THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP STYLE ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN A HIGHER EDUCATION SETTING: AN EXPLANATORY CASE STUDY

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Education:

- Doctor of Education
- Master of Business Administration
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Experience:

- Sr. Director of Enrollment and Student Services (2019 to present)
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- Admission Advisor 2010 to 2013)
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Agenda

- Presentation of the study

- Results of the study

- Activity: How to apply findings

Learning Outcomes

- Explain how a leadership model can improve faculty and staff engagement to strengthen student success outcomes.

- Use leadership model to train and develop the leadership skills of faculty and staff.

- Strengthen hiring questions for leadership interviews.

- Use faculty and staff leadership model to develop a more collaborative environment.

Introduction

Many colleges and universities are facing financial instability and enrollment declines, which has led to many university closings (Toner, 2015).

High employee turnover has grave implications for the quality, consistency, and stability of academic enterprises (Selesho & Naile, 2014).

Uncertainty is defined as another form of job insecurity, which can also be framed as job loss in the future (Elst, Broeck, De Witte, & Cuyper, 2012).

Enrollment Decline

Turnover

Uncertainty

Problem Statement

- Leadership and employee engagement in higher education
- Engaged faculty and staff leads to engaged students (Blad, 2014)
- This study will add to the previous literature of employee engagement and leadership in higher education.
- A leadership model was created to inform colleges and universities on how to engage faculty and staff to help improve student success outcomes.

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Purpose of the Study

- The purpose of this explanatory case study was to examine how a Midwest online university was able to increase employee engagement for two consecutive years and to create a leadership development model from the results. This study will inform colleges and universities on how to engage faculty and staff, so they can improve employee engagement and student success outcomes.

Research Questions

- How did leaders maintain or increase employee engagement in times of upheaval or uncertainty, in a Midwest online university?
- What leadership practices helped or hindered employee engagement at the university?
- How did leaders cope with workplace uncertainty?
- What did leaders do to try to engage employees in stressful times?

Literature Review
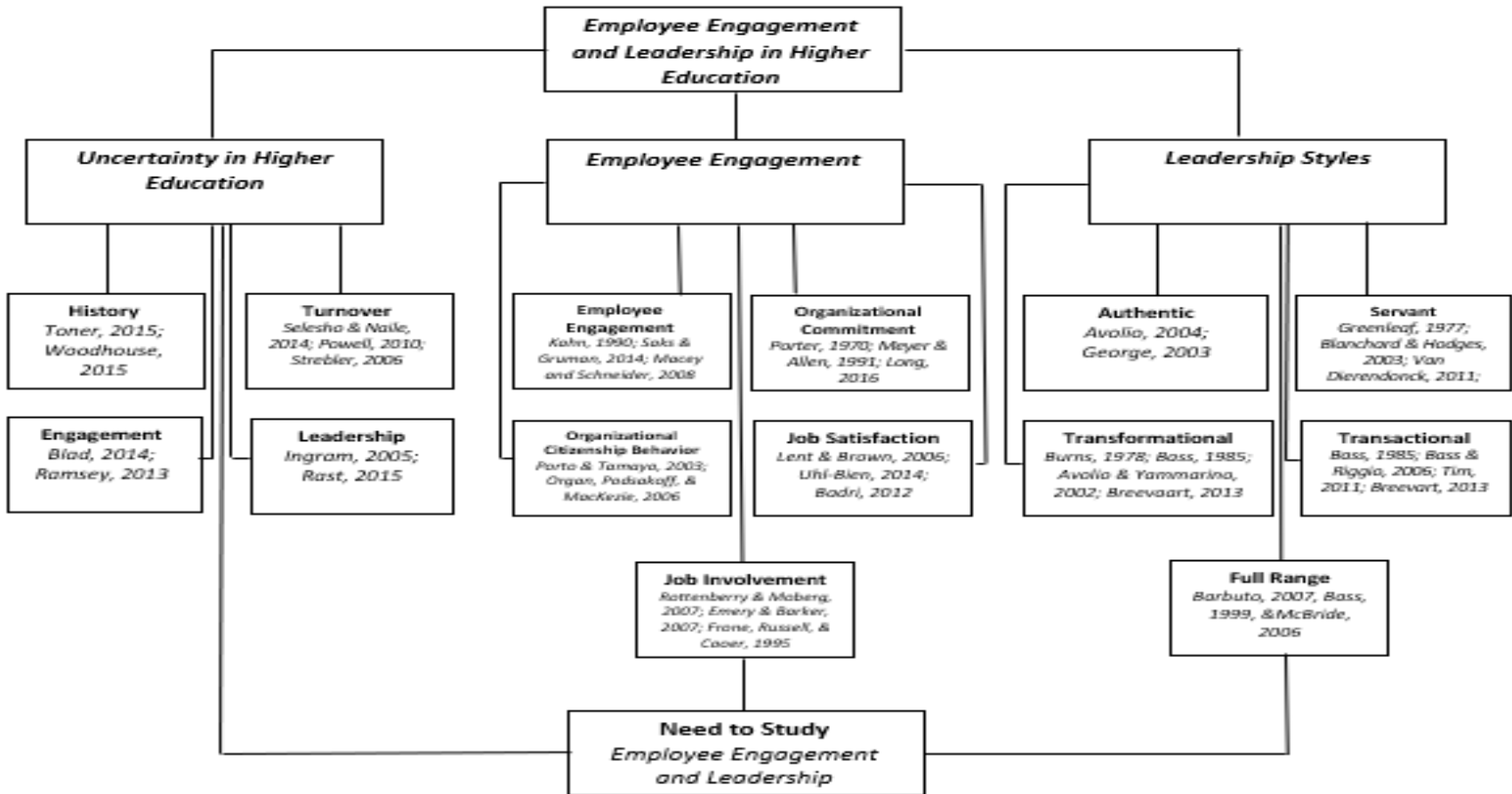
*Previous literature on employee engagement and leadership in higher education

Research Design

- The research design used a qualitative explanatory case study design to examine how a Midwest online university was able to increase employee engagement.

- The explanatory case study design was selected because it is a means to describe how positive employee engagement results were achieved. How and why questions are more explanatory and likely to lead to the use of a case study (Yin, 2014).

Data Collection Tools

- Interview Protocol

- Qualitative Observation

- Secondary Data

- Member Checking

Departments Researched

Academics

Admissions

Business Office

Financial Aid

Student Advising

Findings - Academics

Subthemes	Relationship to Literature	Leadership Recommendation	Employee Engagement Result
Autonomy	Trust, empowerment, freedom, communication, collaboration	Servant Leadership	84%
Collaboration	Trust, respect, reduce barrier of communication, coordinate, developed good working relationships, increased dedication	Empowering and developing people, values people, serving others, trust, humility, interpersonal acceptance, providing direction, and vision.	N/A
Care	Antecedents of engagement are derived from care, Supporting and trusting interpersonal relationships promote psychological safety		79%

Findings - Admissions

Subthemes	Relationship to Literature	Leadership Recommendation	Employee Engagement Result
Growth and Development	Engagement is assumed to produce positive outcomes, Work engagement strongly associated with G&D, Enhanced performance and productivity, Improved training effectiveness, Engagement predicted by resources, Burnout is related to lack of resources.	Transactional Leadership	87%
Goals	Effective goal setting leads to positive impact, Performance metrics and contingent rewards, Goal setting leads to engagement.	Followers agreed with, accepted, complied with leader in exchange for praise, rewards, and resources, avoidance of disciplinary action, rewards and recognition provided for accomplishments, contingent rewards, closely monitoring mistakes and errors, and providing goals and expectations.	85%
Micro Management	Control, Increase short-term productivity, fear creates temporary productivity, constant criticism, loss of creativity, customer service, and risk-taking opportunities.		N/A

Findings – Business Office

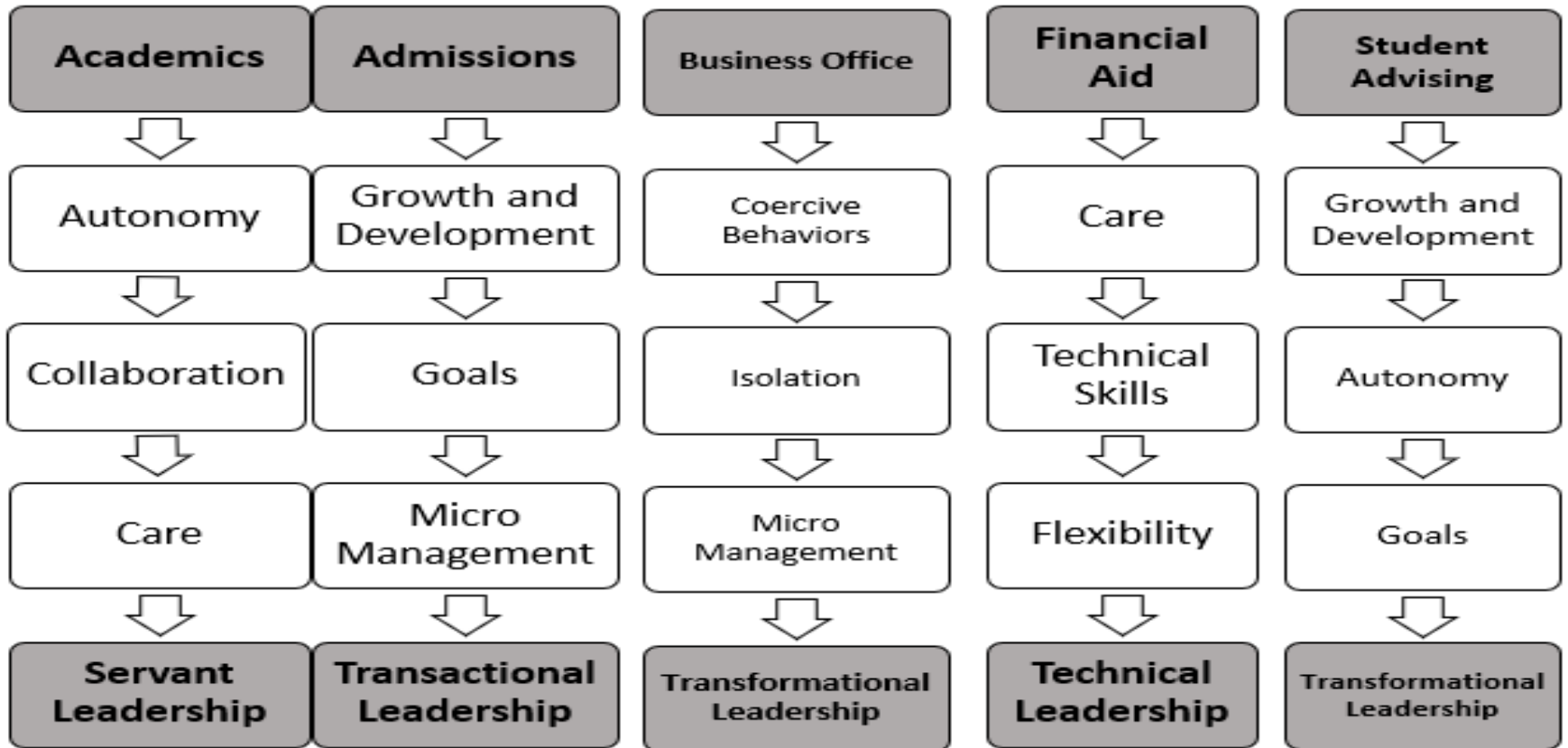| Subthemes	Relationship to Literature	Leadership Recommendation	Employee Engagement Result
Coercive	Effective in turnaround situation, natural disaster, or working with problem employee, reduce employee motivation, negatively impact morale, and fear is a natural result	Transformational Leadership	50%
Isolation	Created from absence of support, Lack of social and emotional interactions, Email and phone lacks richness and social presence	Positive relationship with long term performance, Creating inspiration, commitment and culture, Transform self-concepts of followers, Involvement, commitment, and potency are enhanced, enhance capacity of followers by setting higher expectations.	53%
Micro Management	Creates fear and isolation, Leads to frustration, and Reduced customer service		38%

Findings – Financial Aid

Subthemes	Relationship to Literature	Leadership Recommendation	Employee Engagement Result
Care	Support and trust promote psychological safety, and Valued	Technical Leadership	70%
Technical	Focused on understanding the problem, Managing the flow of ideas, Maintains quality, Providing solutions, and Best style is a problem solving environment	Crucial for coordination, Centrally located in communication network, Collect and disperse information, Strong technical reputation, Personal relationships, and Integrates and combines contributions from team members.	N/A
Flexibility	Linked to positive outcomes for employee and the organization		95%

Findings – Student Advising

Subthemes	Relationship to Literature	Leadership Recommendation	Employee Engagement Result
Growth and Development	Leads to engaged employees	Transformational Leadership	87%
Autonomy	Preferred self leads to a positive effect on people, Micromanagement leads to less creativity, frustrated employees, and less risk opportunities	Positive relationship with long term performance, Creating inspiration, commitment and culture, Transform self-concepts of followers, Involvement, commitment, and potency are enhanced, enhance capacity of followers by setting higher expectations.	97%
Goals	Goal setting leads to engaged employees, and Goals lead to promotions		97%

Proposed Solution

Academics	Admissions	Business Office	Financial Aid	Student Advising
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Autonomy	Growth and Development	Coercive Behaviors	Care	Growth and Development
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Collaboration	Goals	Isolation	Technical Skills	Autonomy
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Care	Micro Management	Micro Management	Flexibility	Goals
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Servant Leadership	Transactional Leadership	Transformational Leadership	Technical Leadership	Transformational Leadership

Conclusions

- The conclusions and recommendations of this study are informative to leaders of online universities who have an interest in improving employee engagement.

- The leadership model developed from this study will present a basic foundation for the type of leadership that is needed for each department to help strengthen employee engagement in online universities.

- Leaders can also use the findings to help strengthen their training and development programs and organizational culture for their teams.