motivation

Question	Morning	Pride	Meaningful	Worth Effort	Engaged
My manager asks me about my well-being	0.0360	0.185**	0.125	0.135*	0.149*
My manager listens when I tell him/her about my well-being	0.143	0.249** *	0.253***	0.196**	0.239**
My manager proactively reaches out to me	0.165*	0.145*	0.135*	0.215***	0.157*
My manager makes time to speak with me beyond conversations about work	0.0565	0.0606	0.0594	0.123*	0.118
My manager is flexible when I face logistical challenges (e.g. childcare issues)	0.122	0.136	0.205	0.228*	0.195

Interview Data for Empathy. Ten out of 10 of interviewees agreed that their managers had been empathetic during COVID-19 and all shared examples

regarding work and personal life; for example, interviewee #1 described how their manager had created opportunities for employees to discuss their emotions and challenges in sharing, “I saw her probing, creating a forum where we could, you know, talk about something if things were challenging.”

Others cited examples of how their manager had supported them through personally stressful situation. Interviewee #7 shared an example of when a close friend was having financial difficulties when in sharing, “I just burst into tears. I was like I cannot believe how mean and evil these people can be. So she was like okay, she listened to the story, and she said, ‘You know what, let me step in that. Let me handle this.’ And I signed off for the day. I was done.”

All interviewees shared feelings of gratitude for their managers’ empathy and discussed how important it had been to their ability to manage challenges; however, it was less clear whether this had had an impact on their motivation and energy for work. No direct question was asked about the impact of manager empathy on work motivation, but it was notable that no interviewees made an explicit link in this regard in the examples that they shared.

Survey Data for Support. Conversely, when looking at more logistical and practical responses provided by managers, statistical regressions reveal many strong relationships between employees’ assessment of supportive manager behavior and higher levels of motivation for work, as seen in Table 22. The impact on motivation appears to be particularly strong regarding feelings of pride in work and that work was worth putting effort in. However, there are significant relationships between all four questions related to supportive manager behavior

and all five questions that measured motivation for work. The lowest coefficient across all 20 relationships was 0.197, and all coefficients were statistically significant. Interview data provided further insight into the nature of manager support and its impact on employees.

Table 22. Relationship Between Questions Related to Manager Support and Questions Relating to Employee Motivation

Question	Morning	Pride	Meaningful	Worth Effort	Engaged
My manager provides me with support when I need it	0.228**	0.291***	0.242**	0.244***	0.262***
My manager ensures I have the resources I need to do my job	0.230**	0.234**	0.213**	0.304***	0.197*
My manager provides helpful responses when I share work issues/challenges with him/her	0.312***	0.235***	0.291***	0.268***	0.311***
My manager sets a positive tone for the team	0.201*	0.196**	0.227**	0.359***	0.229**

Interview Data for Support. All interviewees affirmed that their manager had provided support during COVID-19 and this had had a positive impact on work. For example, interviewee #5 shared how their manager makes herself available: “She'll be in meetings, but she'll be able to get in touch with me, she'll say, ‘Do I need to pull myself out of a meeting, what do you need from me?’” Interviewee #3 shared how their manager helped their team procure equipment when they described their manager: “He was very good about resources. If anybody needed a monitor. They told us very early on, you know, just order what you need even if it’s an expensive piece of equipment.”



While no direct question asked whether supportive behaviors enhanced motivation for work, the way in which manager behavior was described made it clear that it had removed work stressors or impediments in completing key tasks, and this had alleviated negative work experiences. For example, Interviewee #10 explained,

Well, one thing is, we, we made a grab for some additional technological resources we had thinking about Bloomberg subscriptions in particular....and I've talked to him about future staffing needs for our team. You know he's aware of what we need, and you know he's approved the staff one, you know, you know one coming up.

#### Result 5: There Are Many Correlations Between Manager Communication and Employee Motivation

There are many ways in which managers communicate with their teams. Two categories of manager behavior were examined regarding communication within the survey and interviews. The first related to how managers shared broader information and the degree to which there was clarity in their communication. The second related to specific communication from managers which facilitated meaning, such as explaining to employees how their work fit into a broader vision or purpose.

Survey Data for Communication. Table 23 shows notable coefficients between employees' assessment of their manager's communication and their motivation for work, especially regarding their assessment of whether their

manager communicated clearly. However, a review of the interview data is more illuminating regarding this topic.

Table 23. Relationship Between Questions Related to Manager Communication and Questions Relating to Employee Motivation

Question	Morning	Pride	Meaningful	Worth Effort	Engaged
My manager shares information with me beyond essential facts required to do my job	0.202*	0.207**	0.209**	0.199**	0.209**
My manager communicates clearly	0.215**	0.240***	0.282***	0.295***	0.325***

Interview Data for Communication. While several sources in the leadership literature referred to the importance of manager communication and employee motivation (Benson, 2004; Bordia et al., 2004; Erez et al., 2008), my interviews revealed that what was considered good communication varied by individual. Aware of the potential ambiguity, I asked individual interviewees what communication they expected from their manager, and whether their manager's communication met those expectations.

Eight out of 10 interviewees expressed satisfaction with their manager's communication. Of the two interviewees who expressed some dissatisfaction, one would have liked more communication, as they felt that new tasks created by COVID-19 required them to discuss approaches and ideas with their manager, but the manager had not always been available. The other explained that due to the structure of their organization, their manager had little oversight of their day-to-day work and the manager's visibility had been low, and they were largely left

to work independently. They cited this as frustrating in some respects but noted that it did not really impact their motivation for work.

What was clear from all of the responses to this question, however, was that individuals' expectations of what constituted good communication varied considerably. Four out of 10 of respondents talked about the frequency of communication they desired and received; for example, interviewee #8 talked about manager availability and responsiveness in describing,

I would expect my manager to be sort of available on a daily basis, via email, you know, if I were to contact my manager, by email in the morning I would expect a response by the end of the day.

Three out of 10 interviewees talked about the communication channels used, such as how their manager checked in with them and the style of meetings they held. Three talked about how their manager provided them with the information they needed to do their job and to understand the broader context of their work. For example, interviewee #1 explained, "I would expect that if there's something that would impact me or my team, something that's changing in the vision structure, I would hope that I'd hear."

Due to the variety of responses it was hard to determine more precisely how communication impacted motivation. However, in one specific element of manager communication, that of facilitating meaning, the results appeared clearer.

Survey Data for Facilitating Meaning. Specific communication linked to employees' and teams' mission and purpose had a strong and consistent

relationship with motivation. As the results in Table 24 reveal, questions related to the facilitating meaning category of behavior had relationships with all five of the motivation questions. For the question *My manager makes me feel inspired by the purpose of my work*, there were the most significant coefficients (showed by the \*\*\*) with all five questions. For the two questions related to providing context for work (*My manager explains how my work fits in to the bigger picture* and *My manager makes me feel like I am part of something bigger than my own contribution*) the most significant coefficients also existed with employee feelings of pride in their work, feeling their work was meaningful and worth the effort, and engagement with their job.

Table 24. Relationship Between Questions Related to Manager Facilitating Meaning and Questions Relating to Employee Motivation

Question	Morning	Pride	Meaningful	Worth Effort	Engaged
My manager explains how my work fits in to the bigger picture	0.174*	0.254***	0.284***	0.328***	0.296***
My manager makes me feel like I am part of something bigger than my own contribution	0.249**	0.303***	0.382***	0.332***	0.311***
My manager makes me feel inspired by the purpose of my work	0.304***	0.326***	0.337***	0.334***	0.348***

Interview Data for Facilitating Meaning. Results from interviews provided more context on how managers played an inspiring role for employees. Seven out of 10 of interviewees agreed that their manager played an inspirational role for them, although examples of how they did this varied. For example,

interviewee #1 talked about how their manager's words inspired them: "She's just very skilled at choosing the right words when looking to motivate someone or inspire someone and she is genuinely very motivating."

Three interviewees shared that they saw their manager as a role model and someone they admired and looked up to. For example, interview #4 talked about how their manager encouraged them to grow: "He has been encouraging me you know, to take on additional learnings."

For the three interviewees who did not feel that it was their manager's role to inspire them, one cited that their manager was not a very inspirational person, another talked about how they didn't really look to their manager for inspiration, and a third (interviewee #7) explained that the nature of their and their manager's position (very different roles with defined responsibilities and few areas of overlap) was such that they respected their manager but that she would not be the source of inspiration: "So the answer is no but I don't expect her to do what I do."

### Results Which are Most Significant

Result 6: There Are Very Strong Correlations Between Manager Behavior

Building Competence and Motivation

While there were notable coefficients between all categories of manager behavior examined and employee motivation, by far the strongest relationships appear to exist between manager behavior building employee competence and the motivation of those employees.

Survey Data for Building Competence. The statistical relationships shown in Table 25 show consistently significant coefficients between manager behavior building employee competence and the self-reported motivation of employees—the smallest being 0.165 and each one being significant (as indicated with the multiple \*). Relationships are particularly strong for employees who perceive their managers are encouraging them to stretch themselves, helping them find development opportunities, and acknowledging good work. While slightly weaker, the relationship for employees who see their manager providing them with feedback to improve performance and receive expressions of confidence is also notable, especially on the feeling that they are proud of their work and it is worth putting effort into.

Table 25. Relationship Between Questions Related to Manager Building Competence and Questions Relating to Employee Motivation

Question	Morning	Pride	Meaningful	Worth Effort	Engaged
My manager expresses confidence in me	0.208*	0.274***	0.221*	0.259**	0.233*
My manager gives me feedback that helps me improve my performance	0.221**	0.165**	0.232***	0.256***	0.165*
My manager acknowledges when I do good work	0.286**	0.253**	0.242*	0.337***	0.360***
My manager encourages me to stretch myself	0.221**	0.259***	0.250***	0.279***	0.272***
My manager helps me to find development opportunities	0.236***	0.200***	0.259***	0.227***	0.209**

Interview Data for Building Competence. All 10 interviewees reported that their manager helped them to build their competence and for all, their manager's

actions were valued and appreciated. The ways in which managers did this was varied and depended on the role of the individual as well as the role of their manager. For example, interviewee #4 talked about how their manager included them in meetings with the manager's peers and how this made them feel their opinion was valued:

But like when it's something that maybe they wouldn't include my role in a meeting in a blanket way he'll, he'll like, bring me in and it's clear the way he does it that he values my opinion from a different lens.

Other interviewees cited more structured training or conferences that their manager invited them to attend (either with the manager or in their place) and many referenced on-the-job learning that their manager helped to facilitate. While all managers had ways to build competence, for some this was more holistic (helping to understand their employee's needs and discussing various development opportunities), whereas for others it was more ad hoc; for example, interviewee #9 talked about being recommended to his manager's peers for opportunities: "He would absolutely kind of throw my name into the hat knowing that I may or may not have had an opportunity to do that myself."

#### Other Significant Results Emerging from Survey and Interviews

The results shared above relate to themes and results which I was hoping to discover and which I structured my survey and interviews to explore, based on my review of motivation and leadership literature. However, through my review of open text responses in the survey and anecdotes shared by interviewees, I identified some additional themes and insights that I believe are noteworthy. In

several cases specific circumstances of the interviewee's role, their manager, or their personal situation contributed to findings that differed from the majority in a novel way. In reviewing the verbatim comments, some common responses emerged that provided additional perspective on work experiences during COVID-19 that my survey had not otherwise addressed. I was able to enquire further regarding these themes through my interviews and provide a brief discussion of each in the following paragraphs.

#### Experience of a Longtime Remote Worker

One of my interviewees (interviewee #8) works for a large corporation but is not based in one of the company's offices. This individual relocated over five years ago and received permission (a relatively rare occurrence within their organization) to work remotely due to moving with their spouse's job. With colleagues who are largely office based, COVID-19 has revealed interesting patterns of behavior which have been positively received by this employee. As explained in the interviewee's own words,

I found that really interesting because of the fact I'd work from home before, so it was really interesting contrasting my experience working from home when everyone else was in the office to my experience working from home when everyone else was. So, when I first started working from home. One of the things I was really aware of is sort of lack of presence in people's minds and daily routines, so I really felt I had to like really go over and above to make myself, kind of visible, even though I wasn't present with a lot of people then.



And you know, quite often people expect to hear from me by phone but there wasn't the emphasis on video calling and sort of maintaining lots and lots of contact. I was kind of left to my own devices a bit and it really felt like it was up to me to kind of set up that contact with my team and my boss a bit more. And then of course, COVID hit and all of my colleagues are now working remotely, in their homes, all around the world from Asia to the US and suddenly I felt like there was this real drive to really increase, how often we like spoke, and suddenly the, you know, people weren't expecting anyone to use phones anymore. Everyone wanted the visual aspect as well.

Later in the interview they expressed a hope that this level interaction with colleagues and effort made to include them would continue after COVID-19.

#### Experience of Those with More Independent Roles

Two of my interviewees appeared to operate more independently than the others. One was a consultant whose work is carried out with little direct manager oversight. The other is a senior executive whose manager had a large number of meetings with the organization's CEO and CFO during COVID-19 due to new tasks that the pandemic created for their organization. As a result of these meetings their manager was less present—in interviewee #10's own words, "I think he's pulled away with other priorities. There are other things you know that have taken his priority."

However, although both seemed to have much less contact with their respective managers during COVID-19 than that of other interviewees, both

referenced having more motivation during COVID-19 than previously. Results shared above suggest that managers who dedicate more time to their teams, provide a sounding board for issues, and engage in meaning-making conversations should have more motivated employees. However, the managers of each of these individuals seemed to spend less time doing so than other managers whose behavior was shared during my interviews, yet neither of the employees reported lower motivation, instead experiencing the opposite. The more independent nature of the roles these individuals held seemed to suggest that neither was expecting their manager to play such an active and involved role. I will not attempt here to breakdown the many situational factors that may complement or contrast with manager behavior and engender states of motivation, but I believe that these results highlight the variety of influences that intertwine with those of the manager and create a specific environment for individual employees.

#### Changes to Work Brought About by the COVID-19 Pandemic

Finally, I share a review of responses shared in the open text question. These questions were:

- *Are the interactions you have with your manager different compared to prior to COVID-19? If so, please share (briefly) how they are different.*
- *Is there anything about your work experience during COVID-19 that this survey has not addressed that you think is important?*

Responses to these questions provide some additional insight as to work experiences during the global pandemic and indications as to what may change afterwards. For the first question 84 (52%) of the 163 respondents in my sample affirmed they had not experienced any change in their manager's behavior or had only experienced change in terms of having virtual as opposed to in-person interaction. Of those who shared that manager behavior had changed, most alluded to the frequency of communication, although some shared that they had interacted more with their managers and others that they had done so less.

Although the question did not relate specifically to motivation, an analysis of responses to the second question revealed the prevalence of specific themes that negatively impacted work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. 15% of those who provided comments referenced a blurring of lines between work and personal life, and many reported that this was a source of significant stress such as longer hours, struggles to compartmentalize the separate parts of their life, and lack of work or personal space. To quote one respondent, "Most of household home working and attending school and sharing the same space."

Other responses varied significantly and included poor management practices, rigid policies and a lack of financial or wellbeing resources from organizations to support their personal and professional needs. The theme of work-life divide was explored further with interviewees, and all 10 individuals shared how this had played a role in their work experience during COVID-19. For example, interviewee #2 shared, "I don't like to come to my family room, like this

side is my office or the other side is my family room, and I don't like to come down here when I'm not working.”

### The Future of Work

A final interview question provided more context regarding changes to work environment, and specifically the future of work as interviewees were asked what changes they had experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic that they thought would continue in the future. All nine interviewees who prior to COVID-19 had worked in an office expressed a desire to have more flexibility to work remotely going forward, although they cited different reasons for wanting this. Some shared a desire to spend more time with family and others a more flexible work schedule or a more relaxed way of working. In addition, many interviewees shared that they believed key activities that had successfully moved from face to face would be conducted differently going forward. Two individuals working in Human Resources predicted more virtual training delivery, and two lawyers (one working for a corporation and the other for a government agency) anticipated that more mediations and negotiations would happen via virtual platforms rather than being always conducted face to face, as had previously been the case. Half of the interviewees (5 of 10) had previously traveled regularly for work, yet only one had continued to do so at all during the pandemic. All five believed they would travel significantly less in the future, sharing that they would leverage technology more effectively, be more thoughtful about what had to be done face to face, and use the time that had been used to travel for activities that added more value to their organizations. Finally, a senior HR leader I spoke with expressed a desire

that organizations become less rigid with their location requirements for senior roles and opportunities to participate in high visibility projects or temporary assignments.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, there was significant support in both my survey and interview data for many of the ideas espoused in motivation literature, principally for the six categories of behavior that influence positive employee motivation: autonomy, building competence, communication, facilitating meaning, empathy and support. The most significant relationships were between managers who built competence, who facilitated meaning and who provided employees with support and the motivation of their employees. There were also strong relationships between managers who provided autonomy, who showed empathy, and who communicated clearly and the motivation of those who report to them. While most measures of employee motivation appeared to be affected by the behavior of managers, employees' perseverance and sense of immersion in their work did not appear to be impacted by this.

While the COVID-19 pandemic and changes it entailed resulted in much disruption to employees there did not appear to be a consistent impact on the motivation of employees during this time. Average scores on each motivation question were lower when comparing experience during COVID-19 to experience before however these changes were not large ones. Interviews revealed that while some employees experienced a drop in motivation due to the difficulties

caused by the global pandemic, other employees were more motivated due to new challenges, especially those who operated more autonomously.

While both my survey and interview sample represented a range of ages, nationalities, industries and organizational sizes it was skewed in certain respects. My survey data for analysis had a high proportion of women (69%), those working in financial services (33%) and Americans (66%). My interview sample was similarly skewed towards those working in financial services (40%), Americans (70%) and those working for organizations of 5,000-50,000 employees (80%). As such my results are likely more reflective of those working for large corporate organizations in the US than they are of the general workforce in any country.

Comments from interviewees and from open text survey responses suggested other changes during COVID-19, such as a blurring of lines between work and home. Interviewees also indicated that they anticipate changes in how they work going forward as a result of new practices introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as less business travel and increased leveraging of technology. I will discuss the conclusions I have drawn based on these results in the following chapter and conclude with where further research should be conducted to gain deeper insight.

## CHAPTER 5

### INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Introduction

In 2020 the global COVID-pandemic led to unprecedented changes in people's work and personal lives (Robinson, 2020). The objective of this capstone was to explore if and how manager behavior played a role in motivating employees regarding their work during this time. In Chapter 1 (Introduction), I discussed assumptions about what I expected my research would uncover. In Chapter 2 (Review of Literature), I then explored the literature pertaining to work motivation and leadership, and practitioner insights regarding best practice manager behavior during COVID-19. I outlined my research approach in Chapter 3 (Research Methodology). In this final chapter I present my interpretation of the results reported in Chapter 4 (Research Results) and discuss if and how they align with both my expectations and the prevalent themes from the academic literature. Finally, I suggest areas for future study as well as the practical implications of my research, its limitations, and the personal learnings I have taken from it.

I believe that the challenges and stressors created by the COVID-19 pandemic provided a unique opportunity to examine how employees across industries simultaneously encountered high levels of personal stress and significant upheaval to work routines and, for many, changes to job responsibilities. In an environment where all but those in "essential roles" were working remotely, "pervasively disruptive" (Arruda, 2020, para.6) changes

occurred to how people both lived and worked. I am aware, through my work in Human Resources, of the influence an effective manager can have on employee engagement and the overall employee experience, and I was interested to explore if and how specific manager behavior impacted motivation for work at this time. Major findings from my research are listed below, organized according to theme, as identified from the motivation literature.

### Autonomy

The theme of autonomy is central to multiple job design and work motivation theories (Bakker & Demerouti,2007; Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan,2000; Gillet et al.,2020; Hackman & Oldham,1976; Karasek,1979; Langfred & Moye, 2004; Ryan,1985) and is considered a significant resource in mitigating against job demands (Bakker & Demerouti,2007; Bakker et al.,2005). My survey results revealed strong correlations between manager behavior that enabled autonomy and employee motivation. It also supported the importance of autonomy as an underlying condition facilitating motivation for work. This was particularly notable for employees who felt their manager trusted them to think for themselves and make their own decisions, as well as for those who agreed their manager encouraged them to take calculated risks. However, despite being one of the most cited factors contributing to employee motivation in the academic literature and often the first in a list of characteristics, the correlations between questions pertaining to autonomy and self-reported scores of motivation were not as strong as for some other elements of manager behavior.



My interview data provided further insight in this regard. All 10 of my interviewees spoke positively about their manager giving them autonomy and could cite examples of how they benefitted from it. However, none of them made a strong link between the autonomy their manager afforded them and their motivation or passion for work. When asked whether their manager played a motivational role, none cited the degree of autonomy they were given as a factor that either helped or hindered motivation. The words and tone they used when discussing autonomy led me to believe that it was something that they expected or at least something that was necessary to get their job done; for example, interviewee #4 explained,

So he's very flexible and gives us the space to do things the way we think they should be done and on our own time, so like he doesn't care if I take an hour and a half lunch, as long as everything's done in that he respects my ability to get the work done.

I believe this may be partly due to the characteristics of individuals in both my survey and interview sample. In distributing my survey, I leveraged my personal and professional network, and used the distribution list for current and former participants in my master's program. I am conscious that most of my survey respondents and all 10 of my interviewees work in professional roles which, by design, afford them a high level of autonomy. My survey did not include questions about job characteristics or years of work experience, but I believe very few, if any, respondents sit in entry level roles where autonomy levels would likely be lower and autonomous decision-making would be limited. I

do not have data to corroborate this assumption and therefore I cannot control for this or draw definitive conclusions, but I believe one of my interviewees (interviewee # 7) encapsulated the viewpoint of many of my survey and interview respondents when he shared, “My manager gives me 100% autonomy, and I wouldn't accept anything less.

I believe that respondents whose managers give them little autonomy (even if the manager limits autonomy in an attempt to support the employee) will have reported lower motivation, which explains the numerous notable statistical relationships between measures of autonomy and motivation. However, I also believe that the predominance of professional roles held by respondents in my samples makes my data insufficient for exploring the impact of differing levels of autonomy on motivation. I believe this is the reason why the relationships outlined in my results between autonomy and motivation are not as strong as some other relationships discussed below.

### Competence

Building employee competence was the second most prominent theme across research studies and articles in the job design and work motivation field. Different studies within the literature examined different aspects of building competence and addressed topics ranging from delivering feedback (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2005; Gagne & Deci, 2005; Gillet et al., 2020; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Humphrey et al., 2007; Langfred & Moye, 2004; Lesener et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000; van Dierendonck et al, 2004), providing coaching or encouragement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2005;

Gagne & Deci, 2005; Nielsen et al., 2008; van Dierendonck et al., 2004), to consciously working with employees to build skills (Barling et al., 2004, Kim et al., 2018; Nielsen et al., 2008; Tuckey et al., 2012). I was curious to see if this theme would be evident in my results. I was unsure whether the level of personal stress and uncertainty encountered by individuals during COVID-19 might make the need for managers to facilitate professional growth less important in the face of other more immediate challenges. However, both my survey and interview data revealed that managers who supported employees to build their competence were strongly linked to employee motivation in several measures. All 10 interviewees provided examples of how their manager helped to develop them and all were strongly engaged by these experiences. For example, interviewee #5, one of the most enthusiastic interviewees, described,

I had an amazing experience, which was just a thrill for me, she included me in this thing called [name of forum].....she took me along as her guest, and had me in the program and introduced me to everyone and I was there for this three day event.

As with autonomy, interviewees were not asked directly to ascertain how their manager's support for building their competence impacted their motivation. However, for those whose managers played a smaller or a less structured role (three interviewees), I noted that these individuals were either highly self-motivated or were not looking to their manager to help them build competence, or both. For me this suggested that support for building competence may have been provided had it been sought out, and therefore the absence of structured or

extensive support had not negatively impacted the employee's motivation. For example, interviewee # 6 explained,

There aren't really specific activities that we do to build my level of competence. If there was ever a particular need for me to go on a training course then that would probably happen, but it's been quite a long time.

I believe the topic of building competence is one that warrants further research. It would be revealing to compare employees' expectations of having their competence built with their actual experience, and to examine what the impact of any gap was on their motivation. While my results indicate that managers who actively help employees build their level of competence have employees with higher levels of motivation for work, interviewing employees who did not get the desired support and understanding the impact on them would be illuminating. I believe it would also be revealing to research if a relationship exists between managers who build competence and those who demonstrate other supportive behavior. Many of the anecdotes shared by interviewees about building competence had similar characteristics. Six of the interviewees told stories where they had ongoing dialogue with their manager (during which their manager asked questions or otherwise sought to understand their learning needs) and five talked about the way in which their manager was inclusive in sharing and enabling learning opportunities. For example, interviewee #10 explained, "Typically, he defers on those (conferences) and, you know, puts my name forward. That allows me to meet with the [name of manager's role] from, you know, our peers within the industry."

### Communication- General Communication and Facilitating Meaning

A third theme that emerged in different terminology in various literature was that of communication (Bakker et al., 2005; Benson, 2004; Erez et al., 2008; Kim, et al., 2018; Langfred & Moye, 2004; Lesener et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Spreitzer et al., 2005; van Dierendonck et al., 2004). Both my survey and interview results pointed to a relationship between manager communication and the motivation of employees. This was revealed in general communication, as results from survey questions relating to clarity of communication and proactive sharing of information had strong correlations with questions relating to motivation. What was revealed in subsequent interviews, however, was that expectations of what constituted good communication varied. This may be partly because neither my survey or interview (by design) provided a definition of communication and so individuals made their own interpretation. While the expectations interviewees shared about their manager's communication did not conflict, they included timing and regularity of communication, level of information sharing, and manager responsiveness.

From this I concluded that while employees seem to expect a minimum level of responsiveness, connectivity, and sharing of information, the desired communication of each employee likely varies depending on their role, the manager input required to get their job done, and their personal communication preferences. I believe that further research regarding different dimensions of communication and comparisons to employees' expectations regarding this and

their motivation would be informative in understanding the nuances of how manager communication can influence employee motivational state.

While there was some ambiguity around employees' expectations regarding communication, one specific element of manager communication, that of facilitating meaning, was clearly correlated with high levels of motivation reported by employees. This is consistent with multiple studies in the motivational literature (Arnold et al., 2007; Barling et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2018; Nielsen et al., 2008) as well as with ideas espoused in practitioner articles published during the COVID-19 pandemic (Emmett et al., 2020; KornFerry, 2020; Ratanjee & Gandhi, 2020). The strong and consistent statistical relationships between all three survey questions ascertaining the degree to which managers facilitated meaning and five of the seven questions relating to employee motivation underscores the significant impact that managers can have in this regard. The prominence of meaning and purpose as a theme within recent articles and guidance from experts in the Human Capital field (Emmett et al., 2020; KornFerry, 2020; Ratanjee & Gandhi, 2020) highlights the paramount importance of creating meaning at a time of upheaval and uncertainty. I believe that the strong correlation observed with employee motivation is driven, at least in some part, by the significant role leaders and managers have played clarifying direction and purpose during the recent times of uncertainty.

However, despite the strong correlations within the survey data between managers engaging in meaning-creating behavior and employee motivation, responses from interviewees to this topic were more mixed. Some interviewees

spoke passionately about their manager being an inspiration or a role model, but others (three of the 10 interviewees) didn't see their managers having the ability or the need to take on this role. I am unsure as to why a theme so strongly supported in statistical data was less evident in qualitative interviews. It may be linked to the small size of my sample, but I also speculate that employees may have failed to fully notice and appreciate the role their manager plays in creating meaning. I believe this may be the case as only two interviewees recounted stories that described an instance of their manager facilitating meaning, even though most interviewees' survey data pointed to managers who engaged in meaning-creating behavior. Finally, I surmise, in a similar way as about autonomy, that as interviewees all work in professional roles with a high degree of responsibility and autonomy their expectations for leaders creating meaning may be different. They may take for granted their manager's role in setting context for their work and explaining the bigger picture, and not see it as something special or something that warrants special mention. My results may therefore be reflective of the embedded expectation respondents have of their managers' roles.

#### Responsive Manager Behavior- Empathy and Support

In contrast to more subtle nuances of manager communication, two overt ways in which managers support their employees are in showing empathy and providing support. These are areas that are explored extensively in the Job Demands and Resource Model developed by Bakker and numerous collaborators (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2005). In ascertaining

the impact of manager empathy and support, my survey data established strong correlations between employees' observations of this behavior and their own motivation. Interviews corroborated the impact of both support and empathy, as interviewees gave many different examples of managers providing resources and relief in the face of work and personal challenges.

What was revealing, however, was that although my research interviews—as well as many other conversations I had during the COVID-19 pandemic—highlighted the importance and impact of empathy, the statistical relationships with motivation were much stronger for manager behavior that provided logistical or pragmatic support rather than that which purely involved demonstrating empathy or understanding. For example, I had expected to see some of the strongest links to motivation for employees whose managers enquired about wellbeing, provided flexibility, and proactively reached out to them. The results of my statistical analysis revealed that there were correlations between these behaviors and certain dimensions of motivation. However, there were far more numerous and more significant relationships between employee motivation and managers who provided helpful responses in the face of challenges, and who ensured employees had the resources necessary to do their jobs. In short, managers who lessened the burden on their employees had more motivated employees than those who merely demonstrated sympathy and flexibility.

This distinction was not made apparent in the interviews I conducted, which similarly suggested an important role for manager empathy in the employee experience. However, I believe this may be because manager



empathy, while highly valued, is considered peripheral to employees' energy for their job. In contrast, an absence of resources or pragmatic manager support in the face of challenges can actively undermine employee motivation. There is no doubt that most employees notice and value empathy when their manager demonstrates it. However, employees whose managers have weaker interpersonal skills, manifested via lower empathy, but are nonetheless viewed as fair and effective, can still be highly motivating. Conversely, employees whose managers are empathetic but fail to procure resources or to support logistical and practical needs may undermine their employees' motivation. This could be the case even if the shortage of resources or inability to provide support is beyond the manager's control, as lack of resources to get the job done is likely to be the source of much frustration.

#### Perseverance and Immersion

The results discussed above provide support for a number of themes from the motivation literature which are correlated with employee motivation. However, it was notable in my results that while manager behavior had a relatively strong relationship with five of the questions measuring employee motivation, for the remaining two questions there appeared to be weak relationships. These were questions which asked about respondents' perseverance in the face of challenges and the frequency with which they were immersed in their work. There was no clear relationship between manager behavior and responses to these two questions, or indication as to why a stressful or changing work environment (as created by COVID-19) would lead

them to be unaffected by manager actions that had a favorable impact on other facets of motivation.

In my interviews I did not specifically ask questions about perseverance or immersion; however, I believe that comments made in response to other questions shed light on these issues. When asking interviewees about the impact of COVID-19 on their work motivation, responses were mixed. Three out of 10 discussed having lower motivation, two disclosed that they had higher motivation, two explained that their motivation was unchanged, and three explained that their motivation was higher in some respects and lower in others. For the two individuals with higher motivation, both had experienced personal and professional challenges, and both alluded to having felt fatigued or burnt out at certain points. However, both also talked about how the challenges and situations that the COVID-19 pandemic created gave them a chance to prove themselves and contribute. Similarly, even for the three interviewees who discussed having experienced lower motivation, all recounted that they had managed to overcome or at least find ways to address the challenges they faced with lower levels of motivation. It appears that despite the challenges faced during COVID-19, many individuals showed great perseverance.

I believe the timing of my survey is also significant when examining employee perseverance. Surveys were completed in October 2020 and interviews were conducted in November 2020. However, the level of uncertainty and upheaval due to COVID-19 was probably experienced more strongly in spring and summer 2020. This is because national lockdowns and moves to fully

remote working happened in March 2020, and therefore the move to remote working was more recent and uncertainty was higher in the first part of the year, especially as expectations shifted constantly as to how long the disruption would last. I think that a hindsight bias may exist whereby individuals overestimated their level of motivation, possibly influenced by a more recent sense of having overcome or prevailed in the face of challenges.

With respect to immersion, I believe that factors other than manager actions must prove more significant in impacting this dimension. I speculate that characteristics of the job or other situational factors may be more relevant, but further research would be required to form a hypothesis in this regard. With respect to both perseverance and immersion I believe that future research would bring further insight and could be focused on uncovering if and how managers can influence perseverance and immersion in work. Specifically, it could examine how both the individual employees and their jobs, and the broader work environment play a role in the employee's motivation, as demonstrated by their level of immersion and perseverance.

#### Alignment with Assumptions

Before sharing practical applications, limitations and final conclusions, I will discuss to what extent my findings were consistent with my assumptions going into this capstone, as outlined in Chapter 1. Below I list these assumptions before discussing to what extent they have been corroborated by my findings.

**Assumption 1-** There will be in a decrease in employee motivation for work during COVID-19 when compared to before.

**Assumption 2-** At least some employees will perceive a noticeable motivational role played by leaders.

**Assumption 3-** Employees will perceive changes compared to how leaders acted and interacted with them prior to COVID-19.

**Assumption 4-** Leaders who provide emotional support, share information and provide opportunities for growth will positively motivate employees.

**Assumption 5-** Frameworks from the job motivation literature will prove a useful lens through which to interpret behavior.

#### Support for Assumptions

I will start by addressing assumption 4 (*Leaders who provide emotional support, share information and provide opportunities for growth will positively motivate employees*) and assumption 5 (*Frameworks from the job motivation literature will prove a useful lens through which to interpret behavior*). As explained in the analysis above, frameworks from the motivational literature have proved highly relevant in predicting and understanding manager behavior that is correlated with employee motivation during COVID-19. The six categories of manager behavior around which I structured my survey and interviews (autonomy, building competence, facilitating meaning, communication, support and empathy) were taken directly from the leading themes from the motivation literature. The three areas I predicted would be significant (empathy, sharing of information and building competence) all showed relationships with motivation although, as noted above, specific communication about facilitating meaning appeared to be more significant than more general communication, and provision

of resources and practical support were more strongly linked to motivation than actions which only demonstrated empathy.

Regarding assumption 1 (*COVID-19 will have resulted in a decrease in employee motivation for work*) and assumption 3 (*Employees will perceive changes compared to how leaders acted and interacted with them prior to COVID-19*), results are more mixed. As explained in my results chapter, while the average scores across questions pertaining to motivation dropped when comparing experiences during COVID-19 to those prior, these decreases were not large. I believe there may be a degree of hindsight bias in my survey results, as although individuals were responding during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, they were reporting the level of motivation for work more than six months after the most profound changes they had experienced and may therefore have underestimated the drop in their personal motivation. The apparent lack of a strong relationship between personal stressors experienced and the change in motivation I believe is revealing in this regard. I would have expected those who had encountered financial, health, or childcare challenges to have experienced a more profound drop in motivation, but this was not reflected in my survey results. I believe this is illustrative of the multitude of different variables that influenced motivation during COVID-19; for example, as revealed in the interviews, some individuals who had to contribute in new and significant ways had higher levels of motivation. As such I believe that lower motivation scores by some will have been offset by higher motivation scores by others, and

the variety of personal and work experiences makes it hard to generalize about changes to motivation and the underlying reasons for those changes.

Given the predominance of female respondents within my survey sample I was somewhat surprised that there was not more evidence in my data for negative motivation changes. This is because numerous articles and research published during the pandemic suggested particular challenges for women. For example, a McKinsey report published in September 2020 studying women in the workplace discussed the COVID-19 pandemic and declared that “Women in particular have been negatively impacted” (McKinsey, 2020, p. 6). Articulating how mothers, women of color and women in disabilities have encountered some of the most significant challenges McKinsey predicted that “Covid-19 could push many mothers out of the workforce” (McKinsey, 2020, p. 16). I am unsure why such a strong theme in McKinsey’s research is not reflected in my results. I speculate that the timing of my research or composition of my sample could be a factor, but this would require further research in order to form and test a hypothesis. It is worth noting that while only three of my 10 interviewees shared that they had experienced lower motivation during COVID-19, two of the three were mothers with young children. The remaining mothers within my sample (who did not experience a drop in motivation) all had significantly older children. Unfortunately, the size of my sample prevents me from drawing any notable conclusions based on this observation but indicates an area worthy of further study.

With respect to assumption 2 (At least some employees will perceive a noticeable motivational role played by leaders), 50% of survey respondents affirmed they had not experienced any change in their manager's behavior or had only experienced changes in terms of having virtual as opposed to in-person interaction. Of those who said that manager behavior had changed, most alluded to the frequency of communication rather than to any change in underlying manager behavior. During my interviews I asked each person if their manager's behavior had changed during COVID-19 in any respect and their responses to this question provided additional perspective. While four of my interviewees confirmed that their manager's behavior had changed, for two respondents this did not relate to their role as a line manager but more to the fact that their managers had taken on new roles or responsibilities in their organizations to respond to COVID-19. For the two individuals who felt their manager had changed, in both cases they alluded to an increased level of involvement; for example, interviewee #1 explained, "I think that empathy definitely changed. It was a little more frequent, a genuine level of involvement definitely higher. For building competence stuff I'd say it was comparable or even more."

For the six individuals who didn't feel their manager's behavior changed, most seemed to answer the question referring to their manager's personality and general way of operating. For example, interviewee # 2 explained that, "I think he would have performed the same without COVID." Similarly, interviewee #4

talked about changes to ways of communication in sharing, "I think the only thing that really changed, was the fact that it was much more written communication."

However, although six of the 10 interviewees asserted that their manager's behavior had not changed when asked directly, comments made at other points in the interview told a different story. For example, interviewee #4, quoted above in discussing that communication channels were the only change, underscored how important their manager's empathy and support had been by sharing,

Just knowing that I wouldn't be like reprimanded or judged for not finishing something when I said I will, because my house is an incubator, right. And that kind of support every day, you know, "take care of your family first, we'll figure it out." Yeah, or, "Keep me posted if it's something I need to take on because you can't finish it I will," just that, like just so much flexibility and, and care. Yeah, it's been really great.

Many seemed to answer as if they had been asked if their manager's personality had fundamentally changed or whether they had seen their manager demonstrate significant new behaviors. Stories that were shared suggested that the level of manager empathy and support witnessed by employees was higher and was responsive to emerging needs due to COVID-19, but because behavior was consistent with their manager's personality it was not viewed as a change in their eyes. For example, showcasing a deeper level of empathy or support was not seen as a difference by employees, possibly because they had not needed or asked for this level of support from their managers previously.



## Limitations

While my research has uncovered several significant findings, there are some key limitations to my work. The first of these is that, while I was able to find evidence for statistical relationships between employees' observations of manager behavior and self-reported motivation, I am unable to prove causation, and cannot definitively conclude that it was the manager behavior that impacted motivation. Additionally, while my study sought to examine changing motivation as a result of COVID-19, the fact that survey respondents and interviewees were asked to report on their present and past feelings of motivation at the same moment, rather than being surveyed at two separate points in time, makes it hard to make definitive statements about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on motivation. A future study could address these issues by taking a longitudinal approach, measuring the same population on current motivation at different points in time, and incorporating and controlling for variables other than manager behavior that impact motivation

An additional limitation of my work comes in the size and composition of my survey and interview sample. My interview sample consisted of only 10 people, which is significantly smaller than a quantitative research study that would seek to make conclusions and generalizations about the experience of employees in multiple industries. While my survey sample was bigger, with 203 completed survey responses and 163 utilized for statistical analysis, this is relatively small compared to funded research projects that may be conducted by Human Capital consultancies or thought leaders. For both samples I am conscious that in

leveraging my own network for responses, my sample was skewed in many respects: 70% of the sample were female, a significant number of respondents worked in HR roles or for my own employer (although I cannot quantify due to confidentiality), and the vast majority worked in professional roles and held advanced qualifications. Similarly, a disproportionate number of interviewees (eight of 10) worked for large organizations of between 5,000-50,000 employees. I am also aware that as eight of my 10 interviewees were individuals I knew already, there is potential unconscious bias in how I conducted my interviews and how I interpreted responses, although I took steps to mitigate for this bias, as discussed in Chapter 3.

A further limitation I see is linked to the fact my survey did not ask for the highest education level or years' work experience of respondents or whether respondents had young children (only asking if they had experienced childcare challenges). As such I was unable to examine the nuances of manager behavior in relation to these characteristics. For example, I could not measure if autonomy was higher for those with work experience, if behavior building competence had any relationship with the educational level of employees or if motivation was lower for those with children of a certain age.

A final limitation I see in my work is that while my research sought to uncover impacts within the workplace it is difficult to truly separate the stressors caused in the personal sphere and those in the work sphere. As such I believe that further research would benefit from a narrower focus on one element of work or on more specific impacts of a single work or personal stressor. The benefits of studying

the COVID-19 pandemic were that it allowed me to compare individuals in multiple industries experiencing similarly high levels of stress and upheaval. However, the disadvantages of drawing a sample of individuals from across companies, industries, countries, and life experiences is that there was a huge variation in the individual circumstances (both at work and home) encountered by each person, which makes it hard to make any definitive conclusions regarding causation, or even to generalize about common experiences.

### Future Research

Based on my findings I identified several areas which I believe would be fruitful for further research and which would build on my work.

Firstly, I believe that taking a longitudinal approach would heed greater and more detailed insight. A future study could examine an employee population undergoing transition or change and could measure the same population on their current motivation at different points in time. I think that this would address the limitation of my own work where employees were asked to reflect on their current and past motivation at the same point. I also believe such a study could incorporate and control for variables other than manager behavior. These could include the self-disclosed level of stress experienced in personal life, the ages of their children, the level of education, the level of their current job, the number of years of professional experience and the nature of the employee's team (such as number of coworkers and interdependence of work). Further and broader research would also overcome the limitations of the current respondent group and relationship many have to the researcher.

Building on this, I believe that a more rigorous study with additional variables could allow the identification of causal links between manager behavior and motivation. To do this a researcher would have to measure a multitude of different variables which are believed to underpin employee motivation. In performing statistical analyses, a researcher would need to examine which of these variables are linked to motivation and if, once controlled for, whether there is still a significant link between manager behavior and employee motivation. They would also need to consider the impact of broader societal factors (such as the COVID-19 pandemic or other factors that may contribute to employee stress or uncertainty at the time of conducting research).

Finally, I believe that valuable further work could be performed concerning employee immersion and perseverance to examine if managers are able to influence these dimensions of employee motivation and even to determine if specific manager behavior may contribute negatively to any dimensions of motivation. A starting point for this would be to examine academic literature that researches both immersion and perseverance and examine what factors within the workplace may influence each. Following this, more detailed questions could be developed that ascertain the presence of factors linked to immersion and perseverance, and specifically the facilitation of these factors by managers. A similar approach could be used to measure employees' observations of these behavior and their levels of immersion and perseverance.

### Practical Implications

The insights gained from my survey and interview analysis have strong practical implications for behaviors managers can adopt to increase and maintain the motivation of their team members.

Emphasis on emotional intelligence has been common in discussions of effective leadership in recent years (Society of Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2018) and so the idea that empathetic and supportive behavior by managers impacts the employees who work for them is not new. However, my research indicates specific behavior that is particularly effective in this regard. Managers who want to support employees while simultaneously enhancing their motivation should focus on really listening to their employees rather than just asking about wellbeing and showing flexibility. Additionally, managers should consider not just how they can use supportive words, but how they can practically help their employees to get their job done by providing a sounding board for challenges and helping them procure the resources they require. This doesn't have to be by giving them large budgets and could be as simple as helping to secure IT equipment, identifying support from other team members or departments in completing key tasks, as well as coaching them through obstacles by asking questions and helping them to brainstorm solutions.

Linking day to day work back to the overall purpose of the team, department, and company is another way that managers can enhance employee motivation. It may not be immediately obvious to all managers, but for individual contributors it can be hard to recognize how their daily tasks contribute to the organization's

overall mission. Those who manage people are often privy to additional information about results, strategy, and the workings of other teams, which usually gives them a more comprehensive understanding of their organization and thus of how their team and its work fits into the broader picture. If managers help their teams to gain a similar understanding, it is likely to contribute positively to motivation, as it will add meaning to their work as well as giving them an appreciation of the importance of the interactions with other teams. This doesn't mean that managers need to add daily pep talks to the calendar or philosophize with their team about the organization's broader mission within society, although these could be successful tactics depending on the perceived charisma of the individual manager. Meaning is more likely to be facilitated in smaller ways, for example by sharing the outcome of an individual or team's work when it leads to success, especially if that success is not easily visible to the team; for example, if it is part of a broader piece of work that is completed long after the team's contribution is complete. Another way managers can facilitate meaning is by introducing new work and tasks to the team through explaining how it fits within the organization and department's broader mission, and how it links with the work of other teams. Many leaders already take these steps, but by becoming more systematic and intentional in their approach and consistent in how they facilitate meaning, team members will benefit, and team motivation will likely increase. This will be especially true if combined with activities that enhance employees' ability to contribute through building competence.

My research indicated that there is no single approach to how managers can best build employee competence. However, what was clear was that in taking the time to ask questions, listen and understand their employees' aspirations, and help them identify learning opportunities, employees will not only be motivated, but they will also feel heard and valued. As the approach managers take will look different depending on the individual, their skills and aspirations, and the organization in which they work, managers should start out by building understanding through asking questions of their employees about their current level of competence and where they are looking to grow. Once this understanding has been built, they should work with employees to identify where they can support learning and growth and where they can include them in existing opportunities. This could be through inviting them to join or stand in for the manager in key internal meetings or external conferences, increasing visibility by highlighting employees' contributions and nominating them for opportunities, or through helping them identify structured training opportunities.

Finally, managers should give thought to how autonomous their employees feel and what they can do to enhance this feeling of autonomy. Many managers are mindful of avoiding micro-management, often inspired to differentiate their own behavior from that of the worst of managers they have encountered. However, in doing so, many managers' reference point is a mental list of things not to do rather than an idea of what activities they should be trying to incorporate into their interactions with their teams. Additionally, managers may fail to recognize that different employees have different preferences for autonomy

and a one-size-fits all approach is inefficient. My research provides some useful suggestions of effective behavior that will help motivate employees through autonomy. Encouraging employees to take calculated risks and delegating authority to make their own decisions are both tactics that managers can employ to create more autonomy for those they manage. Equally, engaging their teams individually in conversations to understand their aspirations, competence and what motivates them will allow them to tailor their approach with specific employees to provide an appropriate level of autonomy.

### Conclusion

I have drawn the following final conclusions based on the findings as detailed in the previous chapter (Research Results) and the discussion above.

Manager behavior can and does have a profound impact on the motivation of employees and was shown to have a strong relationship with various elements of self-reported motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, manager behavior that built employee competence, facilitated meaning and provided practical support was strongly correlated with feelings of pride in work, engagement, feelings that work was meaningful and worth putting effort in, and the feeling employees had in the morning that they felt like going to work. Empathy, autonomy and communication were also correlated with motivation. However, the relationship appeared to be more nuanced, with specific manager behavior (for example encouraging employees to take calculated risk in the case of autonomy) showing strong relationships and other behavior demonstrating more moderate relationships. On two measures of motivation (employee's



perseverance and frequency with which they were immersed in their work) manager behavior did not appear to have a significant impact.

With regard to changes experienced during COVID-19, there was a decrease in the average level of motivation of employees, but this decrease was not as notable as might have been expected. When considering the role of managers, employees did not note a marked change in their manager's way of working or supporting them, but many noted more subtle ways in which their managers played a motivational role, such as areas where managers seemed to extend their support compared to how they had prior to COVID-19.

More generally employees' work experience during COVID-19 changed, as there was a blurring of lines between work and home life, an increase in the use of technology to conduct activities previously occurring face to face, and a significant drop in business travel. Looking forward, employees predicted that when business travel and working from the office can resume, certain characteristics of their work life will change as they will look to work from home more regularly and to travel less, using technology to facilitate interaction that would have previously happened face to face.

### Personal Learnings

My work as a manager in Human Resources strongly informed my interest in this topic as well as its potential practical implications for supporting the leaders in my organization. Beginning my capstone work, I had instincts about what kind of leader behavior would be valued by employees and influential in respect to their motivation. While I found evidence to support many of my

assumptions, the nuances of my findings surprised me. The role of empathy on motivation was less prominent than I expected and the role of facilitating meaning was even greater than I had anticipated. Overall, my research has reinforced the belief I held that behavior of line managers is highly influential in the employee experience, and organizations and HR departments should invest time and money in developing the skills of line managers to enhance the wellbeing of their employees and performance of their organizations.

The implications for my work are clear in the coaching that I provide for managers and leaders in my organization, specifically in emphasizing the importance of adopting behavior that supports employees, most notably in the areas of building competence, facilitating meaning, and providing support. This behavior will also support the success of both managers and organizations. The insights shared by survey respondents and interviewees reinforces my belief that organizations have a responsibility to their employees to support them more holistically in both a personal and professional capacity. Doing so will likely increase the well-being of their workforce and will increase employee engagement, thereby improving productivity.

I hope that the findings from this work will provide a starting point for areas of future study, for example examining the nuances of manager actions and the causal links between specific elements of employee motivation. I also hope to use these insights personally in my role as an HR manager for employees and leaders in my organization, as well as in informing colleagues and peers in the

HR profession about best practices for advising and coaching managers and in their approach to supporting employees at times of crisis and upheaval.

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## Appendix A

### Survey Questions

#### Section 1

1. During COVID-19 did the main tasks and responsibilities of your job change significantly? -If yes, please explain briefly
2. Did you/ a member of your household/ a close relative suffer significant health issues due to COVID-19?
3. Did you/ a member of your household/ a close relative suffer financial loss due to COVID-19 (for example reduced income, loss of job)? If yes, please specify.
4. Did you encounter significant childcare challenges due to COVID-19?

#### Section 2

Please provide two answers to each of the following question. The first in relation to your work experience prior to COVID-19, the second in relation to your work experience during COVID:

5. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work - During COVID-19
6. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work - Prior to COVID-19
7. I persevere at my job, even when things are not going well - During COVID-19
8. I persevere at my job, even when things are not going well - Prior to COVID-19
9. I am proud of the work I do - During COVID-19
10. I am proud of the work I do - Prior to COVID-19
11. I find the work that I do meaningful and purposeful - During COVID-19
12. I find the work that I do meaningful and purposeful - Prior to COVID-19
13. I feel like my work/job is worth putting effort in - During COVID-19
14. I feel like my work/job is worth putting effort in - Prior to COVID-19
15. I am frequently immersed in my work - During COVID-19
16. I am frequently immersed in my work - Prior to COVID-19
17. I feel engaged with my work/job - During COVID-19
18. I feel engaged with my work/job - Prior to COVID-19

#### Section 3

Please answer the below questions in your relation to your experience during COVID-19:

19. My manager asks me about my well-being
20. My manager listens when I tell him/her about my well-being
21. My manager proactively reaches out to me
22. My manager makes time to speak with me beyond conversations about work
23. My manager is flexible when I face logistical challenges (e.g. childcare issues)

24. My manager explains how my work fits in to the bigger picture
25. My manager makes me feel like I am part of something bigger than my own contribution
26. My manager makes me feel inspired by the purpose of my work
27. My manager trusts me to think for myself and make my own decisions
28. My manager lets me complete my work in the way I think best
29. My manager does not micromanage me
30. My manager involves me in decision making that impacts my role and the role of the team
31. My manager is open to new ideas from me and my colleagues
32. My manager encourages me to take calculated risks
33. My manager shares information with me beyond essential facts required to do my job
34. My manager communicates clearly
35. My manager expresses confidence in me
36. My manager gives me feedback that helps me improve my performance
37. My manager acknowledges when I do good work
38. My manager encourages me to stretch myself
39. My manager helps me to find development opportunities
40. My manager provides me with support when I need it
41. My manager ensures I have the resources I need to do my job
42. My manager provides helpful responses when I share work issues/challenges with him/her
43. My manager sets a positive tone for the team

#### Section 4

44. Are the interactions you have with your manager different compared to prior to COVID-19? If so, please share (briefly) how they are different.
45. Is there anything about your work experience during COVID-19 that this survey has not addressed that you think is important?

#### Section 5

46. Name (note you can choose not to provide your name)
47. Gender
48. Age
49. Nationality
50. Country of Work
51. Number of employees in your organization
52. Industry worked in
53. Would you be willing to be interviewed about your responses to this survey? If yes, please provide your email address in the following question.
54. Email address

## Appendix B

### Interview Guide

1. Clarify interviewee's age range, role/ occupation, industry and educational level
2. Did you experience any personal stressors during COVID? Prompt if required (this could include childcare, economic, family/friends' impact, general stress/anxiety, other)
3. Was your work different due to COVID? Prompt to ask if the dynamics of work were different?
4. Was your personal motivation for work impacted during COVID-19? If so, how?
5. Did your manager motivate you (positively or negatively) during COVID-19? If so, how?
6. Manager probing:
  - How do you see your manager's role?
  - How do/did you see your manager's role during COVID? Prompt to ask if they see a role for manager inspiring them. If so, how. If not, why not?
  - Does your manager give you autonomy?
  - Is your manager empathetic? Prompt to ask if the manager was empathetic during COVID? If so, how? If not, how?
  - Did your manager show support for you during COVID? If so, how did they show this support? (could prompt to ask about having adequate resources, information)
  - What communication do you expect from your manager? (prompt about what good communication looks like, sharing info beyond immediate task)
  - Does your manager work with you to build your level of competence? How do they do this? Does this work for you? (examples include feedback, builds confidence, acknowledges, encourages to stretch, help find development opportunities)
7. Did any of the above change over COVID in terms of:
  - What your manager did?
  - What you expected of your manager (e.g. did you have higher or lower expectations in any respect)?
8. Has the divide between work and home changed for you during COVID?
9. Has anything changed that you believe will remain so even after COVID-19?

## Appendix C

## Demographics of Survey Respondents (203 completed surveys)

<b>Gender</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Female	143	70
Male	60	30

<b>Age Range</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
18-24	2	1
25-34	58	29
35-44	59	29
45-54	45	22
55-64	31	15
65+	8	4

<b>Nationality</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
United Kingdom	45	22
United States	135	67
Other	23	11

<b>Country of Work</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
United Kingdom	46	23
United States	147	72
Other	10	5

<b>Industry</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Commerce/Retail	1	0.5
Construction	4	2
Education	18	9
Energy	1	0.5
Financial Services	64	32
Healthcare/ health services	15	7
IT	5	2
Manufacturing	11	5
Not for profit	4	2
Pharmaceuticals	5	2
Professional services	34	17
Public services	4	2
Telecommunications	3	1
Transportation	3	1
Travel & hospitality	1	0.5
Other	30	15



<b># of Employees in Organization</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
0-100	21	10
10-500	20	10
500-5,000	39	19
5,000-50,000	99	49
50,000+	24	12

## Appendix D

## Demographics of Respondents in Statistical Sample (163 completed surveys)

<b>Gender</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Female	113	69
Male	50	31

<b>Age Range</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
18-24	2	1
25-34	49	30
35-44	49	30
45-54	31	19
55-64	25	16
65+	7	4

<b>Nationality</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
United Kingdom	36	22
United States	107	66
Other	20	12

<b>Country of Work</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
United Kingdom	37	23
United States	117	72
Other	9	5

<b>Industry</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Construction	4	2
Education	14	9
Financial Services	54	33
Healthcare/ health services	11	7
IT	3	2
Manufacturing	9	6
Not for profit	3	2
Pharmaceuticals	4	2
Professional services	29	18
Public services	2	1
Telecommunications	2	1
Transportation	3	2
Other	25	15

<b># of Employees in Organization</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
0-100	17	11
100-500	15	9
500-5,000	30	18
5,000-50,000	80	49
50,000+	21	13

## Appendix E

## Demographics of Interviewees (10 people)

<b>Gender</b>	<b># of Interviewees</b>	<b>% of Interviewees</b>
Female	5	50%
Male	5	50%

<b>Age Range</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
25-34	1	10
35-44	3	30
45-54	2	20
55-64	4	40

<b>Nationality</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
United Kingdom	2	20
United States	7	70
Other	1	10

<b>Country of Work</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
United Kingdom	2	20
United States	7	70
Other	1	10

<b>Industry</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Education	1	10
Financial Services	4	40
Healthcare or health services	1	10
IT	1	10
Professional services	1	10
Public services	1	10
Other	1	10

<b># of Employees in Organization</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
0-100	1	10
100-500	0	0
500-5,000	0	0
5,000-50,000	8	80
50,000+	1	10

## Appendix F

### Coding Guide

**PS-** Personal Stressors as a result of COVID

**PS-H-** Personal Stressors- health- stressors related to own health or health of family

**PS-CC-** Personal Stressors childcare- stressors caused by need to provide childcare during COVID-19 where children would have otherwise been at school or daycare

**PS-U-** Personal Stressors- Uncertainty- personal stress due to increased uncertainties created by COVID-19

**PS-O-** Personal Stressors- other- other stressors in personal life (includes logistics, job security, anxiety, logistics and others)

**WC-** Work Change as a result of COVID

**WC-R-** Work Change due to Redesign. Change to work as a result of COVID that required rework or redesign of existing work

**WC-V** Work Change- Volume. Change to work as a result of COVID that required an increased volume of work

**WC-I-** Work Change- Interaction- change of work as a result of how interaction with colleagues and other stakeholders happened

**WC-O-** Work Change- Other- other change to work as a result of COVID (includes change to daily routine, additional bureaucracy, pressure or uncertainty and others)

**OC-** Other Change in work/personal life not related to COVID or related to COVID but not the source of significant stress

**PM-** Positive Motivator- something that has resulted in positive motivation

**PM-MA-** Positive Motivator as a result of an Action by Manager

**NM- Negative Motivator-** something that has resulted in negative motivation

**PM-MA-** Negative Motivator as a result of an Action by Manager

**PM-EA-** Positive Motivator- Early Adopter- Positive motivation from a sense of pride at having adapted to a change or taken a new approach or moved forward in the face of much change and uncertainty (possibly also acting as a role model to others)

**PM-F-** Positive Motivator- Flexibility- Positive motivation from additional flexibility afforded during COVID-19 e.g. ability to wear own clothes, no requirement to commute

**PM-CC-** Positive Motivator- Company Culture- Positive Motivator in an aspect of the company culture- e.g. no feeling of pressure to respond to emails out of office hours

**PM-O-** Positive Motivator-Other- Positive motivator as a result of other cause (including helping others, feeling supported by others, learning, feeling fortunate and others)

**PM-MA-E-** Positive Motivator – Manager Action- Empathy- positive motivation (or alleviation of factors that would have impacted motivation) as a result of manager showing empathy

**PM-MA-C** Positive Motivator – Manager Action- Communication- positive motivation as a result of manager communicating or sharing information

**PM-MA-S-** Positive Motivator – Manager Action- Support- positive motivator as a result of manager providing practical support

**PM-MA-Cp** Positive Motivator – Manager Action- Competence- positive motivation as a result of manager supporting employee to build their competence

**PM-MA-A** Positive Motivator – Manager Action- Autonomy- positive motivation as a result of manager providing employee with autonomy

**PM-MA-Cb** Positive Motivator – Manager Action- Collaboration- positive motivation as a result of manager creating a sense of collaboration and involvement that produces positive work environment

**PM-MA-O** Positive Motivator – Manager Action- Other- positive motivation as a result of another action by the manager (includes manager being a role model, facilitating meaning and others)

**NM-MA-C** Negative Motivator – Manager Action- Communication- negative motivation as a result of insufficient or inadequate manager communication

**NM-MA-S-** Negative Motivator-Manager Action- Support- negative motivation as a result of insufficient or inadequate manager support

**NM-MA-Cp** Negative Motivator – Manager Action- Competence- negative motivation as a result of a manager failing to or insufficiently supporting an employee to build their confidence

**NM-MA-O** Negative Motivation- Manager Action- Other- negative motivation as a result of another action by the manager (including manager micromanaging, failing to facilitate meaning and others)

**NM-F-** Negative Motivator- Fatigue- Change of work as a result of COVID that resulted in fatigue because way of doing work is more mentally taxing (e.g. continuous virtual meeting)

**NM-I-** Negative Motivator- Interaction- negative motivation as a result of a decrease or a change in the way of interacting with others

**NM-O-** Negative Motivator-Other- negative motivator as a result of other item (including lack of autonomy, negative company culture, lack of focus and others)

**E-** Expectation. A specific expectation that an interviewee expresses.

**WL** Work Life – Allusion to the interaction between separate work and home life

**WL-B-** Work Life Boundary- element of work/life where boundaries may have been changed or blurred

**FC-** Future Change- reference to how something may change in the future

**FC-WD-** Future Change- Work Done- change in the future to how work gets done, may include doing different activities virtually or in person (includes move to virtual platforms, work travel, interaction between colleagues and others)

**FC-WF-** Future Change-Work Flexibility –change in the future regarding work flexibility (including how interaction between colleagues works)

**FC-O-** Future Change- Other- other change in the future regarding work (including work opportunities)

## Appendix G

## Utrecht Work Engagement Survey

1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy
2. I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose
3. Time flies when I'm working
4. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous
5. I am enthusiastic about my job
6. When I am working, I forget everything else around me
7. My job inspires me
8. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work
9. I feel happy when I am working intensely
10. I am proud on the work that I do
11. I am immersed in my work
12. I can continue working for very long periods at a time
13. To me, my job is challenging
14. I get carried away when I'm working
15. At my job, I am very resilient, mentally
16. It is difficult to detach myself from my job
17. At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well