ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES: A PRAGMATIC EXPLORATION OF MANAGEMENT PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYEES

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By

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I would like to thank the management and employees of GuardCo who allowed me to write their story in this document. What is not written but is indeed found in the white space between the letters in every word, is my immense gratitude for the academics who came before me and the many teachers who illuminated the path.

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This, by the way, is your gift.

Abstract

This thesis uses a pragmatic action research paradigm to investigate themes relating to manager perceptions of employee entitlement in an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) company in rural Texas in the United States of America. Addressing management's concerns about employee entitlement created a research opportunity for consultancy. The action research framework is as much a predominant character of this thesis as the narratives and data derived from it. This thesis employed varying investigative methods in each action cycle to identify and examine various theoretical lenses used to conceptualise management's concerns. This study pragmatically employs various methods for data collection to inform the analysis for this thesis. By using survey questionnaires, observations, interviews, and focus groups, this thesis provides a scaffolding of data that enhances clarity and reduces researcher error. The three action research cycles used initial scoping survey with employees (n=53) in the first cycle, a semi-structured focus group with management (n=6) in the second cycle, and more detailed interviews with management (n=4) in the third and final cycle.

Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) companies are rare and unique in that employees are part-owners in the organisation for which they work. This paradigm creates a context whereby employee entitlement might appear justified. It is a reasonable assumption that owners might feel entitled to certain perks. The abundance of entitlement research in business is focused primarily on first-level organisational support roles and how management might address employee entitlement to form a more harmonious workplace (Harvey and Dasborough, 2015; Joplin *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the rarity of ESOPs, or employee-owned organisations, makes the power dynamic between management and employee-owners a distinguishable research concept. After initial scoping of employee entitlement concerns, the focus of this research turned away from employee entitlement to a focus on management perceptions and identity.

This thesis adds to the body of action research, first, through the investigation of manager identity and its influence on the dyadic manager-employee workplace relationship. Second, this thesis creates a directional theme of research for both scholars and management to further identify the potential conflicts arising from the titles of 'owner' and 'manager' within an ESOP context. Finally, this thesis informs our understanding of self-narratives in shaping manager identity.

Reflexive practice of one's own narratives should enhance managerial effectivity. Management's narratives inform the relationships and culture of their organisation, and by this intentionality of reflection, a manager can mitigate their own bias and support the manager-employee dyad.

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Key Words: Action Research, Manager Identity, Narrative Inquiry, Employee Entitlement, Manager Entitlement, ESOP, False Perceptions

Declaration

I certify that the work presented here is mine alone and no portion has been submitted previously to qualify for any other academic award.

All sources referred to have been documented and acknowledged. Ethical clearance was duly granted.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Discussion amongst business owners and managers regarding employee entitlement is not a new topic (Harvey and Dasborough, 2015; Bedi, 2021). Perceptions of the millennial workforce have prompted studies regarding psychological contracts, reciprocity, and narcissism (Fisk, 2010; Bolino *et al.*, 2015; Harvey and Dasborough, 2015; Klimchak *et al.*, 2016). According to Harvey and Dasborough (2015), academics and practitioners agree that literature has lagged in producing helpful remedies for this issue within the workplace context. Much of the research data gathered was for clinical use in psychology and not for practitioners within industry. This research proposes using an epistemological framework by which a practitioner's active participation can uncover and assess their influence within the dyadic relationship between employer and employee.

My research study began with a desire to contribute to the body of knowledge by introducing a case study narration of a manufacturing business located in a small town in Texas, USA. This chapter will identify the background and organisational context of my research problem. I will identify the aims and objectives of my research and the significance to both academia and the organisation wherein this research took place. I will provide a brief review of this study's thesis structure and potential implications.

1.2 Background

In early 2019, during an unrelated email exchange with the owner and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a manufacturing plant, it was suggested that I might 'brainstorm' with members of his senior management team about how to solve a particularly sensitive concern. It had come to his attention that discord between his senior management team and employees was increasingly prevalent, and he wondered if I might offer suggestions to assist. I requested a meeting and proposed using our work to be part of an action research study for my doctoral thesis at the University of Liverpool's DBA programme.

As the CEO had prompted the meeting, the president agreed, and the human resource department became my primary contact. We agreed to an informal, unpaid contract whereby I would be allowed access to the employees with a promise to anonymise the organisation and not share the data 'around town'. The company name and the participants' names, if

known, have been changed for this thesis. Management was less concerned that the thesis would be in the public domain, as their primary concern was that any study on employee entitlement might negatively impact an already strained relationship between managers and employees. For this reason, the fictitious name, GuardCo, is used in this document, and all known participant names have been removed.

1.3 Organisational Context

GuardCo, an international manufacturer of moisture barriers for homes, machines, and pipelines, was searching for strategies to address employee entitlement concerns. This organisation employs 124 people who work either as office staff or within their manufacturing plants. The plant's workers are divided into product divisions and divided again geographically. The organisational structure is relatively flat, with only one division containing two supervisory layers. All other areas have only one layer of management who report directly to the organisation's president.

This organisation has a tradition of promoting the narrative that the company is '100% employee owned' (Organisational website) and enjoys low employee turnover. A unique feature of this organisation is that it is an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) company. Under this framework, the employees share ownership via stock shares (Kurland, 2018). There are approximately 6,416 ESOPs in the United States, with 10.3 million active participants holding approximately USD 1.4 trillion (NCEO, 2020). Records from the 2019 Internal Revenue Service Form 5500 note that this particular organisation has 128 participating (active or retired) employees and holds over $41 million in assets under management (Form 5500, 2019). In addition to company stock, employees receive *perks* including a one-week stay at a beach house on the Gulf of Mexico every year after five years of service, a four-day working week, birthday celebrations, production bonuses, innovation bonuses, and gifts for meeting goals set by management. The general concern of the organisational leadership is the employees' vocalisation and resentment when not given special treatment they felt they deserved.

When I asked a senior leader within the organisation to describe what he saw, he sent me the following email:

> *"…most of the behaviors are related to demanding or expecting things that are not within the normal scope of business: i.e., free lunches and then complain about the food, too hot, too cold, etc., expecting bonuses when not earned, expecting paid time off without earning it, expecting the company to foot the bill for more of their share of the benefits, bigger raises (annually), more PTO (Personal Time Off, paid of course). They really expect us to go above and beyond but they are not as willing to go the extra step themselves. Another thing and that is, since we are an ESOP, they expect to be able to have a say in all decisions as they relate to the business".*

For purposes of this study, Managers (Management) are defined as the salaried employees of the organisation. They are the company's President, the Chief Executive Officer, the Chief Operating Officer, the Human Resource Manager, a Human Resources Assistant Manager, and one of the Plant Managers (n=6). Employees in this study are defined as all hourly-paid employees. Some of the hourly-paid employees have supervisory or managerial-type duties as shift supervisors. However, the senior-level managers, using the vernacular commonly used within the company, indicated that shift supervisors were not 'managers', and as non-salaried employees, should be considered as employees for the purposes of this research.

1.4 Research Problem

1.4.1 Employee Entitlement defined

Literature defines *Employee entitlement* as: 'expectations of praise for mediocre performance, intolerance of negative feedback, and reward expectations that border on bizarre…' (Harvey and Dasborough, 2015, p. 460). Westerlaken, Jordan and Ramsay fashioned the definition as '…employee entitlement is an excessive self-regard and belief in the automatic right to privileged treatment at work' (2017, p.394). These two quotations provide a useful foundation for the organisational context and initial workplace problem definition.

The previously noted email excerpt illustrates management's perception regarding employee entitlement within the company. According to the managers, employee entitlement is frustrating and embarrassing. During an initial meeting, two managers of the human resource department expressed that they had tried to discuss this situation with other ESOP human resource managers to see if this problem was prevalent amongst their organisations. The human resources manager expressed that other ESOPs either did not see it as a problem, did

not want to disclose this as a problem, or did not actually have this problem. Those conversations left the management at GuardCo feeling embarrassed and alone. For this reason, managers wanted an outsider to review this situation and offer some ideas on how to stop their employees from feeling entitled.

Management acknowledged that they would be happy if their employees stopped verbalising or exhibiting behaviours of entitlement. I entered this organisation as a consultant to assist in addressing this primary concern. It was necessary to investigate if management's feelings of employee entitlement were justified. Initial scoping was necessary and would determine the direction of the research.

1.5 Aims of the Research

It was apparent in both manager narratives and my observation that there was a breakdown in employee/manager relations. This disharmony was reported at both locations where this company operates and across all shifts. As I had only met with senior-level management, I understood the divaricated potential of my research questions. If employee entitlement exists, to what extent is it a product of the company culture? It was necessary to uncover how management felt toward benevolence (Chan and Mak, 2012) and how they perceived the social contract (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; González-romá and Blanc, 2019; Rui and Xinqi, 2020) after noting the company's history of company benefits and perks. If employee entitlement did *not* exist, why did managers perceive that it did? Did all employees feel this way, or did only a select few? Were there influencers within the organisation that helped formulate a narrative of entitlement?

As neither time, people, nor situations remain stagnant for long, action research emerged from the initial attempts to problematise as the best evolutionary device to capture the iterative nature of my queries. It was clear that there would need to be multiple attempts to uncover the true source of discontent.

1.6 Problem statement

The general concern of the organisational leadership was the vocalisation and resentment that employees felt they deserved more. This, in turn, has led to feelings of resentment amongst management about their employees' excessive expectations.

My tendency and bias toward problem solving initially led to foundational human resources literature. I understood that my initial attempts to 'find a solution' predicated upon the impressions and perceptions of management which needed verification. I understood that management's perceptions might be inaccurate or skewed either in whole or in part. I, thus, started with defining employee entitlement and seeking to understand if, by definition, I could either accept or reject manager's narrative. It was unclear from the onset if true scope of the problem stemmed from poor or strained communication between managers and employees or borne of the ESOP's influence on organisational culture. It was unclear if this problem was systemic or anecdotal.

I attempted to answer these research questions: Why do employees have feelings of entitlement? And importantly, how might management strategies mitigate employees' feelings of entitlement? These research questions would alter dramatically as my action research constructed new realities as new data emerged.

1.7 Objectives

The initial objectives of this study were to investigate employees' feelings of entitlement and to examine the disharmony between management and employees. Both management and I initially sought strategies for mitigating perceived or actual feelings of entitlement. While objectives to create workplace harmony never changed, the strategies changed as data emerged from each action cycle. This research study explored insights into managing relationships with employees, management's perceptions that their employees feel entitled, and manager identity as supported by their personal narratives. Engaging in action research and action learning provided insights into potential solutions for positive change.

The workplace problem required an understanding of the feelings of both the employee and management as stakeholders in finding workable solutions to this negative perception of employee entitlement. I first sought understanding of the phenomenon within the organisation and then engaged in action learning through consultancy.

1.8 Study Significance

If an employer wants to be generous with their employees, they risk creating an environment of expectations. Employers, thus, walk a fine line between benevolence and taskmaster as they work to maximise the output of their human resource capital. ESOPs take pride in

providing a mechanism for employee engagement. Extant research on employee engagement is well established and provides a strong corollary for justifying a company's decision to become an ESOP. Studies on employee feelings of ownership show correlations to higher productivity (Blair, Kruse and Blasi, 2005; Bartling, Fehr and Schmidt, 2010; Piliouras *et al.*, 2014; Kurland, 2018). Employees who feel ownership—and, in the case of ESOPs, are actually legal and financial owners—should be more productive and loyal to their organisation (Kurland, 2018; NCEO, 2020). If employees who have been given the title of 'owner' under the ESOP (Company website) exhibit behaviours or vocalisations that they deserve preferential rewards without regard to the impact on the organisation or individual performance (Harvey and Dasborough, 2015; Klimchak *et al.*, 2016), clashing views may be inevitable.

Previous quantitative research on the topic of entitlement utilised the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) (Raskin and Terry, 1988) and the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES) (Campbell *et al.*, 2004). However, these tools are best used to establish general personality disorders (Pryor, Miller and Gaughan, 2008) and not as a tool for managers or executives. When applied in a workplace setting, these scales leave questions about whether the findings were applicable or transferrable in varying environments (Westerlaken, Jordan and Ramsay, 2017). Were people more tolerant and less demanding with different stimuli? For example, questions posed by the NPI asked about the potential desire to show one's body (Raskin and Terry, 1988; Westerlaken, Jordan and Ramsay, 2017). Would a person's answer change if they were asked this question at work or if the question was modified to include the workplace as a setting? If we are looking at a true narcissist, perhaps the answer would not change after introducing a workplace setting; however, the question is irrelevant when you are a business owner trying to temper feelings of entitlement exhibited by your employees. The NPI and PES are less relevant tools for managers, and therefore, much of the research falls short of helping managers address their concerns.

For this reason, Westerlaken, Jordan and Ramsay (2017) developed the Measurement of Employee Entitlement (MEE) by modifying the NPI and PES evaluation tools to create a survey designed for the workplace context. I conducted the MEE survey with employees as a tool to validate management's perception of employee entitlement as the first action research cycle. The data derived from the survey served as a discussion piece for the management focus group in the second action research cycle. Management engaged with data in the

second cycle, and both the quantitative data and the qualitative data yielded productive descriptive material. The clustering (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2020) of comments made by management showed a contradictory nature that would be explored in the third action cycle.

Management ultimately crafted narrations in the third cycle that placed themselves as heroes in their own story. In doing so, they relegated their employees into tertiary actors or, in some cases, antagonists. The implications of demoting your employees to lesser characters is appears less democratic and calls to mind something more feudal. The verbalisation by management of their story within the workplace context illuminated a more complex reality of their managerial position. Their sense of self as heroes should be taken into consideration when looking at how and why decisions might be made that affect employees.

1.9 Methodological overview

This research engaged interpretivist qualitative research within an action research framework. Action research was chosen not only for the intended iterations identified during the problematising process but also because of the necessary management engagement to understand and then take action to solve the problem. Ontologically, the multiple realities exhibited by the stakeholders were significant enough to make quantitative research less likely to address the problems presented by the management.

That management actively participates in the reflection, validation, and critique necessary for action research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014) was achieved in this study. While I could see the potential for an ethnographic look at the social norms and company culture, the data and literature suggested that the participatory nature of action research would enable the reflectivity needed for substantial change (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). Action research also allowed for the sensitivity to the historical and existential power relationships contextually embedded in this organisation.

This study uncovered and shaped relevant information using Coghlan and Brannick's method of constructing, planning, taking action, and evaluating action. Action research uncovers data, requires evaluation of that data, and then returns to uncover and evaluate more data within a cyclical flow. Notably, taking a pragmatic approach to action research enabled the questions to flow from a deductive stratagem to a necessary inductivity derived from dialogue and

narrative inquiry. The first iteration of action research was to provide an early assessment of the feelings of entitlement that might have existed amongst the employees. While I employed a quantitative survey as part of initial fact-finding, it was used only to gauge employee feelings and as a discussion point in the second action research cycle with the management focus group.

The second action research cycle involved a review of the raw data found in the first cycle within a semi-structured, interview-style focus group (workshop) with management. During this cycle, the challenge of normative ideas and the direction of the research changed as management discussed amongst themselves and answered questions derived from the data discovered in the first cycle. After analysis and reflection, a third action research cycle employed narrative inquiry with specific management. Individualised narrative inquiry allowed management the opportunity to monologue their histories. The third action cycle created a unique and granular view of individual histories and the imaginations that inform the stories we tell ourselves and others. The chosen methods for each action cycle aligned with the pragmatic approach as necessitated by the emergent data. In essence, which approach was best likely to answer the questions as they emerged?

1.10 Implications

The initial goal of creating workplace harmony remained thematically within the entire experience. The problem identification and identity-actualisations became the greater focal point during the action cycles. The findings within this action research framework helped this organisation understand that minimal feelings of entitlement existed amongst their employees. It shifted their focus inwardly to a reflective exercise in their narration and identity. Action research as applied to management narrative identity work is an important area of further exploration. The findings of this research study offer transferrable insights for other organisations by creating an example for traditional, hierarchical organisations to engage in action learning.

Early problem identification assumed that managers had to balance the desire for employee engagement and ownership (Robertson and Cooper, 2010; Brough and Biggs, 2015; Wiefek, Rosen and Garbinsky, 2019) – whether literally or figuratively — within an organisational context without creating an environment or culture of expectation (or entitlement). This idea transformed during the action cycles. Focus on management's actions that might have led to

employees' feelings of entitlement lessened with the findings of the first action cycle. Emergent information shifted to management's erroneous perceptions of their stated problem, only to morph again after each action cycle.

Eventually, within the time constraints, this research concluded with a contribution to identity studies. This thesis adds to the literature for action research, managerial identity, and narrative inquiry. This thesis contributes and provides an example to managers on the significance of their own narratives to examine their histories and actions as ipso facto antecedents for possible feelings of resentment.

In the case of GuardCo, management clearly saw themselves as rescuers. As protagonists, they entered the company to make it better by their focused removal of unwanted parties (antagonists). If management lacks awareness of how they might relegate their employees to tertiary characters, they may also be unaware of the influencing dynamic that their self-perception has on company policies and decisions. This goes beyond a potential lack of humility, but extends to how one sees oneself in relation to others. Managers should do more than reflect on their opinions and biases; they should examine their position as heroes in the retelling of their company's history. In doing so, they may note the dyadic relationship between themselves and their subordinates diminishes the employee perspective.

1.11 Thesis structure

Chapter 1 introduces the context and framing of the research question. It provides the motivations for commencing with this topic of study by the organisation. I briefly outline the action research cycles and disclose the implications for the organisation. I identify the potential application of the findings to other organisations.

Chapter 2 identifies the literature that provided the necessary understanding of entitlement, perceptions, benevolence, and gratitude both as preparation for and as a result of the first action research cycle. The initial literature review foundationally established my understanding of employee engagement and employee entitlement. I also sought to understand the structure of an ESOP and its influence on the employer-management dyad.

Chapter 3 examines the methodological framework and a description of the data collection. I describe my method analysis and justify my use of action research, focus groups and narrative inquiry. This chapter reflects the longitudinal reality of this research. As I was

unsure if feelings of employee entitlement existed, I had to address the potential deviation from initial assumptions about the workplace problem. This notable bifurcation meant a continual literature examination throughout all stages of data collection. The literature review resumed after the initial action research cycle established a clearer direction for data collection and focus. In the second action research cycle, I was able to shift more clearly to the literature focusing on the potential lenses with which to view management perceptions. The third and final action research cycle narrowed the scope further and established additional areas of inquiry in manager identity.

Discussion of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on data collection are outlined and explained. United States and the University of Liverpool's protocols in 2020-2021 required creative modification and accommodations for data gathering.

Chapter 4 provides the narrative details of the action research cycles. It identifies the multiple methods used in discovery. It highlights the shift in focus away from employees as the problem to management perceptions, identity, and storytelling as potential themes for future examination. After the first action research cycle, when it became clear that any feelings of employee entitlement were specific to an isolated subset of employees, the focus shifted to questions about management perceptions and expectations following acts of benevolence. I then researched positive psychology's influences on gratitude and introduced the possibility of management entitlement. In preparation for the third action cycle, I investigated narrative and identity as the individuality of certain managers emerged to form the basis of the final theme of this thesis. I provide a theoretical analysis after each action cycle section of this chapter.

Chapter 5 provides analysis, evaluation, and reflection of the outcomes of this research. This chapter examines the implications of first-, second-, and third-person learning posited by Coghlan and Brannick (2014). This final chapter serves as a conclusion to the thesis and identifies possible themes for future discovery.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter intended to provide an overview of this thesis document. I provided background and contextual framework for the establishment of this research. I identified the methodological framework and data collection methods used in this action research

consultancy. I noted the significance and implications of this study, and concluded with an overview of each chapter.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the justification for the methods and scope of the initial literature review. It was necessary throughout this research to revisit the literature before, during, and after each action cycle. The pre-emptive literature review introduces the dimensions of the problem and provides a basis for the methodological approach chosen for data extraction. Revisiting the literature during and after each successive cycle was a reaction to data emerging from the participants. As expected, literature reviews following each cycle introduced additional dimensions of the problem and provided a basis for the next consecutive cycle. This chapter serves as the initial starting point.

This review begins with a look at the literature search methods and scope. I discuss the overall conceptual framework before examining the various specific constructs used for data assessment. The constructs found in literature created a variety of lenses by which to problematise and then examine the emergent data. These lenses were incorporated after each action cycle to both assists in understanding the evidence presented and to inform and frame the future cycles and iterations of the action research. The constructs that informed the research will be presented in the same linear progression as they occurred within each cycle in chapter four.

Traditional business management research emphasising human resource management and organisational behaviour provided the lenses to view this phenomenon. Another useful lens was an interdisciplinary approach with a review of cognitive and positive psychology. This chapter will conclude by elaborating on the literature gaps and contradictions between the practical application and theoretical views of academia. Suggestions for future study are mentioned but supported in greater detail in the final chapter.

2.1 Literature search methods

Embedded into Action Research is the iterative process of revisiting literature to frame (and reframe) an understanding of a problem, render a diagnosis, and establish a proposal for action (Anderson et al., 2015). Pollio, Graves and Arfken (2006) note the significance of interdisciplinarity in phenomenological research and suggest taking a broader scope of the literature. Hart (2018) identifies two ways for a researcher to engage with the literature.

Researchers might engage in a scholastic (traditional) review of the literature, which seeks a deep meta-analysis that is limited in scope. Given the pragmatic methodological approach chosen for this research, Hart's interventionist (systematic) review was deemed a more appropriate practice. By taking a systematic review, one scopes the literature from the evidence that emerges from each action cycle. Whilst each literary search method has significant limitations, the interventionist approach was more likely to address the variability of stakeholder responses and enhance the outcomes by incorporating cross-disciplinarity found in the research questions of this study. Table 1 outlines the method, discipline, and search tools initially used in this research.

Table 1 Initials Search Tools

Action Cycle	Emergent evidence	Discipline	Literature Search tools
1	• **Employee Entitlement** • **Workplace culture** • **Reciprocity** • **LMX and Psychological contracts**	• **Organisational Behaviour** • **Cognitive Psychology** • **Applied Psychology** • **Human Resource Management** • **Research Methods**	• **EBSCO via University of Liverpool Online Library** • **Mendeley** • **Google Scholar** • **EThOS, EBSCO and Social Sciences Citation Index via Liverpool Online Library.**

The design of the first action cycle helped clarify the problem presented by management. Managers at GuardCo expressed embarrassment and frustration about their employees' discontent with the benefits and perks provided by the organisation. Managers cited examples of employees demanding things that fell outside the scope of their business, such as bonuses, free food and gifts, and annual raises. Managers stated that their employees acted entitled. Whilst there are several possible explanations for this phenomenon and relational

breakdown, the preliminary literature review before the first action cycle aimed to explore the potential lenses for sensemaking of the problem as presented by management.

2.2 Context and language

This research occurred in a traditional 'blue-collar' hierarchical manufacturing company in Texas. Demographically, they are predominantly male and vary in age. Uniquely and significantly, this organisation is an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) company. The employees share ownership via stock options (Company website; Kurland, 2018) which they purchase at a discounted price on a pre-determined, periodic basis (Kurland, 2018). Research suggests that ESOPs decrease employee turnover, increase productivity, and guard against hostile takeovers (Pierce, Rubenfeld and Morgan, 1991; Blair, Kruse and Blasi, 2005; Wiefek, Rosen and Garbinsky, 2019; Paterson and Welbourne, 2020). This organisation has used their ESOP as a recruiting and marketing tactic since the inception of the ESOP in 2010 (Organisational website). This company appears to have created an ESOP for reasons not significantly noted by previous research. The owner stated in 2017 that his motivation for creating the ESOP was his desire to help his employees save for retirement and promote employee involvement (Company website, 2017). He concludes, "They help us succeed. We share the company with them." These motivations are considered briefly in Paterson and Welbourne's (2020) and Blair et al. (2005). However, prior literature does not explicitly address the possibility of benevolence as a motivating construct for creating ESOPs.

Additionally, it is noteworthy to recognise the influence of language in this study. As the action cycles progressed, triangulated understanding resulted from using the varying constructs of past theorists. As most interactions occurred over the phone or computer due to Covid-19 protocols, this study was interpreted entirely through verbal communication. Whilst voice inflexion could be noted and assessed, body language could not. Interpretation, therefore, relied heavily on the geographic verbiage of the area. Not only did the etymology matter but so too the lexical of the words used in the rural southern part of the United States. That management referred to employees as 'entitled' was denoted as a slight or offensive term.

Had employees known the initial scoping of the first action cycle as a determinant of the existence of employee entitlement, it would likely further strain a tense manager-employee relationship. This knowledge would have invariably altered the answers of the participants.

Likewise, too much information might have increased the dissonance between employees and their management in later action cycles. For this reason, I limited the use of certain words when interacting with both management and employees.

Even with the limited use of certainly terms, defining terms for clarity was necessary. At the onset of the first action cycle as initial scoping commenced, the scholarly definition had to be weighed against the interpreted understanding by management. Management requested that I assist in curing a problem that they defined. If management and scholarly definitions of entitlement misaligned, the direction of the study could disappoint all stakeholders by failing to address the problem.

2.3 Conceptual framework

The dissonance between employers and employees is not a new concept. Central to our understanding of human resource management is that it is relational. Enmeshed in this relationship are questions about power, ethics, and reciprocation (Holt, 2006; Thorpe and Holt, 2008). How one might interpret these is equally as significant as the phenomena itself.

Whilst literature exists about the stereotypical, generational feeling of entitlement amongst the millennial workforce (Grijalva and Zhang, 2016; Klimchak *et al.*, 2016), the problem as described by GuardCo and identified from the initial scoping of the situation did not suggest this as a generational concern. Literature indicates that employees' feelings of entitlement can cause workplace disruptions (Harvey and Harris, 2010; Tomlinson, 2013; Harvey and Dasborough, 2015). However, it does not appear to rest at the feet of one generation.

GuardCo's story could have been about organisational culture. This organisation has a reputation in the community as being a generous employer. Drawing upon Bellot's (2011) definition, the interplay between management and their employees contributes to culture creation and manifestation. Methods for assessing organisational culture are diverse and often conflicting; yet one can define it by Bellot's (2011, p 23) four elements:

1) It exists
2) It is ambiguous
3) It is malleable
4) It is a socially constructed phenomenon developed from group interactions.

By this standard, it is reasonable to assume that the organisation's historical generosity might raise employee expectations, thus contributing to a company culture with qualities justifying feelings of employee entitlement.

Another contributing factor constructing their workplace reality might have been the words and language used by management during their group interactions. The language used by management was often paternalistic, as is associated with benevolence. The Covid-19 workplace accommodations described by management held a paternalistic tone. Discussions about the perks and efforts to control the conduct of employees also provided examples of paternalistic language and opinions.

Benevolence differentiates itself from other human resource literature (such as the Leader-member-exchange theory or Equity theory, which is discussed later in chapter four) because of its holistic concern for the well-being of the employees and their families (Hiller *et al.*, 2019). Human resource theories primarily focus on the work within the workplace. GuardCo management and employee relationship crossed these boundaries with management actively participating in an employee's leisure time decisions. In the instance of the vacation home on the Gulf of Mexico, one could say that GuardCo was responsible for their employee's leisure time.

As mentioned in the thesis introduction (Chapter 1), this organisation is an Employee Stock Option Program (ESOP) company whereby employees are co-owners. Their marketing and employee recruitment often describe the employees as the "owners" of the company. Many of the perks enjoyed by the employees are family-focused, including the children and spouses of employees (e.g., vacation houses, employee assistance for family struggles, and such). The first action cycle investigated manager complaints and perceptions of employee entitlement by looking at this company's organisational culture using the Measurement of Employee Entitlement. *Entitlement* is an interactive construct that assumes an attitude of one party to another. Notably, a broadened view of entitlement should encompass managers as well as employees. This understanding led to investigating human resource management literature—specifically the question of expectancy, psychological contracts and reciprocity.

I initially hypothesised that company culture was an antecedent to a feeling of entitlement. For this reason, initial investigations of the elements influencing organisational culture were touched upon but eliminated when differing variables emerged.

2.4 Entitlement

The initial step in constructing the first action cycle was to define entitlement as it relates to management theory and the working use of the word whilst scoping the problem. Literature defines *entitlement* in the workplace as unrealistic expectations regarding rewards or praise for mediocrity (Harvey and Harris, 2010; Harvey and Dasborough, 2015). The definition of e*ntitlement* used for the first action cycle was the presence of stable feelings of deservedness regardless of performance. Most studies regarding entitlement derive from research on narcissistic personality disorders (Grubbs and Exline, 2016; Westerlaken, Jordan and Ramsay, 2017). Recent research counters that equity sensitivity theory (Huseman, Hatfield and Miles, 1987) and attribution theory (Heider, 1958) are perhaps the best theories for a conceptualisation of entitlement (Bedi, 2021).

Heider's attribution theory (1958) understood people as active participants in finding causal relationships between one's internal and external factors. People's desire to construct meaning based on situational or dispositional perceptions was prevalent in GuardCo management's description of their workplace concerns. Equity sensitivity theory expands Adam's (1965) equity theory. Equity theory posits that people will act differently based on their perception of fairness. Employees will function better when they perceive fairness, and unfairness will lead people to try and restore equity and reduce stress. Huseman, Hatfield, and Mile (1987) posit that equity theory missed a sensitivity construct. Equity sensitivity theory introduces the element that perceptions of equity are related to a person's differing preferences.

Equity sensitivity theory notes a continuum of three categories: *Benevolents*, *Equity Sensitives*, and *Entitles*. Benevolents want to give more than they receive. Equity Sensitives fall under the existing equity model in that their ratio of inputs to outputs would be equal. Entitles have "high thresholds for feeling indebted" and expect to receive more than their peers. While linkages are prevalent in these two theories, in narcissism literature, the linkages are strong. Critics of this comparison feel that narcissism's emphasis on the grandiosity of oneself was too far removed from equity sensitivity theory (Woodley and Allen, 2014) to be a contributing factor. However, studies on narcissism, like the equity sensitivity theory, posit an emphasis on preference and an internal focus by the participant. In other words, people do not feel entitled because others have something they do not. People feel entitled because they inherently believe they deserve it.

Equity theory (Adams, 1965) assumes people are motivated by a sense of fairness and an equal emphasis on external constructs. Equity sensitivity theory assumes a comparison with another (Huseman, Hatfield and Miles, 1987). Unless we speak of one person's sense of fairness without regard for another, we are not likely talking about entitlement. Even with attribution sensitivity theory's use of the term, *Entitles*, their description was lacking for this study. Their description could not fully explain management's concerns.

Defining entitlement from social and behavioural psychology epistemology created the basis of the first action cycle. Entitlement, as defined for this thesis, aligns with Harvey and Harris (2010) and incorporates equity sensitivity theory, attribution theory and psychologists' definition of narcissism because all three theories held important aspects of the working definition at GuardCo.

Until recently, the standard assessments for measuring entitlement came from the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES) and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) (Thorpe and Holt, 2008) and were used diagnostically (Pryor, Miller and Gaughan, 2008; Grubbs and Exline, 2016). PES and NPI testing were the foremost quantitative research tools used for studies on narcissism and were intended for a generalised understanding of the subject for clinical purposes (Raskin and Terry, 1988; Pryor, Miller and Gaughan, 2008; Levy, Ellison and Reynoso, 2011). These tools were not designed to enhance work relationships. The questionnaires look for personality disorders characterised by negative relationships, hostility and dominant social interactions and are not readily adaptable to workplace settings (Pryor, Miller and Gaughan, 2008). A review of the survey in the PsycTESTS database found that not all of the NPI questions would yield valuable data for a workplace setting. While the results of an NPI questionnaire include information regarding personal responsibility and self-efficacy that could easily be useful in a workplace context, several questions fall outside of a business framework. Examples of questions not likely useful include: 'I like to display my body' or 'I would do anything on a dare' because the setting might influence the self-reported answers (Raskin and Terry, 1988).

Additionally, the variance of information derived from both PES and NPI creates a dilemma for the researcher desiring workplace specificity. Unless one took the time to review the individual questionnaires, the practitioner would unlikely understand how much inference was involved in constructing management theory regarding narcissism. The lack of context becomes a significant criticism of early research on employee entitlement. In answer to this

contextual gap, Westerlaken, Jordan, and Ramsay (2017) created the measure of Employee entitlement (MEE). The MEE survey measures situationally activated responses within the employer/employee relationship context. MEE looks at an individual's beliefs about their desire for control and how they view themselves as being unique to determine their level of counterproductive feelings toward work (Westerlaken, Jordan and Ramsay, 2017).

We can review management's behaviours as an external construct if we use attribution theory as a lens to look for a link between the external constructs that might lead one to seek out causality for entitled behaviours. According to Fisk (2010), management practices could trigger feelings of entitlement. Previous human resource management research correlates entitlement with counterproductive work behaviours (Fisk, 2010; Harvey and Harris, 2010). The implications of managers as stimulus triggers for employee feelings of entitlement would mean there is hope for mitigating GuardCo's concerns. If managers can change feelings of entitlement, then entitlement must be malleable (Naumann, Minsky and Sturman, 2002; Tomlinson, 2013). Tomlinson (2013) refers to feelings of entitlement as a state rather than a trait that allows for hope in reconciling the manager and employee relationship. Viewed through this lens, we can incorporate other research that posits that managing is situational (Yukl and Lepsinger, 2005) and that behaviours can be altered and corrected through interaction and reciprocity.

One should also not suppose that entitlement is a vulnerability exhibited only by employees. Expectations, narcissism, and entitlement are just as likely to reside in the role of managers as with employees. Managers with unrealistic expectations of gratitude (Maccoby, 2000) are likely to perceive injustice (Grubbs and Exline, 2016), similar to previously noted theories on equity and attribution. Grubbs and Exline (2016) posit that unmet expectations and ego-threat can lead to psychological stress regardless of who in the organisation might hold feelings of entitlement. Therefore, feelings of entitlement were not assumed to be the sole onus of the employee.

2.5 Psychological contracts

A psychological contract is primarily a perceptual construct whereby two parties hold an implied obligatory relationship. Herriot, Manning, and Kidd (1997) posit that perceptions about the relationship could come from a formal contract or the subtle (or not so subtle) interactions between the parties. Workplace psychological contracts are the beliefs about

mutual obligations between employees and management (Soares and Mosquera, 2019). Over the last fifty years, this topic has been richly studied, especially regarding employee engagement and potential breaches of these unwritten obligations (Conway and Briner, 2005; Schein, 2015). Organisational systems and the interpersonal relationships between leaders and workers have a complexity, primarily due to the human element necessary for social contract construction. They are also contextually diverse and dependent upon organisational location and culture (Collinson and Tourish, 2015; Smith, Haslam and Nielsen, 2018).

Alvesson and Deetz (2017) highlight this complexity as justification for the empirical leadership analysis within social and interpersonal communities. This interpersonal relationship resides in the psychological contracts found within a workplace setting. It is precisely this psychological contract that may have prompted the creation of the ESOP at this company in the first place. Nevertheless, management indicated a strained current relationship with their employees. Social theories and psychological contracts are borne out of the complex nature of human interaction, and it would be stressful were the relationship tenuous.

ESOP literature, the ESOP annual meetings (akin to shareholder meetings), or the language used in GuardCo's advertising and employee recruitment which notably identifies them as investor-owners, might have formed the GuardCo employee's perception of the psychological contract. Rhetoric aside, tenure may also play an active role in an employee's understanding of their obligations to the company. Regardless of the antecedents, it is likely that management and employees differ in how exactly they define obligations of themselves and others within their workplace relationship (Herriot, Manning and Kidd, 1997). It is equally likely that the company's narrative creates a culture that influences the psychological contract between employee and employer. Understanding the psychological contract provides background for understanding the development of Leader-Member (LMX) Theory and reciprocity that were possible explanations for exploration in the first action cycle.

Reviewing psychological contract literature assists with the contextualisation of the framework that is present in organisations. Scrutiny of the psychological contract between manager and employee (including manager to employee and employee to manager) also helps with vetting patterns for further investigation. It helps explain the relational perceptions that underlie expectations and examines the expectations and potential gaps that may exist outside the company rule or handbook. If a particular set of psychological expectations exists, how

well does each party understand them? How are they learned by new members of the organisation? Are they reasonable? Can they be misinterpreted?

A final benefit in understanding the psychological contract between management and employees is GuardCo has the added benefit of helping me avoid potential political errors as an outside consultant. As a backdrop for understanding LMX and reciprocity, psychological contract literature keeps the relationship of the people within this organisation prominent through this study.

2.6 Leader-member-exchange

LMX focuses on the dyadic social relationship between leader and follower, evolving from the interactions between the two factions (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Cote, 2017). Literature often emphasises the positive leadership outcomes associated with supportive, high-quality exchanges (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). One would be hard-pressed to find anyone in industry who disagreed that skilful leadership positively influences an organisation. Even early pioneers like Henri Fayol understood that within a hierarchal structure, a person in management must possess skills to successfully navigate their occupation (Palmer and Dunford, 2008).

The attempt here is not to determine what makes a successful manager but rather to look at management's perceptions of those they manage as possibly influencing management behaviours toward their employees. In this case, we are examining management's complaint about employee entitlement.

Exchanges within a workplace context are often transactional (remuneration exchanged for goods or labour). The exchanges between people in a hierarchical structure are transactional and also relational. The relational dynamic evolves from the formal and informal interactions of behavioural and emotional exchanges between leaders and followers (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Sparrowe and Wayne, 1997).

The vertical dyadic linkage was first coined in the analysis of leader-behavioural literature, which looked at the influences of authority in negotiation (Dansereau, Graen and Haga, 1975). The dyadic relationship between management and employee was the basis for developing the Leader-Member Theory or Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) that emerged in the 1970s (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). LMX has been the dominant framework for social-

psychological contracts and leadership theories ever since. With over two million search results on Google Scholar's search engine, LMX has not lacked scrutiny over the past forty-eight years. Even with known critiques of research validity, misalignment, bias, lack of rigour, and unclear definitions, the theory itself remains popular (Gottfredson, Wright and Heaphy, 2020).

The emergence of the informal, relational, and emotional vertical dyad between manager and employee forms the next lens with which to view this workplace problem. Its popularity may come from the intuitive nature of the original research, which first identified that leaders held differing relationships with individual subordinates, classified as In Groups or Out Groups. Those varying relationships influenced negotiations within a workplace context. The relationship between the manager and employee, or leader and member, found that negotiation and trust was an essential determinant of the quality of the relationship (Dansereau, Graen and Haga, 1975; Liden, Sparrowe and Wayne, 1997).

I have drawn upon the research of LMX to understand both the definition and potential moderating effects of a breach in a psychological contract. LMX is both a transactional and transformational exchange process (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; González-romá and Blanc, 2019) which remains relevant to examining management and employees at GuardCo (Lee, 2020). The weight placed on the relationship for the leader to member, or manager to employee, is noteworthy for reinforcing the hierarchical structure while simultaneously levelling expectations of one to another. From as early as the hiring of an employee, the (potential) employee and manager begin a tentative and fragile relationship focusing on trust and justice (Herriot, 2002). LMX is also considered a positive mediator for benevolence within the workplace (Chan and Mak, 2012; Westerlaken, Jordan and Ramsay, 2017).

LMX pulls from positive psychology the idea of mutual respect and work meaningfulness in promoting workplace well-being (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman *et al.*, 2005; Chan and Mak, 2012). LMX likewise pulls upon Social Contract theory and its reliance on an assumption of democracy as an antecedent for discussions about social contracts (Brenkert, 1992). Each party to the contract must freely be allowed to participate in the contract. In the case of LMX, we are looking at both leaders and members in a top-down hierarchical structure. At GuardCo, managers and employees are the two parties with contractual understanding and beliefs. The employee's right to participation and self-governance is a necessary validation of their expectations or perceptions. Raelin (2003, 2011)

likewise supports democratic adherence as a necessary construct for leadership (management) and realises that the process of developing leadership is interpersonal and derived from social interactions. These social interactions have relevance to this research to understand and analyse the hierarchical and authoritative relations between the groups.

Employees do forfeit some liberties in exchange for belonging to an organisation. Employees must submit to their organisation's objectives, or their tenuous relationship will suffer. These concepts applied to GuardCo's ESOP participants create an interesting paradox because the employees are both democratically free to participate or sell their time to the organisation or quit —which feels less democratic when applied in practice. The employees of the ESOP are also owners, but the sustainability and profitability objectives of the company are unequivocal. The reciprocity of this dynamic appears asymmetrical and has the potential for workplace conflicts.

LMX theory was a stronger construct of this research in the early stages as it was yet undetermined if management's complaints were specific to certain individuals or widespread amongst the entirety of the organisation. This theory was never wholly abandoned, however. It was a useful lens for looking at the trust relationships amongst the human resources manager, president, and CEO. It was also a useful and stark contrast to management's narratives in the third action cycle.

LMX literature adds both texture and a logical link to the psychological contract literature. LMX acknowledges that the relationships within the organisation might differ depending upon situational or contextual differences. This specificity aligns with the context-driven action research used to examine management's concerns. The problem of employee entitlement might prove an individual problem with one employee to one manager. It may be specific to the perks that are offered by the company but have nothing to do with the work or the workplace environment.

2.7 Reciprocity and the ESOP

Cooperation might exist throughout the animal kingdom, but ubiquitous to humans is the notion of reciprocity (Stevens, Cushman and Hauser, 2005). Reciprocity involves an exchange. Cohen and Bradford (1989) note that the basis of business is reciprocity. Normatively, it comes in the exchange of goods and services for cash or equivalent. Within a

social structure, reciprocity relies upon stakeholder expectations and a 'measure for measure' understanding between parties and acknowledging the equal rights and duties of stakeholders (Gouldner, 1960; Cohen and Bradford, 1989; Bell and Bryman, 2007). Equal rights take on a nuanced reality when framed by the employee-manager relationship. Managers often must address both their employees' practical and emotional needs, yet managers' assumptions about those needs might be incorrect or misguided (Herriot, 1993; Pemberton and Herriot, 1994).

In a free democratic society, employees sell their time, talent, and labour to their employer in exchange for compensation. Employees might feel they should be rewarded beyond their usual agreed-upon compensation when they have exhibited *good work.* Contrarily, employers expect *good work* as a mandatory requirement for any form of compensation. Within this subtle variation of expectations is the likely basis for discord in reciprocal thinking.

A social contract of reciprocity exists within all organisations (Bell and Bryman, 2007) but is usually not as clearly defined as one might see in an ESOP. The ESOP has elevated 'ownership' of the employee without the pain points usually associated with an entrepreneurial or sole proprietorship. In an ESOP, employees reap the benefits of company growth through their investment in the organisation. This quasi-elevated state of the employee to an owner is focused primarily on exchanging investment for ownership. Noticeably, research that addresses the reciprocal exchange experienced by top management focuses on the upsides of increased employee engagement which would theoretically make a manager's job more palatable. The literature does not focus on any potential downside resulting from increased employee engagement. This makes sense because ESOPs were created with an understanding that employee satisfaction would occur in tandem with increased participation.

Arguably, managers at this organisation are not really participating in an exchange. Top managers—whilst differentiated in this thesis—are still employees of the organisation. Their exchange mirrors that of the employees (compensation in exchange for part ownership). The top plant manager did not sacrifice anything when his subordinates chose to invest in the company. Top managers received the upside of increased employee engagement without engaging in the psychological bonding that traditional leadership theorists would expect as an antecedent to engagement.

One could argue that management's financial investment might be greater than their employees' because their compensation is greater, but the reciprocating agreement is the same: non-existent. If anything, the ESOP structure might help lessen the divide and bring greater equity in the gap between employees and managers. If employees perceive an increased sense of self, as Westerlaken, Jordan, and Ramsay (2017) proposed, this would be a contributing factor that might confirm the manager's complaint of employee entitlement. Employees who saw themselves on par with their managers might exhibit insubordinate-like behaviours. We might find that the ESOP structure created a suitable environment for the emergence of employee entitlement rather than establishing a desired reciprocating exchange of ownership for loyalty. Perhaps both occurred simultaneously. Prior research indicates that a feeling of loyalty has an inverse relationship with a feeling of entitlement (Naumann, Minsky and Sturman, 2002; Grubbs and Exline, 2016), so it becomes a significant element for further investigation and could not be viewed as assumptive in this particular organisation at the start of the first action cycle.

Literature on reciprocity is challenged in the context of an ESOP. Only one member of management (the original owner) gave away anything in exchange for employee loyalty. The other managers potentially reaped the benefit of the employees being owners of the company.

Without prior knowledge or empirical data to support management's claims, it was necessary to first seek an understanding of employee entitlement and then identify if their claim had evidentiary support. If employees exhibited entitled behaviour or attitude, this research would have looked deeper into the effects of company culture within the ESOP. The initial interpretation of the problem assumed manager's concerns were valid, true, and could be measured. This research and literature review focused more on management perceptions and relational factors because of the lack of uncertainty about the problem. For these reasons, measuring entitlement and reviewing explanations for its existence within the ESOP culture, the dyadic relationship found in LMX, and psychological contracts provided the basis for the first action cycle.

The initial research questions scoped the contextual realities of this organisation. These questions evolved from management explanations about employee behaviours. I wanted to understand the manager's experience with employee entitlement and their motivations for seeking consultancy. If they sought only to validate their experiences or justify their feelings, the research would move in a different direction. It appeared counterintuitive that managers

would continue giving employees perks and yet expect a different reaction from them without intervention.

For the initial scoping, the research questions focused on the following confirmed data.

- Management stated that employees verbalised dissatisfaction with gifts and perks.
- Management was embarrassed and frustrated by employee verbalisations of dissatisfaction.
- Management provided gifts and perks.
- Management spoke disparagingly about employees' sentiments.

As simplistic as the above points sound, they were converted into questions for exploration in the literature.

- Is management's story about employees true?
- Why is management embarrassed?
- Why does management provide gifts?
- Why does management speak disparagingly?

The first action cycle using the Measurement of Employee Entitlement (MEE) would validate or invalidate the first point to determine if employees felt dissatisfaction. Literature on entitlement and its measurement amongst employees was valuable in explaining the motivating factors from previous psychological research. The MEE would not, however, explain if managers' perceptions if employees were not dissatisfied. Human resource literature regarding LMX and psychological contracts provided a framework with which to examine the remaining questions.

2.8 Chapter Summary

GuardCo's complaint about employee entitlement provided the situational impetus for understanding and defining entitlement. Questions about the validity of management's claims kept the initial literature review focused on areas understood at the onset. The dyad of manager and employee was examined by viewing their relationship in terms of their psychological contracts, leader-member exchange, and reciprocity within an ESOP framework. Human resource literature provided relevant cognitive and organisational psychology themes for investigating the workplace problem.

At GuardCo, the psychological contracts, leader-member exchange, and reciprocity literature offered insights into the relational dynamic of personnel within ESOPs. Specifically, when employees are touted as owners with little to no authority, the dynamics challenge extant literature regarding leader-member exchange because the roles of individuals in an ESOP are less defined, or outright misconstrued. Moreover, the psychological contract between employee and manager is inconsistent depending on whether you are a manager or an employee-owner.

Managers may assume the more traditional role of an authority figure, while simultaneously promoting employees as owners. These employee-owners have no authority and therefore sit in a quasi-confused state as to their importance within the organisation. Employees may feel they are not in a traditional role as subordinates to a manager. This ambiguity creates a construct that is less in line with current leader-member exchange literature which assumes less ambiguity in the roles of each party.

Reciprocity literature measured against the relational dynamic encapsulates the disharmony between managers and employees. Contextually, GuardCo's managers and employees highlight inequality in terms of expectations. As employee-owners, the employees have little authority but are touted as owners but are expecting some type of stature. Managers, who have given up financial and legal ownership, expect employees to not complain. This misalignment of reciprocating expectations provides a complementary perspective to existing literature.

The nature of this action research involves repeated engagement with data and literature. As is explained in the next chapters, action research requires additional analysis and critique of literature in light of emergent data from each action cycle. This chapter myopically looked at literature addressing the reported concern of employee entitlement based on the initial understanding of the problem. Chapter four will illustrate the analysis of additional literature embedded in the action cycles as they emerged over time.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.0 Introduction

Management's concerns about employee entitlement provided an opportunity for consultancy using the instrument of action research. GuardCo relayed their concerns, but initial scoping called this into question. It was not possible to definitively determine the best method because of the evolutionary and unknown nature of GuardCo's problem at the onset of this research. Therefore, creating a clear methodological strategy before engaging in this research was impossible because so many variables were unknown. Conceptualisation was intertwined and relied upon the action cycles. By their very nature of diagnosing, constructing, and reconstructing over time, action cycles were as significant to this study and thesis as the data they uncovered.

This methodology chapter—and the historical narration of the expected and unexpected elements that formed this study—are found throughout the remainder of this document. Data discovery was the necessary antecedent for directing and identifying the focus toward relevant literature. Data discovery led to literature as equally as literature led to understanding. The prominence of the embedded action cycles to conceptualise both the problem and the potential outcomes became more than a vehicle for data collection. The action cycles are an equal construct in the overall outcome of the research. The methodology was not simply a vehicle to take us from point A to point B; it was a vehicle built as we travelled, which makes it far more unique and enmeshed in all remaining chapters of this thesis.

Discussions of the theoretical lenses used during analysis are prevalent in both the methods and literature chapters. Norman Denzin notes multiple forms of triangulation (Thorpe and Holt, 2008, p. 223). They are data triangulation, investigator triangulation, methodological triangulation, and theory triangulation. Whilst each intends to capture and analyse a social phenomenon, it was theory triangulation—using different theoretical lenses to interpret this workplace concern—from which the conceptual framework emerged. This endeavour required using various theoretical lenses after each action cycle. This chapter explains how the theoretical lenses informed and promoted the methodological choices used in the subsequent action cycles during the consultancy with GuardCo.

Emerging from these theoretical lenses and addressing emergent research dilemmas (Mcgrath, 1981), this chapter relays the decision to utilise pragmatism whilst attempting to understand the concerns raised by management. This chapter explains the iterative shift from the initial deductive scoping of the problem to an emergent, inductive inquiry and analysis. This chapter explains the ongoing development of the research question and the necessary movement back and forth between the contextualisation of the problem and the literature. The engagement of deduction, induction, initial scoping, focus groups, and ultimate use of narrative inquiry embodied the pragmatic construction of the action research cycles. This chapter will outline the three methods used to gather data: surveys, a semi-structured interview/workshop, and narrative inquiry and how each method formed unique actions within each cycle. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the rationale of the research decisions and methodological design, ethical considerations, and limitations of the methodological approaches.

3.1 Research Question Development

As noted in the thesis introduction, GuardCo's management sought assistance with the workplace concern regarding the employees' behaviours and attitudes of entitlement. As the researcher, I did not directly observe this workplace problem; it required an initial scoping to seek an understanding of what was reported by management. This initial scoping became the first action research cycle intended to develop the research question. As this section will further explain, the initial research question provided by management was assumed to be true as there was no evidence to support or deny its accuracy.

The research question about how management might mitigate their employee's feelings of entitlement evolved into exploring what factors contributed to management's perceptions of employee entitlement. This research question developed from a process of elimination based on emergent information found both in the literature and from the first action cycle. In the following sections, I will explain how this preliminary workplace problem of employee entitlement changed focus over time and moved away from the employees to focus primarily on management.

The following sections provide a framework for understanding the initial problematisation, identified workplace assumptions, observable behaviours, and emergent data from the Measurement of Employee Entitlement (MEE) survey. I note the reasoning for moving from

deductive reasoning to inductive reasoning. This section explains the rationale for using narrative inquiry to assess individualised experiences. Each action cycle altered assumptions and created an opportunity for another way to view the emergent data.

3.1.1 Assumptions

It was necessary to objectively scope the accuracy of management's claims of employee entitlement. Literature on employee entitlement provided useful information at the outset while assuming several factors. So as not to confuse its meaning, the term *entitlement* has a negative connotation in rural Texas, and the management at GuardCo used the term entitlement negatively. Initial conversations with management had an 'us' versus 'them' tone, and their terminology only exacerbated this negative tone. Management said they wanted the employees to stop exhibiting feelings of entitlement, and the assumption was that by ending this behaviour, workplace harmony would ensue. It was undetermined if this was a non sequitur, but I assumed that management desired harmony in the workplace, and they believed that the barrier that kept this from occurring was due to employee behaviours. Because this research began with these assumptions, it was necessary to objectively scope and measure their extent and nature.

Additional assumptions involved the larger context of where this research took place. Action research assumes textual specificity. As an American management consultant to a company located in the United States, I acknowledge my Western understanding and assumptions of democracy (Brenkert, 1992; Hilsen, 2006), employee freedoms (Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1973; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Van Winkle *et al.*, 2014; Schwalbe, 2016), and motivation (Swartling and Poksinska, 2013; Frostenson, 2016; Kanfer and Chen, 2016; Ronald and Christopher, 2019), encompassed in western ideological management (Hofstede, 1993; Gallén and Peraita, 2018). All participants are assumed to have the freedom to craft meaning and love (or hate) within the workplace. Likewise, intrinsic motivation is considered to positively influence workplace behaviours (Kottke and Mellor, 1986; van Yperen and Hagedoorn, 2003; Ronald and Christopher, 2019). These identified assumptions aided in avoiding obfuscation caused by the inherent bias in the locality of this work.

Research about employee entitlement has primarily come from positivist scientific methods. Therefore, when scoping the initial problem to determine the direction of my investigation, I contextualise and review the previous scientific studies within a pragmatic constructivist

framework within the action cycles. Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018) argue that investigatory engagement is necessary for adaptability and strategic framing. Similarly, action research requires engagement by the participants—in this case, management—to frame the problem (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011) and demonstrate sensemaking (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). Engagement in the investigation also aids in the adaptability of leaders (Uhl-Bien and Arena, 2018). As noted above, management keenly expressed their assumptions regarding the problem. I also assumed that management already felt they knew the solution to fix the problem. For these reasons, management's engagement was a critical construct in the investigation, problematisation, and research question development.

3.1.2 Deduction to Induction

The organisation's management gave me the workplace problem., and it evolved as additional data surfaced. The initial focus was on the employee. I began with a more traditional positivist approach that morphed into a constructivist, postmodernist framework as new information emerged. My initial hypothesis was that the environment created by management (e.g., the ESOP) was a temporal antecedent to feelings of entitlement. Taking a positivist view, I created a near functional notation whereby management's activity led to employees' feelings of entitlement.

Figure 1 Traditional Positivist approach

This proposition and functional notation held positivist weaknesses in both the independent and dependent variables. Firstly, a determination had to be made regarding the management's employee entitlement claims. If there was evidence supporting the claims, an assessment regarding the extent and level of employees' feelings would be necessary. Next, the severity of influence would then need to be measured against workplace disharmony. This led to the unknown variables (Y) or Employee Entitlement(Y).

Likewise, if evidence supporting management claims of employee entitlement were accurate, management activity would need assessment as an antecedent to employee entitlement. Were there particular activities or perks by management that were particularly influential in

creating feelings of employee entitlement? This created the unknown variable (X). Therefore, the weakness of this formula: Management(X) → Employee Entitlement(Y), is that this assumes that entitlement exists. Bu following this well-established scientific method, I attempted to answer causality deductively, which proved unsatisfactory without first substantiating the initial claims.

Statements by management had to be reviewed for accuracy. I could not assume that employee entitlement existed; therefore, my initial research steps required an analysis of both the independent and dependent variables. Deductive reasoning created a simple framework to direct preliminary research questions on whether gift-giving occurred and whether employee entitlement existed. Initially, I verified the company's gift-giving culture and the level of perks provided to employees that went beyond their normal pay for work. My initial framework had a typical if-than outline:

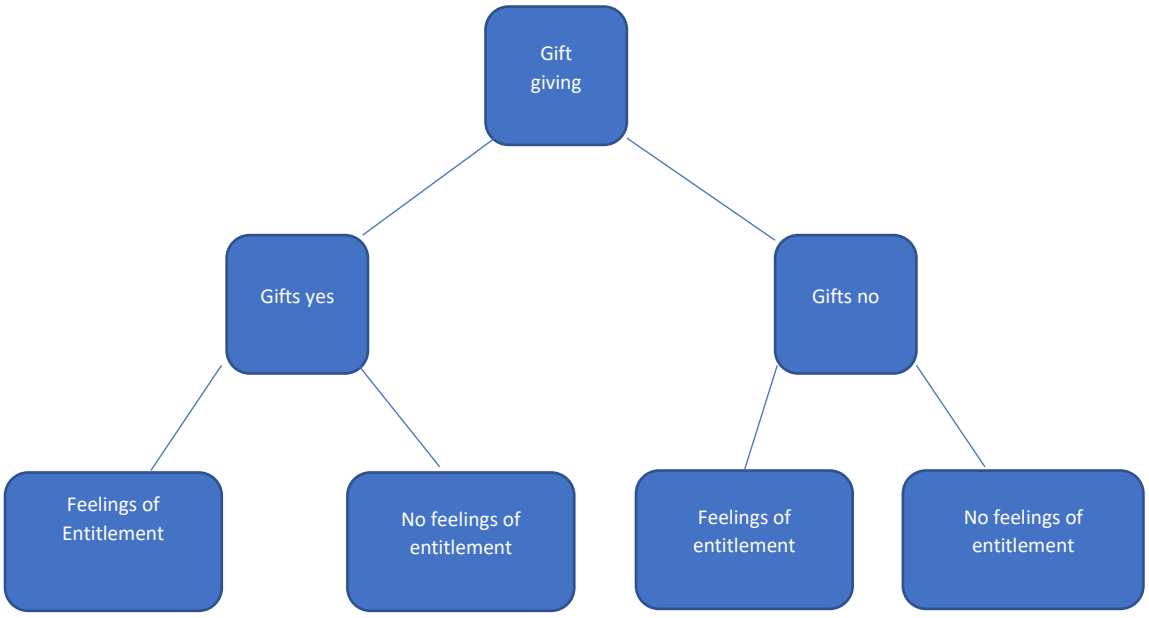

Figure 2 Simple if-than outline

Identifying and substantiating gift-giving practices at this organisation were simple to determine. An interview with the human resource manager answered this query. After answering whether gifts existed (they did), the next question would be if feelings of entitlement existed. If employee entitlement existed, could causality be determined? If employee entitlement did not exist, why did management perceive that it did? Therefore, measuring entitlement was the determining factor for the first action research cycle, as noted later in this chapter. This determination directed the entirety of the research. If the employees

felt entitled, the focus would be on the antecedents and to what extent the environment helped form employee beliefs and behaviours. The focus would be on the employees, with management forming a supporting role. If the employees did not feel entitled, the focus would shift to addressing and investigating the antecedents and environment supporting the management perceptions. The focus would then be on management, with employees forming a supporting role.

Continuing the path of deductive reasoning after establishing the existence of employee entitlement was problematic for several reasons. First, statistical research on entitlement tended toward clinical use in understanding individuals in psychiatric practice (Raskin and Terry, 1988; Pryor, Miller and Gaughan, 2008). The employees at GuardCo were not in need of clinical analysis. Contextual realism specific to this organisation's company culture, the influence of individuals, social contracts and politic, the ESOP, or management interpretations was essential. It was apparent that an inductive approach was more likely to harvest the data necessary to answer the questions and identify the constructs for analysis. I understood that the specificity of this ESOP's culture, interpersonal relationships, and perceptions were equally likely to influence employee behaviour and feelings of entitlement. It appeared short-sighted and ineffectual not to engage in a more collaborative, multivariant dialogue.

Another concern of deductive reasoning was the unknown basis on which I created my initial hypothesis. The assumptive nature that management concerns were true created a potential problem. Proof of management's generosity was observable in our initial meetings. I witnessed and had prior knowledge of gift-giving and perks to the employees, but I did not clearly understand management's feelings or impressions upon giving these gifts. Nor did I know the employee's feelings or impressions upon receipt of these gifts. I had no understanding of employee opinions outside of hearsay derived from management. This caused me to question the fallacy of using scientific methodology to address this problem because of the need for emergent data to address these questions. If company or management gift-giving was an antecedent to employee entitlement, it is imperative to question the reality of both concerns. The problem posed by management looked like this:

Figure 3 Initial hypothesis

In the language used by management, their gift-giving was akin to 'spoiling'. I did not separate gift-giving from spoiling in terms of a distinct antecedent, as the outcome remained the same: gift-giving leads to employee entitlement, as noted earlier. The use of the word spoiling was subjectively negative in its connotation. The negative language used by people in this organisation evolved into a minor theme of this research and is discussed further in this thesis.

Another factor used to reject positivist deductive reasoning was the concern in measuring culture. Organisational culture is unique and contributes significantly to our understanding of the political complexities and social paradigms (Izraeli and Jick, 1986; Seel, 2000). Pauchant and Mitroff (1988) liken culture within an organisation to a personality within a person, and it is paramount in every aspect of decision-making within this sphere. It would be undesirable to divorce the organisational culture from our study, considering its significance.

Finally, my emphasis on inductive research was due to the relevance of interpretation by all stakeholders. Scientific research, by its very design, can be limiting in terms of sensemaking. An organisation desiring that management, employees, and researcher scaffold their understanding of a problem must apply an inductive approach that allows ideas to arise from dialogue (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Pea, 2004; Rousseau, 2006). While pragmatism is fraught with pervasive bias as each person's interpretive lens becomes part of our interpretations, these opinions were essential to discovery.

I was unsure as to the validity of management's claims but proceeded as though they were true until emergent data disproved them. As a result of the initial scoping done in the first action cycle, my research questions shifted away from scientific deductive inquiry about management's gift-giving or how organisational culture might lead to employee entitlement to something less concrete. Questions emerged on why management perceived that employee entitlement existed. Did providing benefits, gifts, and perks to employees at an ESOP cause management to perceive employee entitlement? This question provided opportunities to look at areas of perception, expectation, and reflectivity.

3.2 Narrative inquiry

Emerging from the first action cycle was data that supported the movement away from deductive reasoning into the inductive research of a small group semi-structured interview. The discussions in the second action cycle brought forth themes which again demanded a pragmatic approach to determine the underlying causes of management's perceptions. Management, by their admission, held strong feelings of resentment and embarrassment about employee entitlement. According to management, employees expected more for doing less and were reportedly never satisfied. These interactions between management and employees created disharmony. Why did providing benefits at an organisation that touts the importance and significance of employee ownership create such strong feelings amongst managers? It was difficult to foresee finding those answers without engaging in an interactive and reflective process. My research question would be best answered within a constructivist ontology using a pragmatic approach by narratively exploring the phenomena (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2015; Clandinin, 2016). Clandinin (2016, p 18) notes,

> ***'…the focus of narrative inquiry is not only valorizing individuals' experience but is also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. Understood in this way, narrative inquiries begin and end in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study the individual's experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside an other, and writing and interpreting texts***.'

For this reason, an environment for narration to be said and heard provided a useful setting in which to explore the experiences of management lives and their influence on the relationships within the workplace.

3.3 Research Strategy

This research eventually engaged an interpretivist qualitative action research framework. Schon's (1983) problem-solving approach involving 'reflection-in-action' and the expected participatory nature of the questions asked by management made action research a notable choice. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2018) are recognized experts in qualitative data analysis. While their work focuses on data analysis techniques, they acknowledge the

collaborative nature between researcher and participants which empowers the later to actively participate in the research process. Likewise, Brooks and King (2016) proport the importance of engaging key stakeholders to align with the principles of engaged scholarship. In the case of GuardCo, this involves engaging employees and managers to understand the underlying causes and implications before developing strategies to address negative effects and promote positive workplace dynamics. This Action research also provided the flexibility to engage in a longitudinal study that was both reflective and reflexive. Given the desire to bring harmony to the organisation, participatory action research made more sense than practical action research, which is less empowering (Mertler, 2020).

Whilst this research was participatory, decisions and methodological choices were pragmatically and exclusively made with a focus on pragmatism. The people of GuardCo participated in each cycle, but they were not part of the steps determining how best to garner additional data in the next cycle.

This pragmatic approach should not be confused with the practicality embedded in other forms of action research. Management presented a problem ideal for a practical action research approach because of its emphasis on problem-solving for one solution. However, the dyad between manager and employee constructs both a social and a contextual reality which ultimately required an interpretivist approach.

Initially, however, I took a positivist approach and undertook quantitative data collection. This reflects the pragmatism used in my attempts to investigate the phenomena after each action cycle. Initial scoping of the problem by means of quantitative data collection using the Measurement of Employee Entitlement, I moved to a semi-structured interview in the second action cycle, only to move to narrative inquiry in the third action cycle.

The final action cycle found that ontologically, the multiple narratives exhibited by the stakeholders in both the second and third action cycles were significant enough to make quantitative research less likely to address the problems presented by the management. The action research was chosen because of the intended iteration and engagement of management to understand and then take action to solve the workplace problem. By accepting a pragmatic approach to action research, I removed limiting factors associated with staying within one method.

While I could see the potential for an ethnographic look at the social norms and company culture, the data and literature suggested that the participatory nature of action research, as noted and defined by (Johnson and Duberley, 2000), would enable the reflectivity needed for substantial change. Action research also allowed for the sensitivity to the historical and existential power relationships that are contextually embedded in this organisation. This study relied upon management's participation in the reflection, validation, and critique necessary for action research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014).

3.4 Consultancy

I was not an insider-researcher (see Appendix 7.1). Whilst it is unusual in action research, it is not without precedence. Greenwood and Levin (2007) illustrate examples of themselves as external consultants and their practical approach to participation in action research. Every attempt was made to keep the problem and management at the centre of the research by placing myself peer-to-peer with management. Certainly, the psychological and humanist approach permeates action research in praxis, and while I could appreciate the importance of trust in learning the nuances of an organizational culture of which I was not a part, I feel that being an outsider was useful to this research.

Consultancy is a co-productive link between academia and practitioner (Hughes, O'Regan and Wornham, 2009), but it is not without a unique set of factors to be considered. In my early discussions with management, it became apparent that my personal bias as a business owner and manager of a small business would play a significant role in the dynamics of our relationship. As another business owner in the same community, I knew most of the management from having served together on charitable boards or having attended fundraising events. Management viewed me as a peer, and our familiarity quickly established trust. This trust removed barriers and allowed for honest discussions about their concerns. Managers had admitted to being embarrassed to share with other ESOPs about their entitled employees as they felt alone in this problem. However, managers were not shy in sharing their thoughts and beliefs with me. The axiom that '…the activities of the scientist must be construed as beginning in experience'(Pollio, Graves and Arfken, 2006, p 254) truly did set the foundation of my interactions with management. I intentionally identified my assumptions and understanding of reality in the early data-gathering stage of my research to provide initial paradigms that set the methodological stage.

My prior history with the managers helped to build rapport, and my lack of history with employees allowed me to function without preconceptions based on past experiences with them. I am also a manager/business owner with employees, but I understood that GuardCo employees were not *my* employees. Earlier in my career, I had been an employee, and the experience of becoming a manager was noted and provided a foundation. Still, I was mindful that my experiences were not from a rural Texas manufacturing plant. I remained cognizant that their experiences were not my own. I intentionally used my background and familiarity to establish rapport with managers. I maintained a more clinical disassociation during my interactions with employees, which aligns with Starkey, Hatchuel, and Tempest's (2009) argument for management research as a design science that supports relevancy.

I met with the management of GuardCo to learn of their concerns about employee entitlement. At this initial meeting, one of the participants had to leave to hand out backpacks to the employees who had completed a training class in another part of the building. I questioned the management about the perks offered to employees, and we discussed the frequency of gift-giving. We decided that I would return to survey the employees and conduct focus group sessions as a non-paid consultant. I would benefit from using the research for my doctoral thesis, and they would benefit from an outside consultant who could focus their attention on addressing this workplace issue.

3.5 Action Research Cycles

Stakeholder involvement and contextual relevancy were significant components for the understanding and intervention of the proposed workplace problem. This supported the use of action research (Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2015). In this section, I will give a brief overview of the action research processes which utilised the model of construction, planning, process, and evaluation (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). Figure four denotes the steps taken to collect and analyse data, not necessarily the 'action' that catalysed thought development. Figure four highlights the research design and the development of actions and interventions. Chapter four will delve more specifically into the action within each cycle. Reflections on the nature of action development within the thesis are articulated in chapter four and Figure 22 at the end of chapter four.

The process of each cycle was contextually relevant and brought forth additional perspectives, and prompted the manager's participation. The action of framing, re-framing,

and constructing from emergent data required that managers express their perceptions about the employees based on their available information. For example, in cycle one, manager perceptions were based on their observations and personal analysis of how they perceived employee entitlement. In action cycle two, managers participated by reviewing and providing their perceptions of the survey results. In the third cycle, managers again introduced new perspectives. This distinction is significant because the cycles provide a framework of action imbedded in this research. These cycles were not the vehicle that prompted some other action to take place at GuardCo. As explained previously, this action research used a pragmatic approach to addressing and working amongst the people at GuardCo. Cycle one begins with a positivist analysis that shifts to a constructivist epistemology in the second action cycle. The second action cycle uses a focus group research method, whilst the third cycle relies upon narrative inquiry as individuals share their stories. This is illustrative of the shift from deductive to inductive data collection and how the evaluation of each cycle caused a shift in the method used to pragmatically acquire necessary information.

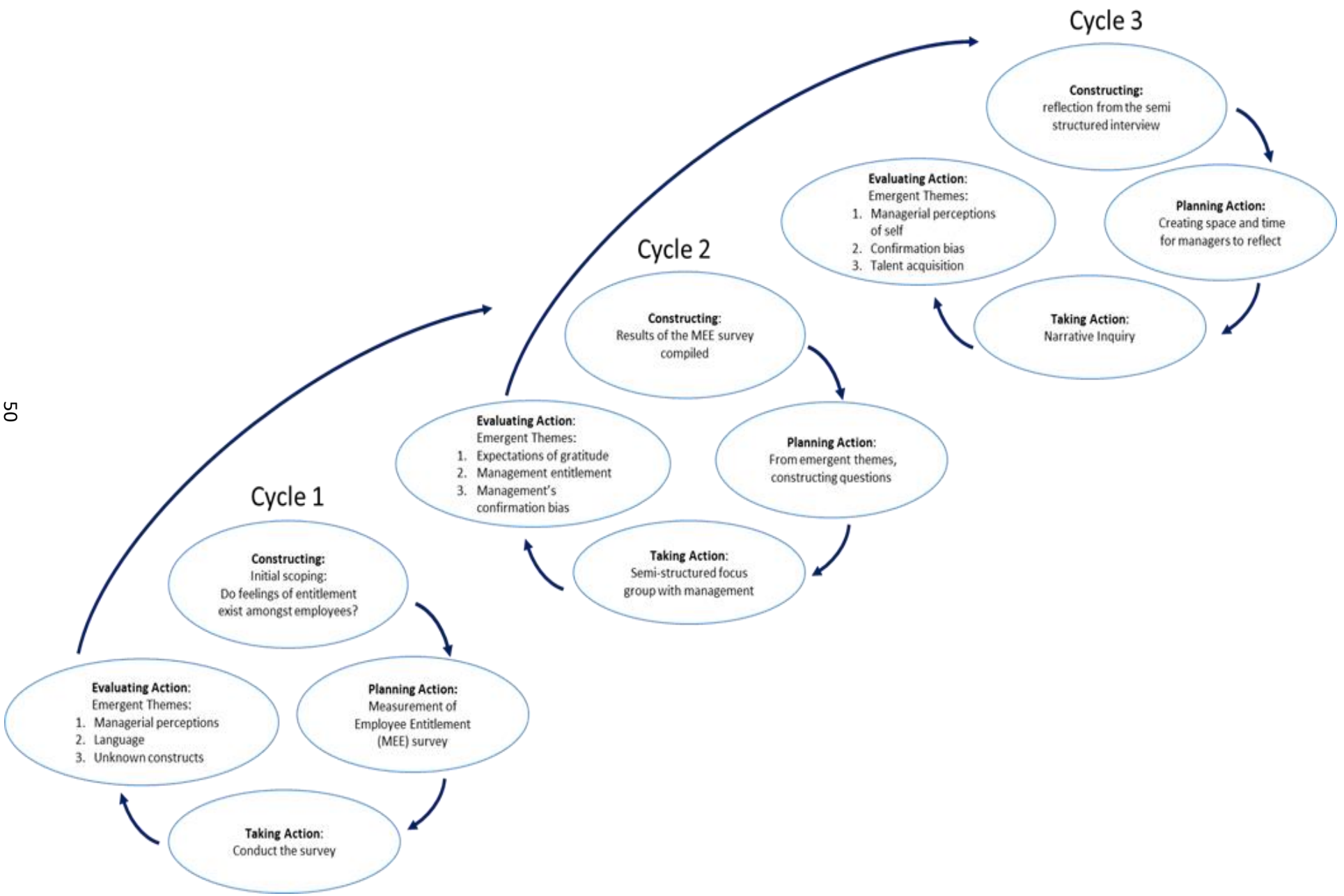

Figure 4 Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick

3.5.1 Cycle 1

Constructing the Problem – Schön's (2001) approach to reflective practice is embedded in action research. The construction of the problem is a starting point within the context of a larger social structure already in motion. Science of this nature is fluidly evolving within its context. Having been presented with the problem by management required me to mine for literature to define and understand the constructs associated with employee entitlement. The construction phase, therefore, of this first action cycle involved the mining of literature that reflected this purpose. Details of the initial literature are discussed in chapter two.

As noted earlier in this chapter, it was important to determine if employee entitlement could be measured or if its existence was merely a perception of management. I followed Westerlaken, Jordan, and Ramsay's (2017) Measurement of Employee Entitlement (MEE) survey (See appendix 7.2) to see if we could determine the existence of employee entitlement. This survey was designed to assess employee entitlement related to certain psychological aspects discussed further in the findings chapter. This eighteen-question survey utilised a one-through-six Likert scale, where one was 'strongly disagree', two was 'disagree', three was 'mildly disagree', four was 'mildly agree', five was 'agree', and six was 'strongly agree'.

Planning Action – the original plan was to provide the paper survey to be filled out anonymously during an all-employee meeting. I would not collect names or have any way to know details about the person completing the survey. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, modifications to this plan and a new ethics review were necessary to plan an anonymous survey via phone. During the planning stage, management asked for a modification of the survey in the form of additional questions. They specifically asked for data about how the employees felt about the modified work environment due to implemented Covid-19 Federal restrictions. To determine the possible significance of the perks offered to the employees in this ESOP, and as part of the scoping of the workplace problem, I asked the employee to rank the importance of certain amenities in an open-ended question which allowed them to self-identify and self-assess their added value. The survey and survey results are discussed in greater detail in chapter four. A copy of the survey and results are found in Appendix 7.5.

Taking Action - Due to Covid-19 restrictions and because the majority of employees work on a production line in a warehouse, I read the survey aloud over the phone to the employees

and recorded their answers on paper. A manager provided a phone for the employees in a small private office or conference room, depending upon the location. The human resources representative brought people to the phone one at a time. Once they were present, they were asked to read and acknowledge the participant sheet and sign the disclosure acknowledgement. I reviewed both documents with them verbally and asked for permission to proceed. I surveyed a total of 53 employees over three days which was nearly every plant employee. No attempt was made to capture employees who worked out of state, may have been absent due to illness, vacation or otherwise unavailable on the days of the survey. Employees who worked out of the area were sales people and technicians that were excluded from this study as management did not see these workers as a problem. We received a full response rate from the employees.

Evaluating Action - The first iteration of action research provided an early assessment of the feelings of entitlement that might have existed amongst the employees. While I did employ a quantitative survey as part of initial fact-finding, it was used only to gauge employee feelings and as a discussion point in the second action research cycle with the management focus group. SPSS was used to identify the averages and frequency of respondents' answers. SPSS was also used to provide visualisations of the data in the form of tables and graphs that were used as discussion points in the next action cycle. Full details are found in chapter four.

3.5.2 Cycle 2

Constructing the Problem – Drawing upon the results of the first action cycle, it was apparent that feelings of entitlement were minimal amongst the employees. The focus shifted to question why management perceived employee entitlement. Within the pragmatic paradigm, a different method was employed for data extraction. The data was compiled from the first cycle and was used in a group discussion using a focus group strategy modelled after (Cyr, 2019). Cyr suggests a focus both on the data created from the individuals but also focusing on small group dynamics and interactions. The purpose of the second cycle was to assess management perceptions of entitlement in a dialogical exchange.

Planning Action – In this exploratory stage, I compiled the results from the first cycle into a document given to the managers (see appendix 7.5). I created a list of questions in case the dialogue strayed from the goal of capturing management impressions.

Taking Action – I began by asking management to predict how the employees might answer each survey question, and then we reviewed the results of each question. Finally, I captured their observations and impressions while soliciting additional information based on their comments. During this cycle, the challenge of normative ideas began to form both in the managers and in the direction of the research itself.

Evaluating Action – Field notes were compiled during and immediately following the meeting. I documented additional impressions and group dynamics immediately following the meeting. Each of the participants and I had a copy of the results of the MEE survey. Due to covid restrictions, this meeting took place online. As I wanted to remove as many barriers to information access (Sanger, 1996; Shaver, 2005; Rutakumwa *et al.*, 2020) and felt management would be more inclined to speak 'off record', I chose not to record our conversation and instead took notes of speakers on particular topics and wrote a short-hand of the conversation. This forced me to be highly attentive to the conversation. Immediately following the meeting, I took my notes and turned them into written detailed dialogue that appear as 'snapshots' of conversations within this thesis. The dialogue was written over two hours following the meeting. I attempted to punctuate the verbal account in the 'truest' nature to how I understood what and how things were said (Braun and Clark, 2016).

By observation, participant profiles are noted in the following table. The approximately age was noted. Emic racial identifiers were noted in this table to ascertain a pattern in the language from those from Texas versus those not from Texas. Following Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2020), I noted my impressions about their socioeconomic status based on previously known information, observation, and information provided by the HR Manager. I made initial notes during the meeting on my copy of the GuardCo/MEE document, but most notes followed the meeting. I noted all who were present.

List of Managers	Approximate Age	Employment Status	Emic Racial Identifiers	Socioeconomic Status	Speaking time
CEO	70+ years old	Initial owner of GuardCo. Semi-retired. Part-time Salary.	Male, White from northern US.	Wealthy	Dominant
President	50-60 years old	Joined GuardCo. Full-time Salary. Hired by CEO.	Male, White Non-Texan	Wealthy	Dominant
HR Manager	65-70 years old	Hired by President. Full-time Salary	Male, Hispanic from Texas	Wealthy	Neutral
Assistant HR Manager	30-40 years old	Hired by HR Manager. Full-time Salary	Female, White from Texas	Middle to lower income.	Very little - neutral
Plant Manager	40-45 years old	Hired by President. Full-time Salary	Male, White from Texas	Middle to upper income	Very little – mostly to agree
COO	50-60 years old	Hired by President. Full-time Salary	Male, White from Texas	Middle to upper income	Very little – mostly to agree

Table 2 Participant Profiles (Adapted from Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2020, p 156)

I acknowledge that my fieldnotes emphasised the manager's particularly surprising or useful comments. This can be explained by the 'difference between seeing and observing' (Sanger. 1996). My observation was for a purpose. I focused on finding data to answer questions raised in the construction phase of each cycle. Emergent data came from my focus on answering the questions and any surprising observations or comments that resonated as harsh or contradictory. To acknowledge my bias and any cognitive filtering, I noted dialogue where the managers seemed to be talking to one another for more extended periods. On my copy of the survey, I noted if managers had little or nothing to say about a particular area. I was unclear at the time if this would be significant; however, it only occurred twice and very early in the conversations. I surmised that the lack of comments in these areas was because they had limited time with the data and had not yet formed opinions, they felt like expressing

at that time. Ultimately their non-comments did not provide any particular insights that were useful for discovery.

Later, my fieldnotes were coded into multiple categories: examples, comments, and my impressions of facial expressions/tone of voice/body language. These categories were colour-coded with highlighters. For example, if management said something derogatory or perhaps rolled their eyes, I highlighted it in yellow. Yellow denoted negative comments. Positive comments about employees were highlighted in blue. .If a manager said something contradicting the survey data, I highlighted it in orange. An example, using Sanger's (1996) methodological approach for data collection is noted in the next paragraphs.

When we arrived at page 19 document given to GuardCo, I noted that the CEO wanted to show this table to their employees at the upcoming 'owner's meeting'. He noted that the employees had unrealistic expectations and talked about 'freeriders'. This was confusing to me because the frequency table and frequency data which clearly noted that most employees either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. I noted the key words used by management along with the first letter of their names on the document. I noted the following:

> *S – wants to show empl. Shift A probl. "unrealistic exp" (JS agrees)*
>
> *V – shift A*
>
> *J – freerider. Demoralize. Not doing share. 3-year esop*

Following the meeting and using the complimentary approaches of both Sanger (1996) and Clandinin (2016), I translated the dialogue into my field notes as follows:

> *S – I want to show this to my employees*
>
> *My notes to side: Confused. His tone is accusatory? Unclear what he is seeing. Jes parroted him. V points out the first shift? [this question mark was my question as to why she brought up the first shift].*
>
> *J – asked about tenure. Said he was always worried about freeriders. Said they were demoralizers that do not do their share. He felt there was a disconnect with people who had not been with the company long enough to "get it" with the esop. He said that they get it at the 3-year mark when they get their 3rd esop statement.*
>
> *I asked if this had anything to do with raises and it doesn't. It has to do with how well the company does and increase in their retirement benefits. Like 401K. What are they talking about? They should have been happy with this result. What did the quiet*

people think? What did I miss? I believe they are looking to be right. Confirmation bias? Tried to remain neutral but confusing.

This exchange was translated into dialogue and found in section 4.2.

I entered my notes into Excel but found it easier to refer to my field notes because the conversations aligned with the data given to the managers.

Table 3 Example of rejected Excel coding

MEE Q	CEO	Pres	COO	Plant MGR	HR Mgr	HR Asst Mgr	My impressions
Employees should be rewarded for average performance	Freeriders. Demoralizers Disconnect? 3-year ESOP statement	Wants to show this to his employees Points to unrealistic expectations Shift A			Parrots unrealistic expectations	Parrots shift A	Confusing. They ignored the fact that their employees were not feeling entitled. I pointed it out but they kept with this idea.

The Excel document lacked the contextual references found in the field notes as dialogue my thought could enter as comments were made. I used Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic coding approach notes that when coding interviews or focus groups, one should seek a recurring pattern around a central concept by using the colour coding. I was satisfied that the decision to abandon Excel in favour of drawing directly from my field notes to best capture context. As noted in the example above, and in the case of this action cycle, the focus of management on actively seeking out something they felt to be true was often found in the orange highlights and will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

The documentation of the manager's comments was intended to be as clear and contextual as possible. The purpose was not to eliminate all ambiguity as in more positivist approaches. It is certainly possible (and arguably, preferred by most) to conduct this research with the intent to remove the impressions or contextualism of a researcher's observations. Considering my perceptions, my findings were analysed in terms of the literature and extant studies on the emergent themes. Noteworthy and specific manager comments are noted in detail in chapter

four. Cognitive bias and organisational language became emergent themes of this cycle and formed the basis for switching to narrative inquiry in the following action cycle.

The highlighted colours established themes or patterns in the words used by management and in my reactions to those words. Data could be entered thematically into a matrix after the second and third action cycle. Themes became lenses for reviewing literature and establishing the next iteration of this research. These themes are identified in chapter four after each action cycle.

3.5.3 Cycle 3

Constructing the Problem - Two highlights arose from the focus group discussion. One highlight was the emergence of what might be interpreted as cognitive bias in some of the comments by management. Upon reviewing the results from the survey (cycle 1), they would point to the minor and slightly obscure survey findings as "proof" of their opinions. This is discussed further in chapter four. The next highlight was in the early and unguarded use of demeaning language when referencing employee behaviours. While these particular comments emerged in a group setting, it appeared that the comments were limited to only one or two people. Further investigation would again require analysis of the literature and a closer inspection of individuals. There appeared to be a limited number of more vocal participants that voiced stronger opinions than others. I employed narrative inquiry for this third action cycle because self-narratives create meaningful insight into how and why managers perceive their world (Rostron, 2021). Continuing the participatory action research process aligns with narrative inquiry by allowing managers to share their narratives and contribute to the construction of knowledge (Clandinin, 2016). Exploring through personal stories and experiences can deepen our understanding of the phenomenon and provide a more holistic perspective. Participatory action research allows for active listening and co-construction of knowledge which enables the capture and analysis of narratives. For this reason, I used narrative inquiry to discover perceptions and thoughts of the environment, I employed a narrative inquiry methodology. Clandinin (2016) posits the process of living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories is how we exist. We live in personal, cultural, and institutional stories. Experience is relational, contextual, and, importantly, narratively composed. To gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of both the managers and the employees, one must first listen to their stories. The narrative inquirer becomes integral to the process because listening is necessary.

Planning Action - The literature and data collected in the second action cycle provided the basis for the questions created for the semi-structured phone discussions. The questions could not be identical for each participant because of the varying roles played by the interviewees. The fourth and fifth chapters of this thesis provide greater detail and analysis of the third action cycle. The goal of this action cycle was to allow the participants to self-reflect on their history to see if they could recognise by self-discovery their own bias. A secondary goal of the cycle would be to see if they could identify mediation efforts to address bias or identify possible implications of ignoring them.

Taking Action - I conducted one-to-one semi-structured interviews over the phone whereby I asked open-ended questions soliciting the participant to recall their past and institutional experiences. I began by asking each person how they came to be associated with GuardCo. I documented their stories.

Evaluating Action - Again, my handwritten notes were colour-coded with highlighters. After looking for patterns and comparisons, themes emerged. These themes directed me to additional literature for review. These themes developed into lenses by which to analyse the phenomena. During this time, initial themes were evaluated for accuracy and emergent themes replaced or enhanced any existing themes. In the third action cycle, thematic analysis was less relevant because of the shift the focus narrowed to individual narration and the significance of perception in storytelling and sensemaking. These are discussed in depth in chapters four and five.

3.6 Ethics

I re-submitted my ethics proposal to the DBA Research Ethics Committee with modifications due to Covid-19 constraints in data collection. My modified ethics proposal was approved on 11 June 2020. Following the University of Liverpool's guidelines for ethical research, as outlined in the DBA Thesis Handbook (2021) and following the general concerns identified by (Bell and Bryman, 2007), I sought mitigation of any potential ethical pitfalls. My primary goal was to promote harmony in the workplace while simultaneously eliciting information that could potentially damage the manager-employee dyadic relationship. For example, negative comments could cause personal distress if confidential conversations were disclosed outside of data acquisition. These risks were assessed to be minimal because of the limited number of stakeholders, but I reminded management that the goal was to foster positivity.

I was on the phone and unable to meet the participants in the first action cycle. Participants were told by the plant manager and human resources manager that they were to take part in a doctoral thesis research study. I understood that the employees welcomed the break away from the production line. There did not appear to be coercion involved in forcing employees to participate. The human resource manager voiced a concern that the employees might take advantage of being away from their tasks for too long. I assured him that I would not engage in additional dialogue with the employees beyond the parameters of the survey. Participants sounded to be in good moods and seemed willing to assist me in my study. Participants were given a consent form and information sheets upon entering the room. After explaining both the consent form and information sheets to the voice on the phone, I verified their understanding that participation was voluntary and asked them to sign the consent if they would like to proceed. While some of the employee participants claimed to know who I was, I did not recognise any of the voices on the phone. I live in a small town, and it was likely that I might know some of the employee participants. This concern was mitigated because we never met in person. I attempted to avoid information from the MEE survey tracing back to any particular person or group of persons. Only one person chose not to answer one of the questions asked in the survey.

Regarding the organisation's anonymity, I assured the owners and managers of GuardCo that every effort would be made to mask their names and any identifying information. I chose not to electronically record our conversations. Instead, scribed field notes of our conversations were used to ease and comfort the managers in the focus group who preferred not to be recorded. My notes were made immediately following the meeting and reflected my impressions and management's comments. Quotes were noted during the meeting. On two occasions, I called GuardCo after the meeting to gain clarity about a particular item. As noted earlier, the dialogue was written as management commentary of the survey data. Attempts were made to capture answers to my questions as well as manager to manager conversations. I was cognisant of my goal of capture management perceptions and avoid misrepresentation.

Whilst I obtained informed consent from the employees and managers, and the overall research theme research was discussed, the nature of each action cycle evolved over time. It would not have been possible to fully disclose the goals of the research cycles as the themes were emergent and more focused over time. Management was emailed the informed consent

form directly from the human resources manager before starting the research. Additionally, existing research shows the influence of the researcher can impact results (DiLalla and Dollinger, 2006). In order to diminish the likelihood of steering participants' answers before discovery, deception was avoided, and the overall theme of perception was used in an attempt to create open-minded cognition (Ottati *et al.*, 2015).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter began examining the development of my research question and followed the process of examining assumptions, moving from deductive reasoning to inductive reasoning to understanding the need for understanding narratives. This development followed the action research strategy whereby the first cycle employed deduction before moving to the second cycle, which focused on emergent themes from the dialogue. The final cycle employed narrative inquiry as I documented management's stories for further analysis. Greater analysis of the individual cycles and their stages can be viewed in chapter four. I concluded the chapter by looking at ethical concerns as they arose and were addressed.

Both the methodology and literature emerged throughout the action cycles and were the basis for scaffolding contextualised knowledge into understanding. The next chapter will examine the workplace phenomena from varying lenses which enabled theoretical scoping and triangulation. The multiple lenses came from emergent themes within the action cycles and helped form each subsequent cycle. In the next chapter, literature purposely outlines the lenses that were used—and in some instances, rejected—in the process of striving toward understanding.

Chapter 4 – Cycles of action

4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides the narrative details of the action research cycles used to identify and understand the organisational concerns having led to workplace disharmony. By pragmatically engaging multiple methods of discovery, I managed the dynamics and politics within this organisation for three action research cycles. The first of these iterative cycles used a quantitative study for the initial scoping and problematisation. This cycle was primarily viewed from a management perspective and used management's preconceptions as a starting point. The central area of concern was assumed to be the employee. The second cycle used semi-structured interviews within a focus group 'workshop' as the primary method of data extraction. This cycle addressed the emergent and thematic understanding from cycle one and created further questions for exploration. This cycle focused on thematic constructs and used data from the survey as a catalyst for our group discussion. The third and final cycle used individual narrations to address management perceptions of themselves and others. Managers were able to tell their stories and reflect upon their perceptions. Each iteration increased actionable knowledge for management and allowed me, as the consultant, to navigate action learning (Pedler, 2008).

This chapter acknowledges that whilst each cycle honed both the problem and the participants, the potential stakeholders expanded in size. There remained only four participants in the third cycle, but their influence and power within the organisation were widespread. What started as an initial problem for managers would later be viewed as a more significant potential problem for employees should manager behaviours change as a result of their ideas and perceptions.

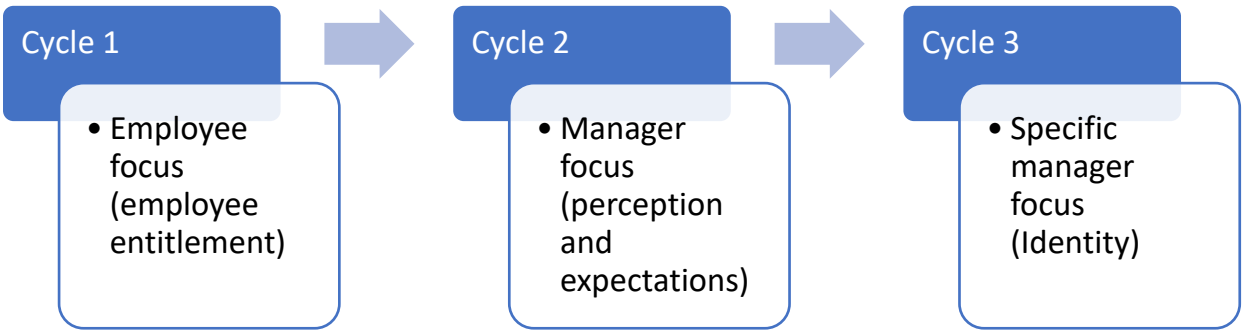

Figure 5 Focus shifts by cycle

4.1 Action cycle 1

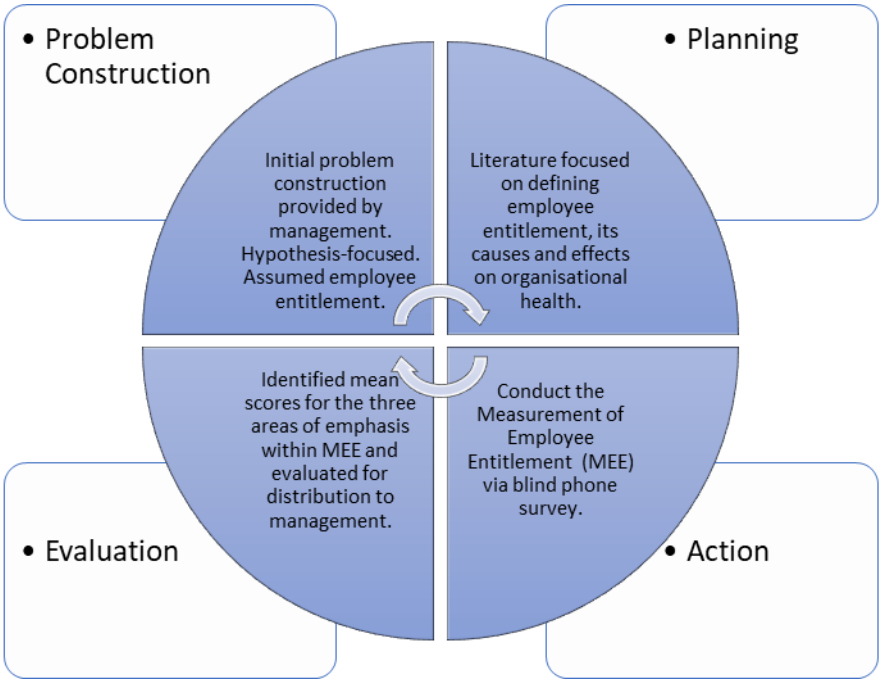

Figure 6 Action cycle 1

4.1.1 Problem construction

The initial problematisation of this workplace concern came via one channel: the human resources department. The human resources manager, the assistant human resources manager, and the company president met with me in 2019. According to the human resources manager, the executive management had reached a high level of frustration due to employees' demanding expectations. The discussion centred around how I might assist them with this embarrassing situation. Management felt the employee's expectations exceeded normality and appeared 'one-sided'. '*They expect[ed] more and more without giving any more*' (Fieldnotes, 2019). This caused the relationship between managers and their subordinates to sour, which led to resentment. The human resource manager had expressed that he tried discussing his frustration with human resource managers from other companies within their ESOP cohort but quickly stopped. He expressed, '…*we were the only ones with this problem. It was frankly embarrassing.*' He thought he might have found an ally with one other organisation but found that was not the case.

> *'One guy said that his people acted spoiled, or whatever, sometimes too. But when I told him some of the things that our employees demanded, he backed off and said, "No, our guys don't act like that". So, I backtracked and acted like it wasn't that big*

> *a deal. I don't want it to reflect badly on [the company]. I don't want it to look like we have a really bad problem. It is embarrassing to think that our employees act spoiled.'* (Fieldnotes, 2019).

Their primary concern was that the topic and title of employee entitlement could negatively reflect—and thus impact—the manager and employee relationship. For this reason, I chose not to disclose this thesis title or exact topic and opted for a rather broad description of employee and management perceptions. We discussed the importance of anonymity. I shared my thesis proposal, and we decided upon a flexible timeline. We agreed to an informal contract that allowed me to survey the employees and, if necessary, follow up with focus group discussions.

I have long-standing acquaintances with this company's human resource manager, president, and chief executive officer. I formulated the first round of literature research from their descriptions, assuming that their description of the workplace problem was accurate. I acknowledged myself as an outside researcher and consultant with personal pre-formed knowledge of the company's reputation. I had witnessed and been aware that this organisation was a generous employer. It is highly regarded in the community and has the reputation of being an excellent place to work. In addition to being an Employee Stock Ownership Plan company (ESOP), the Chief Executive Officer provides other unique perks. As noted in the introduction, these perks include access to a beach house (after five years of service), shortened work week, birthday celebrations, bonuses, and gifts for meeting goals. Observation and initial questioning of both employees and management determined that gift-giving and perks were indeed a fact of this organisation. What had yet to be determined was if empirical evidence could support management's claim of employee entitlement in its negative form, as described earlier. Initial questions for addressing this construct were specific:

> **Q1: Did feelings of entitlement exist amongst the employees?**
>
> **Q2: If entitlement exists, could it be measured?**
>
> **Q3: If entitlement exists and can be measured, can the scope be narrowed even further to determine if the problem exists amongst a subset of the whole?**
>
> **Q4: If entitlement exists, what antecedents contribute to feelings of employee entitlement within an ESOP?**

Q5: If entitlement did *not* exist, why did management think it did?

Therefore, the first action research cycle emphasised scoping an initial understanding of the environment for validation of management's claims of employee entitlement. The next section identifies the initial planning of this effort.

4.1.2 Planning

The self-reported Measure of Employee Entitlement (MEE) designed by researchers Westerlaken, Jordan, and Ramsay (2017) draws on Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES) and NPI's normative scales within a more relevant workplace context. The initial MEE study used a small cross-section of employees from varying industries and backgrounds to identify three factors: reward as a right, self-focus, and excessive self-regard.

Figure 7 Components of employee entitlement

Reward as right was identified as expectations of automatic rewards and recognition and an unwillingness to consider external factors that might have a diminishing affect. It was seen as a misalignment between employer and employee performance requirements. Self-focus was identified as a focus on self to the exclusion of others. Self-focused individuals were noted as having a self-servicing attribution by diverting blame to others. Lastly, the third area of focus was excessive self-regard which was characterised by employee's perception of self as having a great value to their employer. People with excessive self-regard see themselves as special and place themselves uniquely above their peers (Westerlaken, Jordan and Ramsay, 2017). The combination of all three would manifest in employee entitlement

behaviours.

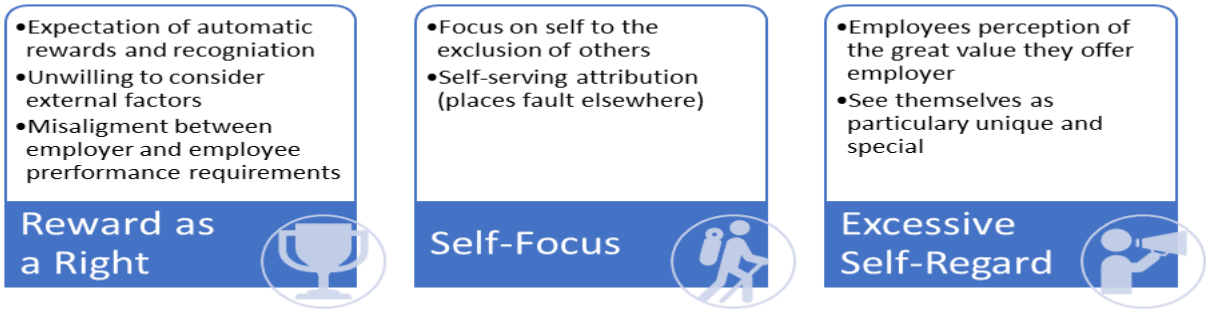

Figure 8 Factor summation of employee entitlement

Westerlaken, Jordan, and Ramsay's (2017) Measurement of Employee Entitlement (MEE) is an eighteen-question quantitative survey. The MEE uses a six-point Likert scale whereby 1 is Strongly Disagree, 2 is Disagree, 3 is Mildly Disagree, 4 is Mildly Agree, 5 is Agree, and 6 is Strongly Agree. There is no option for a neutral answer. The MEE survey was tested for external validity against other more commonly used surveys, such as the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES), Self Esteem Scale, and the Positive Reciprocity Questionnaire. The original study researched civil servants across a network of locations in Canada and had not been studied in one workplace, nor had it been studied in the United States. I obtained permission from the authors of the MEE to utilise their survey for this endeavour (see appendix 7.2 email authorization.

Adding contextualisation to the survey meant a modification to the original survey. I included an additional question which solicited employees to identify their opinions and the impact of the ESOP and other perks. I remained under the assumption that entitlement existed and wanted to discern if the ESOP—specifically the employee-owner designation—was an antecedent to these feelings. Further modifications to the survey were at the behest of management. Management asked that I garner the employee's impressions about management's handling of Covid-19 protocols. A copy of the full survey can be found in the appendix 7.4. The results of the MEE survey in its original format were provided to management in action cycle two. The results of the modifications were shared verbally at a

separate time with the human resources manager and became a sub-topic discussion point that is noted in cycle two.

The original plan was to distribute a paper survey to the employees during a monthly meeting. Employees would fill out the survey and drop it into a receptacle. This would ensure the anonymity of the survey's participants. When the United States went into lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this manufacturing company was considered 'essential' and was able to continue operations and production with modifications. All in-person, non-essential meetings were discontinued, which prevented the distribution of a paper survey. In order to maintain safety protocols, employees were divided into smaller shifts so that fewer people were in the building simultaneously. Management and I decided that in order to ensure that employee anonymity was maintained, I would conduct the survey over the phone during the various shifts.

4.1.3 Taking Action

I surveyed 53 employees from two manufacturing plants located in two different cities (approximately 30 km apart). Forty-five of the participants were men, and eight participants were female. Excluded from participating were employees who primarily worked internationally or outside of the manufacturing plant. No attempt was made to capture any employees who may have been absent due to illness, vacation, or otherwise unavailable on the survey day. This survey's purpose was as an initial scoping method to determine if there was a basis for management's perceptions of employee entitlement.

A human resources representative provided a phone for the employees in a small private office or conference room, depending upon the location. The human resources representative brought people to the phone one at a time while I waited for them to arrive. Once they were present, they were asked to read and acknowledge the participant sheet provided to them and sign the disclosure. I reviewed the information with them verbally and asked for permission to proceed.

They were told and verbally acknowledged their understanding that their answers were to be used as part of my doctoral research addressing workplace perceptions. I read the survey questions and documented their responses to a one-through-six Likert scale. Each questionnaire was numbered for reference purposes. No names were provided to me, but I

documented if the voice sounded male or female, which shift they worked, and if they had supervisory duties or not.

4.1.3 Evaluation

The data from the survey was entered into SPSS in order to generate a mean score, standard deviation, and variance of each answer. Following Westerlaken, Jordan, and Ramsay (2017), I created an average mean of the entire survey and then broke the means down by the three entitlement subscales: reward as right, self-focus, and excessive self-regard. A score between one and three indicated lower feelings of entitlement. Scores between four and six indicated higher feelings of entitlement. The results are in the table below.

Table 4- MEE Survey results

Factors	Results
MEE (overall score)	3.19
• Reward as Right	3.09
• Self-Focus	2.39
• Excessive Self-Regard	4.37

A breakdown of each factor was used to identify particular areas that would be used in the development of the next action research cycle. Specifically, the questions which resulted in a mean score over four were highlighted and used during our conversation in cycle two. The tables below distribute the questions related to each factor. Nine of the MEE questions related to Reward as Right. Five questions related to Self-Focus. Four questions related to Excessive Self-Regard. The results by factor and individual questions are noted in the following sections.

Table 5 Reward as right

Reward as Right (Mean = 3.09)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I expect regular promotions	53	1	6	4.15	1.307
I should get a pay raise if I perform my job to a satisfactory level	53	1	6	4.36	1.257
I expect to be able to delegate tasks that I don't want to do	53	1	6	2.19	1.226
It is my employer's responsibility to set goals for my career	53	1	6	2.66	1.544
I expect regular pay increases regardless of how the organization performs	53	1	6	3.11	1.296

I expect a bonus every year	53	1	6	2.96	1.454
I deserve to be paid more than others	53	1	5	2.85	1.433
Employees should be rewarded for average performance	53	1	6	2.91	1.596
I should have the right to demand work that is interesting to me	53	1	6	2.72	1.524
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Under the factor Reward as Right, two questions met the criteria to be discussed in the second action cycle. They were:

- I expect regular promotions
- I should get a pay raise if I perform my job to a satisfactory level

The frequency of each of these answers are shown in the following graph:

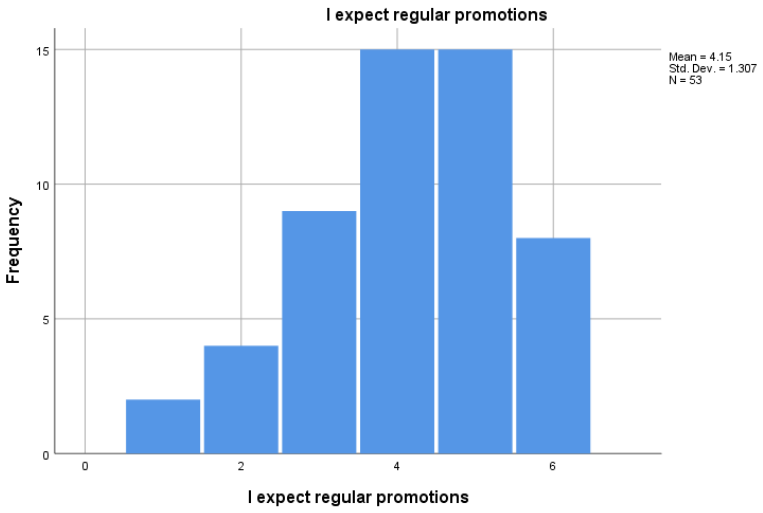

Figure 9 Frequency graph 'I expect regular promotions'

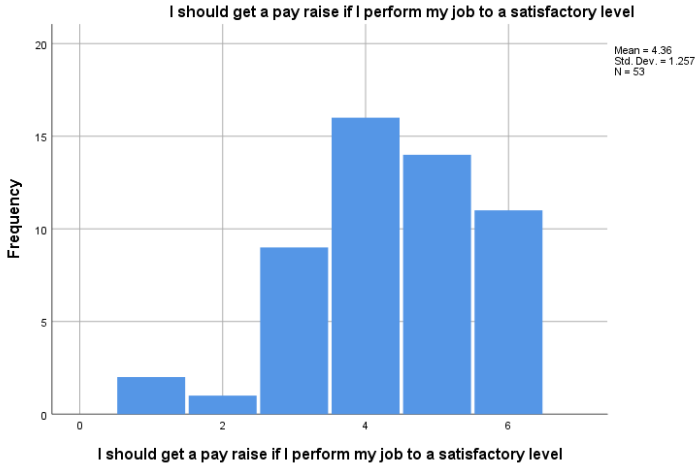

Figure 10 Frequency graph 'I should get a pay raise..'

Both graphs show a frequency skewed to the higher end of the Likert scale, which would indicate a higher feeling of entitlement. The most common responses were ‘mildly agree’ or ‘agree’. These two questions would be used and highlighted in cycle two.

Self-focus

The next factor is Self-focus. There were five questions on the survey that aligned with this subset. Whilst the overall mean of this factor would not indicate a tendency toward employee entitlement, one question yielded a 3.87 mean score. This question was noted and brought out in the cycle two discussion. The results of this subset are shown in the following table.

Table 6 Self focus

Self-Focus (Mean = 2.394)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I expect to be able to take breaks whenever I want	53	1	6	2.13	1.331
I should be able to take leave whenever it suites me	53	1	6	2.25	1.357
Employers should accommodate my personal circumstances	53	1	6	3.87	1.194
It is the organization's fault if I don't perform my job requirements	52	1	6	1.87	1.284
I deserve preferential treatment at work	53	1	5	1.92	1.174
Valid N (listwise)	52				

The frequency of the participant’s answer to the highlighted question is show in the following graph:

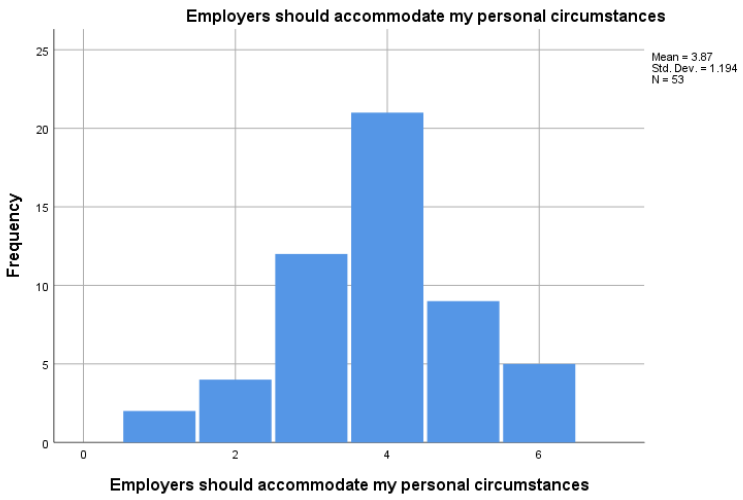

Figure 11 Frequency graph 'Employers should accommodate...'

The responses to this particular question were noteworthy. GuardCo has a reputation for employee accommodations from a history of doing so. Employees have shared examples of management helping families with sick children by providing additional family leave and financial assistance for medical bills. While conducting the survey, two employees mentioned that the new shift was very difficult because they now worked during the weekends. One person had not seen his wife, a nurse, in over a month because, as a healthcare worker, she was called in for extra shifts. The second gentleman was struggling with joint custody of his children. By court order, he had his children on weekends. When the human resource manager became aware of these situations, he stepped in to adjust schedules to accommodate these employees. It was likely that employees held an understanding that should they ever need assistance for personal problems, they would be afforded accommodations because, indeed, they always had. Nonetheless, the question of employee accommodations was added to the list of questions taken into the second action cycle.

Excessive Self-Regard

The final factor to be analysed was the subset of Excessive Self-Regard. With the highest overall mean score of 4.365, this area had the greatest impact on the overall MEE mean.

Table 7 Excessive self-regard

Excessive Self-Regard (Mean = 4.365)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Any organization should be grateful to have me as an employee	53	2	6	5.15	.928
I believe I have exceptional skills and abilities	53	3	6	5.23	.847
I want to only work in roles that significantly influence the rest of the organisation	53	1	6	3.70	1.367
I only want to work in positions that are critical to the success of the organization	53	1	6	3.38	1.404
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Whilst only two questions had a score of four or higher, every question had a mean score higher than three and was therefore worth noting in action cycle two. The following graphs show the frequency of the answers to the four questions found in this subset.

Figure 12 Frequency graph 'Any organization should be grateful...'

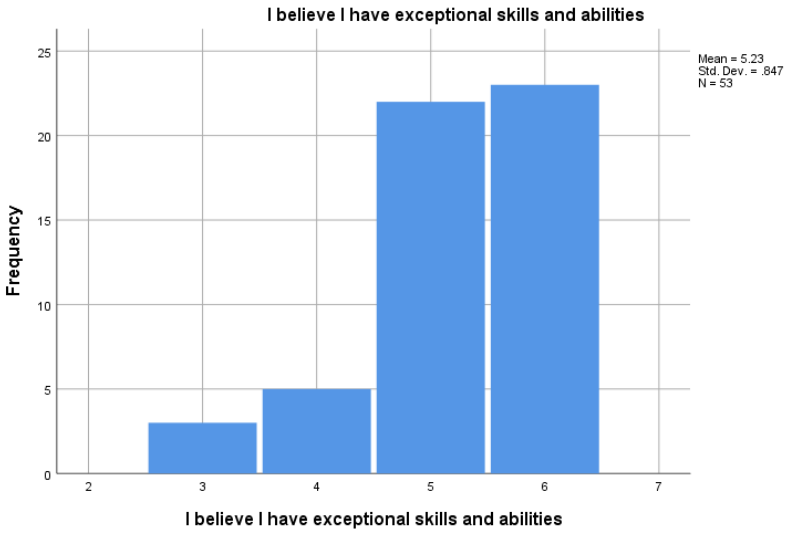

Figure 13 Frequency table 'I believe I have exceptional...'

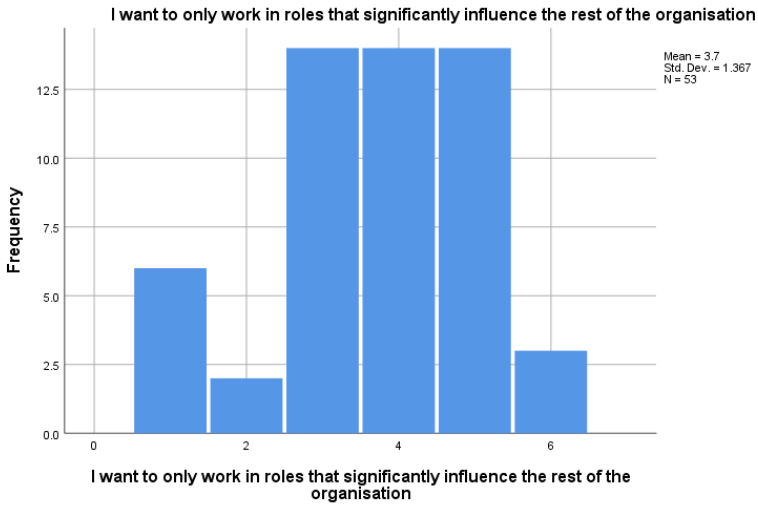

Figure 14 Frequency table 'I want to only work in roles...'

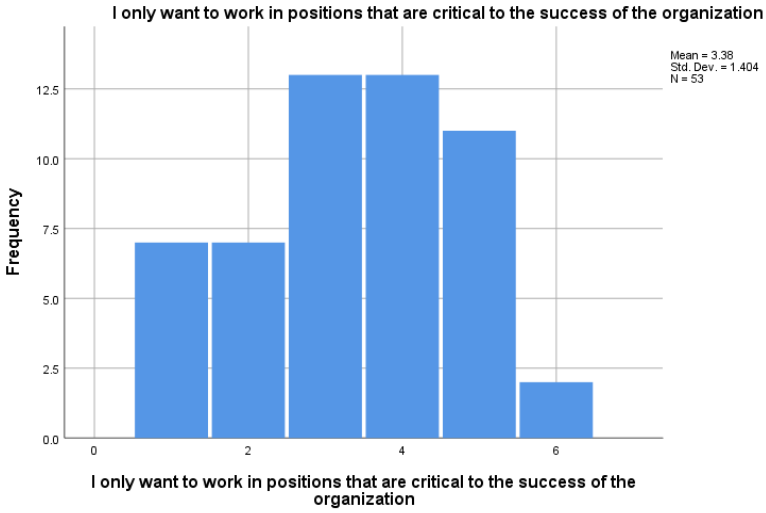

Figure 15 Frequency table 'I only want to work in positions...'

A further breakdown of the frequency and standard deviations of every individual question in the MEE survey can be found in appendix 7.5.

Reflective themes

This section will explain the themes that emerged from the initial scoping of the first action cycle. These themes served as constructs for the formation of the second action cycle. Each theme expressed here is further developed in the construction of the subsequent cycle. The emergent themes are:

1. Reality versus perception
2. Language

From an analysis of the data from the initial scoping in this action cycle, the overall mean of the Measurement of Employee Entitlement did not indicate that the employees held a strong sense of entitlement. Yet there were areas in the individual factors that could serve as discussion points. Management's belief and opinion as to the feelings of the employees was incongruent with the overall data. However, the individual factors might be better indicators as to why they held their current perceptions. In other words, could their emphasis on one or two behaviours be the reason for their perception that entitlement exists amongst their employees? This became the first emergent theme from action cycle one.

The second theme from the first action cycle involved the language used by the survey participants. During a debriefing discussion with management following the survey, I mentioned that some of the employees referred to themselves as 'managers', which seemed to upset management. Managers were quick to advise that shift supervisors were included as surveyed participants, but they were not salaried managers. During the survey, I asked the person on the phone if they were managers, and a few of them said that they were. This obvious faux pas highlighted an organisational cultural norm that required further examination. That management was quick to explain that salary-paid versus hourly-paid employees as a differentiator between themselves and their employees was significantly different from how the employees differentiated themselves. To the employees, their supervisory duties elevated them to a management position. These differences in the language they used to describe themselves within this organisation were noteworthy in cycle two and in the literature.

Discussion

The first action cycle sought to create clarity around unknown variables. With a lack of prior knowledge of the people taking the survey, my consultancy role required that I could look at the data provided to see if any particular anomalies presented themselves. I had prior knowledge of management, and I understood the company's reputation. I did not, however, know the participants of the survey (the employees). I had only the information provided by management. For this reason, I questioned the accuracy of management's narrative and looked for specificity in the survey's findings. As I examined the data, I also looked for what the data did not show. It was important to review the limitations of the survey in addressing the details that management identified as particularly irksome. That the evidence might not correlate to the problem, that language might be causing inconsistency, and that evidence is incongruent with management perceptions were the final themes that were taken to the second cycle.

Following the survey and in keeping with the established model of action research cycles of constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action that leads to the construction of a second action research cycle (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014), the HR manager, Plant manager, and I held a conference call to assess and construct the groundwork for cycle two. We felt that all management input was necessary to evaluate the information learned from this first action cycle. According to the MEE survey, employee entitlement was not extremely high in the surveyed population. Yet, managers were so convinced and embarrassed about their employee's entitlement that they enlisted an outside consultant to address this concern. The incongruency between the survey results and the perception by management could have several explanations. Firstly, employees could have provided false answers to appear less entitled. This seems highly unlikely because they were never told the research title, nor were they led to believe that they were its subject. As the participants were unknown to me, it was unlikely they were trying to appear to be anything other than honest. There was no incentive to be inaccurate. Secondly, management's perception might differ from the survey results because the survey itself holds flaws. This is also unlikely as the questions on the survey were derived from long-standing and oft-used, peer-reviewed psychological surveys. These surveys have stood the test of both validity and generalisability in academia. Therefore, if the survey is valid and the employee's answers to the survey are accurate, we must look to management for evidence to explain the incongruence of their perception.

4.1.4 Theoretical Analysis: Expectancy

This action cycle began with an assumption that employees acted entitled. Management believed that employee comments and attitudes were creating disharmony in the workplace. This understanding warranted initial theoretical investigation in leader-member-exchange (LMX), psychological contracts and reciprocity. These initial constructs were incomplete after the initial scoping. Managers' expressions of dislike for employee behaviours did not align with the results of the survey. It is within this gap that theories as to why this might be the case were next investigated.

The psychological contract literature brought up questions about expectancy that were useful in the context of the ESOP. Managers were motivated to create an ESOP and provide gifts to their employees. If managers were unhappy with the way employees expressed their situations, what was the expectation for what an employee might say? It was reasonable to believe that the same motivations that caused management to create the ESOP might be a construct that led to managers' perceptions. If management created the ESOP to create employee loyalty, they might expect then expect employees to express that loyalty in a particular way. There is an expectation.

Expectancy theory emerged in the 1960s when Victor Vroom theorised that if an employee believed that their actions would lead to valued reward, they would be motivated to act in a way to create satisfaction (Vroom, 1964). Conversely, if an employee felt the reward would not be in their best interest, they would avoid the action to avoid dissatisfaction. The perception of the value, what Vroom called 'Valence', was put into the following formula:

Motivation = Expectancy * Instrumentality * Valence

Expectancy (the belief that action would lead to an outcome) and Instrumentality (the belief that the outcome will be a reward) are given values between 0 and 1. Valence is given a value of -1 and 1. If the variable is 0, it would not be a motivating factor (Vroom, 1964; Lloyd and Mertens, 2018). Like LMX theory, we have had decades to analyse, criticise, and remodel Vroom's original theory. However, true to each of the subsequent models are the fundamental elements of belief and perception. Because of the if-then nature of expectancy theory, it is understood that the following must be true: a person(s) must be present, they

must perceive chronology, and they must cognitively acknowledge themselves as an actor within a situational construct. Within these three elements lies infinite permutations of motivation because there are an infinite number of beliefs and situations. This makes a diagnosis of motivation challenging to generalise because of the emphasis on the situation and the perceptions of individual actors. This shift to expectancy signalled a shift in focus away from the employees to address management's perceptions of entitlement. Expectancy theory aligned with the observed behaviours and comments by management and was a useful construct for understanding the motivation behind their actions. Expectancy Theorists primarily focus on employee expectations. This study pivots that focus away from employees to look at manager expectations.

Regardless of the title of either manager or employee, this is an analysis of people, and people are an evolutionary species whose beliefs may alter over time. A snapshot of a person's motivation at a given moment is as likely to be an inaccurate measure as it is to be accurate. A person might feel a certain way one day and wake up tomorrow feeling slightly different, which only adds to the complexity of creating an ideal model of motivation. Nonetheless, expectations play a role in motivating both employees and managers (Starkey and Tempest, 2008; Oldham and Hackman, 2010; Stacey, 2011; Cote, 2017). So, while Motivation = Expectancy*Instrumentality*Valence, the focus is on expectancy. Manager gift-giving might have come with the belief that they would receive something in return. The data from the first cycle was primarily positive, but management still felt their employees were acting entitled. From this dissonance, the framework for the construction of the second cycle emerged.

Entitlement research by Fisk (2010), Tomlinson (2013), Westerlaken, Jordan, and Ramsay (2017) primarily and problematically focus on employees as the primary concern. When we turn our attention away from the employee's expectations and review the expectations and feelings of management, we find less to review. There exists a central belief in the truism that morality is the basis for our motivations. For example, *servant leadership is good* and has a moral implication outside the scope of this thesis but forms a notable bias toward addressing benevolence, hubris, humility, and paternalism. Societally, we accept that *niceness is good* and *meanness is bad*. Belief predicates our expectations. Management and employees at GuardCo might share basic moral and societal beliefs, but are there other more specific expectations found within their organisational construct? Ajzen (2001) asserts,

"Although people can form many different beliefs about an object, it is assumed that only beliefs that are readily accessible in memory influence attitude at any given moment" (p. 30). Ajzen understands the chronology necessary in the creation of experiences. A person's experiences are necessary for constructing memories, and those memories influence attitude. Attitude, in turn, begets behaviour. Ajzen notes that "chronic accessibility" (p. 30) to beliefs creates a valuation developed over and within a lifetime. Applying this model, one would anticipate emergent behaviours aligned with expectant beliefs.

In contrast, a lack of exposure, inconsistency, or fragmentation of historical recall could lessen the value placed on a belief (March, Sproull and Tamuz, 1991). In other words, expectations are modified by memory —regardless of that memory's accuracy or validity. Historical evaluation and sensemaking are necessary components to moderate strong feelings of expectancy. Sensemaking, retrospectivity, and self-examination create boundaries (Beech, MacPhail and Coupland, 2009) and wisdom (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) and articulate our significance (Hay, Parker and Luksyte, 2021). Thus, we might assume that employees with a shorter tenure might not have developed feelings of entitlement based on their lack of exposure to the prevailing organisational memory. Similarly, management might perceive their employees are entitled because of their history and constructed memories. Understanding the individual's memory and the collective organisational memory should provide insight into potential unrealised expectations. Uncovering this data from the participants in cycle two was an important element and would be revisited in the third cycle.

4.1.5 Theoretical Analysis: Paternalistic Benevolence

The second construct that emerged and would need further investigation was that of organisational culture and the paternalistic behaviours ubiquitously exhibited by management and observed throughout every interaction. The surfeit of leadership studies helps supply rich resources on workplace dynamics. Specifically, studies on servant leadership and dynamic leadership create a nomological understanding that management is influencing behaviours and attitudes toward employees (Yukl, 1993; Yukl and Lepsinger, 2005; Sokoll, 2014; Van Winkle *et al.*, 2014; Wang, Xu and Liu, 2018). This review is not intended to address the totality of leadership literature but rather to specify benevolence in leadership as a possible construct supporting the concerns in this organisation.

Chan and Mak (2012) pull heavily from the transformational leadership literature of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Boomer (1996) in explaining the mediating role of benevolence in the workplace. Transformational leadership posits a trickle-down approach to management whereby the manager can positively (or negatively) affect the worker's performance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Bommer, 1996; do Nascimento, Porto and Kwantes, 2018) and attitudes (Purvanova and Bono, 2009; Chan and Mak, 2012; Long *et al.*, 2014). Chan and Mak (2012) acknowledge their research as influenced by the culturally patriarchal society within the People's Republic of China and view their culture as a positive antecedent in employee/management relations. In contrast to Chan and Mak, Alvesson and Deetz (2017) suggest that patriarchal influences are negatively viewed in business and reflected in postmodern literature as we have moved away from traditional bureaucratic societies.

I do not disregard the postmodernist views on the patriarchal power influences of management (Chia, 1995; Kilduff and Mehra, 1997) and understand them as a necessary counterbalance to traditional management theory (Calás and Smircich, 1999). However, given the management's comments and my observations, Chan and Mak's patriarchal understanding of benevolence appears to best support the manufacturing enterprise of this organisational problem.

Benevolence within the patriarchal lens of management could create conflicting and contradictory objectives (Dahlmann and Grosvold, 2017; Spieth *et al.*, 2018). Dahlmann and Grosvold (2017), speaking of the conflicting logics of management's profit motives versus management's desire for benevolence, argue that management will ultimately seek self-preservation (profit). While we appear to have evolved away from Milton Freidman's discourse that a business exists solely to make a profit (Friedman, 1970), we do not lack evidentiary support that altruism still struggles for dominance (Baumeister *et al.*, 2001; Waldman and Siegel, 2008). Whilst concepts like the B-corp, 'triple bottom line', or social businesses (Dhiman, 2008; Pava, 2008) are worthwhile goals, we are still awaiting proof of sustainability when economic factors push against social desires (Cortez, 2011). It is expected that when facing scarcity, the preservation of the business entity will dominate (Carmeli and Markman, 2011). Nevertheless, we are still within the context of an ESOP where ownership is divided amongst the workforce. The founder is the lone stakeholder with the potential for conflicting objectives as he was the only one who forfeited anything at the time of the ESOPs formation.

It is assumed that his benevolence in sharing company ownership gave him a sense of altruistic satisfaction. His actions were traded under the assumption that more owners would increase productivity and preserve profitability, thus mitigating the risk of business failure. When viewed through this lens, the question of benevolence in the workplace may be selfishly motivated (Sosik, Jung and Dinger, 2009). It may be difficult to reconcile if the motivations were selfless or selfish, but the outcomes have proven significant. His benevolence resulted in increased company preservation while simultaneously creating a strong company reputation with a useful narrative.

When looking for potential contributing factors that might account for the manager's complaint of employee entitlement, the paternalistic benevolence exhibited by the owner may have been an antecedent to those feelings. This company's generosity regarding pay and perks could have set up an environment where employees might expect to be given more because their experienced history taught them to expect more.

Notably, the attitudes of management challenge Equity Theory. Equity Theory states that *benevolents* possess an innate desire to give more than they receive. In GuardCo's case, it appears management holds expectations of their employees as a direct result of their benevolence. Examination of the motivations of management provided the framework for questioning in the second action cycle.

4.1.6 Theoretical Analysis: Management Perceptions

The final theme arising from the first action cycle was the dissonance in management perception. Management employees did not express feelings of entitlement, but management voiced concerns counter to the emergent data. Perception is how we comprehend the world. Perception is our cognition and interpretation of sensory data. The data provided to a person is objective; however, this data travels through a filter of your extant knowledge causing variations in the interpretations of the stimulus (Weinstein, Sumerracki and Caviglioli, 2019). This process leads to subjectivity and misperceptions. Perception (or misperception) drives cognition and behaviours (Ferris *et al.*, 2002; Eysenck and Keane, 2020). Kurt Lewin's thesis that people act on their perception of reality, not on reality itself, is the basis for management studies on perception (Madison *et al.*, 1980; Schein, 1999; Vigoda, 2000; Ferris *et al.*, 2002; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). GuardCo, having given voice to their beliefs about employee entitlement, have taken their historical and sensory data and has constructed a version of

reality and is acting upon those perceptions. It becomes important that time is spent investigating the perceptions or misperceptions of GuardCo's management and employees if we seek harmony in this workplace.

According to research relating to perceptions of organisational politics, one's personal history, organisational influences, and workplace contexts are antecedents to workplace perception (Ferris *et al.*, 2002). Vigoda (2000) added the influences of greater societal knowledge and its influence on perception. The Covid-19 pandemic that impacted the world in 2020 also impacted this organisation as work hours, social distancing, and other mandatory health protocols disrupted normal operations. It would be reasonable to assume that Covid restrictions might also influence manager and employee perceptions depending on how substantially they had to alter their behaviours. It would be necessary to include an investigation into the potentially moderating effect that Covid-19 might have on both employee and management perceptions as an ongoing event. Covid -19 also had an impact on the entirety of the action cycles. Health protocols required our dependence on verbal communication only.

That we could not meet in person heightened the awareness of verbal communication, which added another lens when assessing company culture. Looking at the impact on cultural development through language was a sub-theme that also linked to perceptions. The language used by the managers in describing the workplace problem was not only the way that participants' thoughts were divulged, but it was also how managers reinforced their perceptions. Humanity understands and interprets reality through our use of language. Our language forms narrations, and those narrations inevitably create an identity that formulates the way we view ourselves and others within that sphere. This narration and the subsequent identity formation are both carried into the workplace and formed by interactivity inside the workplace. Narration, thus, influences the relationships found within the organisation and calls into question the influence it might have on the formulation of policy and culture.

Cycle two shifted the focus away from the employees to address management perceptions of their employees. Management became the focal point when scaffolding the theoretical lenses found in the first cycle (entitlement, LMX, psychological contracts, and reciprocity). It was possible that management, not employees, had a sense of entitlement. The same lenses used to examine employees were now used to look at managers' perceptions. The lenses of paternalism, benevolence, and expectancy were added to the initial theoretical lenses.

Management's description of their employees did not align with the results of the survey, and theoretical possibilities were sought to explain management's incongruous perception, as illustrated in Figure six:

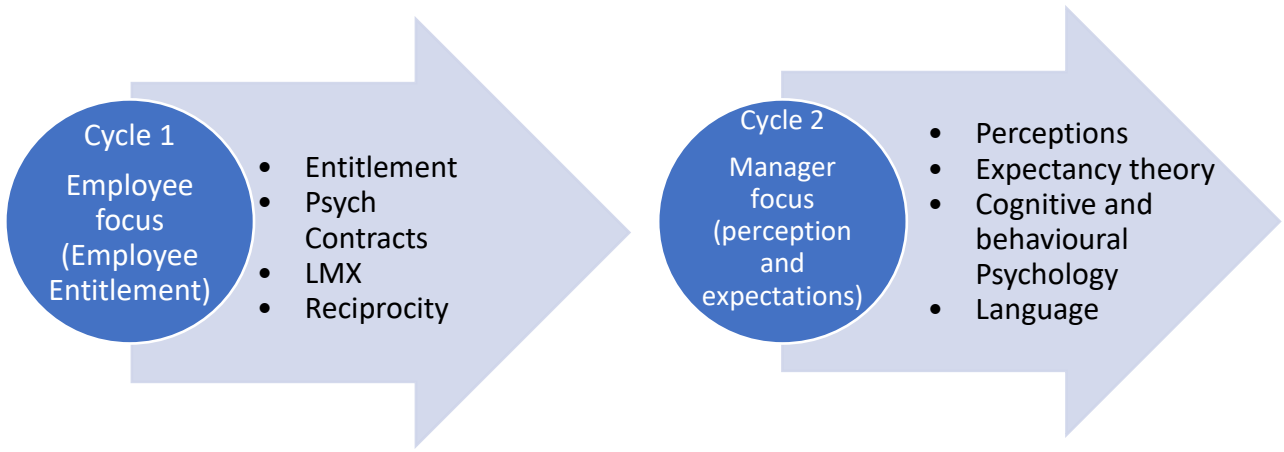

Figure 16 Additional theoretical lenses for action cycle 2

4.2 Action cycle 2

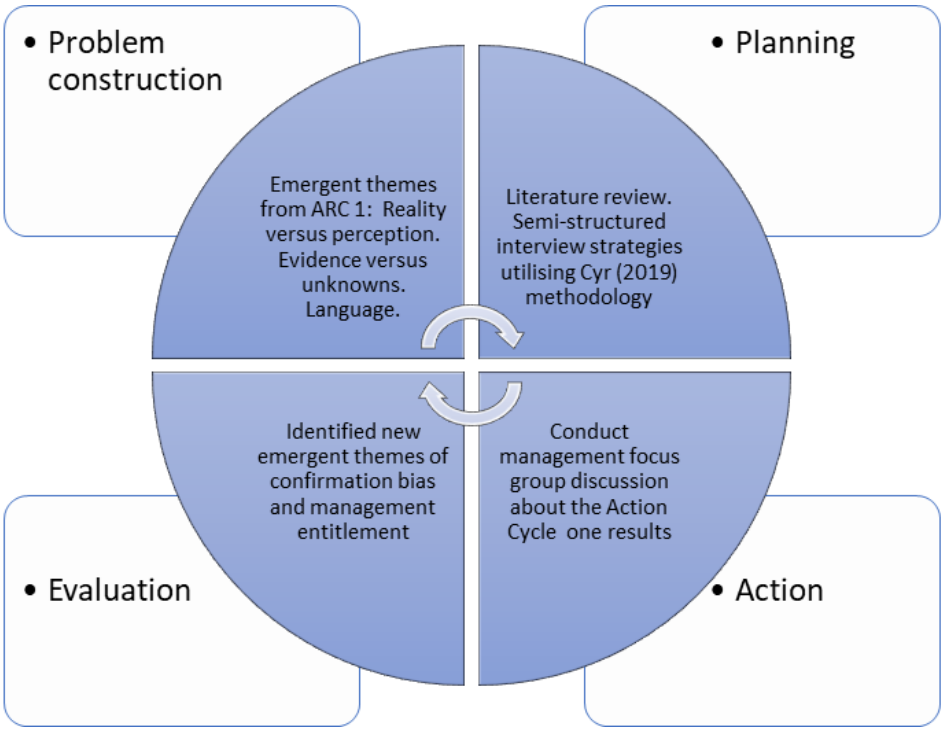

Figure 17 Action cycle 2

4.2.1 Problem reconstruction

The first action cycle identified the misalignment of management's understanding regarding their employees' feelings of entitlement. As the consultant and action researcher, this acknowledgement had an intervening effect of altering my research. Whereas I had been prepared to address entitlement, the employee-employer relationship, and the reciprocity associated with benevolence and gratitude, the data suggested another direction. The employees were the subject of the first action cycle, and the information derived from this cycle set the stage for where I believed the necessary intervening action research would take place: with management. At the very least, I wanted to understand management's point of view on why they believed their employees. Upon seeing the survey results, I felt certain that management would logically reevaluate their perceptions.

Following the survey and in keeping with the established model of action research cycles of constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action that leads to the construction of a second action research cycle (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014), the HR manager, Plant manager, and I held a conference call to assess and construct the groundwork for cycle two. We felt that all management input was necessary to evaluate the information learned from this first action cycle.

According to the MEE survey, employee entitlement was not extremely high in the surveyed population. Yet, managers were so convinced and embarrassed about their employee's entitlement that they enlisted an outside consultant to address this concern. The incongruency between the survey results and the perception by management could have several explanations. Firstly, employees could have provided false answers to appear less entitled. This seems highly unlikely because they were never told the research title, nor were they led to believe that they were its subject. As the participants were unknown to me, it was unlikely they were trying to appear to be anything other than honest. There was no incentive to be inaccurate. Secondly, management's perception might differ from the survey results because the survey itself holds flaws. This is also unlikely as the questions on the survey were derived from long-standing and oft-used, peer-reviewed psychological surveys. These surveys have stood the test of both validity and generalisability in academia. Therefore, if the survey is valid and the employee's answers to the survey are accurate, we must look to management for evidence to explain the incongruence of their perception.

Management had previously provided evidence of employee entitlement at their organisation. Could they look at the same examples and view them differently? New questions emerged following action cycle one:

Q1. After viewing the survey results, will management's perception of entitlement change?

Q2. Can their previously held perception of entitlement be viewed another way?

Q3. Can management articulate what they want from their employees (rather than stating what they do not want to see?)

The second construct from the first action cycle was the management's strong reaction to surveyed participants referring to themselves as managers. Management scoffed to an employee's use of this term. The participants who answered that they were managers may have used this term because they understood that they were speaking to an outsider and wanted me to understand that they held a position more significant than their peers. They may have assumed I was using the term manager and supervisor interchangeably, so the employee opted to refer to what they *do* rather than their title. However, the managers' reactions when the supervisors referred to themselves as managers were most intriguing. Every organisation has its own culture, and the language used is a vital component of that culture. As noted in the literature chapter, words are used to construct our workplace reality. Humanity understands and interprets reality through our use of language.

A previously noted construct of employee entitlement is an inflated sense of self. If particular employees viewed themselves as more elevated than they were, it would be worth exploring. Managers at this organisation did not appear to take an egalitarian view of the workplace. The managers within this hierarchical structure understood themselves—whether they felt it was only an external construct or if it was embedded in the psyche—to be in an elevated state above their employees. As an outsider-researcher, this was the impetus for investigating the language used by management. The topic of language would become a more prominent theme following cycle two. At this point, the following questions emerged:

Q4. Why was the term 'manager' used by employees who did not hold this title?

Q5. Why did the use of this term by the employees seemingly bother the managers?

Q6. Were employees aware that this was bothersome to managers?

Q7. Would it have been reasonable that the shift supervisors who referred to themselves as managers referred to their duty to manage people rather than their title?

The third and final construct to emerge from the first action cycle examines my position as a consultant. I chose to use the MEE survey to address this workplace problem under assumptions that entitlement likely existed. Another possibility was that the survey might be assessing the wrong thing. It was possible that the survey might hold inconsistent language that did not resonate in this context. Might the confident Texan's answers differ significantly from someone from the north? Could the survey reveal answers to the wrong questions? Consultancy requires relationship building which ironically, is the construct that management often seeks (Schein, 2015). A scholar-practitioner involved in consultancy differs from the scholar-practitioner investigating their own company. I am not an expert in the type of business or the skills required to be successful in this particular industry. As a consultant, I must decide what aspect of my current context are relevant and which constructs to disregard. Pragmatically, the search for understanding of the workplace problem, was not because I was accountable to the organisation because they paid my salary. I also did not find myself conflicted with dual loyalties as one might if they were beholden to their company or their boss. My reflection in action was firmly fixed on attempting to make sense of the world as it was presented to me. As a consultant, how was I defining my goal? In addition, how was I defining the significant stakeholders? Even defining the client can create conflict within an organisation-consultant dyad.

> *Here, the social world is not an objective fact, existing wholly outside the consciousness and languages through which human beings relate to it. In other words, the client logics and positions discussed about are seen as both products and processes and it is important to examine the ways in which the client is (being) constructed.* (Alvesson *et al.*, 2009, p. 256).

Defining the client might create artificial barriers that exclude or limits the relationship. Assuming that management's narrative is accurate is equally limiting as assuming it is not. Alvesson (1995) notes that unpacking the unknown aspects of the client could lead to a significant understanding of power and politics within organisations. Thus, questions about the unknown cultural, political, and relational gaps could be answered with additional questioning.

Q8. What power dynamics are at play in this organisation?

Q9. What is the relationship between managers?

Q10. What language and behaviours are exhibited in the manager-employee dyad?

Q11. What influences do I, as the consultant, bring into the analysis and investigation of this research?

4.2.2 Planning

I scheduled a video-enabled online meeting for all of the managers. I planned to utilise a focus group using a semi-structured interview technique, allowing the executive management team to relay their first-person opinions and feelings concerning the Measurement of Employee Entitlement (MEE) survey results. To ensure specificity regarding phenomena, focus groups provided a useful framework for interviewing management. Cyr (2019) posits that focus groups' emic processes create data about the individual, the small group, and the dynamics within their interactions. As I sought a more internalised understanding of the culture, data generation via focus groups provided an optimal setting, given our limiting time constraints. Focus groups are well-suited for addressing potentially controversial topics and defining additional constructs and contextualisation of the themes of culture and management perception (Cyr, 2019)

I made a concerted effort to look at the individual responses to my questions and how they interacted with one another. Using Cyr's (2019) approach to data collection in focus groups, I categorised my questions in terms of the individual's responses, the group's responses, and lastly, the interaction between the group. I attempted to capture responses to all three of Cyr's categories.

Table 8 Cyr's data collection approach.

	Individual response	Group response	Group interaction
Q1. After viewing the results of the survey, will management's perception of entitlement change?	x	x	x
Q2. Can their previously held perception of entitlement be viewed another way?	x	x	

Q3. Can management articulate what they would like to see from their employees (rather than stating what they do not want to see?)	x	x	
Q4. Why was the use of the term 'manager' used by employees who did not hold this title?	x		
Q5. Why did the use of this term by the employees seemingly bother the managers?	x	x	
Q6. Were employees aware that this was bothersome to managers?	x	x	
Q7. Would it have been reasonable that the shift supervisors who referred to themselves as managers were referring to their duty to manage people rather than their title?	x		
Q8. What power dynamics are at play in this organisation?		x	x
Q9. What is the relationship between managers?		x	x
Q10. What language and behaviours are exhibited in the manager-employee dyad?			x

These questions were foundationally contrived to provide a framework for the open discussion planned for the meeting. Information was limited for managers to derive their conclusions about the findings. I compiled and presented the raw data (see Appendix 7.5) from the MEE survey without explanation, as catalysed discussion.

As stated earlier, I chose not to record the group discussion out of fear that the managers would be hyper-sensitive to being recorded and would be less likely to speak 'on the record'. Sanger (1996) posits that recording devices can obscure facts, and indeed I acknowledge my own bias in this. For example, a transcribed recording of sarcasm may not translate as humour. I had previous experience with this and took time to examine both the benefits (ease of recall) versus the negative aspects of recording the conversations, such as disingenuous conversation (Shaver 2005, Rutakumwa *et al.* 2020) and lost nuances (Sanger 1996).

4.2.3 Taking action

The focus group included the company's President, the CEO, the COO, the HR Manager, the HR Assistant Manager, and a Plant Manager. All the managers were male except for the female HR Assistant Manager. I provided the HR Manager with an advanced copy of the survey results 24 hours before the meeting. The remaining participants reviewed the survey and the results during the meeting. The managers received the raw data with no written or verbal commentary. The meeting was not digitally recorded. I took handwritten notes and documented impressions immediately following the meeting.

I began with a brief explanation of the three constructs evaluated in the survey. I explained the concepts of Reward as Right, Self-Focus, and Excessive Self-regard. I then asked management to predict how they thought the employees might answer each survey question. We reviewed the averages and frequencies of the employees' responses. After documenting management's comments on each survey question, we examined the three MEE constructs (reward as right, self-focus, and excessive self-regard). I captured their verbal observations and impressions.

My handwritten notes were reviewed to ensure that I had noted a person for each comment written. I then colour-coded (highlighted) the responses to indicate the themes or trends in their words or my observation. The words used and observations captured were used to find commonalities and contradictions. Reoccurring ideas or comments emerged and developed into the themes noted below. For instance, managers perceived the data differently than it was presented to them. This disconnect between the data and perception formed the first emergent theme.

Another theme that emerged came from my observations of the language that was used by the managers. There was tension between the benevolence of management toward employees and their resentful remarks. This tension is illustrated in the remarks made by management and possibly the organisational culture which they helped develop.

Theme 1: Reality v perception

I asked management to predict the outcomes to the survey. The group consensus was that the employees would have a composite mean between five and six on the scale. The actual composite mean score was 3.1. Both the employees and managers agreed and acknowledged that perks benefitted the employees. Individual managers believed that these perks created an

atmosphere of entitlement amongst the employees. This perception was counter to the survey results.

After providing the managers time to review the survey I asked if they had any initial thoughts regarding the actual score versus their prediction.

> COO: *'I am surprised. I thought it would be higher'.*
>
> Me: *'Do you think Covid might have impacted the answers that your employees provided?'*
>
> COO: *'Maybe. Probably. We only had to shut down for a week. They are able to work 36 hour and are paid for 40. We bought them masks, face shields, whatever they needed to be safe and they have steady pay checks. We worked with them because we had to split them up and couldn't have too many people in the building at the same time. So, we run the plant on weekends to accommodate everyone getting 36 hours.'*

The survey results indicated mid- to low-level feelings of entitlement except for one factor, excessive self-regard. Of the questions that related specifically to this subset, two particular questions rose to prominence. The answers to the following statements had the highest mean scores.

> **I believe I have exceptional skills and abilities (Mean = 5.23)**
>
> **Any organisation should be grateful to have me as an employee (Mean = 5.15)**

I asked the management group to review the questions and comment on these scores.

> CEO: *I don't have a problem with this.*
>
> President: *I would expect them to say that. We hire the best and we tell them they are the best and the top of the top. We want them to know they are the best which is why we hired them.*
>
> Me: *Is this correct? Do they actually have exceptional skills and abilities?*
>
> President: *No. But we want them to think they do.* (Fieldnotes, 2020b).

The president did not view the high scores of excessive self-regard as a negative trait. He appeared proud to hear that his employees felt this way. This implies that how management viewed entitlement might differ from those identified by the MEE survey creators. It was unclear if the president meant that he wanted his employees to feel that they were better than their peers in other companies and therefore found the employee's beliefs in their unique and elevated self-regard to be justified. Or did the president feel that management's rhetoric gave their employees confidence, making them better employees? There appeared to be a fine line between confidence and arrogance, which would need additional investigation in the next cycle.

Everyone had a bit to say about the topic of pay for average performance. It serves as another example of the incongruency between the survey results and management comments.

Employees should be rewarded for average performance (Mean = 2.91)

President: *I want to show this page to the employees. This shows their entitlement problem. They still have unrealistic expectations!*

HR manager: *Unrealistic expectations.*

Me: *But it appears the majority do not.*

President: *Yes, but we still have a ways to go.*

Assistant HR Manager: *The problem is the first shift.*

The CEO: *Is it tenure? I am always worried about the "freerider". They are demoralizers. They do not do their share. There is a disconnect here. I feel an employee doesn't really 'get it' until the 3rd year or the 3rd ESOP statement.*

Me*: Does the ESOP statement reflect or have anything to do with raises?*

HR manager*: not really.*

Management's comments appeared to reflect their existing belief that the employees were entitled. Employees had received raises consecutively for years but management felt that their expectations for raises were unrealistic. No person commented that the majority of participants did not appear to expect raises for mediocre performance. Although the CEO's

comments seemed odd and misaligned at the time, I revisited his comments regarding the ESOP and tenure in next cycle.

The final example supporting the dissonance between the survey results and the manager perceptions came during our discussion of the highest factor, excessive self-regard (Mean = 4.37) versus the lowest factor, self-focus (Mean = 2.39) and their view of Reward as Right (Mean = 3.09).

Me*: The highest Mean score is in Excessive Self Regard.*

President*: Again, I don't have a problem with this.*

HR Manager*: yes, that is fine.*

Me*: Ok, what are your thoughts on the lowest Mean score? Self-Focus?*

CEO*: This is because of Covid.*

Me*: How so?*

Hr Manager*: It is about workplace accommodations. The mean is 3.87. That is high.*

Me: *What are your thoughts on the section Reward as a Right?*

Asst Hr manager*: I am not surprised.*

Hr Manager: *Yeah, this shows us where we need to work.*

President*: Yes, that is our problem.*

Me: *How so?*

President: *Well, look. They are 4.15 and 4.36 on expected promotions and pay raises for doing their job to a satisfactory level.*

CEO: *We have been able to do this because we are small.*

Me: *I am not sure I follow. Do what exactly?*

CEO: *Give annual raises and bonuses.*

The examples noted above showed a contradictory narration by the managers. The employee results of the MEE survey did not indicate an overall entitlement problem. The area where employees held the highest mean score—the area of Excessive Self-Regard—was not problematic for the management team. They admittedly fostered this belief and felt it was good for morale. For the construct of Reward as Right, where employees had a mean score of 4.36 and 4.5, management felt this score held a high significance to the problems they were facing. Here management admitted that they gave annual raises and bonuses, which could, and likely were, assumed by employees. Later discussions would reveal that these bonuses were not guaranteed but were given as part of a pay structure for organisational growth. The company has had over ten years of growth; therefore, the employees had over ten years of raises and bonuses. Employee assumptions that their satisfactory work would result in a raise were reasonable but remained bothersome to management. Management's attention to the moderate results of the mean score for self-focus (3.87) gave the impression that having rejected the survey's likely cause for feelings of entitlement, and they were eager to find justification for their existing perceptions. The HR manager was aware that a score between four to six would indicate feelings of entitlement, and the mean score for this was slightly below four. His comments, '*The mean is 3.87. That is high'* was a further example of incongruency between the survey results and manager comments.

Theme 2: Benevolence and resentment

GuardCo managers exhibited a curious dynamic in the second cycle. The company's culture allowed for language that exemplified a tension between benevolence and resentment. This organisation created employees as owners, but in words and tone, there appeared to be resentment.

The second emergent theme involved the language used by both the employees and the managers in describing themselves and others. Particular words triggered notable reactions by managers. For instance, that shift supervisors referred to themselves as managers during the survey might have been due to my phrasing. I asked the anonymous voice on the phone if they were a manager because I wanted to ensure I was only speaking to hourly employees. Seven of the eight shift supervisors answered yes to my query, are you a manager? Only one shift supervisor explicitly stated his title. When relaying this information to the HR manager and the plant manager, they appeared unhappy that the shift supervisors would refer to themselves as managers. They quickly clarified that shift supervisors were

hourly employees and not salaried employees and would not be defined as managers within the organisation. In other words, nobody would call them managers, and they should have known this.

> Me: *I previously mentioned to [HR Manager] that some of the employees referred to themselves as managers.*
>
> COO: *(laughing) Who did that?*
>
> President: *(laughing) You didn't interview any of us, did you?*
>
> Me: *Not that I am aware of. Why do you suppose they would have referred to themselves that way?*
>
> CEO: *They didn't understand your question maybe?*
>
> Me: *Do they manage people?*
>
> HR manager: *They are shift supervisors. They are still hourly employees. You didn't interview anyone who was on salary.*
>
> Me: *What does a shift supervisor do exactly?*
>
> Hr Manager: *They make sure everyone is doing what they are supposed to be doing and employees report to them if there is a problem.*
>
> Me: *Would the shift supervisors know they were not managers?*
>
> Plant Manager: *Definitely*

This illustrates an almost elitist exchange amongst managers about their status compared to that of a shift supervisor. The shift supervisor may have been simply clarifying for me—an outsider—that they had managerial responsibilities. However, management felt that the use of the term *manager* was outside the bounds of normality for this organisation. Uniquely the culture set defining boundaries for certain terms, which problematically highlighted my role as a consultant accommodating the linguistic politic of this organisation. The term manager within this organisation is differentiated by how a person is paid. Managers do not work on the factory floor and are paid a salary. Shift supervisors have managerial-type duties; however, they work on the factory floor and are hourly-paid employees.

Within this action cycle, another theme regarding the use of denigratory and resentful language emerged. In defining organisational culture, Seel (2000, p. 2) writes,

> *'Organisational culture is the emergent result of the continuing negotiations about values, meanings and properties between the members of that organisation and its environment. In other words, culture is the result of all the daily conversations and negotiations between the members of an organisation'.*

This organisation was simultaneously both benevolent and almost resentful. As Seel (2000) notes, the conversation, and negotiations of the members of this society are batted back and forth in the words they use to describe their problems. Thus, their meaning and values emerge. The following exchange illustrates the juxtaposition of values:

Me: *Question three is the only question that was high for 'self focus'.*

CEO: *This was influenced by covid.*

President: *We have had to make changes to accommodate illness.*

Me: *Don't you already have a reputation in the community for accommodating employees?*

President: *I don't know, but we do try to help our employees with their circumstances. The hardest hit are people like [name removed]. Single mothers with school-age kids.*

COO: *Look what we are doing now. Nobody lost their jobs. Everyone is working less and getting paid the same. We are essential so we stayed open. When people get sick, we do what we can to help them. [The president] and [the CEO] aren't going to let anyone suffer. They are going to take care of people.*

Me: *I think you have always had a reputation for this kind of benevolence. Do you feel that your employees appreciate this?*

HR manager: *Yes, I think they do. They just maybe don't know all that we do.*

Me: *Do they say thank you?*

President: *I don't need them to say thank you.*

Me: *Culturally in our society, it is common for people to express gratitude. Would you like to see more of that from your employees?*

President: *I don't need gratitude. I just want them to stop being a pain in the ass.*

The benevolent and paternalistic actions that result in the well-being of their employees are evident in the precautions they took to ensure their employees' safety during the pandemic. In the same conversation, they refer to their employees derogatorily as ungrateful pains. Management quickly diagnosed the problem as related to the pandemic's situational context. Managers appeared to see themselves in terms of their benevolence. They appeared to be constructing their sense of self and context within this exchange. Whilst this was evident to me, I did not feel that reflexivity was verbalised during this action cycle. Identity construction and the contradiction between benevolence and derogatory language would be a significant focus of the next action cycle.

Theme summation

Incongruency of the employee results with the opinions of the managers caused me to question nearly every aspect of the first action cycle. Emerging from cycle one were questions about my role as an outsider and problem identification. The problematisation was certainly shifting away from the employees toward the managers. This theme developed from the survey results in the first cycle but offered an opportunity in cycle two. Questioning the accuracy of answers and seeking clarity in the language brought additional insights from the expressions and dialogue with managers. Literature regarding manager-employee dyads is exemplified in leader-member exchange theories and offers insights into expectations. By definition, entitlement aligns with expectations. Entitlement is the 'legal right, or just claim to do, receive, or possess something' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021). Employees, according to management, expected too much for being average. Legality or justice had little to do with the employees' claims for prestige or pay. Yet, what of the managers' expectations? If we turn our focus toward management expectations *to claim, receive, or possess something*, would we find their own unique brand of entitlement?

The boss is naturally allowed more freedom and stature by virtue of their title. We do not lack literature on how one might go about becoming an effective or beloved manager. Nor do we lack literature on how a manager might handle the problem of employee entitlement. Where literature is lacking is how employees might handle manager

entitlement. How should an employee handle a manager's expectations that differ from their own? Indeed, how does any person handle another's perceptions? And how does this differ when the individual is part of a whole? Can one person within the group alter another's negative perception of the entire group? In other words, what is an employee to do if their manager has expectations that the employee cannot fulfil? What should employees do if their manager thinks negatively of them and their co-workers?

Additional questions emerged about the history of the managers at this organisation. How were managers hired? Why were they hired? Could there be clues in their personal stories that could create a greater understanding of who they are and how they would manage? How influential were they in the creation of the current organisational culture? How committed were they to their biases? When looking at the raw data, managers sought confirmation of what they already believed. They disregarded data that entitlement was not the problem for their organisation. They found a minor area of one subset with a moderate score as the evidence they needed to support their present beliefs. It was a skewed mirroring. The following section evaluates the second action cycle and identifies the themes derived from the focus group discussion.

4.2.4 Evaluation

Following the manager meeting and discussion, I highlighted my handwritten notes and compiled them thematically by colour. I did not enter them into Excel or other electronic software. The proceeding paragraphs explain the emergent themes derived from the second cycle management discussion. They are:

1. Expectations of gratitude
2. Confirmation bias
3. Management entitlement

Literature in the field of positive psychology and expectancy theories provided insight into the initial theme that emerged from the second action cycle. Management indicated that they did not need expressions of gratitude from their employees. They simply wanted them to stop demanding more. The issue of gratitude had not been addressed in detail during the focus groups but, nonetheless, stood out within the dialogue.

> Me: *Do they* [the employees] *say thank you?*

President: *I don't need them to say thank you.*

Me: *Culturally in our society, it is common for people to express gratitude. Would you like to see more of that from your employees?*

President: *I don't need gratitude. I just want them to stop being a pain in the ass.*

I had not yet seen evidence that the employees were ungrateful or that a lack of gratitude was a precursor to inflated expectations. I could not assume that ingratitude had any correlation to entitlement. Recalling that the only place the managers felt was problematic within the survey was under the subset of reward and right:

Table 9 Highest mean scores

I expect regular promotions	53	1	6	4.15	1.307
I should get a pay raise if I perform my job to a satisfactory level	53	1	6	4.36	1.257

Managers were not concerned about the highest mean scores that were found under the subset of excessive self-regard. Instead, they focused their attention on these two questions.

Hr Manager: *Yeah, this shows us where we need to work.*

President*: Yes, that is our problem.*

Me: *How so?*

President: *Well, look. They are 4.15 and 4.36 on expected promotions and pay raises for doing their job to a satisfactory level.*

As previously noted, raises had occurred every year for over ten years due to the company's growth and the employee's current pay structure. If the expectation was present because the antecedents were constant, and all variables remained the same, only one's reaction could provide either variability or changeability. History could have taught employees that their current work effort was sufficient for raises and promotions. It may be that the problem is not the expectation but rather the *expression* of the expectation.

Managers expressed the expectation that their employees stop complaining; they did not identify what behaviours they desired. One would not assume that the opposite of a factory full of complaining employees was a factory full of silent employees. If the absence of

complaining is not silence, it must be something else. If it is not gratitude, then what is it? Having a policy or company goal for expectations of gratitude or niceness would be beyond the normative organisational culture. What were management's expectations? The third cycle brought these questions for scrutiny.

The next theme was the manager's focus on finding 'the problem' in the data. The managers had predicted an overall MEE mean score of five or six, and when shown that the mean score was much lower, they sought out areas that could justify or explain their beliefs. Turning again to cognitive psychology, action cycle three supported the literature on confirmation bias. According to Koslowski and Maqueda (1993, p.105), '…people often do not accurately perceive data unless their theory predicts the data should be there…'. People exemplify confirmation bias by looking for evidence supporting their perception whilst disregarding evidence contradicting it. Michel and Peters (2020) posit that confirmation bias is a function of reasoning and perception and that manipulating the volume of information might alter those perceptions.

Given this research's constraints, it was not possible to create a longitudinal effort exposing managers to employees who did not feel entitled in the hopes that this exposure would alter their perceptions. Weinstein *et al.* (2019), citing Mussweiler, Strack and Pfeiffer (2000), noted that given the cognitive bias and tendency toward reconfirming evidence, it was more useful to ask a person to cite their reasons why their opinion might not be valid if one were trying to disprove a faulty bias. For this reason, I prepared open-ended questions that requested management consider an alternate narrative ('If what you are saying is not the case, what other reason might there be for…?') in action cycle three.

The final theme emerged from a lack of understanding of manager expectations. Managers did not voice a concern that employees were not doing their jobs properly. As neither the first nor second action cycles addressed the quantity or quality of the interaction between employees and managers, it was an important question for the third cycle. What was the quality of the interaction between managers and employees? Did employees only talk to managers when they had a complaint? Management discussed expectations relating to company goals, policies, and safety during monthly and annual meetings. Was this the only interaction in the employee-manager dyad?

The group discussion within the second action cycle revealed a nearly contradictory notion of how management negatively defined entitlement. Managers were benevolent and disparaging when referring to their employees. When analysing the MEE survey, managers redefined entitlement within their company's walls. They did not fully accept the MEE definition of entitlement. Management chose the aspects of the MEE survey that best fit their perception of the problem and disregarded those constructs that did not align. There were also notable comments that needed additional analysis to better understand how managers perceived themselves and their workplace relationships. These factors were used to scope additional literature and created a basis for constructing the third and final action cycle.

The intervention regarding management perceptions was problematic during this cycle. Perhaps after reading the survey results, management felt they wasted my time bringing me in to solve a problem of which I could find no evidence. I had wrongly assumed that management would see the survey results and rejoice in having been wrong in their assumptions. I was surprised by their comments and recalled [the human resource manager]'s early description of embarrassment when discussing their employees' behaviour and attitudes. They might have felt that my inability to bring evidence was due to my inexperience as a researcher. Perhaps management believed that their employees provided incorrect information to me. Perhaps management, likewise, did not want to report their own true impressions. All of these required a consideration of human error, and there was not sufficient time during our focus group to discuss it.

I also realised that management did not have time to be either reflective or reflexive, as one might, had they been given the survey results days in advance. I was unprepared for management's comments to be so contradictory. I had not prepared questions that required management to analyse their comments as being unsupported by the data during the focus group. I offered to come back and work with employees to foster greater exhibitions of gratitude in the workplace, but management was content with the survey and indicated they had 'found the problem' in one small aspect of the survey.

Management was able to sit with the data for several months whilst I planned for the third action cycle. It was questionable if I would be allowed to proceed because management received a completed survey and felt I was no longer needed. I do not believe they spent these months pondering their significance or influence within their employee-manager dyad. I do not believe they assumed any error on their part.

A third action cycle would take the emergent themes of gratitude, confirmation bias, and management expectations as the key constructs in need of intervention for challenging manager perspectives. I would approach the third cycle with evidence that managers had a story about their relationship with their employees that I did not fully understand. Why did they feel they had to be 'right'? The focus group workshop did not challenge their thinking, but I wanted to know what, if anything, might.

Emergent themes

The dialogue presented above provided evidence of the manager's perceptions. There was a clear example of confirmation bias when presented with conflicting data. When questioned about gratitude for benevolence, managers displayed impatience and frustration. Management clearly stated that they were not looking for gratitude, yet, they wanted employees to stop entitlement behaviours. In reviewing the initial claims by management of employee complaints and expectations, it was unclear exactly what management desired from their employees other than silence. Management lauded employees that expressed certain comments that might have exemplified entitlement. This shows their contradictory attitude in aspects of this study. The initial themes of gratitude, confirmation bias, and management entitlement would morph from the incongruencies into questions about language and identity. What role did language play in the analysis of entitlement? How did management perceive itself and others if the data was unable to add clarity? Did the data challenge the managers to look at themselves or their employees differently? What are the effects of this misalignment of perception?

4.2.5 Theoretical Analysis: Language Influences

Language and words define us. Neuroscience posits that words can alter cognitive functioning, regulate stress, and contribute to well-being (Alia-Klein *et al.*, 2007). The thalamus, where perceptual processing occurs, is equally malleable in response to words. This linguistic dynamic is significant in shaping perceptions of self and others and the formation of one's identity. For instance, responses to crises or challenges within organisations have been influenced by the perception of those challenges (Weick, 1993; Brockner and James, 2008; Christianson *et al.*, 2009). It is more than a person believing that they possess a superior intellect as a precursor to successfully navigating a challenge. It falls closer into the category of confidently understanding their history of the challenge or crisis.

Have they been through this type of challenge previously? Have they adequately prepared and thought through possibilities? Success or failure in a crisis becomes part of a narration that impacts identity. Leaders may interpret challenges as an opportunity, or they may deflect responsibility. One might reflect on a disaster and develop a mythical reframing of reality (Rhodes, Pullen and Clegg, 2010; Wolf, 2019; Foroughi, 2020; Sörgärde, 2020). The stories one tells themselves, and others are expressed with words, and their power to formulate our sense of self and our place in the world impacts the souls found in organisations. Words are the primary medium by which we communicate, and by skilful use of rhetoric, they can impact reality. Language, words, and vernacular all form the stories that physically alter our brains and create our understanding of our world. Scrutiny of the words used by both management and employees should deliver insight into how each perceives reality.

In addition to creating our reality, there is an intuitively biased nature to language and words, and they leave a lasting impression. Positive words offer encouragement to an individual, and they create a positive collective identity in groups. If charismatic verbalised encouragement by leaders can affect positivity (Conger, Kanungo and Menon, 2000), we might expect the opposite effect to be true should a leader use negative words. Negative words, however, carry a greater power than positive words (Baumeister *et al.*, 2001). The significance of negative words coming from management would carry a heavier weight, stay in the memory longer, and establish or reconfirm identity. Language appears as an essential aspect for defining roles and appears to contribute to GuardCo's workplace problem as management gives voice to their perceptions. GuardCo's management described their employees in terms that would be considered harsh and demeaning while trying to justify feelings that employees were acting entitled.

In simple terms, if language creates culture and identity, and management's language is negative, one might expect the culture and identity to be negative. The language used by management creates culture and formulates management and employee identities within the organisational culture. This is relevant to our research because GuardCo's words and descriptions are contradictory. Management's contradictions may indicate their confusion regarding the uniqueness of an ESOP versus the historical role of an employee in a factory. Contradictory descriptors add to the complexity of how management might view themselves and their employees. It may also mean that they are unable to reconcile the elevated role of their employee-owners. The language used in the narration of all parties requires appropriate

scrutiny to determine a reasonable analysis of both the problem and the possible remedies. If we find a distortion of reality brought about by the repetitive use of negative language, how likely is it that we can change the narrative by changing the language used?

Both verbal and non-verbal communication provides the stimuli necessary for personal and organisational identity construction (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1988; Beech, 2008; Wolf, 2019). Management's initial concern was provided both verbally and in writing prior to the start of this research. The vernacular expressed by the Human Resource manager appeared prevalent amongst the management in early observations. Management's references to employees appeared idiosyncratic to this organisation and belied the egalitarian approach found in their observed behaviours. While on the one hand, management produces documents and marketing materials that tout equality ('We are all owners!'), they conversely indicate that there is a definite separation between management and employee that create an *us* versus *them* ('They expect us to do more and more for them!') dynamic. The ESOP would suppose an egalitarian belief by management. However, the language used daily was hierarchical and potentially disparaging.

Management's language and expectations toward their employees after gift-giving were likely internalised and assisted in forming their expectations, perceptions, and identity within the workplace (Beech, MacPhail and Coupland, 2009). If titles were not enough to separate the employee from the manager, the vernacular used in sensemaking could. The words they expressed identified attributed constructs as antecedents to their sensemaking of their situation (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1993; Luscher and Lewis, 2008). Foroughi looked closely at the multiplicity of identity narratives (Foroughi, 2020). Foroughi also posits a strong link between memory and identity. If language is the vehicle by which we create meaning, Foroughi's multiplicity would further complicate the distorted mirror by which one measures their self or others. It was, therefore, significant to uncover the memories of the participants and pay close attention to the words chosen in their narration in the third action cycle.

4.2.6 Theoretical Analysis: Identity Construction

Humanist Erik Erikson wrote in 1959 that humanity would seek out its individual identity by review of the life they lived, debated against others, and "…defined according to its place on the coordinates of these interpenetrating plans" (Erikson, 1980, p. 21). Erikson introduces the

idea that the interactions between people are essential to the formation of one's identity. We perceive ourselves in the world based on the relationships that mirror back to us, reflecting what we have revealed. It requires both internal and external sensemaking (Sörgärde, 2020; Hay, Parker and Luksyte, 2021). As a historical and experiential being, one views their reflection and formulates identity. An element that was assumed in most literature about workplace identity formation was that feedback to enable sensemaking would be available within a workplace context. Notwithstanding the element of myth and fantasy that often emerges when discussing identity (Foroughi, 2020), the assumption is that the feedback provided would be "true". What happens, however, when a manager intentionally adds an element of insincerity? In this instance, management at GuardCo publicly promotes their employees as an elevated workforce but privately voices a contradictory narrative. Management's perceptions play a significant role in the feedback given to employees. Their feedback helps establish their workplace identities —but only if those perceptions are shared in the feedback process (Bridges, 2018). If perceptions are not revealed, the employee cannot adjust to the new stimuli. We cannot assume that GuardCo's management has provided true or false feedback to their employees.

Counter to the idea of an open feedback loop is a question of control. A manager's identity in a hierarchical structure is already associated with control (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), and the withholding of information might be considered oppressive. If an employee walks into the workplace 15 minutes late for work and the boss gives a disapproving look, the employee receives honest feedback. In contrast, if an employee walks into the workplace 15 minutes late, is patted on the back by the boss, and then the boss goes into their office and kicks the wall in anger, the employee has not received honest feedback. Identity formation has been thwarted by misinformation. How much of these predicates the dissonance between the employee's view of themselves and the manager's view of the employee at this organisation is worthy of analysis.

In situations where unrealised expectations break a social contract, resentments ensue (Wood and Karau, 2009; Harvey and Harris, 2010; Tomlinson, 2013). If we further add the manager/employee relationship as a control system (Waldman and Siegel, 2008), we find that any breakdown in this hierarchical relationship shines a spotlight on the power dynamic and could create resistance in the workplace (Izraeli and Jick, 1986). It is necessary to review the relationship and how each party might view themselves inside that relationship.

Management has divided itself into two factions: managers and employees. This is equally defining and limiting. It places people into easily identifiable camps while reducing their narrative. It is necessary that those who have been encapsulated are allowed to tell their own robust story as a contribution to the greater narrative. In doing so, the expectation would be to understand how each party viewed themselves inside their story. For this reason, the final action cycle was designed for individual interviews allowing some manager participants to tell their stories.

As with the second action cycle, the lenses used in the first cycle were not wholly abandoned but scaffolded the understanding of the relationship between managers and employees. Language and identity were the lenses that conceptualised the actions of this cycle. Managers' identity was revealed in the language used to describe and construct themselves. Likewise, the words they use to describe and construct their employees to support their identity or construct of self are equally compelling and reveal insight into managerial perceptions.

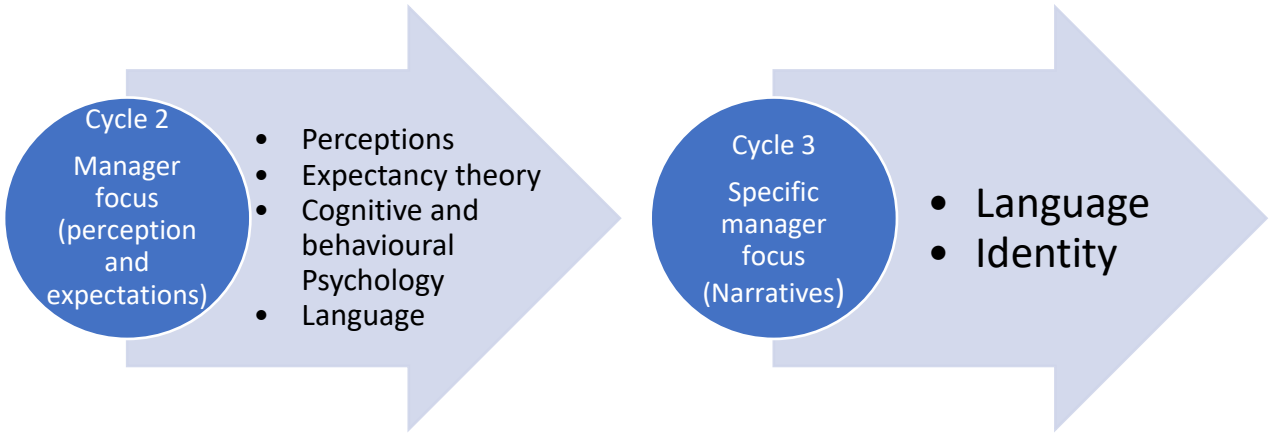

Figure 18 Additional theoretical lenses for action cycle 3

Defining entitlement and reviewing potential relational theories created the conceptual framework of the scoping that occurred in the first action cycle. The emergent data from the initial scoping of the first cycle provided a more straightforward path for further literature review and construction of the second cycle. Data revealed few feelings of either entitlement or narcissism. Focus shifted away from the employees to why managers might perceive and claim employee entitlement. Again, finding cross-disciplinarity studies in social psychology coupled with human resource management studies assisted in exploring the second action cycle in the questioning of management perceptions.

4.3 Action cycle 3

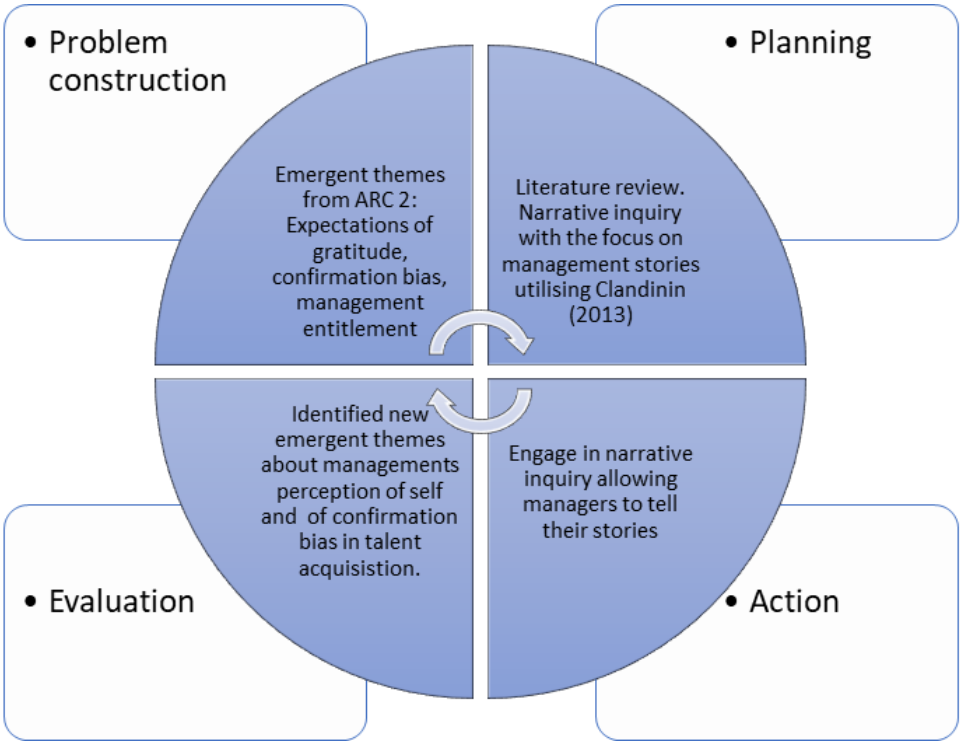

Figure 19 Action cycle 3

4.3.1 Problem reconstruction

The problem has clearly shifted away from the employee to a greater exploration of management and their perceptions, expectations, and management's feelings of entitlement. The dialogue with management enabled me to illustrate the contradictory nature of the data to management perceptions. How did the managers view themselves and their role within the organisation? How and why were managers hired? Were there certain traits of leadership or was the decision based on tenure? Could management articulate their desired relationship with employees? What were their expectations of the employees beyond their labour? How were expectations expressed? These emergent questions were taken into the planning of the third action cycle.

Management's comments in the second cycle indicated that management had a preconceived idea of themselves, their responsibility to their employees, and an expectation within their dyadic relationships. I sought another pragmatic solution for understanding the comments made in the group discussion. Narrative Inquiry became the discovery tool most likely to capture contextual and relational information.

4.3.2 Planning

Clandinin (2016) posits that we exist in the process of living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories. We live in personal, cultural, and institutional stories. Experience is relational, contextual, and, importantly, narratively composed. To gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of both the managers and the employees, one must first listen to their stories. The narrative inquirer becomes integral to the process because listening is necessary. The narrative inquirer exists in the space of both researcher and participant (Chan, 2009) by receiving the information from the stories they are told and synthesising the phenomena. Our interpretive lens is an equal participant in all interactions. Clandinin posits that the researcher should also look at the 'temporality, sociality, and place' (2016, p. 38). Action cycle two brought forth the realities of the fluid and shifting nature of action research. The relationship of both managers and employees was not an instantaneous construct. It was created out of the past, present, and perceived future of the lives of both managers and employees. Narrative inquiry was chosen as the vehicle whereby managers could tell their story to clarify their understanding of comments made in the previous action cycle. GuardCo's history, culture, and perceptions of interpersonal relationships in and amongst one another are told through stories. How employees and managers are shaped by both local and greater society requires narration to understand how each person perceives themselves in the greater context of their organisation (Morrell, 2008; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2015).

Having selected the methodology to capture data, I consulted with the human resources manager to see if I could separately interview him along with the CEO and president of the company. Initially, he did not think this would be possible as the president had moved to another state and was communing and working virtually. He spoke with them and permitted me to contact them individually to try and arrange phone interviews. The final action cycle took place six months after the second action cycle. The fluidity of ‘temporality, sociality, and place’ of the post-pandemic and post-election Texas was noted. I acknowledged that management had moved on and was not in the middle of problem-solving for Covid-19 restrictions. Management also had six months to perhaps process thoughts about employee entitlement in terms of the data presented six months prior.

4.3.3 Taking action

Narrative inquiry was chosen as the method for data gathering in cycle three to allow managers the opportunity to tell their stories. As previously noted, organisational culture is

created through the stories that are told and in their interpretation of those stories. Culture is thus influenced by language. For this reason, I interviewed the three managers who were the most vocal during the second action cycle, the CEO, the president and the human resources manager. These people were also likely to have the greatest impact on the organisational culture. I requested time to visit with them individually at their convenience. Notably, I had a prior affiliation, albeit at varying degrees, with all three of these individuals. I was able to easily access two of the three.

The CEO spoke to me via speaker phone so his wife could participate. He indicated that 'she was a big part of GuardCo's history and should be part of any discussion about our history' (fieldnotes, 2021a). They shared that her business cards read: Mother of GuardCo. I asked them to tell me the story of how they came to purchase GuardCo. I asked them to tell me how they learned about the ESOP structure and why they decided to give up ownership to the employees. I asked them to tell me about their offered perks and their hiring practices. I took notes and indicated their initials to denote which person was speaking. I later highlighted points relevant to the themes of benevolence, gratitude, confirmation bias, or management's expectations. I also noted new insights that could be used for inquiry with the next manager.

I next spoke with the human resources manager and asked him to tell me how management positions are filled and what he looks for in a leader? I also asked a few detailed questions about the ESOP to clarify what happens when a person is terminated or quits. I also asked him to tell me how he came to work for GuardCo and define his role and identity. I documented to comments and looked for themes.

Lastly, I spoke to the president, during which time we struggled with a less than optimal cell phone connection. I had to ask him to repeat himself a few times as our connection was lost more than once during the call. For this reason, my notes from this conversation were less congruent. I asked him how he came to be president of GuardCo. I asked about his early experiences before coming to GuardCo and as a new leader within the organisation. I asked him to define his role and identity and describe his interactions with employees.

4.3.4 Evaluation

GuardCo's marketing told a story of their employees as owners. Foroughi identified that companies advance their cause by using stories to influence both internal and external stakeholders (Foroughi, 2020). He posits that managerial stories align with their preferences

and create collective memories within organisations. Founding stories, in particular, are often one-sided and often used for marketing. Founding stories have all the necessary elements: a plot, protagonist, antagonist, conflict, and resolution. The tertiary characters are likely the employees. This is not to suggest that there cannot be stories or company narratives that promote employee self-esteem (Seaman and Smith, 2012); they are less likely to occur in the founding stories of an organisation. Narratives are particularly compelling when the plot includes conflict and resolution. When the heroes overcome oppression, they affirm themselves as leaders (Rostron, 2021). Their identity categorises themselves and others (Beech, 2008) and determines their view of the world (Alvesson and Deetz, 2017). Reviewing management's narrations from the key actors' viewpoints is important. I anticipated that each manager might place themselves as the protagonist in their story; however, I was surprised to see that this was not entirely so. The CEO's and president's narration both focused on themselves as heroes. The human resources manager seemed more inclined to play a secondary role.

Yet, this research is conducted at an ESOP wherein employees are owners. Paterson and Welbourne (2020) note that ESOP employee engagement is linked to psychological bonds of one's role within a company. Their study on the antecedents of identity at an ESOP found that work-related identity was a significant driver in behaviours and motivations. If our identity is part of a sensemaking process that involves others (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Herriot, 2002; Mckenna, 2010; Smith, Haslam and Nielsen, 2018), we need to focus on both the protagonist and the tertiary characters to fully engage in identity work.

Natural attrition of employees is significant in understanding a company's narration over time. If an employee was there at the founding, they might be aware of missing elements in the stories told by management. Wolf (2019) posits that unfulfilled expectations are catalysts of a cycle (discovery, explorations, commitment, and defence) that creates identity. They might also be aware of their role in the company's success and may experience conflict at being subjugated to the role of an unnecessary actor (Wolf, 2019). Once people are aware of their unfulfilled expectations, they begin a self-examination that helps them identify and defend their identity. This process has a temporality and provides another construct to be examined in future studies. For this research, I was attentive to the employee-witnesses at the founding or during the president's emergence should a conflicting narrative arise.

A theme relating to managerial perceptions of self (identity) emerged in the third action cycle. Talent acquisition became a sub-theme. Confirmation bias was an unresolved theme for potential further investigation. As previously explained, how the managers perceived themselves within the context of their organisation required an element of feedback. Feedback from others is an integral part of managerial identity. Managerial perceptions of self are based on work-based relationships that mirror back to us (Lipman-Blumen and Leavitt, 1999; Beech, MacPhail and Coupland, 2009; Jenlink, 2009). It is not surprising to see mythical elements emerge in the retelling of their stories (Manz and Sims, 1991; Lipman-Blumen and Leavitt, 1999).

> CEO: '*When we started there were twenty-four employees. People were smoking marijuana out in the back. And it took a lot out of us those first few years as we made the company what is it today. We had a couple swings and misses. You need to be able to identify the freeriders. Now look at us. We are growing and we continue to grow.'*
>
> Spouse: *I have business cards. Do you know what they say? 'Mother of [GuardCo]' That is what my business card says.*

The CEO and his wife have placed themselves as the parental protagonists in the history of GuardCo. This position was reiterated by the president.

> President: *We are a family here and [CEO and Spouse] are the head of the family.*

The narratives from all interviews extensively spoke about how managers were selected.

> HR Manager: *We rarely fill management positions but our first priority is always to fill from within. Otherwise, we use our industry contacts to search for candidates. We look for folks that believe in our philosophy of doing the right thing every time based on their past experiences and how they treat people. We look for our leaders in the same way; do they respect the employee owners? Do they treat them with respect? They need to know the subject but not necessarily be subject matter experts. It really comes down to how they handle co-employee owners.'*

Regarding the hiring of the company president:

CEO: I met [him] at a tradeshow in 1999. Networking. He needed a distributer and we became their distributer. By 2006 we were the only successful distributer of their product. They decided to sell in 2006. I thought they might want to buy us out but when I approached them, they said, 'We want you to buy us!'

Spouse: [CEO] wanted [president]because he knew what he would get with [him].

CEO: I had six years to get to know [president]. Six years of interviews. I just knew that he was going to be my successor. In a family-run business the first generation is ok, the second generation is ok but the third generation is a mess. [The relationship with President] was an evolving thing. Everybody liked working with him. He covers fifty balls at once. Everybody he ever worked with asked him to be a leader —in every place he has ever been. After two years I saw that he always followed through and he did it well. He managed five people at the time and his company had the wrong values. Education didn't matter too much to me but he was getting an MBA at the time, but having that kind of strength to manage people when your boss had different values was one of the reasons, I knew I should hire him.

Here the CEO adds the element of justice and morality. The leader of this organisation is defined as having a strong moral compass. The human resource manager and the president share a similar narrative about the character of the protagonist at GuardCo. The president had this to say about himself:

President: *[The TCEO] has an MBA from Harvard. I see myself as a partner to [him]. [The CEO] didn't have to hire me. He didn't need me. I was hired as a vice president and three years later I was president. My job is to make his job easier.*

Me: *What makes a good leader?*

President*: Leading by example. I have had a lot of opportunity to lead. I learned it playing sports. I am more vocal and I can rally the team because I have been captain or quarterback. I was also an Eagle Scout, have an MBA, and I have been very lucky.*

The theme of management identity is highlighted in how the president narrates his first few years at GuardCo and the impetus that brought him to this organisation. The historical backstory within the plot is important in defining his current situation.

> President: *I was working for a company that was not family friendly. They didn't invest in their people. They spend more money on landscaping than on improvements for the company. I was sitting in a meeting with a couple hundred people when the grandson of the founder and current CEO of the company walked in and chastised management. Thirty minutes later the CEOs son comes in looking like a slob. Like he didn't care. That was the day that I quit without leaving.*
>
> Me: *And your move to [GuardCo]…?*
>
> President: *Like I said, I came in as VP and it was like the island of misfit toys. There was a ton of talent. It was a mom and pop, midsize operation. They needed some modernisations but everyone was nice. I had a model to fix one area at a time. We needed everyone to become 100% professional. Shipping to packaging, manufacturing to comp. My model fixed one area at a time. I wanted them all to know [that] 'I view you as the best of the best'.*

The president elaborated on his accomplishments in fixing employee accountability and bringing order to disorder. He mentioned that the more tenured employees were 'lazy' and needed discipline. Managers also spoke confidently of the president's ability to organise and redirect the company to run more efficiently and with greater accountability. The HR manager was not an employee when the president came to the company. The president hired the HR manager as part of the company's accountability. The HR manager identified his support role in the president's narrative.

> HR Manager*: I was hired to help shore up HR. They needed more structure and accountability. I support [the president].*

The narrative amongst management was consistent in that everyone appeared to rally behind the president as the hero who left his previous employer for a more just and noble purpose. That purpose involved vanquishing the bad guys who were the lazy, undisciplined, drug-infested lot employed prior to his arrival. He removed all but a small number of them, but there is a lingering sense that a few tenured employees are tainted by the history of the

company's undisciplined past. The CEO twice referenced 'freeriders' as his history with such people made him wary and sensitive to their emergence within the company.

Me: *Are your employees still acting entitled?*

President: *I think this is an ESOP problem in general. Now that I think about it. Accountability might have made them feel this way.*

Me: *How so?*

President: *I have 135 employees. It is hard to have a path for them to grow upward with promotions. We are in instant gratification society and people want more. When we have openings or when people are looking to advance, we try to look internally but we don't always have a spot. The ESOP helps. It keeps our production in focus. I've done way better in life than I thought I ever do.*

Me: *How did accountability make your employees feel entitled?*

President: *I always tell people they get paid for showing up and doing the job. They get bonuses for great and exceptional work. This allows them to manage and share in the profits.*

Me: *What do you think and employee could or should reasonably assume is satisfactory work?*

President: *To be held accountable for their work. I want to go back to your original question. I don't think most of the employee are entitled but I don't think there is anything we can do about the ones that feel that way.*

Me: *What changed?*

President: *Covid. Flexible work schedules. Admin and office people were given a more flex work schedule.*

It should be noted that the president changed residences between the first and second action cycles. He now lives in another state and commutes to Texas. It may be that distance contributed to the softening of his opinion of the employee's behaviours, or it could be that the time following the initial information about the MEE results had caused a softening of

opinion. The significance of these constructs would have to be investigated at another time. Nonetheless, he has less interaction with staff than previously and had this to say about his relationship with his employees:

> President: *I was a marine. I see red whenever someone is being insubordinate. Look, first I always assume positive intentions, and I expect people to stand up for themselves. But I do not put up with insubordination.*

Harkening back to the original complaint by management, I questioned if employees were perceived to be *standing up for themselves* or *acting spoiled* or *acting entitled.* Could he explain the difference? He admitted to liking his employees and reiterated that he did not want or expect gratitude from his employees. Ultimately, he expressed his desire that employees should partner with management to make the company better.

> President: *I am not here to make friends. I am here to make [the CEO's] life easier and I am going to do the best job that I can. I lead by example.*

The reoccurring narrative centres around the president's talents. He emerges as our protagonist whose plot restores order to a business in need of a hero. Our tertiary characters, the employees, needed fixing and developing. Our hero provides the example for everyone to emulate and humbly does not need the recognition that his management peers afford him.

4.3.5 Conceptual Framework Cycle 3

Following Hart's (2018) systematic review of the literature, and as part of the iterative nature of this study, the data was examined through the lens of language and identity studies. Managers were given data from the first action cycle and commented on the findings in a semi-structured group interview. Emergent data from the group discussion were useful in generating additional questions for the dominant voices. Management appeared offended when their employees used terms that gave the impression that they were at the same hierarchal level as the managers. This apparent affront and the words managers used to describe themselves and employees were worth exploring within this iteration.

4.4 Research Question Development

With this patchwork of possibilities, this research sought to identify the varying possibilities found in the emergent data and informed by the literature. Using Hart's method of viewing the literature with a wide lens to pragmatically attend to the iterative action cycles was useful in this research. Literature was used as a lens to review the data and construct subsequent cycles. The lenses became an interdisciplinary analysis of theories found within psychology, human resources, and organisational dynamics. Research questions emerged and were tested, regarded, or disregarded as the cycles progressed. This research did not form a tidy loop that answered one particular question. Rather, research questions developed longitudinally and were scrutinised in turn.

4.5 Conclusion

The action research cycles pragmatically shifted focus over time. What started as an employee problem shifted to address management perception and identity. Each cycle took on a uniqueness in both the emergent data and in the method of data extraction. The first cycle was a quantitative scoping to determine the direction of the research. The second cycle explored themes of expectations, incongruency, language, and cognitive dissonance in a semi-structured interview. The third cycle used narrative inquiry to develop an understanding of the ways in which management's identity played a role in the dyadic relationship with their employees and how they defined themselves as actors within the organisation. A depiction of the *action within the cycles* is summarized in the following diagram.

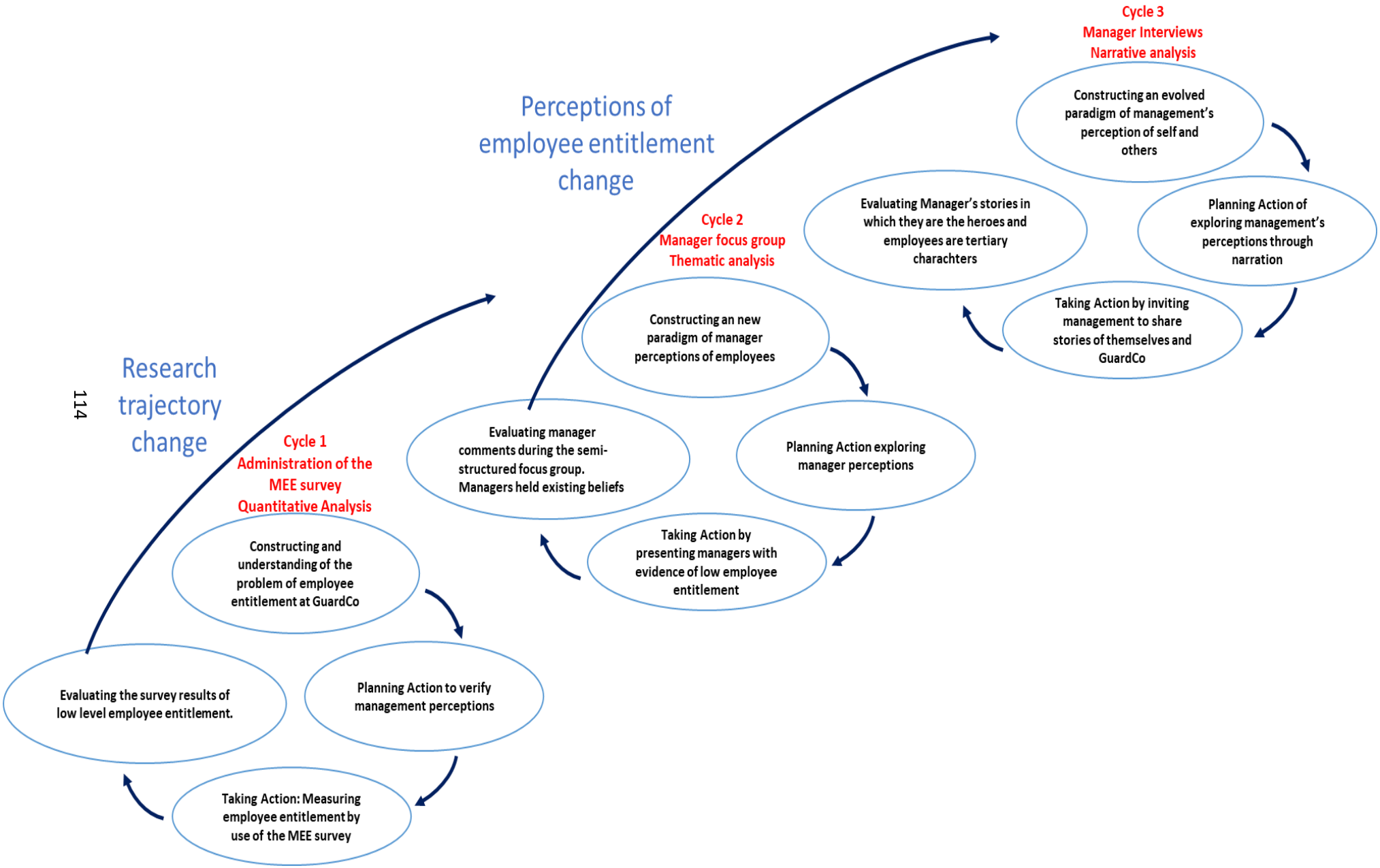

Figure 20 Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick (2014, p. 11)

Action research is a design that allows for immediate application within an organisation (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). However, one should not assume that the application or intervention(s) will be overt, as was the case from the data in the first action cycle. Here the data determined the trajectory of the subsequent research cycles, but management and employees were unaware of this significant, intervening construct. When management reviewed the survey in the second action cycle, they did not behave as expected and thus efforts to use the second cycle to create workplace harmony was postponed.

The president of the company – the prominent voice in the second action cycle – appeared to soften his language regarding his employees. He explained that his employees had changed over time. His new perception was verbalised in a way that gave the impression that change had occurred. Certainly, all research involving human beings has the potential of distortion either by the subjects providing false information to make themselves look better (Leong and Austin, 2006) or by inherent biases of the researcher and participants (McKay and Marshall, 2001). I had no reason to believe that I had been given false information nor that the president was trying to look better to me. Even if my bias distorted my view, the president's descriptions of his employees altered, and in doing so, there may be a subtle shift in this organisation toward harmony. The insertion of the survey results into the psyche of management potentially challenged their thinking but was less overt than in the first action cycle. The narratives of the third action cycle produced additional data that would have been used to develop another cycle to investigate the potential action cycle that involved the significance of the stories we tell.

The next chapter will address the implications of the evidence found in these action cycles. I will reflect on the actionable knowledge gained from this research and discuss possible future action cycles. I will provide my recommendations to GuardCo management for addressing their concerns about employee entitlement within the context of the data collected and supported by the literature. I will also reflect on my development as a scholar-practitioner and consultant by acknowledging my own perceptions of self through narration.

Chapter 5 – Evaluation of the Outcomes

5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a panoptic view of the evolutionary history of this research, from the early question development, through the evolutionary action cycles, to our current stasis and proposals for the future. As with all research conducted over time, one must grapple with the recursive periods of active inactivity whilst we pause to document and question a problem in an ever-changing workplace. The workplace is a malleable and complex organism. The worldwide pandemic of Covid-19 mimetically highlighted this phenomenon of variability and complexity whilst providing a unique opportunity to view a fluctuating workplace under rare stress.

The harbinger for this research was not the pandemic, however. Management's feelings that their employees exhibited behaviours and verbalisations of entitlement catalysed the investigation. The Measurement of Employee Entitlement (MEE) survey scoped the employee's feelings to see if the managers' perceptions were accurate. The data derived from the MEE survey decided the initial direction for the proceeding action cycles described in the previous chapter. This research engaged in the pragmatic use of methods within an action research methodology to uncover and examine data. Previous literature informed the use of particular methods as the best fit for data extraction. Various methods were investigated to determine which would garner the most valuable data to assess and redefine the workplace problem. Once initial scoping data revealed very few levels of employee entitlement, the focus shifted from employee entitlement behaviours and verbalisations to management's perceptions of employee entitlement. As a consultant, I was cognisant of my desire to maintain workplace harmony where it already existed or create it where there was discord.

This chapter examines the findings from the action cycles by looking at the themes categorised within the framework of Coghlan and Brannick's (2014) first-, second-, and third-person research reflection. The first-person research reflection recapitulates the reflective practice of self-examination wherein I was a scholar-practitioner in consultancy with business leaders in an industry that differs from mine. I examine the ubiquity of my bias. The necessary questioning of my assumptions and preconceptions of this workplace, its culture, the managers with whom I had a prior acquaintance, and my identity as a leader and manager defined the meaningfulness of this endeavour for me. First-person reflectivity

highlighted the decisions made in the methodology and literature review. I acknowledge that I created this thesis through my Western scholar-practitioner lens. The only possible exception would be the quoted conversations, yet these, too, reflect my decisions. The emergent data required analysis of my opinions and biases at every step within the cycle. I noted my bias regarding the antecedents, the context, the research question, and the emergent data. In many cases, I asked myself if another right answer might create a counterargument to my existing thoughts. Or simply, what if I am wrong?

Within the framework of second-person learning, I discuss an evolving dyadic manager-employee relationship. I identified the shift from management to the employees as the stakeholder focus shifted from employee entitlement to the perceptions of management. I examined the narrative constructs that work to define relationships and imbed themselves in the history and culture of this organisation. The abundant literature and previous research on the leader-member exchange theory, expectancy theory, and the paternalist and benevolent dyadic relationship between management and employees in this business was the impetus for the action cycles and informed understanding of the interpersonality of human resources in an organisation. Similar to previous research, this thesis posits that managers who engage in reflective practice might establish a basis for impactful change (Weick and Quinn, 1999; Schein, 2015). I revisit the decision to use narrative inquiry to uncover the influences of language and identity construction.

Within the framework of third-person learning, I identify how this research contributes to the greater body of knowledge by identifying transferrable interventions in the workplace. I will identify the limitations of this research and how it might create further discourse on the more significant themes of identity and the implications that narration has on workplace relationships. Practitioners might examine that their narratives and identity are potentially moderating constructs within their workplace relationships. Examining management's self-reported identity as part of leadership training or hiring practices might support corrective interventions to mitigate disharmony.

5.1 Themes

This research pragmatically used multiple methods to gather data that uncovered issues and possible mitigations available to bring greater alignment and harmony to the workplace. Problematisation after initial scoping suggested that managers held perceptions counter to

reality. During the scoping, wherein the broad topic of employee entitlement was investigated, the stakeholders were limited to a small number of frustrated and embarrassed managers. As I progressed through the action cycles, the problematisation honed to more specific topics of management perceptions and their identity. This was a shift in perception away from seeing the problem as an employee problem to be fixed to the potential actualisation that the problem may require more inward and realistic reflection is a topic that would need another action cycle to facilitate greater self-discovery. Already there were hints of a softening of opinion regarding employee entitlement. The president noted, '*I don't think most of the employees are entitled but I don't think there is anything we can do about the ones that feel that way'*. The human resources manager insightfully commented, *'the problem might be us.'*

I began my investigation with limited information from the human resources manager claiming a persistent employee entitlement problem. Being unsure of employee entitlement, I sought literature and tools to understand the experiences of the people within the organisation. The Measurement of Employee Entitlement (MEE) survey became the catalyst for the direction of this research. The emergent themes outlined in each action cycle are summarised below:

Cycle	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Themes	• Entitlement • Psychological contracts • Reciprocity • LMX • Equity theory	• Paternalism • Expectancy theory • Cognitive psychology • Management perceptions	• Narrative inquiry • Identity studies

Table 10 Themes by cycle

The thematic focus narrowed with each successive cycle. Whilst the problem shifted from the larger group of management to its subset, simultaneously, the potential stakeholders expanded to encompass the entirety of hourly employees due to the influence of the main actors.

At GuardCo, anything that falls outside the scope of the ESOP rules is management's domain for creation and implementation. Within this organisation, the management personnel are responsible for creating the rules and process flow in the production of their products.

Management creates the work shifts and regulates staffing to manage their output. They instruct personnel and develop training. This expectation and cultural norm are significant to this research because of the potential impact a manager's perception might have on policy. For example, a manager who perceived her employees were always coming in late might install a time-clock, create a rule about tardiness, or provide a reward for arriving on time. Likewise, suppose a manager perceives his employees as trustworthy. In that case, he may allow them more liberties within the workplace, give everyone a key to open the store or allow them to make bank deposits. Within GuardCo, the perception that the employees felt entitled had the potential to continue to erode relations between management and the employees not only emotionally but more tangibly. It is conceivable that perks might have been taken away or harsher penalties for infractions of company policy. These policy modifications could occur for a reason entirely unbeknownst to the employees. Employees with little or no feelings of entitlement could suffer under rules implemented for purposes or to cure an incorrect perception.

For this reason, the focus of this study moved away from employees as the problem to viewing management perceptions as the problem was significant in mitigating the potential negative impact on employees. Had it been determined in action cycle one that employees did, in fact, harbour feelings of entitlement, the problematisation would have focused on how a small group of managers might address or reconcile with their employees' feelings. This study may have focused on the workplace structure, rules, and corporate culture. This research may have focused on addressing the root causes of feelings of entitlement to mitigate employees' opinions and perceptions. In the initial scoping, no evidence was presented that employees were aware of management's perceptions of them. The assumption was that the employees were unaware. Since the issue was that management perceived entitlement where evidence showed this perception to be false, the problem and focus stayed on management. Therefore, it was unnecessary to study the workplace structure, rules, benefits and culture beyond the parameters noted in the previous chapter.

The impact of management perceptions, however, was not a unilateral concern. There is an element of reciprocity in both the antecedent and the response. Employees understand the perks offered by this organisation, and are aware that they will enter as Employee-owners under the ESOP structure. They have expectations of generosity because they are told of these things as part of the recruitment process. Everyone brings their history and experiences

into the workplace, formulating expectations about the relationship between peers, subordinates, and superiors in a hierarchal context (Lipman-Blumen and Leavitt, 1999; Morgan, 2006; Rhodes, Pullen and Clegg, 2010; Lloyd and Mertens, 2018). Unresolved expectations can breed resentments and dissatisfaction (Ajzen, 2001; Harvey and Harris, 2010; Lloyd and Mertens, 2018). When these resentments are voiced, we bring a narrative that establishes and reconfirms opinions about identity (Rhodes, Pullen and Clegg, 2010; Wolf, 2019). The initial expectations and the response to the dissatisfaction when a person falls short of those expectations were significant in the relationships between manager and employee at GuardCo, albeit not in the way one might think. One might assume that management wanted to be thanked or appreciated for their generosity, but that was not management's response.

This chapter will look at the self-narratives that shape the identity of the managers because of their significance to the dyadic relationship and dominion over employees. Management expected that everyone would 'fall in line' with the program established by the new leadership. This was evidenced by the president's remarks about his military background and previous leadership positions. He and his CEO held patriarchal ideologies regarding their relationship with employees, and while they claimed to not want exhibitions of gratitude from their employees, they did expect deference to the authority they represented. Whilst I could not interview the employees beyond the initial survey, the president mentioned that tenured employees might not give the same deference as the newer employees hired under his leadership.

This company was a traditional hierarchical manufacturing company in Texas. Understanding the historical significance of manufacturing in America was important to deciphering the power dynamics associated with hierarchical structures noted in the literary contributions of Taylor, Fayol, Weber, Folet, Deming and others.

Literature from traditional management theory going back to academia's first attempts to define and understand the importance of efficiency and science management had a prominent place in this company. As noted previously, the owner graduated from Harvard Business School in 1971. He ran his company in a typical top-down management style despite the relatively flat hierarchal structure. Only one department had more than one supervisory level, but there was a deference to management over employees. The CEO noted the importance of leadership when discussing the traits he sought when hiring his successor, the company's

president. In the owner's view, managers made the rules and designed job duties. His views are supported by the history of industrial manufacturing and found in the explosion of management theory of the post-war economy in the west (Huff, 2000; Bennis and O'Toole, 2005). This ontological background creates a foundational understanding of the initial design and culture of GuardCo. It also supported management's expectations of the interpersonal relationships they had with their employees as being top-down.

This expectation echoes the psychological contracts of reciprocity and fuelled a manager identity that ultimately led to problematic behaviours consistent with confirmation bias and management's feelings of entitlement. Examples of the behaviours consistent with confirmation bias were found in action cycle two, whereby managers actively sought evidence that supported their own bias and disregarded evidence that contradicted their existing views about employee entitlement (Koslowski and Maqueda, 1993; Michel and Peters, 2020). While it is not surprising that managers might not recognise that they exhibited cognitive bias by looking for minor, less significant details to support their beliefs, it speaks to this theme and worthy of inclusion as an emergent concern. Cognitive bias will be discussed further in this chapter.

The final theme is that of turning action research into action learning through the reflective and reflexive process of the researcher and the participants. This is ultimately the theme of this entire chapter. Rigg and Coghlan (2016) note that one might differentiate between action research and action learning based on the expected outcome. Regardless of the expectation, transferrable knowledge in this research comes from the consultant/researcher (me) and manager's understanding and verbalisations. This formed the first and second-person learning and developed transferrable knowledge.

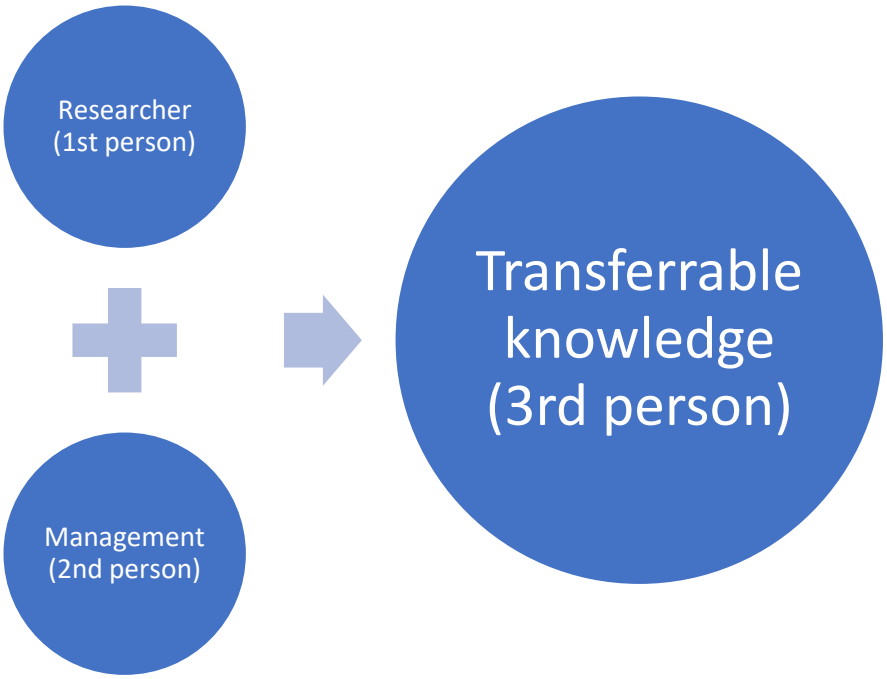

Figure 21 First-, second-, and third-person learning

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the benefactors of action learning and the narrative, reflective practice and transferrable mitigations for our society found in this research.

5.2 First person learning

As a consultant entering this context, I revisited my beliefs about management and leadership. I looked at what I learned from my formal graduate-level master's education and my experiences as a manager for the past twenty years. This is a theme that I revisited multiple times during each action cycle and chronicle in the following section.

My story: I have had the same employees working for me for sixteen years. I did not hire them, and they were not happy to be gaining yet another new boss when I arrived. There was in-fighting amongst the employees, and before my arrival, a few of them started applying to find work elsewhere. I spoke on the phone with them a few times before becoming their boss and could feel the tension and boredom amongst the employees. When I tell the story of what happened next, I am acutely aware of placing myself in the protagonist's role as the redeemer of their potential. I came in with the critical goal of helping my team reach their potential and do great things. In my retelling of our history together, I was the boss who led my team to greatness (in reality, I simply stayed out of their way). We have qualified in the top 5% of all 19,000 sales agent offices within our company for the past two years and met the

international MDRT qualifications. I worked with great intention to create friendships and mend relationships in the office. I gave them a greater purpose for their work and created an environment where they could thrive. My team is amazing. My love for them is only surpassed by their love and respect for one another. I tell this story in every class that I teach and to all the new sales managers I mentor. I believe that I am a good boss.

My narrative memory becomes stronger with each retelling, and I can again place myself back in the early days when I was learning to navigate the personalities of an existing team. Yet, my story may not be a reality. At the very least, it is likely an incomplete reality. My retelling has removed all of my negative qualities. I am the protagonist in a story arch that I created. My retelling informs the collective memories of my business (Foroughi, 2020) and reinforces my belief in all my leadership qualities (Wolf, 2019). If my narrative is indicative of my identity and guides my actions (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010), my narrative will likely foreshadow the policies and procedures I design for my team.

Imagination is a wonderful thing when applied correctly. Imagination and fantasy should be used to envisage a better future. However, when fantasy misrepresents history, we have crossed into ethical and moral implications. What kind of message have I sent my team by holding this narrative of myself as the hero of my own story,? What role did they play in our success? Taken from their point of view, I could have been a fool that arrived, and they controlled to accomplish what they needed to accomplish. They might have repaired their relationships on their own and were perhaps happy to see me as a tertiary character (and hopefully not the antagonist) while they accomplished great things. They could easily relegate me to a supporting character in their narrations. I have taken no account that they were evolving emotionally and cognitively. Despite their growing maturity and foresight, I paid little attention to them as individuals. I have taken LMX theory of individualised relationships and instead lumped everyone into the one category of supporting actors. In my story, I took raw material and formed a perfect team. They are supporting actors in my imaginative retelling. My story lessens theirs. I am left asking, what harm have I caused by narrating a shared experience in which I have relegated my team to anything less than lead characters?

My story at GuardCo

Having been both a project manager and an agency consultant before becoming an independent-contractor sales agent with my own employees, I had the opportunity to move all over the United States with my company. I was used to entering departments and joining teams as 'the new kid'. I was comfortable with the unfamiliar and felt I had a talent for quickly understanding team dynamics. I felt well-equipped to enter another's place of business in the role of consultant for this research.

Upon entering GuardCo, I adopted mirrored management's paternalism by assuming a top-down approach to addressing the problem. As previously noted, I had not yet self-actualised the significance of my narration. Suffice to say, I was still impressed with my humility. I was walking into a situation for which I was ideally suited. I liked the managers, and they liked me. The employees were comfortable with me because my face was on a billboard. Everyone appeared impressed and eager to assist me in conducting research for a doctoral thesis. Most importantly, they had a problem that needed my attention.

I was told that the problem was with the employees and that their feelings of entitlement were embarrassing and annoying to management. In hindsight, I may have wanted this to be the case so that I could do what I do best: repair what was broken and bring harmony within the workplace. I could draw upon LMX research to build relationships that develop trust. In doing so, I would help foster greater productivity which would garner greater wealth for everyone. The managers would continue to like me. The employees would hold me in high esteem, and I would be satisfied knowing that I had fixed yet another problem.

Built into the rigour of action learning are periods where one engages in thoughtful reflexivity. In my case, it happened when things did not go according to plan, and I was forced into periods of self-examination and reflection. Considering the problem contextually and identifying my interpretive lens became important points in each action cycle. Covid-19, like any crisis, forced me into another realignment of previous sensemaking (Christianson *et al.*, 2009). After discovering the employees did not generally feel entitled, I needed to look at the management as the root cause of the workplace problem. Given my recent admission (and apparent desire to be liked), this was a less comfortable position to navigate. The managers expected answers as to why the employees felt entitled and how the employees could change. I was navigating a new paradigm in which I was likely to upset the managers and put my friendships and reputation at risk as I delved into why the managers perceived employee entitlement. This is not without precedence. Consultants must navigate the desire to keep

their clients satisfied by finding something (anything) wrong to justify their existence or fees (Sturdy, 2009). I was compelled to find something wrong because management expected me to find something wrong. They told me they had left three slides open on their presentation slide deck of a PowerPoint in order to share my finding with their employees at an annual meeting. This was an additional construct that presented itself and required careful negotiation.

The shift in thinking away from employees toward managers as the potential problem was part of my first-person struggle. After discussing the survey's findings and the realisation that managers did not see themselves as the problem and continued looking for evidence of their employees' faults, I felt management was looking to me only to confirm their thoughts and justify their feelings. The factor relating to an employee's excessive self-regard could potentially create a problem in the employee-employer dyad; however, management was not concerned with this issue. When shown contrary data, management noted it and then respectfully disregarded it. Even after the manager meeting in the second action research cycle, I continued to want to 'fix' the employees and offered to come in and work with the employees to develop gratitude strategies that might appease management and make happier employees. This idea did not appeal to management and was rejected because they stated they were not looking for gratitude.

I moved on to the third action cycle, hoping to discover why the managers were cognitively dissonant in this matter. I erroneously assumed management would be happy to see that their employees, according to the Measurement of Employee Entitlement, did not harbour feelings of entitlement. I assumed they were perhaps acting on the voice of a minority of people that had somehow amplified in management's minds. I thought they would be satisfied with the results. Contrarily, they did not want to be wrong about the problem.

It was in the third action cycle and the narratives shared by leadership in this organisation that resonated in my psyche. I could empathise and place myself into their stories. Much like one engages imagination whilst reading a novel differs from the passivity of watching a movie, so did I engage imagination when reflexivity and empathy converged. Upon hearing the managers' narratives, I could see myself reflected in their stories. It became almost painful to reflect on my thoughts and words, the lack of humility and understanding, the misapplied praise of self and the obsessive need to elevate others for the purpose of elevating myself. I was ashamed of this part of me that could be so haughty. Following this flash of clarity was a

wave of gratitude to the people I manage and for the souls at GuardCo who trusted me with their stories. I had come to repair them, but in reality, my interpretive lens was irrevocably altered.

As a business owner with managerial responsibilities, understanding the paradigm shift that can occur when self-narratives are reviewed with the intentionality of improvement is significant to managerial growth. Self-narratives shape one's identity and influence workplace relationships (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). Spending time reviewing one's self-narrative is a personal activity, but the implications of doing such have widespread implications in organisational culture and the dyadic relationship between employees and managers.

5.3 Second person learning

This epiphany was not so forthcoming with the management at GuardCo. The second action cycle began with a disclosure of the results of the Measurement of Employee Entitlement Survey. As previously noted, managers were not able to articulate how they wanted their employees to behave. They only stated what they did not want them to do. All we could agree upon was that there were employees who complained and, it was problematic for managers. When shown data on employees' feelings, management sought evidence that would reinforce their beliefs. This theme of confirmation bias would become a symptom of a more individualised internal management problem.

Managers often tell stories that elevate themselves. Their stories become their identity that resonates in the culture of their organisation. The third action cycle brought the individual's history to the forefront. Data emerged to suggest that the problem was no longer about perception but about how one sees themselves in relation to the entirety of the organisation. Rostron (2021) posits that the construction of identity derives from the world or 'landscape' where the narrative takes place. GuardCo provided the landscape for managers at GuardCo to construct their narrations and reinforcement of their identity.

I am reminded of a story that has been told over and over at my organisation. I have no idea if it is true but I am not sure it matters if it is true, because the message is significant to the 70,000 employees who work in it: Once there was a vice president who was the third most important man at our company. He took the company plane and went to California from Illinois to visit his family. When he returned, he was immediately hauled into the CEO's

office with a bill for the plane, pilot, maintenance, fuel, etc. He was told that by taking the plane for non-business use, he had stolen from our customers and policyholders. All of our money comes from our policyholders, and we are accountable to them for every single expenditure. The vice president paid the money back to the company, and the story has become part of our organisational folklore. I have told the story countless times, and it has been told to me, but I could not tell you the names of either the CEO or the vice president at the time the incident occurred. The story has outlived them—if it is even true. And herein resides the crux of our dilemma. What of this story, or anyone's story is true?

Does a manager tell a story that elevates themselves? Do they come into the organisation with an agenda to shine the best light on all of their most favourable traits whilst ignoring their unfavourable ones? Is there an imbalance in the imagination when visualising themselves or their position? Does their story have a moral imperative? Who is the hero? Finally, the most significant question is, why? Why has a manager created this story? How do the stories we tell change an organisation? How do the stories we tell support or destroy our psychological contracts? If our stories are necessary to the fabric of organisational culture, should we not be intentional about our retelling?

At GuardCo, it is not merely that managers misperceived their employees' words or actions; they may have misperceived themselves. Because they do not see themselves accurately, they function in a fantasy of their own making, and it is difficult for a person to navigate accurately in this state (Greenwald, 1980; Michel and Peters, 2020). Their reality is nearly accurate, but not entirely. Managers choose what areas of their story are highlighted and which are discarded (Greenwald, 1980; Koslowski and Maqueda, 1993). At GuardCo, the president placed themselves firmly as the protagonist who entered the organisation and repaired what was broken. In doing so, he removed most of the problems and created order and harmony. Except not everyone was removed. Some stayed and complained and created chaos in a world designed by our hero/protagonist/manager. In other words, those who did not fit the landscape became our hero's antagonist. They were lingering remnants of a tainted past. At the risk of sounding like a dystopian science fiction movie, our main character needs to delve into their psyche and become cognitively aware of the dichotomy of his narrative—identify which side of the looking glass he views his world.

There is factual evidence to support the accuracy of the managers' claims. Employees had complained that the free food was too cold. Employees vocalised how the company should

be managed. However, the facts and omissions in retelling their stories should be examined. What information was omitted? Whose story did you lessen by making yourself the protagonist? If you are a leader, do employees inevitably and irrevocably become your supporting characters?

In order to further examine these questions, I suggest an entirely new thesis. For purposes of this one, I would propose a fourth action cycle in which the managers reflexively explore their narratives on a personal level. However, management at GuardCo is content with our time together. The managers reported that they did not feel employees were complaining as much and felt that the entitlement problem was less noticeable and more manageable. They did not desire further assistance and felt that Covid-19 had curbed the employee's tendency to complain. After spending more time with the survey results, it could be that each manager realised they may have been wrong. The managers may have been appeased in seeing that their employees appreciated what they had and did not expect to be given more than what they earned. It could have been that Covid-19 did have a moderating effect on employee behaviours. Regardless of the cause, managers are content, and the company continues to prosper.

The action cycles impacted GuardCo in three ways. First, GuardCo managers allowed an examination of an embarrassing topic. They revealed concerns to an outside (but known to them) consultant. Their actions indicated both confidence and humility. The confidence derived from their belief that there was a solution to their problem and that the problem rested with their employees. Their humility manifested in sharing their thoughts amongst peers and in front of a consultant. Humility and confidence appear important for managers considering an in-depth study of their organisation.

Secondly, the action cycles impacted managers and employees by identifying and understanding the misalignment in expectations. At first, GuardCo did not appear to understand when reviewing the employee survey data that their comments did not align with the presented data. Management acknowledged areas where their philosophy aligned with employee results but appeared to misinterpret or misread some of the results. It appeared that management only looked for evidence to support their narrative. That the human resource manager would later state that they (the managers) might be the problem was significant because other managers may have held differing and unreported feelings about employee entitlement than what was initially reported. The CEO and the President's opinions may

have silenced these differing opinions. This redirection of thought may also be due to the time given to contemplate the presented information. The managers immediately presented commentary when given data. Had they been given time to digest the information and think more about it, they may have reached different conclusions than what they shared with me. This may have also been reflected in the third action cycle when the narratives shifted away from the whole of employees to a specific subset of people. This would indicate that time is an important factor in assessments.

Thirdly, managers began acknowledging that vernacular was a possible construct of the disharmony. Managers of an ESOP should be aware that calling an employee an owner without giving any authority may result in an unbalanced dyadic relationship with skewed expectations. Caution in the language used in marketing material should align with company culture. In the case of GuardCo, a traditional hierarchical structure dominated, but the progressive language of employee-owners misaligned with the culture. Wherein these are noteworthy outcomes from the first three cycles, the cycles raised far more questions that would have informed the fourth action cycle.

The next cycle would likely be a workshop with managers to work, once again, with the data found in the previous cycle. In this case, managers would give their narratives to examine and possibly look to find patterns in their behaviours and possibly in the policies they have created for their organisation. It would be interesting to see if managers could map or illustrate their narration in a pictorial form, as another mode of expression might stimulate greater problem-solving creativity (Monk and Howard, 1998).

Participatory Action research is intended to engage the organisation to make a sustainable change (Greenwood, Whyte and Harkavy, 1993; Greenwood and Levin, 2007). It appeared that change occurred in the waning of animosity. Were I able to conduct a fourth action cycle, it would have focused on self-analysis and personal narratives. A workshop in thinking about audience and interpretive lenses might have yielded data to assist managers in recognising the influences of their narratives (Greenwald, 1980; Willmott, 1993). How managers design the rules and regulations of an organisation is closely related to their perceptions and history—their narrative. We might have examined current company policies mandated by the ESOP and those created by the managers within the company. We might have further discussed hiring practices in the scope of what actors one looks for in a narrative in which the protagonist is already determined. If a manager is hiring and they have already

cast themselves as the hero, how might that affect hiring decisions? What clues might one listen for in an interview to assess the character they want to fill in their story? How are managers hired? What clues identify humility (or false humility), benevolence, or narcissism? Can we tell this about a person before they are elevated to a position of leadership?

Currently, there is no model for management assessment at GuardCo. This is a relatively small company, and it is not surprising that management is not required to engage in self-improvement as might exist in larger firms. The ESOP structure looks closely at production and profitability. This is the metric by which bonuses are determined in this manufacturing company. There is clear accountability about what a person should be doing. It would be highly undemocratic to suggest accountability about how a person should be feeling.

The effect of the action research and use of action cycles was subtle and affected only the three top managers in this organisation. Their narratives changed from the first description of the problem to their final description. It could have been that they became acutely aware of the words when they saw me taking notes and might have censored or tempered their comments. This phenomenon is a well-documented reaction in research studies (Sedgwick and Greenwood, 2015). Perhaps the managers came to their own realisations, similar to my own. Perhaps they understood that they might not be looking at the situation accurately. Perhaps the employees actually stopped the behaviours that were so upsetting to the managers because the world had moved on and people change and grow and develop. The permutations of these scenarios are equally likely, as are their combinations. As there was not a fourth action cycle, further investigation would be needed to answer these questions.

Coghlan and Brannick draw upon Shein and others to highlight the relational engagement of action research in second-person learning (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). Second-person learning draws upon the workplace context. The employee-owners of an ESOP create a specific problem in terms of how an employee might perceive themselves. This perception may run counter to the perception of management, who sees themselves in a leadership role with dominion over the employees. The third action cycle produced narratives that supported the belief that employees were tertiary figures. It would take additional action cycles to scope this dichotomy.

5.4 Third person learning

Literature and organisational history assume managers play a role in affecting organisations (Checkland and Holwell, 1993; Raelin, 2011). The action cycles of this research moved from a focus on the employee to a focus on the manager. This research should contribute to management literature by looking at management expectations (entitlement) within the scope of their individual stories. The interplay between management's leadership responsibilities as a leader, their imagination, and how that shapes their identity translates into a narrative about how they see themselves and others. Their identity influences their relationships and how they address workplace processes and create policies which link to the creation of company culture (Ezzamel, Willmott and Worthington, 2001). Literature has shown the link between company culture and employee engagement (Rich, LePine and Crawford, 2010; Kurland, 2018), so anything that might affect culture is worthy of examination. It is reasonably assumed that the employee/manager relationship positively effects employee engagement (Robertson and Cooper, 2010; Jayasingam, Govindasamy and Garib Singh, 2016). The relationship between the management and employee dyad can not only lead to engagement (or disengagement) but reinforces each other's identity in a feedback loop (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995; Ezzamel, Willmott and Worthington, 2001; Foroughi, 2020).

A manager's narrative is verbalisation of their identity (Sörgärde, 2020) and can have a mediating effect on the relationship between themselves and their employees (Chan and Mak, 2012; González-romá and Blanc, 2019). Depending upon a manager's self-narrative, unmet expectations of gratification might damage the manager's relationship with their employees. We understand the uniqueness of each manager's personal history that support their perceptions of self (Seaman and Smith, 2012). Third-person learning in this study becomes about helping managers see themselves more clearly. It takes individualised attention to what a manager says and how they describe themselves to understand the clues of why something is said. Rostron (2021) suggests that management education should move beyond skills and knowledge to develop management's critical analysis of their narratives. Managers might look at themselves and recognise they have elevated themselves to the potential detriment of others. They may in this instance engage their imagination and place themselves in a supporting role and imagine someone else in the protagonist role. They may imagine others as the hero or view other's hero stories. The reflexivity could be in identifying their histories, values, company rules, and policies. Being able to reflect on management's own individual stories and is likely to highlight influences on company policy and culture. Management

might gain understanding and modify their verbalisation when faced with incongruencies between espoused values and individual narratives. In terms of their reflectivity and possible understanding of self, managers might create the incremental change that takes a company in a better direction. Fantasy and imagination in business could be used for their intended role of moving industry forward and discovering the unknown (Starkey, Hatchuel and Tempest, 2009; Roepke and Seligman, 2014; Foroughi, 2020).

5.5 Transferrable implications and limitations

This paper provides a starting point for further research. ESOP literature expounds on the benefits of creating employee-owners. This action research provides a contribution to the ESOP literature by identifying potential conflicts in the dyadic relationship between management and employee-owners when a hierarchical relationship exists. Management verbally touted the employee-owner paradigm, whilst their self-narratives clearly placed the employees as tertiary characters on a lower hierarchal rung. Employees believing their status as 'owner' might create more of a peer relationship with management is one that a company might need to spend time addressing for clarity and understanding on the part of both management and employee. Future research might address the relevancy of manager stories on company policy or provide necessary insights on the role of identity on individual and group dynamics.

This research contributes to practice by suggesting that managerial reflexivity in the examination narratives become part of learning and development of leadership. GuardCo was not interested in a fourth action cycle, so the questions raised by the third cycle will need to be answered in future research endeavours. This research has provided a basis from which to view other organisational problems. Other organisations might consider incorporating management narratives as part of the analysis that addresses workplace problems. Stories could be explored to find patterns in habitual thinking and uncover identity's role in sensemaking and decision making. This could take place in a workshop setting or, depending upon the organisation, as part of a formal mentorship programme.

This research was limited by the three action cycles, which left the organisation's effects of management identity undiscovered. As noted previously, the influence of manager identity on the employee-manager dyad is assumed but not measured in this study. Additionally, this study did not address manager self-narratives in the greater societal context. The study was

confined to one company in the southern United States. No effort was made to find cross-cultural or cross-industry patterns for greater transferability.

Because this organisation is small, there were a limited number of managers from whom we could draw data. GuardCo had a flat organizational chart with employees, shift supervisors and managers. The managers did not give the shift supervisors the same credence as they gave themselves and chose to exclude the shift supervisors from any management discussions. Shift supervisors were considered employees for this study. Results might look different in an organisation with a multi-layered hierarchical structure. Another limiting factor to this research was the methods used for data extraction. In the second action cycle, there was very little counter-argumentation, with everyone appearing to defer to the president's or CEO's opinions. Had this study been in a more collaboratively structured enterprise rather than a hierarchical, paternalist one, it might have garnered different results in the second action cycle. I hope others will explore the implications of management identity and the effects that self-narratives might have on the relationships and psychological contracts between managers and employees.

Throughout this research, I had to navigate the politic of my professional relationship with the managers at GuardCo. Emotionally, it was difficult for me to relay some of their comments because it felt like gossip, which I find morally repugnant and try to avoid. It has been over a year since I last collected data from this organisation; however, the president of our local bank asked me last weekend if he could try to guess which local company I used for this thesis. It was an awkward moment for me because I realised that the owner of GuardCo banks with this particular bank, and while I can do all that I can to keep their identity secret, the owner might casually say something in passing that reveals our relationship. I am also aware that some of the employees knew who I was (even if I did not know who they were). Research decisions always pose a dilemma because the decision to include information is weighed against potential loss. I questioned each dialogue that was entered into this thesis against my own moral compass. I realised that while the relationship between employees and managers is currently preserved, should some of the dialogue become known to employees or managers, it could have a detrimental effect on workplace harmony and on my personal relationships with the people of GuardCo. I politely told the bank president that the company wishes to remain anonymous and their info has been redacted from my thesis.

I also became aware of my own bias toward recording devices. Questioning this reminded me of a particularly hurtful experience with a quote in our local newspaper that has kept me from doing interviews ever since. I believe this is why I gravitated toward Sanger's (1996) research guide and the significance of capturing as much dialogue as possible but focusing on the engagement, nuances, and meaning being collected. I am aware that it might have been significantly easier to record the conversations and code everything electronically in Excel, NVivo, or MAXQDA. Nonetheless, it was more portable for me to reflect on my fieldnotes and I genuinely felt closer to the data with the time I spent with the words.

This endeavour has given me an appreciation for the ability of action research and action learning to make an impact on researchers, organisations, and communities. I have taken this knowledge and created a curriculum for a local college to use action research as the framework for their new MBA programme. Each class is designed that the students bring a workplace problem, investigate in literature, and plan for internal investigation within their companies. The class will then evaluate emergent data and attempt to create meaningful and useful change.

5.6 Reflections

The stories we tell engage our imaginations and help make sense and order our world. We want our leaders to engage their creative cognitive muscles and, in doing so, develop new and better products in our marketplace. One of the key conclusions of this research is that when our imagination crosses over to create a fantasy or elevated narrative of one's history, it sends a message to ourselves and others. It forms a feedback loop and creates an opportunity for confirmation biases. When managers or leaders tell the story of our heroism, we move everyone else to the role of supporting actors. We assume our employees have freely allowed us the license to create a narrative in which we play heroes as managers, owners, or CEOs. This research did not intend to look at managers' individual stories to sort out fact from fiction. I would also not imply that anyone abandon their imaginations in the workplace. The implications of not engaging our imagination could have disastrous repercussions for any economy. I suggest only that awareness and intentionality is the missing element.

Acknowledging one's place in the narrative is equally as important as the narrative itself. The adage that 'what Peter says about Paul says more about Peter than Paul' is very close to what this research suggests. I would argue that 'what Peter does not say about Paul says

more about Peter than Paul'. Failure to accurately acknowledge that one's heroism has diminished another's is a closer depiction of the emergent data of this research.

Regardless of the narrative or context in which it was formed, what we tell ourselves about ourselves affects our relationships and guides our actions. As leaders within an organisation, leaders of nations, or leaders within our households, we owe it to those for whom we are responsible to pause and examine our stories.

6.0 References

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7.0 Appendix

7.1 Consultancy Agreement:

[redacted]

January 2, 2020

Human Resource Director

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Jennifer Vidrine

Doctoral Candidate

University of Liverpool

[redacted]

[redacted]

Dear Jennifer Vidrine:

This letter will serve as a follow up to our conversation on 12/12/2019. At that time, we discussed the parameters and scope of your thesis proposal. We understand that you would like to survey some or all of our employees and might conduct 'learning sets' or smaller focus group discussions that may encompass a small number of employees and possibly management. You will not be paid for your services and will not be granted access to any parts of the organization or its employees without first clearing it through myself, [redacted]. You provided a tentative 2020 schedule and will update it as necessary.

You have promised to maintain confidentiality of all participants by masking any details that could reasonably identify individual persons. You have promised to provide aggregate results of your research findings as outlined by senior management. You have promised to maintain the high ethical standards outlined by the University of Liverpool Ethics Policy, the Committee on Research Ethics, and your thesis advisor, Dr Ali Rostron.

We understand that our employee's participation is strictly voluntary and that they have the right to disengage from the research at any time. While we do not anticipate doing so, [redacted] holds the right to stop this research for any reason. We understand that all requests for anonymity relating to its participants or to our organization as a whole will be respected.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Human Resource Director

[redacted]

7.2 Email authorization to use MEE survey

From: Peter Jordan
Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2020 4:20:03 PM (UTC-06:00) Central Time (US & Canada)
To: Jenny Vidrine
Cc: Rostron, Ali
Subject: Re: Measurement of Employee Entitlement

Hi Jenny

Thanks for your email and sorry for my slow reply - I have been on annual leave until yesterday.

The MEE is public domain - so you are welcome to use it in your research. I am attaching a copy of the validation paper for you.

The reference is

Westerlaken, K. Jordan, P.J. & Ramsay, S. (2017) What about 'MEE': The Measure of Employee Entitlement, *Journal of Management & Organization*. 23(3), 392-404.

Let me know if you have any questions and good luck with your research and your studies.

Regards

Peter

Peter J. Jordan (PhD)

Professor of Organizational Behaviour

Deputy Director, Work Organisation and Wellbeing Research Centre

Associate Editor (OB), Australian Journal of Management

Employment Relations and Human Resources
Griffith University | Nathan | QLD 4111 | Business 3 (N50) Room 2.07
T +61 7 3735 3717 | E Peter.Jordan@griffith.edu.au

griffith.edu.au

From: Jenny Vidrine <jennifer.vidrine@online.liverpool.ac.uk>
Sent: Wednesday, 8 January 2020 1:15 PM
To: Peter Jordan <peter.jordan@griffith.edu.au>
Cc: Jenny Vidrine <jennifer.vidrine@online.liverpool.ac.uk>; Rostron, Ali <A.Rostron@liverpool.ac.uk>
Subject: Measurement of Employee Entitlement

Dr Jordan,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Liverpool in the UK. My thesis involves management's perception of employee entitlement that involves a quantitative component that aligns with your measurement tool. I understand that the Measurement of Employee Entitlement (MEE) survey that you co-developed with Kristie Westerlaken and Sheryl Ramsay is not available in the public domain. I am very interested in using this as part of my research. Might I be able to obtain a copy of your survey for use?

For your reference, my thesis advisor is Alison Rostron, PhD. She can be contacted at a.rostron@liverpool.ac.uk should you need further proof of my doctoral candidacy or have additional questions regarding my thesis.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly should you wish to see a copy of my thesis proposal or if I might answer any questions or concerns.

Kind regards,

Jennifer Vidrine

Doctoral Candidate

University of Liverpool

+01-972-249-7810 (M)

JMO MEE Westerlaken Jordan Ramsay 2016.pd

7.3 Survey information sheet

Title of Study

Exploring perceptual gaps between management and employees

1. Version Number and Date

1 March 2020 (version 3 Employees)

2. Invitation Paragraph

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask us if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the purpose of the study?

This research study is looking at perceptions in the workplace. Oftentimes employees and managers see things differently and this study looks at these differences. You will be asked to give your (anonymous) opinions regarding rewards, motivation, and perceptions. The objective is to close the potential gaps in perceptions to create a more harmonious and productive workplace.

4. Why have I been chosen to take part?

Management at [redacted] have allowed me to conduct my research here. All employees are invited to participate in the written questionnaire.

5. Do I have to take part?

While your management has advised that they strongly encourage everyone to submit the written questionnaire, participation is voluntary.

You are free to withdraw your participation at any time, without explanation, and without repercussion.

6. What will happen if I take part?

[redacted] management has approved participation of this study. All questionnaires will take place on-site at [redacted]

Information derived from the anonymous questionnaires will be used to conclude a Doctoral thesis at the University of Liverpool. All research will be collected and maintained by Jennifer Vidrine under the supervision of Dr Ali Rostron at the University of Liverpool.

7. How will my data be used?

Every attempt will be made to maintain anonymity of the participants. No personal data or private information will be collected during this research.

"*The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit.*

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. The [Principal Investigator / Supervisor] acts as the Data Processor for this study, and any queries relating to the handling of your personal data can be sent to Ali Rostron c/o arostron@liverpool.ac.uk

Further information on how your data will be used can be found in the table below".

How will my data be collected?	Personal data will not be collected. Answers to the survey will be collected via paper questionnaire.
How will my data be stored?	In a locked office and protected computer
How long will my data be stored for?	5 years
What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data?	No personal/private information will be collected. Answers to your survey will be stored in a password protected non-networked computer
Will my data be anonymised?	Yes – all attempts will be made to mask any identifying information. All quotes or comments will be reviewed to ensure anonymisation and prevent direct or indirect identification
How will my data be used?	Data from the questionnaire will be used to develop themes and constructs for the focus group discussions. These themes will be used in the development of the thesis. All compiled data will be presented within the thesis.

Who will have access to my data?	Jennifer Vidrine and Ali Rostron, PhD
Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	No, the data collected will only be used for this doctoral thesis. The thesis will be publicly available with the organisation anonymised.
How will my data be destroyed?	All paper questionnaires and notes will be destroyed with a shredder. All electronic versions will be deleted from my computer's hard-drive and put on an external memory stick and kept in a safe until it is deleted according to the University of Liverpool guidelines (Five years following completion of the DBA).

8. Expenses and / or payments

Management intends that you complete the questionnaire during your normal scheduled safety meeting. You will not be paid or incur additional expenses because of this study.

9. Are there any risks in taking part?

I do not anticipate risks outside the normal risks associated with workplace interactions.

10. Are there any benefits in taking part?

I anticipate this will help improve perceptions concerns that might exist and thus improve both relationships and the workplace environment.

11. What will happen to the results of the study?

A recap of the study will be provided to management and to employees at their monthly sales meeting. Results will be published as part of a doctoral thesis.

12. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

Results will be anonymised. Up until anonymisation, participants can withdraw their participation in the study, without explanation or repercussion. Until the period of withdrawal, results may be used to direct the study. Prior to anonymisation, participants may request that the participant-specific results are destroyed and no further use will be made of them.

13. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

"If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting Jennifer Vidrine 972-249-7810 and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you

feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.""

14. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

Jennifer Vidrine (ph) 972-249-7810 (email) Jennifer.vidrine@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Dr Ali Rostron (email) a.rostron@liverpool.ac.uk

7.4 MEE Survey

The statements below represent possible expectations, beliefs, and attitudes that individuals might have in relation to employment and workplace. Please circle the response that best characterizes how you feel about the statement where: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Mildly Disagree, 4 = Mildly Agree, 5 = Agree, 6 = Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Any organization should be grateful to have me as an employee	1	2	3	4	5	6
I expect regular promotions	1	2	3	4	5	6
Employers should accommodate my personal circumstances	1	2	3	4	5	6
I expect to be able to take breaks whenever I want	1	2	3	4	5	6
I deserve to be paid more than others	1	2	3	4	5	6
It is my employer's responsibility to set goals for my career	1	2	3	4	5	6
I believe I have exceptional skills and abilities	1	2	3	4	5	6
I expect regular pay increases regardless of how the organization performs	1	2	3	4	5	6
I should get a pay raise if I perform my job to a satisfactory level	1	2	3	4	5	6
Employees should be rewarded for average performance	1	2	3	4	5	6
I want to only work in roles that significantly influence the rest of the organization	1	2	3	4	5	6

I deserve preferential treatment at work	1	2	3	4	5	6
I should be able to take leave whenever it suits me	1	2	3	4	5	6
I expect to be able to delegate tasks that I don't want to do	1	2	3	4	5	6
I should have the right to demand work that is interesting to me	1	2	3	4	5	6
It is the organization's fault if I do not perform my job requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
I only want to work in positions that are critical to the success of the organization	1	2	3	4	5	6
I expect a bonus every year	1	2	3	4	5	6

1. What motivates you at work? Look for motivations from startups/esops/lit
    - Responsibility?
    - perks?
    - Pay?
    - Vacation time?
    - The ESOP?
    - The vacation property in Galveston?
    - Food?
    - Interesting work?
    - Raises?
    - Comradery with my co-workers?
    - ?

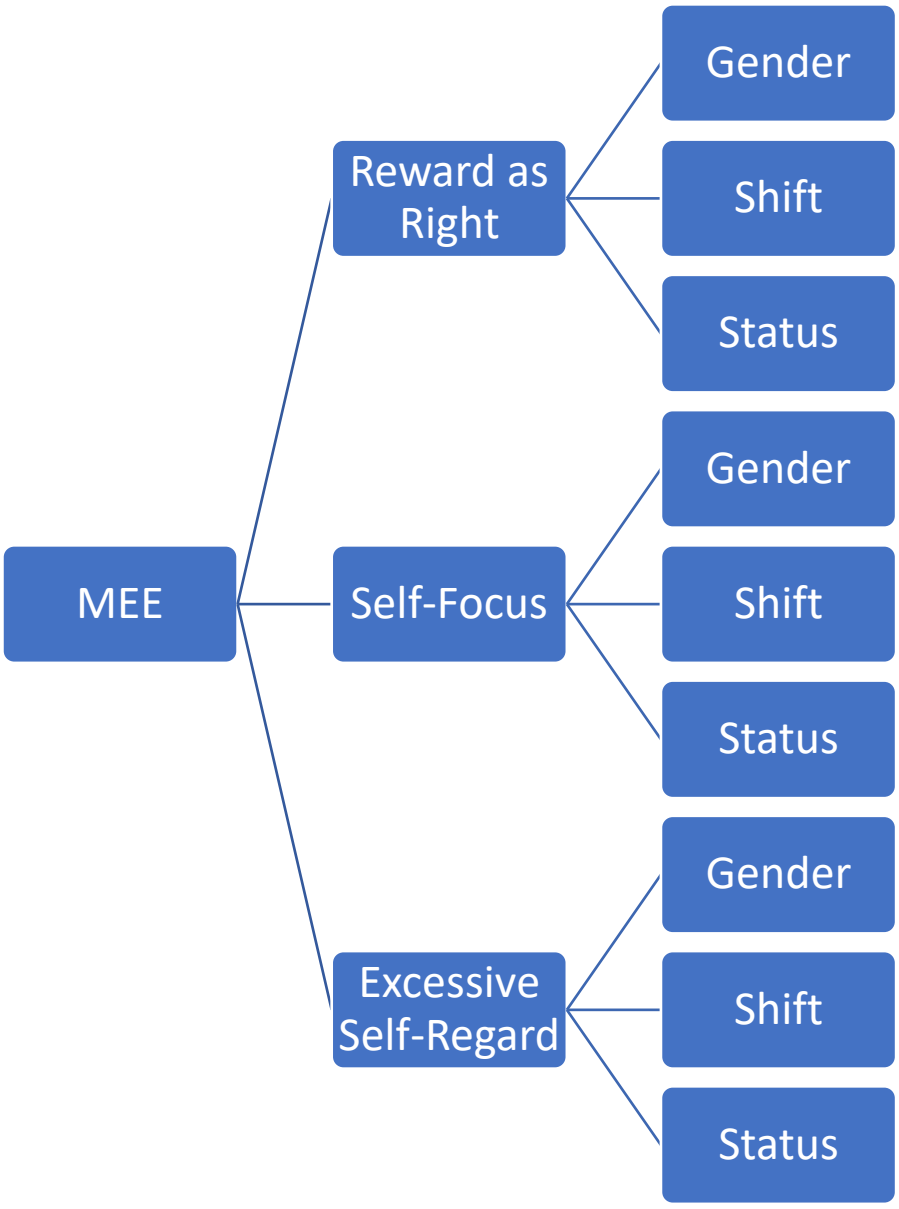
RE: Covid-19

2. How do you feel your employer has responded to Covid-19?
3. Have you had to adjust your schedule or vacation days?
4. How do you feel about the change?
5. Is there anything you would like to add regarding your current working conditions?
6. Do you have any questions for me regarding the survey?

Thank you for your time.

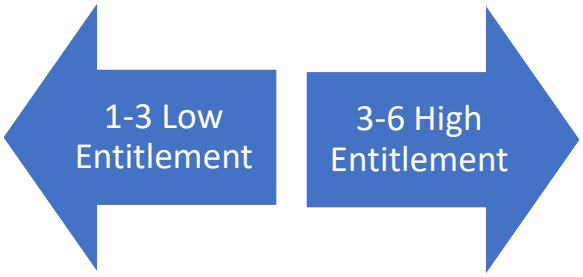
7.5 MEE Survey Results (minus cover page)

Report Flow



The results of the Measurement of Employee Entitlement (MEE): 3.19*

*Employees show a mild tendency toward feelings of entitlement.



- Expectation of automatic rewards and recogniation
- Unwilling to consider external factors
- Misaligment between employer and employee prerformance requirements

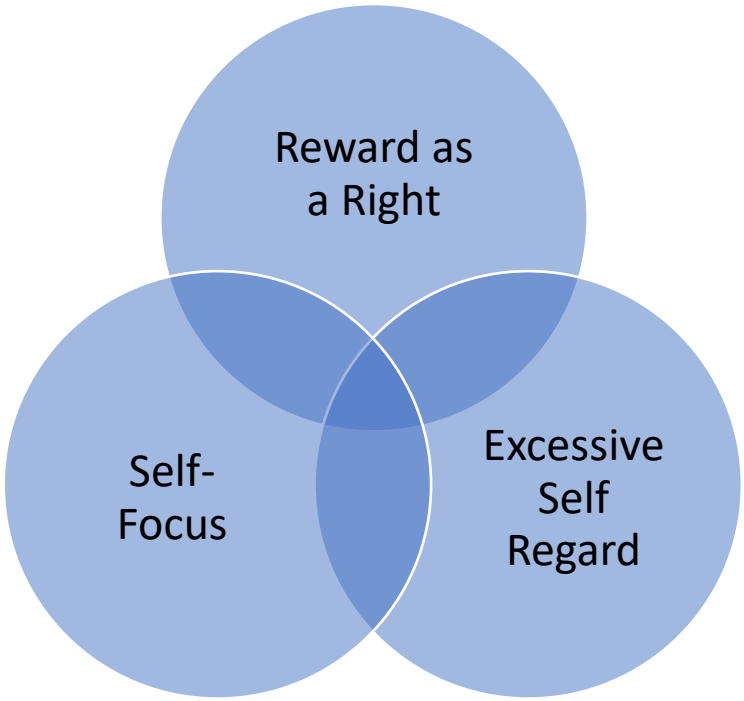
Reward as a Right

- Focus on self to the exclusion of others
- Self-serving attribution (places fault elsewhere)

Self-Focus

- Employees perception of the great value they offer employer
- See themselves as particulary unique and special

Excessive Self-Regard



Factor	Results
MEE	**3.19**
**Reward as Right	3.09
**Self-Focus	2.39
**Excessive Self-Regard	4.37

MEE Questions/Frequencies

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Any organization should be grateful to have me as an employee	53	5.15	.928	.127
I expect regular promotions	53	4.15	1.307	.179
Employers should accommodate my personal circumstances	53	3.87	1.194	.164
I expect to be able to take breaks whenever I want	53	2.13	1.331	.183
I deserve to be paid more than others	53	2.85	1.433	.197
It is my employer's responsibility to set goals for my career	53	2.66	1.544	.212
I believe I have exceptional skills and abilities	53	5.23	.847	.116
I expect regular pay increases regardless of how the organization performs	53	3.11	1.296	.178
I should get a pay raise if I perform my job to a satisfactory level	53	4.36	1.257	.173
Employees should be rewarded for average performance	53	2.91	1.596	.219
I want to only work in roles that significantly influence the rest of the organisation	53	3.70	1.367	.188
I deserve preferential treatment at work	53	1.92	1.174	.161
I should be able to take leave whenever it suites me	53	2.25	1.357	.186
I expect to be able to delegate tasks that I don't want to do	53	2.19	1.226	.168
I should have the right to demand work that is interesting to me	53	2.72	1.524	.209

It is the organization's fault if I don't perform my job requirements	52	1.87	1.284	.178
I only want to work in positions that are critical to the success of the organization	53	3.38	1.404	.193
I expect a bonus every year	53	2.96	1.454	.200

Reward as Right
(Mean = 3.09)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I expect regular promotions	53	1	6	4.15	1.307
I should get a pay raise if I perform my job to a satisfactory level	53	1	6	4.36	1.257
I expect to be able to delegate tasks that I don't want to do	53	1	6	2.19	1.331
It is my employer's responsibility to set goals for my career	53	1	6	2.66	1.544
I expect regular pay increases regardless of how the organization performs	53	1	6	3.11	1.296
I expect a bonus every year	53	1	6	2.96	1.454
I deserve to be paid more than others	53	1	5	2.85	1.433
Employees should be rewarded for average performance	53	1	6	2.91	1.596
I should have the right to demand work that is interesting to me.	53	1	6	2.72	1.524
	53				

Self-Focus
(Mean = 2.394)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I expect to be able to take breaks whenever I want	53	1	6	2.13	1.331
I should be able to take leave whenever it suites me	53	1	6	2.25	1.357
Employers should accommodate my personal circumstances	53	1	6	3.87	1.194
It is the organization's fault if I don't perform my job requirements	52	1	6	1.87	1.284
I deserve preferential treatment at work	53	1	5	1.92	1.174
Valid N (listwise)	52				

Excessive Self-Regard
(Mean = 4.365)

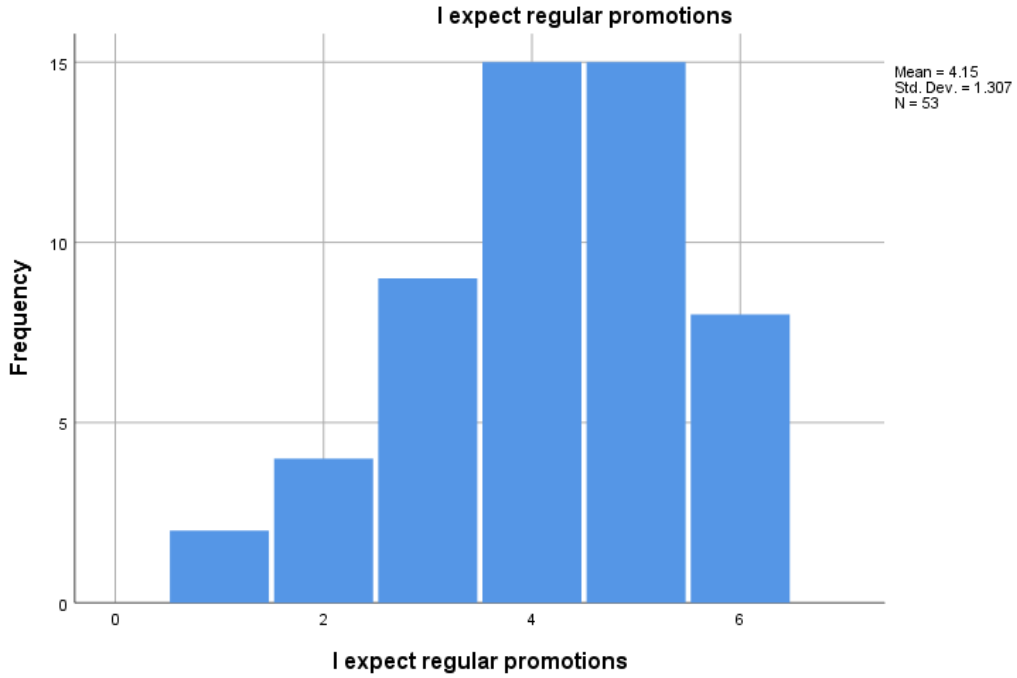
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Any organization should be grateful to have me as an employee	53	2	6	5.15	.928
I believe I have exceptional skills and abilities	53	3	6	5.23	.847
I want to only work in roles that significantly influence the rest of the organisation	53	1	6	3.70	1.367
I only want to work in positions that are critical to the success of the organization	53	1	6	3.38	1.404
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Any organization should be grateful to have me as an employee

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	1.9	1.9	1.9
	Mildly Disagree	1	1.9	1.9	3.8
	Mildly Agree	10	18.9	18.9	22.6
	Agree	18	34.0	34.0	56.6
	Strongly Agree	23	43.4	43.4	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	

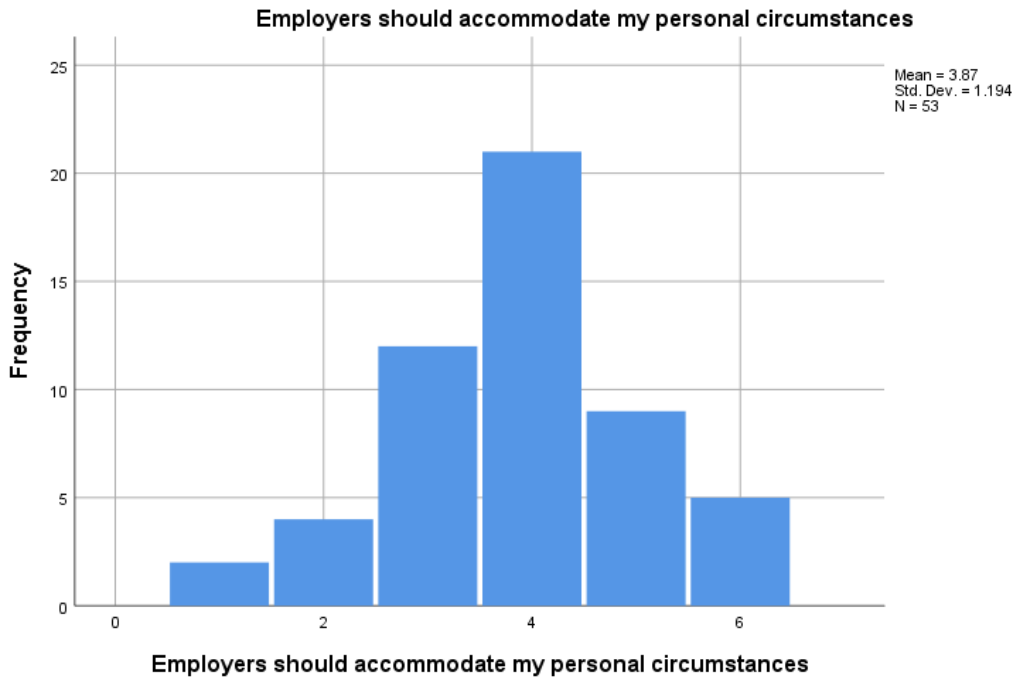
I expect regular promotions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	3.8	3.8	3.8
	Disagree	4	7.5	7.5	11.3
	Mildly Disagree	9	17.0	17.0	28.3
	Mildly Agree	15	28.3	28.3	56.6
	Agree	15	28.3	28.3	84.9
	Strongly Agree	8	15.1	15.1	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	



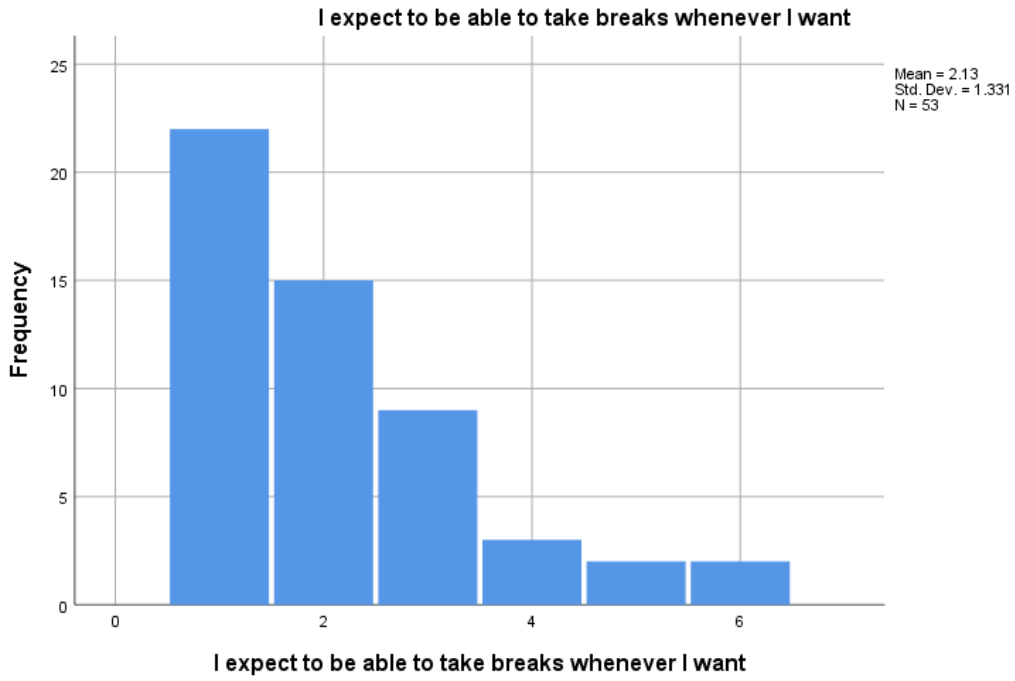
Employers should accommodate my personal circumstances

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	3.8	3.8	3.8
	Disagree	4	7.5	7.5	11.3
	Mildly Disagree	12	22.6	22.6	34.0
	Mildly Agree	21	39.6	39.6	73.6
	Agree	9	17.0	17.0	90.6
	Strongly Agree	5	9.4	9.4	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	



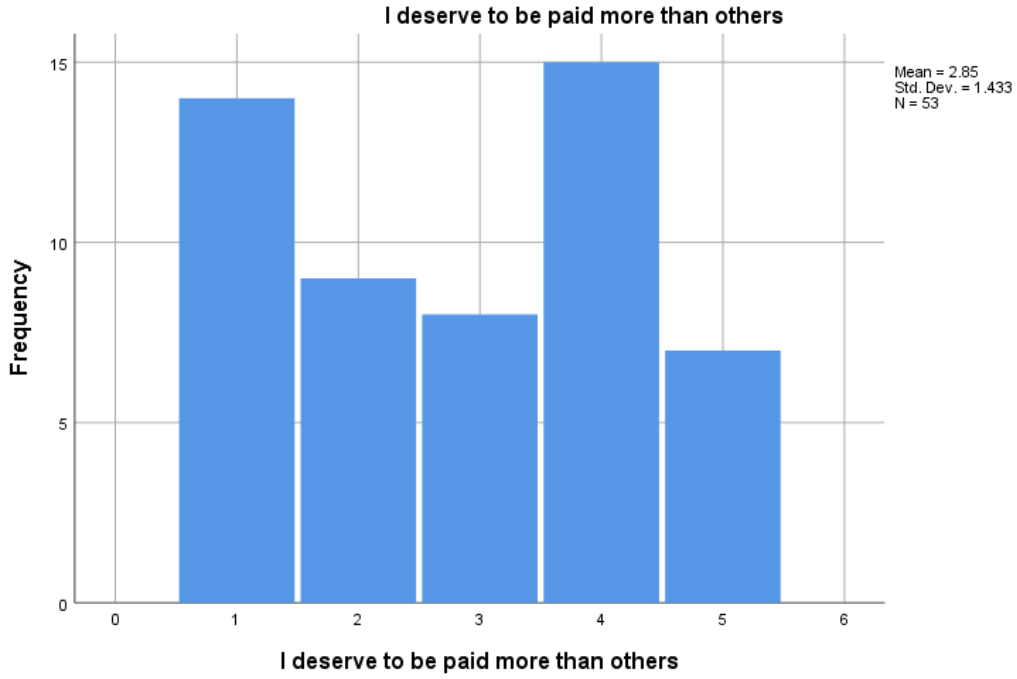
I expect to be able to take breaks whenever I want

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	22	41.5	41.5	41.5
	Disagree	15	28.3	28.3	69.8
	Mildly Disagree	9	17.0	17.0	86.8
	Mildly Agree	3	5.7	5.7	92.5
	Agree	2	3.8	3.8	96.2
	Strongly Agree	2	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	



I deserve to be paid more than others

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	14	26.4	26.4	26.4
	Disagree	9	17.0	17.0	43.4
	Mildly Disagree	8	15.1	15.1	58.5
	Mildly Agree	15	28.3	28.3	86.8
	Agree	7	13.2	13.2	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	

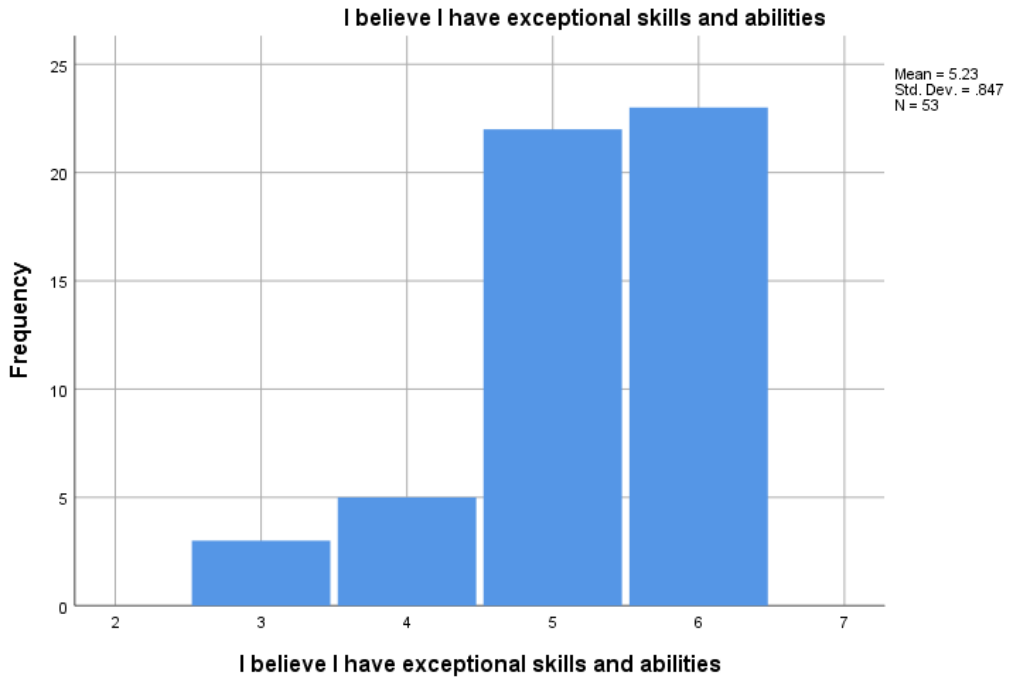


It is my employer's responsibility to set goals for my career

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	18	34.0	34.0	34.0
	Disagree	9	17.0	17.0	50.9
	Mildly Disagree	9	17.0	17.0	67.9
	Mildly Agree	8	15.1	15.1	83.0
	Agree	8	15.1	15.1	98.1
	Strongly Agree	1	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	

I believe I have exceptional skills and abilities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Mildly Disagree	3	5.7	5.7	5.7
	Mildly Agree	5	9.4	9.4	15.1
	Agree	22	41.5	41.5	56.6
	Strongly Agree	23	43.4	43.4	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	

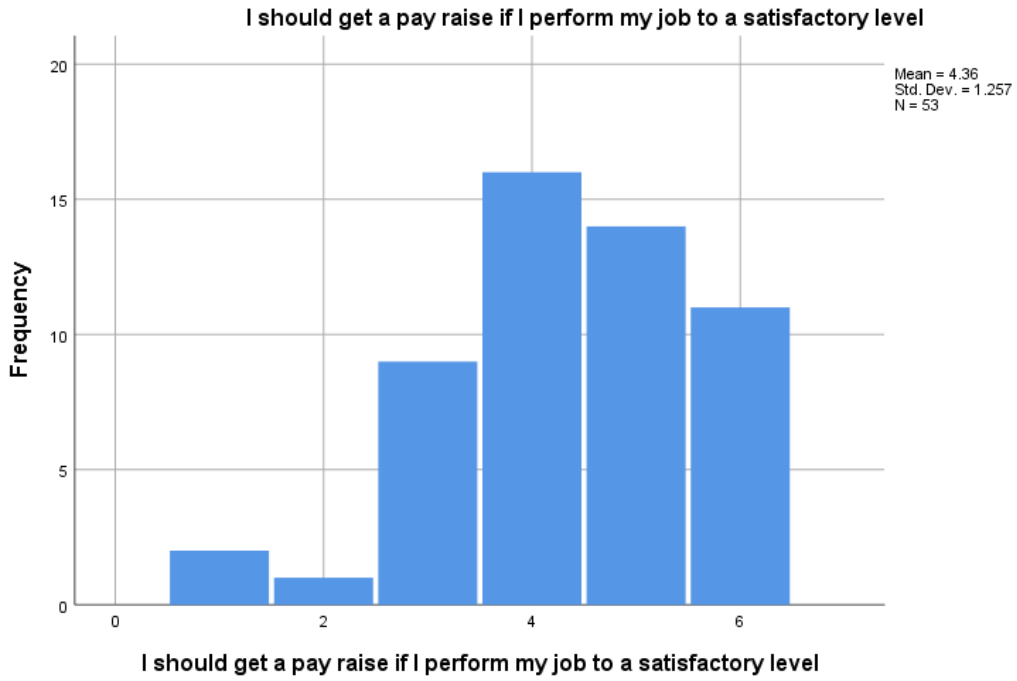


I expect regular pay increases regardless of how the organization performs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	15.1	15.1	15.1
	Disagree	6	11.3	11.3	26.4
	Mildly Disagree	20	37.7	37.7	64.2
	Mildly Agree	12	22.6	22.6	86.8
	Agree	5	9.4	9.4	96.2
	Strongly Agree	2	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	

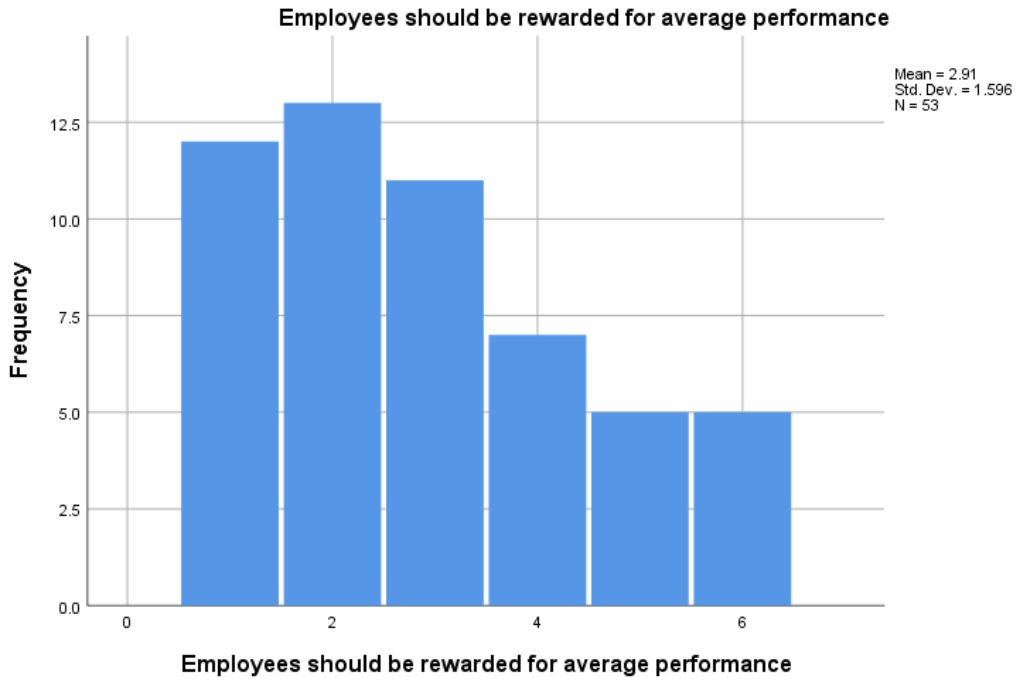
I should get a pay raise if I perform my job to a satisfactory level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	3.8	3.8	3.8
	Disagree	1	1.9	1.9	5.7
	Mildly Disagree	9	17.0	17.0	22.6
	Mildly Agree	16	30.2	30.2	52.8
	Agree	14	26.4	26.4	79.2
	Strongly Agree	11	20.8	20.8	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	



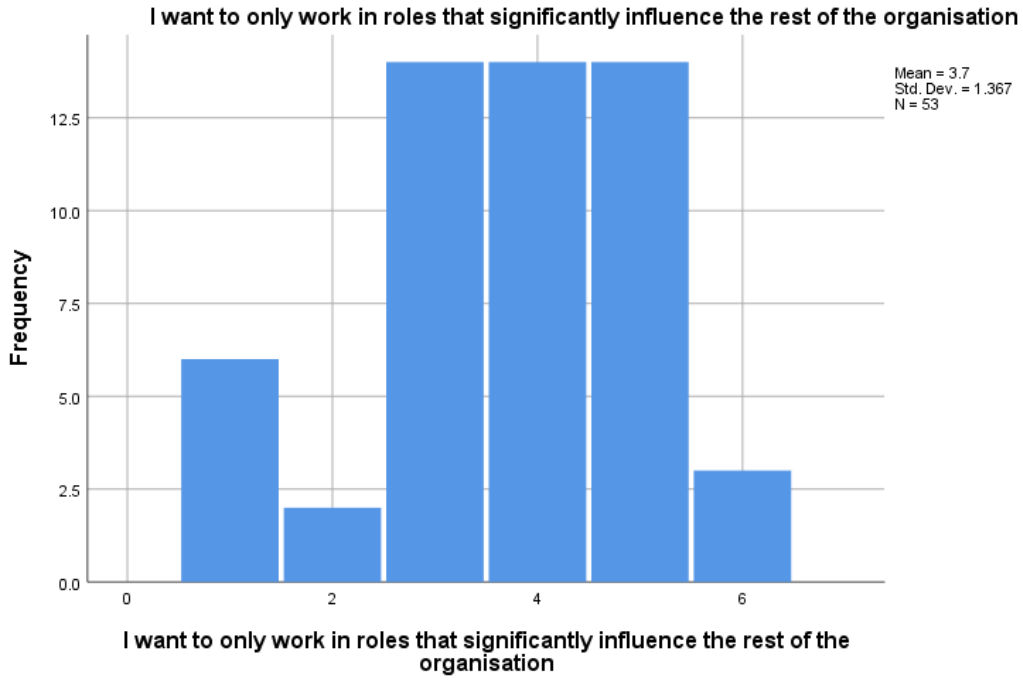
Employees should be rewarded for average performance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	12	22.6	22.6	22.6
	Disagree	13	24.5	24.5	47.2
	Mildly Disagree	11	20.8	20.8	67.9
	Mildly Agree	7	13.2	13.2	81.1
	Agree	5	9.4	9.4	90.6
	Strongly Agree	5	9.4	9.4	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	



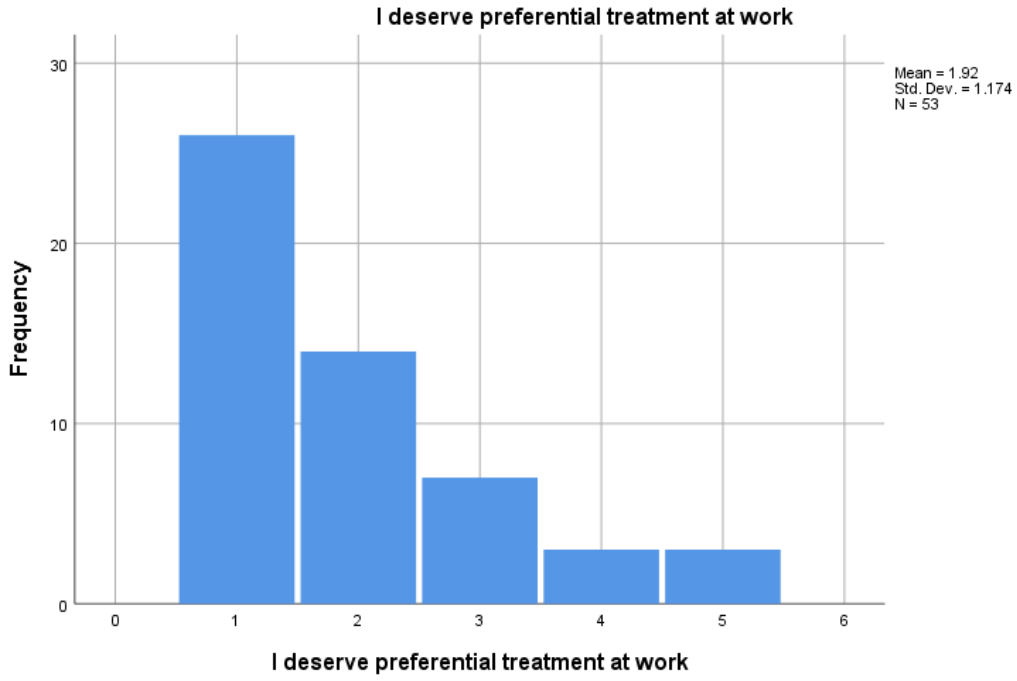
I want to only work in roles that significantly influence the rest of the organisation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	11.3	11.3	11.3
	Disagree	2	3.8	3.8	15.1
	Mildly Disagree	14	26.4	26.4	41.5
	Mildly Agree	14	26.4	26.4	67.9
	Agree	14	26.4	26.4	94.3
	Strongly Agree	3	5.7	5.7	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	



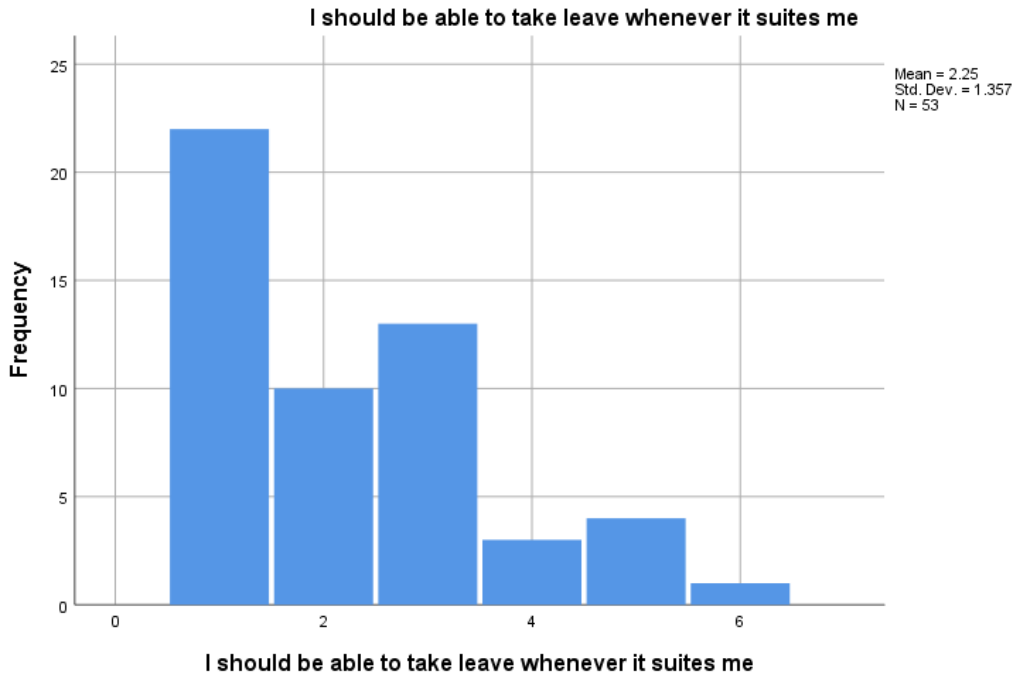
I deserve preferential treatment at work

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	26	49.1	49.1	49.1
	Disagree	14	26.4	26.4	75.5
	Mildly Disagree	7	13.2	13.2	88.7
	Mildly Agree	3	5.7	5.7	94.3
	Agree	3	5.7	5.7	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	



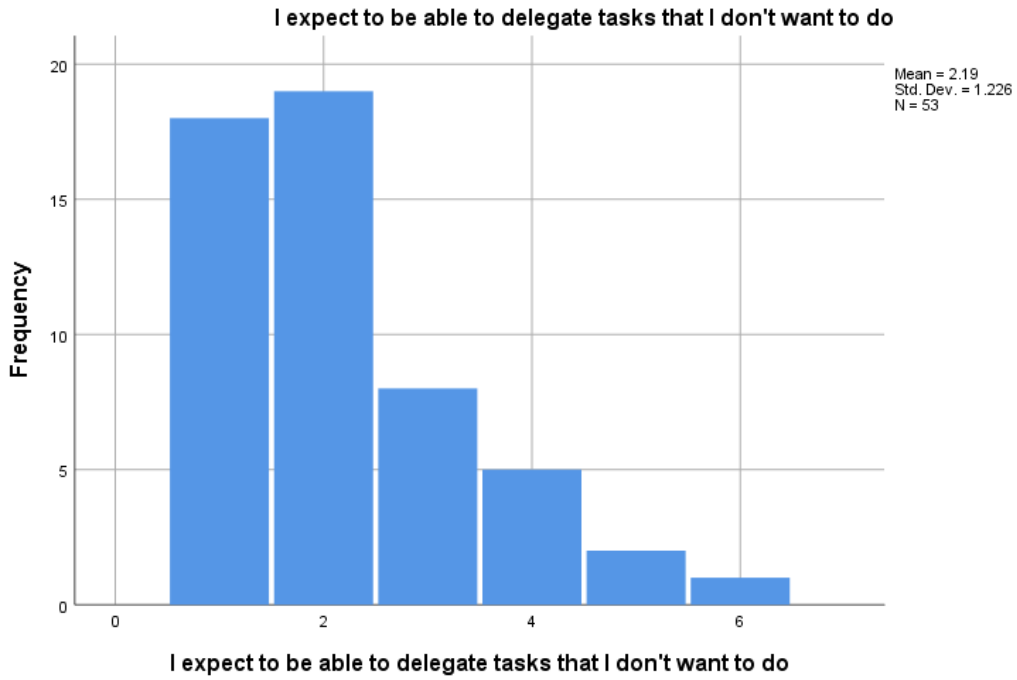
I should be able to take leave whenever it suites me

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	22	41.5	41.5	41.5
	Disagree	10	18.9	18.9	60.4
	Mildly Disagree	13	24.5	24.5	84.9
	Mildly Agree	3	5.7	5.7	90.6
	Agree	4	7.5	7.5	98.1
	Strongly Agree	1	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	



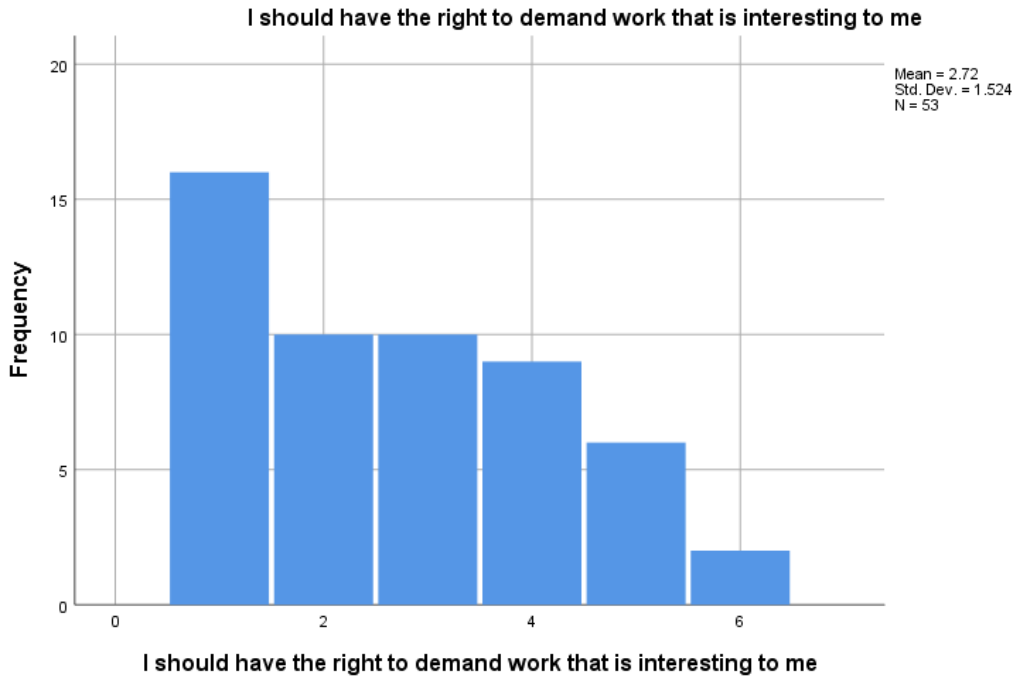
I expect to be able to delegate tasks that I don't want to do

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	18	34.0	34.0	34.0
	Disagree	19	35.8	35.8	69.8
	Mildly Disagree	8	15.1	15.1	84.9
	Mildly Agree	5	9.4	9.4	94.3
	Agree	2	3.8	3.8	98.1
	Strongly Agree	1	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	



I should have the right to demand work that is interesting to me

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	16	30.2	30.2	30.2
	Disagree	10	18.9	18.9	49.1
	Mildly Disagree	10	18.9	18.9	67.9
	Mildly Agree	9	17.0	17.0	84.9
	Agree	6	11.3	11.3	96.2
	Strongly Agree	2	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	

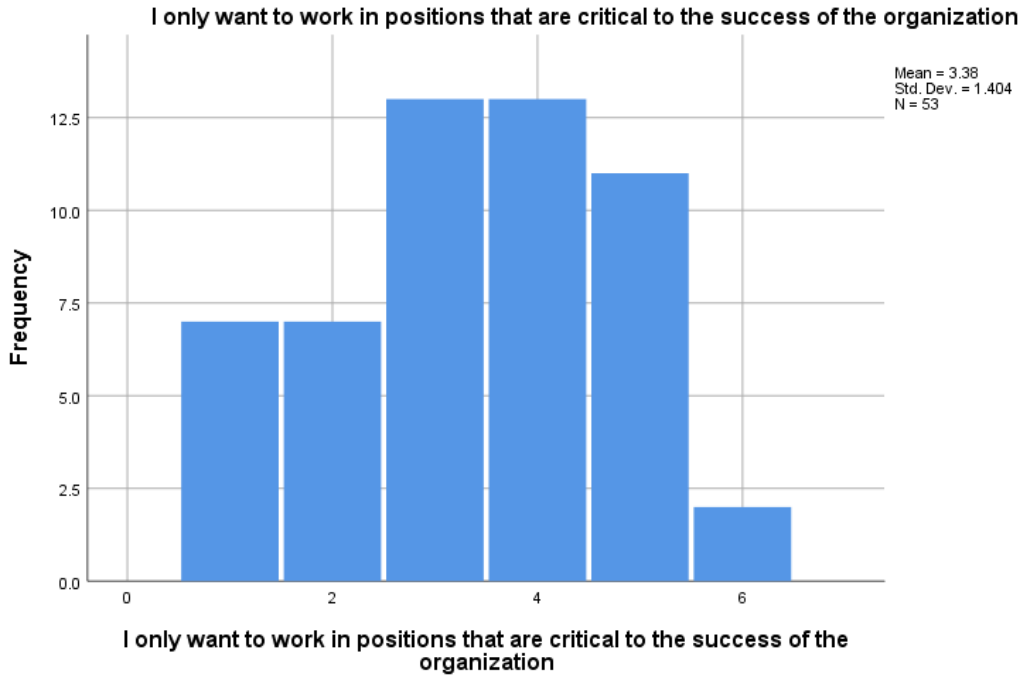


It is the organization's fault if I don't perform my job requirements

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	27	50.9	51.9	51.9
	Disagree	16	30.2	30.8	82.7
	Mildly Disagree	4	7.5	7.7	90.4
	Mildly Agree	1	1.9	1.9	92.3
	Agree	2	3.8	3.8	96.2
	Strongly Agree	2	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	52	98.1	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.9		
Total		53	100.0		

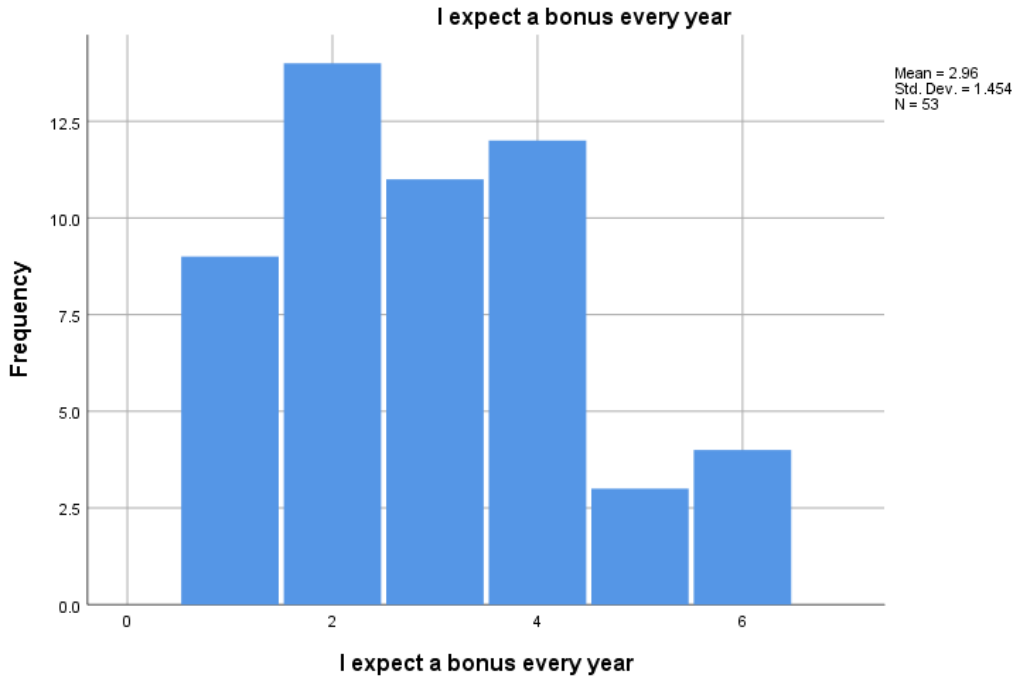
I only want to work in positions that are critical to the success of the organization

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	7	13.2	13.2	13.2
	Disagree	7	13.2	13.2	26.4
	Mildly Disagree	13	24.5	24.5	50.9
	Mildly Agree	13	24.5	24.5	75.5
	Agree	11	20.8	20.8	96.2
	Strongly Agree	2	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	



I expect a bonus every year

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	9	17.0	17.0	17.0
	Disagree	14	26.4	26.4	43.4
	Mildly Disagree	11	20.8	20.8	64.2
	Mildly Agree	12	22.6	22.6	86.8
	Agree	3	5.7	5.7	92.5
	Strongly Agree	4	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	



Employee Entitlement Factor Details

Reward as Right

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I expect regular promotions	53	1	6	4.15	1.307
I should get a pay raise if I perform my job to a satisfactory level	53	1	6	4.36	1.257
I expect to be able to take breaks whenever I want	53	1	6	2.13	1.331
It is my employer's responsibility to set goals for my career	53	1	6	2.66	1.544
I expect regular pay increases regardless of how the organization performs	53	1	6	3.11	1.296
I expect a bonus every year	53	1	6	2.96	1.454
I deserve to be paid more than others	53	1	5	2.85	1.433
Employees should be rewarded for average performance	53	1	6	2.91	1.596
I should have the right to demand work that is interesting to me	53	1	6	2.72	1.524
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Self-Focus

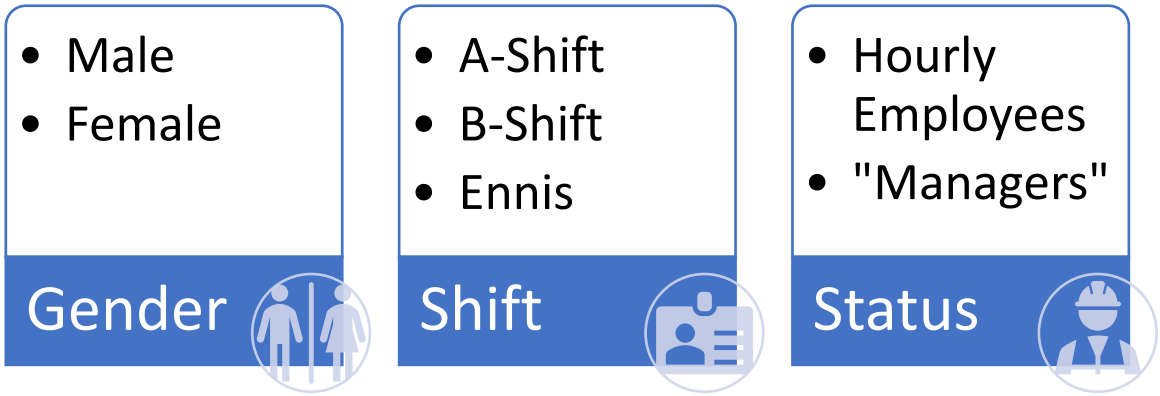
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I expect to be able to take breaks whenever I want	53	1	6	2.13	1.331
I should be able to take leave whenever it suites me	53	1	6	2.25	1.357
Employers should accommodate my personal circumstances	53	1	6	3.87	1.194
It is the organization's fault if I don't perform my job requirements	52	1	6	1.87	1.284
I deserve preferential treatment at work	53	1	5	1.92	1.174
Valid N (listwise)	52				

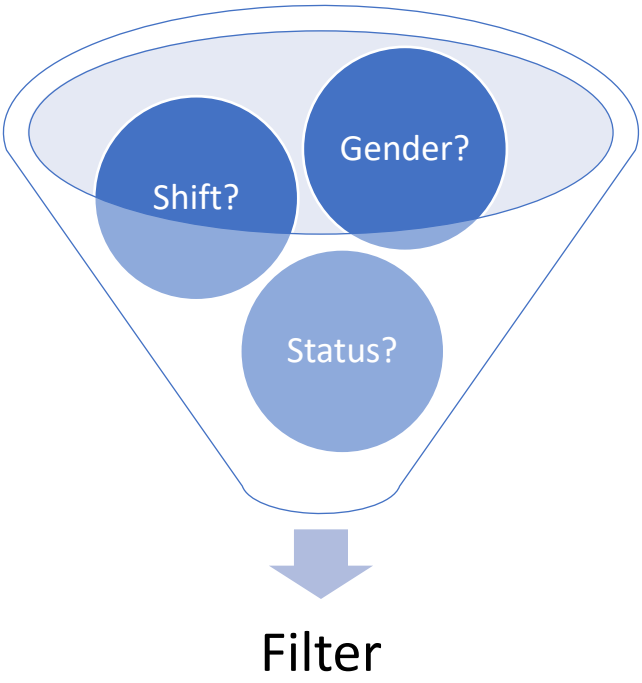
Excessive Self-Regard

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Any organization should be grateful to have me as an employee	53	2	6	5.15	.928
I believe I have exceptional skills and abilities	53	3	6	5.23	.847
I want to only work in roles that significantly influence the rest of the organisation	53	1	6	3.70	1.367
I only want to work in positions that are critical to the success of the organization	53	1	6	3.38	1.404
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Other Considerations

Are there things that might skew the answers?





GENDER

Reward as a right

Gender if known		I expect regular promotions	I should get a pay raise if I perform my job to a satisfactory level	I expect to be able to delegate tasks that I don't want to do	It is my employer's responsibility to set goals for my career	I expect regular pay increases regardless of how the organization performs	I expect a bonus every year	I deserve to be paid more than others	Employees should be rewarded for average performance	I should have the right to demand work that is interesting to me
Male	Mean	4.04	4.36	2.22	2.73	3.16	2.89	2.89	2.84	2.80
	N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
	Std. Deviation	1.331	1.282	1.295	1.615	1.348	1.465	1.418	1.609	1.561
Female	Mean	4.75	4.38	2.00	2.25	2.88	3.38	2.63	3.25	2.25
	N	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
	Std. Deviation	1.035	1.188	.756	1.035	.991	1.408	1.598	1.581	1.282
Total	Mean	4.15	4.36	2.19	2.66	3.11	2.96	2.85	2.91	2.72
	N	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53
	Std. Deviation	1.307	1.257	1.226	1.544	1.296	1.454	1.433	1.596	1.524

Self-Focus

Gender if known		I expect to be able to take breaks whenever I want	I should be able to take leave whenever it suites me	Employers should accommodate my personal circumstances	It is the organization's fault if I don't perform my job requirements	I deserve preferential treatment at work
Male	Mean	2.20	2.22	3.82	1.98	1.98
	N	45	45	45	44	45
	Std. Deviation	1.392	1.347	1.248	1.355	1.215
Female	Mean	1.75	2.38	4.13	1.25	1.63
	N	8	8	8	8	8
	Std. Deviation	.886	1.506	.835	.463	.916
Total	Mean	2.13	2.25	3.87	1.87	1.92
	N	53	53	53	52	53
	Std. Deviation	1.331	1.357	1.194	1.284	1.174

Excessive Self-Regard

		I believe I have exceptional skills and abilities	I only want to work in positions that are critical to the success of the organization	Any organization should be grateful to have me as an employee	I want to only work in roles that significantly influence the rest of the organisation
Male	Mean	5.18	3.38	5.07	3.60
	N	45	45	45	45
	Std. Deviation	.886	1.419	.939	1.405
Female	Mean	5.50	3.38	5.63	4.25
	N	8	8	8	8
	Std. Deviation	.535	1.408	.744	1.035
Total	Mean	5.23	3.38	5.15	3.70
	N	53	53	53	53
	Std. Deviation	.847	1.404	.928	1.367

SHIFT

Reward as a right

A-Shift, B-Shift, or Ennis		I expect regular promotions	I should get a pay raise if I perform my job to a satisfactory level	I expect to be able to delegate tasks that I don't want to do	It is my employer's responsibility to set goals for my career	I expect regular pay increases regardless of how the organization performs	I expect a bonus every year	I deserve to be paid more than others	Employees should be rewarded for average performance	I should have the right to demand work that is interesting to me
A shift	Mean	4.08	4.28	2.28	2.52	3.12	3.04	3.12	3.36	3.16
	N	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
	Std. Deviation	1.412	1.370	1.275	1.475	1.333	1.567	1.563	1.753	1.546
B shift	Mean	3.79	4.26	2.16	3.05	2.74	2.47	2.47	2.53	2.21
	N	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19
	Std. Deviation	1.182	1.195	1.302	1.649	1.098	1.124	1.307	1.389	1.134
Ennis	Mean	5.11	4.78	2.00	2.22	3.89	3.78	2.89	2.44	2.56
	N	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
	Std. Deviation	.782	1.093	1.000	1.481	1.364	1.481	1.269	1.333	1.944
Total	Mean	4.15	4.36	2.19	2.66	3.11	2.96	2.85	2.91	2.72
	N	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53
	Std. Deviation	1.307	1.257	1.226	1.544	1.296	1.454	1.433	1.596	1.524

Self-Focus

-Shift, B-Shift, or Ennis		I expect to be able to take breaks whenever I want	I should be able to take leave whenever it suites me	Employers should accommodate my personal circumstances	It is the organization's fault if I don't perform my job requirements	I deserve preferential treatment at work
A shift	Mean	2.32	2.24	4.00	2.08	2.08
	N	25	25	25	24	25
	Std. Deviation	1.464	1.422	1.354	1.530	1.382
B shift	Mean	1.95	2.05	3.68	1.89	1.79
	N	19	19	19	19	19
	Std. Deviation	1.353	1.026	1.204	1.100	.918
Ennis	Mean	2.00	2.67	3.89	1.22	1.78
	N	9	9	9	9	9
	Std. Deviation	.866	1.803	.601	.667	1.093
Total	Mean	2.13	2.25	3.87	1.87	1.92
	N	53	53	53	52	53

Excessive Self-Regard

A-Shift, B-Shift, or Ennis		I believe I have exceptional skills and abilities	I only want to work in positions that are critical to the success of the organization	Any organization should be grateful to have me as an employee	I want to only work in roles that significantly influence the rest of the organisation
A shift	Mean	5.08	3.48	5.12	3.64
	N	25	25	25	25
	Std. Deviation	.909	1.531	.927	1.497
B shift	Mean	5.21	3.16	5.11	3.47
	N	19	19	19	19
	Std. Deviation	.855	1.302	1.049	1.349
Ennis	Mean	5.67	3.56	5.33	4.33
	N	9	9	9	9
	Std. Deviation	.500	1.333	.707	.866
Total	Mean	5.23	3.38	5.15	3.70
	N	53	53	53	53
	Std. Deviation	.847	1.404	.928	1.367

STATUS “MANAGER” OR EMPLOYEE

Reward as a right

Management/Employee Status		I expect regular promotions	I should get a pay raise if I perform my job to a satisfactory level	I expect to be able to delegate tasks that I don't want to do	It is my employer's responsibility to set goals for my career	I expect regular pay increases regardless of how the organization performs	I expect a bonus every year	I deserve to be paid more than others	Employees should be rewarded for average performance	I should have the right to demand work that is interesting to me
Hourly Employee	Mean	4.11	4.36	2.13	2.71	3.13	2.93	2.80	2.96	2.64
	N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
	Std. Deviation	1.385	1.282	1.236	1.517	1.358	1.483	1.455	1.637	1.540
Manager	Mean	4.38	4.38	2.50	2.38	3.00	3.13	3.13	2.63	3.13
	N	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
	Std. Deviation	.744	1.188	1.195	1.768	.926	1.356	1.356	1.408	1.458
Total	Mean	4.15	4.36	2.19	2.66	3.11	2.96	2.85	2.91	2.72
	N	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53
	Std. Deviation	1.307	1.257	1.226	1.544	1.296	1.454	1.433	1.596	1.524

SELF-FOCUS

Management/Employee Status		I expect to be able to take breaks whenever I want	I should be able to take leave whenever it suites me	Employers should accommodate my personal circumstances	It is the organization's fault if I don't perform my job requirements	I deserve preferential treatment at work
Hourly Employee	Mean	1.91	2.20	3.93	1.93	1.89
	N	45	45	45	44	45
	Std. Deviation	1.041	1.375	1.232	1.354	1.191
Manager	Mean	3.38	2.50	3.50	1.50	2.13
	N	8	8	8	8	8
	Std. Deviation	2.066	1.309	.926	.756	1.126
Total	Mean	2.13	2.25	3.87	1.87*	1.92
	N	53	53	53	52	53
	Std. Deviation	1.331	1.357	1.194	1.284	1.174

EXCESSIVE SELF-REGARD

Management/Employee Status		I believe I have exceptional skills and abilities	I only want to work in positions that are critical to the success of the organization	Any organization should be grateful to have me as an employee	I want to only work in roles that significantly influence the rest of the organisation
Hourly Employee	Mean	5.18	3.36	5.11	3.69
	N	45	45	45	45
	Std. Deviation	.886	1.401	.959	1.395
Manager	Mean	5.50	3.50	5.38	3.75
	N	8	8	8	8
	Std. Deviation	.535	1.512	.744	1.282
Total	Mean	5.23	3.38	5.15	3.70
	N	53	53	53	53
	Std. Deviation	.847	1.404	.928	1.367

7.6 Research timeline