



Leadership and its contribution towards employee retention within the Irish service sector.

**RQ1: What are leaders' perceptions of (in)effective leadership?**

**RQ2: How does (in)effective leadership contribute to employee retention within the service industry?**

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – This research will examine the relationship between leadership and employee retention. It will examine the styles of leadership currently used within the Irish service sector. It will then determine if the managers consciously work on retaining staff.

**Methodology** – A qualitative research approach was used in the form of interviews of leaders in several Irish companies. The leaders range from middle to top management positions with various levels of experience. Previous research has often asked the employees about their managers while this paper bridges the research gap by examining the leaders themselves. Themes were then examined to recognise if there are any patterns present within the current leadership style.

**Findings** –The findings of this paper reveal that the leaders perceived that they had effective styles that proved to have a positive effect on employee retention. Also uncovered was that HR's presence in Irish companies is disconnected, either there was not a department, or the leaders discussed remaining extremely separate. Three leaders admitted to not consciously working on retention as they believed it was not within their responsibility.

**Practical implications** – The paper brings to light that organisations need to examine how managers should be supported by the HR department, and how retention should be tackled by both parties for the good of the companies.

**Research Limitations** – Time constraints due to a worldwide pandemic. Covid-19 restraints as employees were now working from home. The normal environment in which the premise of the thesis was embedded was altered. Further to this, the restrictions imposed for Public Health made it difficult to research libraries as they were closed. Overall, it limited the sources from which data could possibly be harvested from. Limited participants could be accessed through the medium of a phone interview.

**Originality/value** – Expanding on linking employee retention with (in) effective leadership from the perspective of the managers.

**Keywords** – Retention, leadership, management, job stress, job satisfaction, Irish workplace, trust, communication.

# SUBMISSION OF THESIS AND DISSERTATION

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(Linda Teehan)

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# 1 CHAPTER 1

## 1.1 Introduction

In the past several decades, leadership has become an important phenomenon. (In)effective leadership has been analysed in many different studies (Rehman, *et al.*, 2020; da Silva, Nunes, and Andrade, 2019; Mullen, Fiset, and Rhéaume, 2018; Tepper, 2000). Most studies to date have used quantitative approaches to question large samples of employees in different career sectors. The samples range from a minimum of 177 nurses filling in surveys (Mullen, *et al.*, 2018) to over 2000 random people being phoned to answer scaled valued questions (Tepper, 2000). However, none of these studies address this phenomenon in a personal capacity. The semi-structured interviews used in this research allow interviewees to thoroughly explain their responses (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2009, p. 324), which will add significant understandings to the present literature.

## 1.2 Literature gap that emerged

The main issue that emerged was the lack of literature that focused on the perceptions of the managers themselves. The researcher questioned what the perceptions of the actual managers are? Do they possess the self-awareness that Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Cutler (2014) write about when addressing authentic leadership? Most of the previous studies chose to mainly write from the perspectives of the employees. For instance, Naseer, *et al.*, (2016) distributed 600 questionnaires to employees with at least six months experience in the company so they were in the position to comment on their colleagues' behaviour. While Alkaabi and Wong (2019) surveyed over 3,000 nursing school graduates in association with incivility and trust in their managers.

Results emerged in these previous studies showed “*despotic*” leadership is negatively related to employee performance (Naseer, *et al.*, 2016, p. 12) and authentic leadership is positively associated with trust in managers (Alkaabi and Wong, 2019). These are important discoveries in relation to leadership taken from the observations of the employees. This study will concentrate on the managers to uncover the strengths or otherwise of the current leadership in the Irish service sector, hence attempting to contribute to the gap in managers' viewpoints.

### 1.3 Context of this study

The reason why this research is worthy of study is the Irish service sector is as a sector, accounts for 75% of employment in Ireland (Burke-Kennedy, 2017). To date, no previous research has investigated this sector with a focus on managers. There has been research on leadership particularly in the Irish medical sector (de Vries and Curtis, 2019), and the Irish educational sector (Murphy, 2019). In line with the work of Murphy (2019) semi-structured interviews were used, however his participants focused specifically upon one level of management - school principals whereas this study considers management across several levels of the hierarchy. De Vries and Curtis (2019) and Murphy (2019) primarily focus on leadership within specific sectors. While this study explores leaders' perceptions of (in)effective leadership across numerous companies within the Irish service sector. It will examine the impact of the leadership on employee retention which in turn should have a positive effect upon productivity.

The Irish service sector accounts for most of the employment in Ireland, this study explores information from a variety of leaders within this important sector. The service sector is difficult to define as it can have several sub-sectors like business, transport, leisure, and tourism (Hamilton, 2020). The main factor that connects all these sub-sectors are intangible, value-adding tasks and interactions of a high quality (Grönfeldt and Strother, 2006). The interviewees approached for this research project cover most of these sub-sectors which provide us with a wide-ranging representation. Unfortunately, the sector has been severely affected by the corona virus outbreak and it has hit its lowest level of activity in April 2020 (Hamilton, 2020). So, retention of staff during these difficult times will be more paramount than ever. It is crucial to discover if the leaders are effective and is retention a vital concern when speaking about their staff?

### 1.4 Retention

This study makes important practical as well as academic contributions to the current literature. At present, retention of staff is at the forefront of business survival. The Irish Government has set up schemes to help businesses to retain employees during these troublesome Covid-19 times (Government of Ireland, 2020). The issue of retention has become more prevalent due to the pandemic crisis. But even in previous

research, retention has not been a central theme. Organisational commitment is an example of a concern of previous studies and retention is a minor feature within them (da Silva, *et al.*, 2019; Hadian Nasab and Afshari, 2019). Retention is of special interest in this paper and to analyse if styles of leadership contribute to this within the Irish service sector. It has been proven that abusive leadership has a compromising effect on retention (Jha, 2019) however it is crucial to investigate if this still holds true within present Irish society.

Presently, the problem is a gap within research on leadership in relation to the retention of employees. More significantly the personal experiences and perceptions of leaders shall be explored with interviews. The objective of using this approach is to add new in-depth revelations of leadership and retention. New research has shown that only 49% of employees that are satisfied with their leader are engaged while 80% of employees that are dissatisfied with their leader are disengaged (McClatchie, 2019). The key information to question is what role the leader is playing when it comes to engaging staff. Are they approachable and connected to their employees? Do they consciously work on retaining their staff? Examining these factors are part of the overall aim of this research.

Employee retention is the process of encouraging employees to remain in the company for as long as possible (Bussin, 2018). It is incredibly important as costs of the company are reduced in numerous ways. Turnover expenses, like recruitment and training costs, will be kept at a minimum if retention is high. Also, turnover creates an impact to present employees in terms of a greater workload, loss of expertise and a diminished team morale (Phillips and Edwards, 2009). Which may lead to more employees choosing to leave (Bussin, 2018). With such impacts on an organisation, a leader should be aware of the importance of retention. While a HR division may hire the employees, it is the managers who are ultimately responsible for making working conditions optimal (Phillips and Edwards, 2009). Are the current leaders aware of their critical role in retaining staff?

## 1.5 Structure of the Research

The dissertation is organised as follows. Chapter 1, the introduction sets out the research question and contextualises it within the broader landscape. Chapter 2, the literature review begins with distinguishing the difference between leadership and

management. This is critical as we speak to managers, however we are examining their leadership traits. Then an examination of leadership styles, authentic and abusive. This is to build the foundations to allow the researcher to identify different aspects of leadership when collecting the data. We will break down the working attributes effected by leadership style as ultimately retention may decrease if these are negatively impacted.

Communication, trust, job satisfaction and job stress are the main areas that we focus upon; we analyse how leadership can influence these areas. Adigüzel and Kuloglu (2019) found that authentic leaders communicate strongly with their employees which can have a positive effect on organisational commitment. Affective leadership trust can only be developed within fair and safe company cultures (Jiang, Gu, and Tang, 2017, p. 878). Gameda and Lee (2020) recently found that laissez-faire leadership has a significant negative relationship with job performance, while Hadian Nasab and Afshari (2019) found that authentic leadership can counteract job stress. It is these opposing effects That render further investigation. We then analyse the sector in which is the focus of this research, the Irish service sector.

Chapter 3 outlines the research questions and the objectives of the overall project. Then Chapter 4 is the methodology section that will present the approach and rational for a qualitative research paradigm. Chapter 5 will breakdown all the relative findings from the interviews, which will lead to Chapter 6, the discussion of the findings in relation to the literature reviewed. Finally, Chapter 7, will formulate the conclusion and any recommendations for Irish companies and leaders.

## 2 CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Defining leadership

Eisenhower once said, “*Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it*” (1954).

How does a leader get an employee to do something while believing that it is their own choice? In business, leadership is a skill of motivating a team in achieving a common objective (Ward, 2020). What attributes do leaders require to achieve this goal?

For a leader to be followed they must be able to influence the employee (Bolt, 1999). They do this by motivating, inspiring, having strong communication skills and using emotional intelligence to gain an insight into the human condition. These are the trademarks of effective leadership, as recognised by John Glenny, a partner in one of Ireland’s premier leadership advisory firms (McCall, 2017).

To achieve the goals of the organisation, the leader must ensure everyone reaches their maximum potential (Bolt, 1999). The actions of the leader will be continuously observed by all followers and they are constantly judged (Fleming and Delves, 2017). This level of scrutiny is a factor that leaders need to be constantly aware of. The optics of their actions will be examined (McCall, 2017). The leader’s actions can impact the employees and their confidence in the leader can be lost (Fleming and Delves, 2017). That is why it is crucial that the leader is aware and connected to their employees. This connection is the crux of what makes leadership different to management. It can be said that you manage things and you lead people (Khan, 2016). The working environment is what is managed while people are inspired and led (Keogh, 2020).

This differentiation between management and leadership is central to this research. At the core is the impact of leadership on employees. While we may mention managing, it is the style of leadership used by the manager that we are examining. One leadership myth is that leaders are people at the top level of a business. This is incorrect as a leader can be present in any level of an organisation, from the boardroom down to ground level (Goffee and Jones, 2004). Leaders are people who have followers, but how are these followers gained? What can be classed as effective or ineffective leadership?

## 2.2 Leadership styles – effective versus ineffective

There are many classifications of leadership styles. There is the Full Range Leadership model, which has been constantly developing over the past three decades (Avolio and Bass, 2002). It has been studied and written about in many journals (Kanat-Maymon, Elimelech and Roth, 2020; Elliott, 2011). Then there is the Path-Goal theory that focuses on the employee personally gaining by performing in a high productive manner (Elliott, 2011). There is Situational Leadership which is where a leader considers the situation they are facing and may use any style to attain their goal (Cutler, 2014). There are many more we could mention as this area of business has been highly examined. However, for this research we shall focus on the traits of two opposing leadership styles. Authentic leadership which is known to be highly effective and abusive leadership which has been known as ineffective.

Authentic leadership's foundations are in Greek philosophy, the leader possessing self-awareness and knowing themselves (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). There are four key components that are attributed to this leadership style (Cutler, 2014) - Relationship transparency which builds genuine relations that are rooted in trust (Cutler, 2014; Avolio and Gardner, 2005); internal morality that accounts for the leader's deep sense of right and wrong (Cutler, 2014), which ensures strong principles and ethics being present (Avolio and Gardner, 2005); self-awareness which enables the leader to constantly re-examine and learn from their own impact to continuously improve their style (Cutler, 2014); lastly, balanced processing, which is evaluating information in a non-biased way (Mehmood, Hamstra and Schreurs, 2019). These components are what create emotional intelligence (Miao, Humphrey and Qian, 2018; Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 2013). They empower the leader to have a positive effect on employee satisfaction, trust and job performance (Yan, Bligh and Kohles, 2014). This style of leadership establishes open genuine relationships that create a positive balanced work environment and foster employee development (Yan *et al.*, 2014, Avolio and Gardner, 2005). But what happens when an employee works with a leader that possesses an opposing style?

Abusive leadership is defined by Tepper (2000, p. 178) as “*the sustained display of hostile and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact.*” Examples of this are aversive leadership which uses negative forms of communication (Yan *et al.*, 2014) and laissez-faire is the leader giving no guidance. Avolio and Bass (2002) described

laissez-faire as the most ineffective style as nothing is transacted. These styles can have severe effects on employees and increase employee turnover (Jiang, *et al.*, 2017; Pyc, Meltzer, and Liu, 2017; Tepper, 2000). Abusive leadership is a violation of interpersonal fairness to an employee, a common feature is that it occurs between an employee of higher status over lower status (Pyc, *et al.*, 2017). It can be an imbalance of the use of power which is quite the opposite of authentic leadership. Abusive supervision relies on the subordinate's perceptions and deducing that the leader's communication is of a hostile unsupported nature (Mullen, *et al.*, 2018; Tepper, 2000). These elements are vital to identify so we can analyse the (in)effectiveness of leadership styles within a working environment in the Irish service sector.

## 2.3 Leadership and the employee

### 2.3.1 Communication

Communication is at the heart of every organisation (Taylor and Lester, 2009) and effective communication will enable success. This seems like an obvious concept for business, but effective leadership is centred around effective communication. Communication is the transfer of information from an individual to another individual or group (Luthra and Dahiya, 2015; Taylor and Lester, 2009). A leader should be able to analyse the situation and then choose the appropriate style to communicate the objectives of the organisation (Zulch, 2014). But communication can be taken for granted as we use it every day (Taylor and Lester, 2009). An effective leader like an authentic one, will self-examine how they are communicating to their team. They will strive for clarity and ensure that the team understands the message they are trying to convey (Luthra and Dahiya, 2015). Strong, clear communication from authentic leaders can increase commitment to the company (Adigüzel and Kuloglu, 2019). This argument is present in the research of Hadian Nasab and Afshari (2019) on authentic leadership and if it has a significant effect on organisational commitment.

A manager that uses abusive leadership may fail to connect with their team and hamper the success of the organisation. Abusive inclinations of threats or punishments may be used (Kelly and MacDonald, 2019). Poor people skills, arrogance, and stubbornness may be some of the causes for this ineffective communication (Zulch, 2014). However, the manager must realise that without effective communication, they will fail to succeed, hence they are an ineffective leader (Luthra and Dahiya, 2015). If

effective communication is not present, employees may feel frightened approaching the leader. An effective leader should be approachable (Taylor and Lester, 2009), yet abusive leaders can subconsciously send signals of dislike to employees (Jiang, *et al.*, 2017). Hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours are the kernel to abusive leaders' communications (Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Tepper, 2000). These actions can have a detrimental effect on the employee and their relationship with the leader.

One major aspect of communication that a leader needs to master is the skill of listening; without listening, effective communication cannot exist (Taylor and Lester, 2009). Authentic leaders will strive to listen to their employees in an unbiased manner, while the abusive leader may be dismissive to employees. Great leadership requires effective listening because to hear is as important as speaking with clarity (Luthra and Dahiya, 2015). Great leaders can possess a peaceful quality when listening that allows them to fully analyse the information they are receiving (Luthra and Dahiya, 2015). The impact of communication can greatly affect the organisation and the trust that the employee may have with the leader.

### 2.3.2 Trust

Trust is making yourself vulnerable to the actions of an individual because you share a relationship (Alkaabi and Wong, 2019; Evans, 2015). The level of trust depends on what kind of relationship is present. The type of communication used by the leader will resonate in the level of trust that is developed with the employee. Negative behaviours associated with abusive leadership can minimize trust in management (Alkaabi and Wong, 2019). While authentic leadership has been positively linked to building trust between a leader and their followers (Braun and Peus, 2016). If a manager strives to be an authentic leader, they will invite and listen to their followers' opinions. If the authentic leader happens to make a mistake, they will admit it openly to employees which will boost trust and respect (Luthra and Dahiya, 2015).

Trust is dependent on communication, but why is trust so important? It is an essential ingredient in the leader/follower relationship. Employees will follow leaders they can trust, and it has been proven that authentic leadership can increase this trust (Alkaabi and Wong, 2019). The effects can be highly positive for the workplace. Improved performance, achieving work goals and stronger employee commitment are the outcomes of the trust built by an authentic leader (Adigüzel and Kuloglu, 2019;



Alkaabi and Wong, 2019). A solidarity is created between leader and employees, but this unique relationship can only be initiated by the leader (Kelly and MacDonald, 2019). It is the leader's responsibility to avoid the use of any abusive leadership style. If the manager chooses laissez-faire or aversive leadership, they may create damaging problems in the organisation. It has been proven that an employee's level of trust decreases if the leader uses a laissez-faire style (Breevaart and Zacher, 2019; Yasir, *et al.*, 2016).

Previous studies have almost exclusively focused on laissez-faire having a negative impact. However, a critical open question is how true is that within the service sector? Pahi and Hamid (2016) question if it has a place in certain professions, like teaching or medicine. They conducted a broad study on over 180 doctors and found that it was highly effective as it believes that the employee can cope with any situation (Pahi and Hamid, 2016). Yet it will be interesting to see if this is the case in the leader's perceptions.

So, it is in the best interests for the organisation, manager, and the employee that a positive leadership style such as one adhering to authenticity is used. When a leader is seen as trustworthy, this can have a positive result on employee job satisfaction and lead to better job performance (Rehman *et al.*, 2020). Hence, when distrust is present the opposite can occur leading to job dissatisfaction and poor job performance.

### 2.3.3 Job Satisfaction

The employee's level of trust is influenced by the leader's style of communication. These factors will alter the workplace environment and will modify the employee's job satisfaction. This is extremely important as employee performance is imperative to the organisation's success (Hadian Nasab and Afshari, 2019). In a utopian workplace, all employees would be happy and have great job satisfaction. Managers would lead with an authentic leadership style and conflicts would never arise. The business would be successful, which all sounds perfect. However, in reality a dystopian workplace can evolve simply by a lack of understanding of individuals and misuse of communication. Managers need to be highly aware of their team as individuals. The positive environment created by authentic leadership has been proven to directly increase the employee's performance (Hadian Nasab and Afshari, 2019; Azanza *et al.*, 2018). Job satisfaction suggests that an employee would stay with a job

that gives them satisfaction and quit a job that gives them dissatisfaction (George and Zakkariya, 2015).

Since it is the onus of the leader to ensure that there is positive communication between them and the employee (Kelly and MacDonald, 2019), the result should be high job satisfaction when the leader is authentic. This was the case in research that studied the effect of constructive leadership on job satisfaction (Skogstad, *et al.*, 2014). If job satisfaction was on the decline, the employee should be able to approach their authentic leader or the leader themselves would notice something is wrong with their team member. Interestingly, the research showed that with constructive leadership, job satisfaction came quickly and lasted fleetingly (Skogstad *et al.*, 2014). One could surmise that if the leader was genuine/authentic, that consistency in leadership style would combat against this fleeting satisfaction.

Satisfied employees have proven to be more productive, provide a high level of service, talk more positively about the organisation and go beyond their job requirements (George and Zakkariya, 2015). Abusive leadership can create the opposite effect, a growing dissatisfaction. Skogstad *et al.*, (2014) found that laissez-faire leadership has a greater negative impact on employee job satisfaction than tyrannical leadership. Laissez-faire can be equated to “*the silent treatment*”, making the employee feel ostracised and attributing to heightened feelings of rejection (Skogstad *et al.*, 2014; Williams, 2007).

Laissez-faire may be regarded as non-leadership, but the consequences of experiencing this can be highly negative and destructive (Breevaart and Zacher, 2019; Skogstad *et al.*, 2014). It can have a substantial impact on job satisfaction as the employee may feel extremely unsupported by their manager (Gemeda and Lee, 2020; Skogstad *et al.*, 2014). This lack of support, especially in any critical work situations, may generate resentment and unnecessary job stress for the employee (Foy *et al.*, 2019; Skogstad *et al.*, 2014). There is a strong connection between job satisfaction and turnover, employees with low satisfaction are more likely to quit (George and Zakkariya, 2015). Unfavourable situations created by abusive leadership can lead to staff dissatisfaction and high stress levels (Foy *et al.*, 2019).

#### 2.3.4 Job Stress

There are several definitions of job stress. First off, stress can be described as when a person considers the demands of a situation that they must deal with to be greater than their abilities (George and Zakkariya, 2015). This causes an imbalance between what is expected of the person and what they think they are capable of. Hence, stress can be dependent on a person's reaction to how they perceive a situation (Fléron, 2016). Job stress is how the employee responds to any aspect within the work environment that they perceive is posing a threat (George and Zakkariya, 2015; Caplan, Cobb, and French, 1975). It can also be defined as emotional responses to job requirements, which can be positive and negative. A positive effect of stress can motivate employees to perform at a higher level, while too little stress can generate boredom (Foy *et al.*, 2019). Stress-free work environments have proven to reduce productivity (Uysal, 2019).

While the negative effect of stress can be detrimental to job satisfaction, output, and the retention of staff (Foy *et al.*, 2019; Quade, Perry and Hunter, 2019). Employees who have regular interactions and feel supported by their managers are less likely to feel unnecessary stressors (Foy *et al.*, 2019; Demerouti *et al.*, 2014), as the leader will create the organisation's "*optimal stress*" level (Uysal, 2019).

Authentic leadership creates positive work environments which can avert stress (Hadian Nasab and Afshari, 2019). The leader needs to be aware of what is being asked of the employee, is it within their capabilities and how might they react? This should come naturally to a relationship that is built on authenticity as openness and trust should be present (Braun and Peus, 2018). It has been proven in studies that authentic leadership has had positive effects on job satisfaction along with negative relations with job stress and employee turnover (Braun and Peus, 2016). Ineffective abusive leadership, whether it be aversive or laissez-faire, can act as a job stressor and create a negative effect on job satisfaction that can cause turnover (Jiang *et al.*, 2017).

These kinds of destructive leaderships can positively relate to the intention of staff members leaving their organisation (da Silva *et al.*, 2019). Interestingly Uysal (2019) discovered that employees in workplaces that did not reduce unnecessary stress associated this with the leader. The employees developed a negative belief about the manager's leadership style. Also, increasing job stress can intensify a toxic perception

that the employee has of their leader (Uysal, 2019). Leaders need to be aware of their own behaviour when dealing with subordinates as their style can impinge on employee job performance and job retention (Rehman *et al.*, 2020).

#### 2.4 Leadership in Context – The Irish Service Sector

The Irish service sector accounts for 75% of employment in Ireland (Burke-Kennedy, 2017), and it has done for the past decade. This can be seen in the graph appendix A, provided by Statista (2020). The service industry depends on customer interaction but for an organisation to be successful there needs to be a good culture present. Workplaces should have positive values and an inclusive workforce with leaders that help create environments where employees can thrive (Carrick, 2019). Having an authentic leader will forge a positive work environment and foster employee development. This will hopefully instil the employees with some level of job satisfaction which can be crucial in the service industry. If employees are happy in their workplace, they will probably be more likely to satisfy their customers (George and Zakkariya, 2015).

However, if the employee is entering a workspace that is run by an abusive leader, there can be a loss of morale and performance. In turn, poor quality of work may transpire which could result in loss of customers, customer relations and company reputation (Uysal, 2019). It is the leader that sets the tone of the workplace which is crucial in any organisation.

One Irish business that recognised the importance of leadership is Woodies. Not happy with poor ratings for trust (50%) and whether it was a great place to work (37%) in 2014, they put a leadership development programme in place. It resulted in trust increasing to 79%, a great place to work increasing to 77% by 2017. The overall profit of the company went from 2.4million in 2014 to 11.2million in 2017 (O'Connell, 2019). With outcomes this visible by improving leadership, it is hard to deny how crucial is the role of effective leadership. Why are not all Irish businesses following suit?

At the core of Woodies' leadership programme, is identifying the difference between controlling and inspiring. They suggest it starts with the use of the word "*leadership*" over the use of "*management*" (O'Connell, 2019), which reflects the idea that you lead people but manage things (Khan, 2016).

Ibec, Ireland's largest business organisation carries out numerous surveys in relation to this research. In 2019, their HR survey on workplace trends had 60% of the participation from Irish companies in the service industries (Ibec, 2019). First priority in training for 26% of the companies that took part is "*Leadership/people management*", and this was actually in the top five training priorities for 82% of the companies. Attracting, retaining and engagement of employees were all present in the top 5 HR priorities for half of the respondents (Ibec, 2019).

## 2.5 Employee Retention

Retention and turnover have been described as "*almost opposite terms*" (Bright HR, 2020). Retention can be classed as the process that encourages an employee to remain in a company for as long as possible (Bussin, 2018). So, retention is the portion of the employees that remain with the company, while turnover is the portion of the employees that decide to leave. Retention is a positive outcome for the employee and the company. For retention to be successful the employee must gain a work outcome that gives them job satisfaction while the company is avoiding the unnecessary costs of employee turnover. Hobson (2019) states that employees are a company's number one asset.

In 2018, Fora published that the cost of replacing staff had doubled in Irish SMEs within one year to €13,100 per position (Woods, 2018). If a company has a good retention strategy in place, they will be lowering the cost of employee turnover. Turnover is one of the constant challenges that businesses may face; loss of highly skilled staff potentially leading to negative consequences (Apostel, Syrek and Antoni, 2018). The cost of turnover involves the expense of advertising the position, the hours put into interviewing new candidates, the hiring and training of a new applicant. All this in addition to the regular cost of running the company, hence employee turnover can impact productivity and increase workload for the remaining employees. This in turn can reduce morale, lower job satisfaction, and increase the perception that the company may not value staff (Rehman *et al.*, 2020; Woods, 2018).

There are many reasons why an employee may choose to leave an organisation. However, putting a retention strategy in place may combat against this. Retention of staff is dependent on the employees' job satisfaction. As mentioned above, job satisfaction can be affected by communication, trust, job stress and numerous other

reasons. To counter this trend, businesses need to be willing to treat employees like customers (Dosik, 2015), find out what would give them job satisfaction and see if they can align their vision with the company's goals. It is important for the company to continually extract knowledge from the employees on what would maintain their sense of value (Jha, 2019). For instance, Google discovered that women quit their jobs due to maternity leave being too short. So, Google extended paid maternity leave for a period of 12 to 18 weeks to retain their staff (Dosik, 2015). This is one example, but there is a saying that "*People don't quit jobs, they quit managers*" (Woods, 2018).

## 2.6 Leadership and Employee Retention

It is important to understand the difference between retention and turnover as this research is examining the effect of leadership on retaining employees. Leaders need to be aware that part of their role and responsibility is the retainment of staff. They should encourage employees to be more engaged with their work (Xiong and Wen, 2020). Creating a positive work environment is essential to effective leadership. It will promote communication, trust, job satisfaction and reduce negative stress related to work. A leader will do this by establishing an effective working relationship with employees, one that is based on trust and genuine interest to knowing individuals (Coates and Howe, 2015). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development conducted surveys which revealed that when there is an improvement in a line manager's skills it can have a positive effect on retention of staff (CIPD, 2018).

Semedo, Coelho and Ribeiro (2016) consider that the style of leadership of the manager is the most important criterion affecting employee performance. If every manager were given the knowledge of how leadership can affect their employees, a presumption of retention could be made. If the manager is to succeed within their position, they would strive to use a positive leadership style like an authentic one. The power of appreciation coming from the leader can strengthen the self-esteem and lower the stress levels of the employee (Apostel *et al.*, 2018). It can create psychologically safe working environments that can help increase job satisfaction (Jha, 2019). This appreciation could only be found within a positive leadership style as an abusive style would only increase a sense of threat (Jha, 2019; Uysal 2019). The only response an employee may feel towards an abusive leader is to search for new employment opportunities as they may feel like they have no power in the situation

(Jha, 2019). Turnover intentions are a coping mechanism against a major threat, abusive leadership (Apostel *et al.*, 2018).

Employees who feel that their work has meaning and that their worth is valued have proven to show fewer turnover intentions, hence, increasing employee retention and commitment to the organisation (Apostel *et al.*, 2018). If effective communication is present, employees will understand what tasks are being asked from them and why those tasks are essential to the running of the business. If there is a lack of understanding on why the employee is assigned a task, they should be able to approach their supervisors for an explanation. Fostering open communicating and establishing mutual understanding of role expectations will assist in a productive work environment. But it hinges around the leadership style of the manager, which begs the question, “Is that manager approachable?”

Employees can feel devalued and offended by managers that choose abusive leadership styles. In turn, this can increase turnover intention as the employees may feel unappreciated by their manager (Apostel *et al.*, 2018). Authentic leadership fosters employee development which gives the staff a sense of empowerment. Initiatives like goal settings together for skill development can build trust and increase employee job satisfaction. While abusive leadership creates the antithesis of this effect as it makes the employee feel helpless (Jha, 2019). It has been noted that the authoritarian leadership style of the past, which was based on control, power and one-way communication or instructions simply does not have a place in today’s work environment (Coates and Howe, 2015). Effective leadership helps to create effective workplaces and they maintain the direction of the overall company (Goldner, 2009). Employees need to be able to trust their leaders and this trust is all built upon communication, the fact remains that the leader themselves need to have a willingness and a desire to develop effective leadership skills (Goldner, 2009).

## 2.7 Conclusion

By analysing the literature, authentic leadership is based on a self-aware manager creating a relationship transparency with the employee (Cutler, 2014; Avolio and Gardner, 2005); while an abusive leadership style can be hostile and create an unproductive relationship much like the laissez-faire leadership style (Avolio and Bass, 2002). Adigüzel and Kuloglu (2019) address that authentic leaders should have

strong, clear communication. This was examined in this study, as the researcher observed each leader's style of communication by their words and responses as well as their tone of voice and choice of phrase within the phone interviews. While the leaders themselves portrayed no signs of hostile behaviours, they were able to provide valuable examples and understandings of ineffective leadership based on their own experiences.

These observations contribute to the gap in the findings of Jha (2019) and Pyc *et al.*, 's (2017) quantitative research. Both researchers conducted large surveys and did have some input from managers. Jha (2019) focused on empower balance between leader and employee by using standard questionnaires with 337 employees yet did two structured interviews with managers. Pyc *et al.*, (2017) worked with a nursing agency that employed 15,000 staff. They both discovered that high abusive leadership may result in employee turnover. This research while having some similarities to these studies is unique in a number of ways: Within this research personal in-depth stories are elicited from participants to allow them draw on experiences and reflect on their perceptions around leadership, thus providing a rich and deep qualitative understanding of the phenomenon. Equally this study is unique given its context of the Irish service sector, which to date has been relatively under-researched. It is the rich narratives that supplement the scientific approach of the other research which makes this particularly distinctive and pertinent.

Laissez-faire is portrayed in two opposing views within the literature (Pahi and Hamid, 2016; Avolio and Bass, 2002). Pahi and Hamid (2016) concluded that this style is quite effective in certain professions. These opposing viewpoints shall be examined in this study and question if it has a use in the Irish service sector. Hadian Nasab and Afshari (2019) surveyed 173 employees regarding the positive effects of authentic leadership, but this study strives for the personal experiences of the managers. How do they gain an employees' trust? Breevaart and Zacher, (2019) proved that trust in leaders was reduced when they used a laissez-faire approach.

An opportunity for further study beyond this research concerns the issue of employee job satisfaction. The researcher believes this can only be known by asking the employees themselves. Unfortunately, due to time constraints this was outside the parameters of this study. Additional future studies could interview the employees of



the leaders. If we adhere to the research of George and Zakkariya (2015), employees with low satisfaction are more likely to quit, which is what we use to gauge the employees' satisfaction. George and Zakkariya (2015) also used a quantitative approach by surveying 337 employees in the banking sector.

A negative correlation was found between job stress and social support by Foy *et al.*, (2019). But again, what is significant about all the above research is the large number of participants. Foy *et al.*, (2019, p. 1025) had a minimum requirement of 92 participants. Kelly and MacDonald, (2019) believes that the unique relationship that an employee and leader has, is a result of the attitudes of the leaders and hence the onus for job satisfaction falls on the leader. This is why it is central to this study that we interview the managers themselves about their leadership styles. Next we will explain the methodology used within this research and the justification of a qualitative study.

### 3 CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES

**RQ1: What are leaders' perceptions of (in)effective leadership?**

**RQ2: How does (in)effective leadership contribute to employee retention within the service industry?**

Above are the overall questions that this research addresses, currently the author has found no works that focus on leadership in the Irish context and the subsequent contribution of leadership style on employee retention. This research will hopefully be able to bring some valuable observations and clarity on the importance of this subject to the future success of Irish companies.

Objectives of the research will be –

- Explore leaders understanding and perceptions of (in)effective leadership?
- The evaluation of the leader's own style of leadership.
- The examination of the perceptions of leaders and their understanding of how they impact employees.
- Together how do these elements contribute to staff retention.

## 4 CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research methodology and design that was used to gain insights into the chosen subject area. The author shall use Saunders research onion (Appendix B) as a framework to create an effective structure to the study (2009). Saunders, *et al.*, (2009) provides a systematic approach to discover what it is we are investigating and the reason behind the research. Each stage of the research is peeled back like the layer of an onion so that the researcher can understand the phenomenon they are examining.

This device is renowned as it has various options in each layer, and there are multiple combinations that can be applied to numerous research questions. Using this approach allowed for an effective understanding of the research question under study. This study seeks to understand if managers believe their chosen leadership styles are (in)effective and if they influence the retention of their employees. The next section describes the chosen research philosophy, the approach, explanation of the instrument chosen, the sample, the data collection, data analysis, limitations, and ethical considerations.

### 4.2 Research Objectives

The aim of this research is to gain insight into perceptions and understandings of (in)effective management within the Irish service sector. Mainly because of how prominent leadership has become in training programmes within Irish companies. This intrigued the researcher in terms of what kind of managers are present within the sector. Is there a self-awareness present within the managers of how important leadership is and what kind of style is present? Out of thirty-five journals (Mehmood, *et al.*, 2019; Mullen, *et al.*, 2018; Semedo, *et al.*, 2016) relating to the subject, the majority conducted quantitative studies that required large quantities of surveys that mainly used scales like Likert in order to measure leadership styles.

This method alongside a large number of participants produced extremely scientific outcomes yet are impersonal and do not allow for a more exploratory understanding in the words of the participants. The researcher wishes to learn about management perspectives in a more holistic manner. Directly learning the emotional impact from the participants using interviews, in the hopes to learn about how effective current management practices are. Within the study focus is given to the relationships of

leaders with employees, the individual's self-awareness and what factors contribute to their own leadership. Through this we will gain understandings of the types of management visible within the sector.

### 4.3 Research Philosophy

The chosen research philosophy will comprise of important assumptions about how the researcher views the world (Awasthy and Gupta, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The researcher will develop new knowledge to discover an answer to a question. To begin with the outer layer, there are the following main philosophies to consider.

#### 4.3.1 Ontology

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality (Quinlan, 2011, p. 14; Saunders *et al.*, 2009). It is a way of examining the world and the nature of humans as individuals (Awasthy and Gupta, 2015. p5). Ontology can be broken down into objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism is looking at social entities existing independently from social actors (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Objectivism assumes that the topic is measurable which explains the use of surveys within previous research. However, this study will be using a subjective ontological approach. Other researchers were measuring the impact of leadership styles upon a large sample of employees. Rehman *et al.*, (2020), Pyc, *et al.*, (2017), and Hadian Nasab and Afshari (2019) all used questionnaires with large samples of how leadership impacts performance, job-outcomes and intention to quit. These studies provide valuable information that can contribute to this subjective research.

Rehman *et al.*, (2020) determined that proper leadership behaviour may be able to improve work environments which have a positive effect on performance and job-outcomes. While Mullen *et al.*, (2018) also uses a large survey to confirm previous findings that destructive forms of leadership impact the willingness of employees to engage with a company. However, these large studies fail to understand the personal element within the workplaces. This study is attempting to hold a magnifying glass over leaders within the Irish service sector, to try to gain some understanding about their own perceptions of leadership. The author is trying to understand the meanings that individuals are attaching to a social phenomenon (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). It is centred around individual perceptions and consequences of the social actors (Saunders

*et al.*, 2009). The phenomenon of leadership styles and their impact upon retention of employees are the focus.

#### 4.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is how we investigate the study in the world we have chosen (Awasthy and Gupta, 2015 p 6; Quinlan, 2011, p. 96; Saunders *et al.*, 2009). This is broken down into approaches that affect the role of the researcher; positivism and interpretivism are examples of epistemologies which lie on opposite ends of the spectrum. The positivism paradigm is to study through orthodox scientific methods. It will have an author who attempts to remain objective and separate from the data gathered. They will attempt to prove, or disprove a hypothesis based on existing theory. However, this study diverts from this somewhat in that it is trying to obtain some understanding between individuals and examining them as social actors. The author wants to ascertain rich insights into the complex leadership world which is facilitated by a more interpretivist approach.

This paradigm focuses on the study of people, the term social actors are used (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). An element of this was used by both Uysal (2019) and Jiang *et al.*, (2017) as they attempted to make a personal impact on their participants in their studies concerning toxic leadership and bullying by supervisors, Uysal (2019) used a face-to-face survey approach while Jiang *et al.*,(2017) used focus groups. Connecting to participants in this manner gives the researchers a way to explore people's responses in a more personal immediate way. However, this research wants to fill a gap, which is connect with the leaders in a personal manner. Like watching actors onstage and interpreting their actions, this study shall be examining and interpreting managers perceptions (Saunders *et al.*,2009).

#### 4.4 The Research Methods

After careful analysis of the different philosophies, the researcher feels that currently the best approach is interpretivism and a subjective ontology. Interpretivism rejects a focus on scientific and focuses on the subjective meaning of social action (Quinlan, 2011, p. 96). The study is constructing a reality of the present standard of Irish leadership within the service sector through the meanings created by managers. A subjective interpretation will be placed upon the perspectives given in interviews. It will be a qualitative research approach as the study will be a micro sample, yet it will

delve deeper than the use of a survey. As mentioned, previous research dealt with large volumes of data, sourced from hundreds of employees to render numerical data for quantitative interpretation of their studies (Alkaabi and Wong, 2019; Hadian Nasab and Afshari, 2019). This has led to outcomes of a statistical nature which may be interpreted as more objective and generalized. They lack the insights that the researcher wishes to uncover using a qualitative method.

#### 4.4.1 Deductive

Deductive examines scientific principles through which the author then uses theory to produce data. This theory is known as the universal laws (Adams, 2007, p. 29). It requires large samples that can be attained using quantitative tools. It can be highly structured in its approach and the researcher should remain independent from the information. Deductive is the opposite approach to what this study requires. This research is examining feelings, beliefs, and perceptions. An inductivism approach is much more suited.

#### 4.4.2 Inductive

Inductive examines an understanding of meanings within a human context which may be attached to certain situations. Observations of specific circumstances are used to establish general ideas about a phenomenon (Awasthy and Gupta, 2015, p 20). The collection of data is not fixated on large samples, instead a small sample is focused upon in a more in-depth analysis. There is a realisation that the researcher is part of the process.

#### 4.4.3 Justification for Using an Inductive Approach

This author decided upon an inductive approach as it allowed the managers to be complex beings and will explore their journeys to leadership. Murphy (2019, p. 96) used interviews to discover that principals perceive that mid-career teachers assume leadership was confined to the teachers in principal roles. The aim in this research is to gain similar insights in the managers' careers, have they been affected by opposing leadership styles? It also seeks to discover if they realise how they impact their employees and see if the managers actively strive to retain staff. This level of understanding of these personal situations may not be fully explored using a survey. The aim was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of leadership styles and leadership within the Irish service sector.

#### 4.4.4 Justification for using Qualitative Research Method

Quantitative design focuses on quantities and measurements (Quinlan, 2011, p. 106). This can be best suited for a deductive approach. It examines the relationship among variables based on specific numbers. It is used to answer “*how*” questions. As mentioned, the majority of journals about leadership and the effects of different styles have used quantitative research. Large numbers answering scaled surveys can be good for getting broad insights. Interviews can be used; however, the design would be highly structured, rigid with closed questions (Quinlan, 2011, p. 292). Hadian Nasab and Afshari (2019, p. 553) asked scaled answered closed questions like do leaders listen to different points of view before making decisions. The measure of AL ( $\alpha=0.76$ ) is then used to calculate the answer (Hadian Nasab and Afshari, 2019, p. 552). This research chooses to opt for a more thorough exploratory account of the subject matter, one based on people’s experiences and words.

Qualitative design is more about people’s opinions and perceptions which are analysed by themes therefore, in this study the description and exploration of individual leaders within the Irish service industry. Qualitative design examines questions, sentences, and words. It allows you to extract rich information from situations relating to human behaviour. It can be used to answer “*why*” questions. Hence due to the nature of the data the author is collecting, a qualitative approach is best suited to this research. The qualitative interviews will have a loose structure with open questions to allow the researcher to prob any interesting responses (Quinlan, 2011, p. 292). For instance, when Interviewee 2 was asked if she ever had an ineffective leader, she admitted that her current manager was. This led to the researcher asking if it would affect her future with the company and she confessed that it would make her rethink it.

#### 4.5 Secondary data collection

The literature review was constructed upon secondary data. The use of documentary, multiple and survey classifications was used. The use of several secondary resources allows for a complete representation of opposing styles of leadership. Currently, surveys from Ibec and the CIPD highlight how important leadership is within the workplace. CIPD (2018) revealed that improvement in the line manager’s skills had a positive effect on retention but it raises the question if this factor is important to actual leaders. Training of leadership is within the top 5 concerns in the Ibec (2019) surveys.

These factors combined with the constant use of quantitative studies and impersonal surveys in journals (Adigüzel and Kuloglu, 2019; Hadian Nasab and Afshari, 2019) informed the decision to take a more interpretivist led approach to the research. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, journals, eBooks, and books were difficult to access.

#### 4.6 Time Horizon

Due to the nature of the research being gathered within a short amount of time, the longitudinal approach was not appropriate for application. Instead a cross-sectional time horizon was used. The interviews were gathered within a two-week process. At first, open ended questions were tested in a pilot study in week one. Any changes to the questions were addressed in order to improve the interviews within the second week.

#### 4.7 Data Collection

After careful consideration of the approaches available, qualitative research in the form of interviews was selected. The objective of these interviews was to learn about the leaders' individual experiences in relation to leadership. The author decided upon a semi-structured approach in the hope of discovering valuable information in relation to their leadership styles and their effect on retention of staff. The technique was used in the hope that there would be open free flowing conversation, interviewees are given more freedom in their responses than any survey would allow them (Walle, 2015). Hence, the researcher shall be able to delve deeper into any rich information that may be discovered.

Another effective approach may be the use of a focus group because you could record intimate perceptions in a group environment. Again, open ended questions could be used by the research to gather important viewpoints (Walle, 2015, p 18). However due to the lockdown during Covid-19 this option had to be vetoed. The safest method during these difficult times was interviews over the phone.

#### 4.8 Sample Selection

The author chose to conduct in-depth interviews of 6 managers within the Irish service sector. To begin, a pilot study was conducted with a manager/director within the animation industry. A male, in his thirties, his background of leadership spans a two-decade career. The choice of a different industry was deliberate as the researcher



wanted to test if business leadership skills are transferable or similar in other industries.

#### 4.8.1 Sample Demographics

There were six participants, three male, three females ranging in age. Both genders had people ranging from ages 20 – 50. The female leaders had ages of mid-twenties, mid-thirties, and early forties. The male leaders had mid-twenties, early forties, and early fifties. There is a wide age span across the leaders. Lastly, the positions of each interviewee range from several years as middle management to leaders of their own organisation or of a department of a huge American multinational based in Ireland. These different factors hopefully present a complete range of leadership currently present in the Irish service sector. A purposive sampling technique was used, as each candidate was specifically chosen to create this range (Quinlan, 2011. p. 292). The anonymity and confidentiality of each participant was guaranteed.

The questions (seen in Appendix C) chosen were derived from the literature and focused upon certain themes, leadership: (in) effective, impact on employees and the self-awareness of the individuals. This is like the contrast of questions in Hadian Nasab and Afshari, (2019). They broke their questions into focusing on employee's performance, authentic leadership, and organisational commitment. The categories chosen for this research are closely related. The researcher also examined questionnaires like Authentic Leadership Self-Assessment Questionnaire Created by Walumbwa and associates (Northouse, 2010), and the Belbin team roles (Belbin, 2020). Both questionnaires highlight self-awareness which helped create questions like “does the leader concisely evaluate their style?” and “what impact do they think their style has on employees?”. Such emphasis informed how the interview schedule in this study was designed.

Adigüzel and Kuloglu (2019) question manager's behaviour in terms communication, effects on employees and beliefs. However, they ask for the employee's perceptions on the managers while this research wants to get the actual perceptions of the managers. Lastly, questioning the effect of (in)effective leadership is inspired by Pyc, *et al.*, (2017) as they use several scaled questions to examine abusive and authoritarian styles. Extra questions which focused on communication, trust and retention was

present to help determine what style each leader has. These questions help gauge whether the leaders influence employees' job satisfaction and stress.

#### 4.9 Analysing Qualitative Data

This is a cross sectional, qualitative study implementing in-depth interviews using non-probabilistic sampling techniques. The research approach is interpretivist in nature as we are interpreting the harvesting of subjective data from managers in the Irish service sector. The researcher chose to carry out interviews via phone calls mainly due to the reliability of this medium. Internet seemed to be dropping because of Covid-19. After gathering all the interviews, the next step was to transcribe them and analyse the data.

The three subthemes ((in) effective leadership, impact on employees and the self-awareness of the individuals) were used to create the questions, were then used to frame the coding of the data analysis (Appendix D). Extra subthemes that reflect communication and trust are to examine the style of leadership present in the Irish service industry. These traits and how managers use them are crucial in the researcher determining the style. After examining the interviews, the researcher hoped to uncover patterns of leaders' perceptions of (in)effective leadership and how they may contribute to employee retention.

#### 4.10 Ethical Consideration

All interviewees were asked for consent before the interview. Their identities and companies will remain anonymous. The participants could withdraw from the study at any stage if they wished to do so, as seen in consent letter in Appendix E. They could also refuse to answer any question without any consequences. Incidentally, this did occur in the pilot interview, afterwards the participant was asked for feedback and they explained that the question felt too vast. There was never any pressure or coercion place upon participants. Questions were sent in advance and interviews were pre-empted with a chat about the questions. This chat was added after the pilot interview, the researcher did not want any other participant to feel like any questions were unanswerable or misunderstood. The interviewer wanted to create a sense of ease and a connection with the participant. This also gave them a sense of security in the questions being asked.

#### 4.11 Limitations to research

There are several limitations to the study. 2020 has been the year that the world has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. This had a significant effect on the original research project. At first the project was based on a survey of employees and their perceptions of their leaders. That would have required a large sample and the possible use of a rating scale like the Likert scale. This would be like research used in “*Destructive forms of leadership*” (Mullen *et al.*, 2018) and “*Employees’ perceptions of their manager’s authentic leadership*” (Mehmood *et al.*, 2019). The pandemic pushed the researcher into analysing their chosen topic in a more intimate individual style which is contrary to most journals examined.

The cross-sectional design of the interviews provide a snapshot of leaders’ perceptions. However, future research may benefit from a longitudinal or experimental design i.e. – shadowing the leaders over several years and analysing any developments within their styles. This is like the suggestion of Mullen *et al.*, (2018) of a longer study, that would examine the causal relationship between leadership behaviour and employee health and safety. But due to the intimate style of this study, choosing certain leaders, analysing their development, and studying what effect, if any on their employees was the main aim. The study could be further expanded on by adding a survey of the specific leaders’ employees. That would be transforming the study into a mixed method approach of quantitative and qualitative.

Another limitation that arose due to Covid-19 was the inability to access the libraries or having trouble with accessing surveys through companies. The library only has a certain number of books and journals online, so there is a limitation on the resources available. The portals encumbered online library sessions due to the reduced quality of Wi-Fi. There is currently an unprecedented demand on this asset due to the amount of people now working from home (Browning, 2020). The researcher found that contacting companies during Covid-19 extremely difficult, there was mainly a lack of response to any approaches.

#### 4.12 Conclusion

Unfortunately, due to time constraints and unknown issues that arose due to a worldwide pandemic, the research had to evolve and adapt in a new direction. Issues such as people having to work from home and a national lockdown presented the

researcher with unforeseen obstacles that have never been present in previous years. To cope with this the researcher narrowed the study, focusing mainly on intimate interviews. However, this factor is what assisted the researcher in filling a gap in previous research. The element of using qualitative over quantitative research uncovered some new insights into the impact of leadership style upon employees.

## 5 CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS

### 5.1 Introduction

The interview transcripts (sample seen in Appendix F) were rich in data and provided a comprehensive account of the participants views, expectations, and perceptions. To evaluate the data, thematic analysis was used. As part of this an overarching grid which summarises the key findings was created, sample of coding grid can be seen in Appendix G. This was valuable as part of the coding, analysis process and in synthesising the data to develop overarching themes which represent the data findings. This allowed the researcher to determine which themes and sub-themes were present. This chapter sets out the findings in detail and presents the emergent themes, patterns and trends which are apparent. The researcher was conscious of the interpretivist paradigm which underlies the study and as such alongside the transcripts and words, other verbal and non-verbal information which emanated from each interview was also considered and brought to light some interesting and pertinent findings.

Perspectives aside from the interview transcripts themselves included the tone of voice and communication style of the interviewees. For example, Interviewee 2 answered all the questions concisely and in a clear manner. She was the shortest interview at 22 minutes, yet she felt she answered all questions appropriately. Interviewee 5, on the other hand, a top-level manager, had the longest interview duration at 44 minutes. As part of his communication style was a storytelling approach with lots of anecdotes and examples drawn from everyday life. These styles of communication allowed the researcher to better understand their communication styles and consequently the management style of the interviewees. In the case of Interviewee 5, he indicated he has a sales background which had influenced his communication style and was present in the use of stories. He was visual in describing experiences, while Interviewee 2 took a much more concise approach and was focused on precise answering throughout. This may be reflective of her employment history and experience which included numbers in the financial sector.

This finding was particularly thought provoking and indeed significant as it identifies how different leadership styles can be present, even within a person's speech pattern. It is discoveries like this that strengthened the use of qualitative research with interviews as opposed to surveys that requires scaled answers.

When asked about the impact of their leadership on their employees, Interviewee 2 states *“I try to adopt a style that I let them know if they need help or if they have any issues with capacity to work just to let me know, not to be afraid if they need any help at all.”* While Interviewee 5 states *“we have lost nobody in the two years I’ve been there, I’m like the dashboard. They’re the engine, I point them in the correct general direction. And I will actually delegate the responsibility and the authority for them to execute their function. I wouldn’t be a micromanager.”* Interviewee 5 uses an *“engine”* to describe his team which his leadership is the *“dashboard”* in control.

Next the interviewees’ perspectives on effective leadership will be examined, followed by an exploration of ineffective leadership. Then their thoughts on communication, trust and stress will be shown. Finally, their viewpoints on retention will be clarified and any idiosyncratic findings mentioned.

## 5.2 Effective leadership

One word connected most of the interviewees used when it came to their own leadership style, was being *“open”*. In the pilot, this person described their style as *“open, honest, always jovial”*. He expressed that a boss should not *“sit in an ivory tower”*, he should *“always be approachable”* and *“honest”* with his team. Interviewee 1 described their style as *“very open, very kind of laid back”*, which reflects the atmosphere of his working environment. He described it as *“kind of relaxed and kind of open”*. It is interesting to note that Interviewee 1 moved up the ranks of this company to become middle management. This office culture may have influenced his style over his 3 years with the company. Interviewee 2 described her communication style as *“approachable”* and *“open”*. She relates this to any of her team having any issues, maintains that they should not struggle and that they should approach her for help. While Interviewee 4 used *“I’m open, I’m a very open person”*.

The other interviewees may not have used this word so directly within their description of their own style however *“openness”* was present within their interviews. Interviewee 4 was like Interviewee 3 as they both describe training up through the ranks of companies as an advantage. Interviewee 4 said this has allowed her to be *“open to learning from the people around you”*. While Interviewee 3 perceives this factor as allowing her to be able to *“empathize with the staff”* as she has *“been in their shoes”*.

The top-level managers were compelling when asked about their style. The male leader described himself as “*charismatic, higher energy, customer first*”, while the female said “*I’m a very good listener. And I believe that every problem has a solution*”. While they did not use the word “*open*”, they put forward values and viewpoints which identified the importance of openness and transparency at work. They said, “*have a sit down with them in a quiet space and I’m going allow them to vent off on any issues*” (Interviewee 5) and “*I’m always open to people’s ideas*” (Interviewee 6). Interviewee 5 was the only manager that spoke about business results when asked about how his style impacts employees. In his first year, productivity grew by 100%, and in year two his team is in the process of growing another “*60% on top of that.*” He has the same number of staff, but they are now “*delivering far more than ever thought they could deliver.*” He accredits this to “*customer likes dealing with people that are happy and enjoy their work. You have to try and create that environment, that’s what I do.*” One other factor worth noting about his style is that he is extremely aware about the use of “*positivity*”, even if he is dealing with a difficult situation, he will tackle it in a “*positive frame of mind*”.

The interviewees all agreed on effective leadership being underpinned by being open and approachable. As their insights into ineffective leadership allowed them to re-evaluate their own styles. Several experiences have taught this group of leaders the worst traits that are best avoided when dealing with fellow employees.

### 5.3 Ineffective leadership

When asked about ineffective leadership, what it looks like and what experiences they may have had to date, a common theme across the cohort was apparent. All interviewees at one point or another in their career had themselves experienced ineffective leadership. The overarching theme here was the ineffective interpersonal skills of the managers.

#### 5.3.1 Interpersonal Skills

Interviewee 2 in discussing ineffective leadership was of the view that her line manager was not an effective leader. She describes the style of the leader as unsupportive, lacks empathy and speaks about her style being quite autocratic. “*She gives orders to get things done by this time*”, she does not care if interviewee 2 has “*a lot of other stuff going on.*” When probed a little closer in relation to this, interviewee

2 admitted that *“it puts her under a lot of pressure”*. She even goes as far as angrily describing that the manager *“thinks that we have 10 arms each, and we’re all robots, and it should be done because she wants it done.”* Her main point is that the leader lacks approachability and empathy. Yet her anger gives insight into the stress that can arise within an employee when they are managed by someone who is an ineffective leader. When asked if it would affect her staying with the company, she said *“yeah, probably would.”* She admitted to considering *“requesting to move teams”* but it would mean surrendering her own team who she had *“built up such good relationships”*. She stated it would not be *“fair on the team.”*

Interviewee 3 described having a manager that *“lacked energy”*, felt *“burdened”* if staff approached her, and she *“didn’t really want to know”*. The team was left *“to their own devices”* and *“weren’t being managed”*. This is a clear example of the laissez-faire style of leadership and when asked did she think it had a negative effect on the team; the response was an emphasised *“big time”* as employees had to sort problems which resulted in *“people feeling like their toes are being stepped on.”*

Interviewee 6 was the main person that brought up bullying and abusive leadership. Interviewee 6 identified as having a varied history in different job sectors and now runs her own business. She volunteered that she was bullied at a young age after she was promoted to management level in a creche. She described how a manager *“became very abusive towards me”* in construction industry. She described him as *“a dog would have had better communication skills”* and having *“little man syndrome, a big ego, in a little man’s body”*. Again, anger came through her tone when she declared *“he didn’t do his job, so he tried to push it on top of me.”* Both experiences created *“severe anxiety”* in her life and pushes her to avoid these abusive styles of leadership as she suffered the anxiety it creates.

Several other subthemes emerged as part of the analysis of ineffective leadership. These are Approach, Ego, and Blame.

### 5.3.2 Approach

When describing any experiences of dealing with ineffective leaders, a common subtheme of being *“unapproachable”* came forth. The underlining reason for this was that the managers they dealt with sounded highly *“bossy”*. More concerned with the job than the individuals. Statements like *“there was no personality, just you were told*



to do X, Y or Z" (Interviewee 4), "*she was notoriously bossy*" (Interviewee 3), and "*this has to be done at this time because I said so*" (Interviewee 2). It seems that these managers were more concerned with managing tasks than connecting with their staff, which illustrates the beliefs of Khan (2016) where managers concentrate on working environment while it is leaders that focus on employees.

### 5.3.3 Ego

The pilot interviewee said that ego results in a leader "*being dismissive*" which is "*a huge factor in being an ineffective leader*". This echoed throughout interviewee's 3,4,5, and 6. Ego was a distinct issue with superior ego associated with alienation of staff. Interviewee 3 said "*people don't respond well to people who feel that they're superior*". While interviewee 4 spoke about ineffective leaders being people with "*an opinion of themselves that was a lot higher than they should have been.*" Again interviewee 5 examined ego from the perspective of holding the whole company back, which in his opinion is ineffective leadership. This demonstrates how this leader examines the big picture in business, which may explain why he runs a whole division within an American corporation in Europe. Interview 6, said ego "*it's not good, it's not a healthy way of being a manager, of managing people.*"

### 5.3.4 Blame

Blame arose as a subtheme under ineffective management. Interviewee 1 spoke in-depth of a manager that "*blamed*" mistakes on other people. Every mistake was a "*problem*" which created a "*scary work environment*". It resulted in people feeling unsupported. While Interviewee 6 had her boss in construction try to "*push the blame*" of money going missing on to her. The pilot interviewee states, "*I think poor leadership occurs when you begin to blame people that work for you*" and "*I have worked with people who have blamed everybody but themselves for the mistakes that were made*". The mention of "*unapproachable*" managers that "*blame*" their staff allows us to draw the conclusion that the interviewees had experienced working with ineffective leaders.

## 5.4 Communication

Communication was an important issue in all interviews with interviewees agreeing that good communication is "*key*" (Interviewees 1, 6). Phrases like "*being able to understand people's communication styles is really important*" (Interviewee 3), and

*“Whatever style leadership you have, communication is the blood that makes that happen”* (Interviewee 6). We can conclude that the interviewees are aware of the importance of communication. But only 4 of the leaders mention the importance of listening. The irony here is that the researcher found Interviewee 5 did not answer questions that was asked, and it took a number of iterations before the questions asked were considered. However, the interviewee did demonstrate self-awareness, in fact at one stage he did admit *“I don't listen enough, that's my thing I need to listen more”*. The researcher would agree and was impressed that he was aware of this trait and openly admitted it.

Interviewee 3 spoke about the Michael Jordan (Netflix, 2020) documentary. Some would see his style of leadership as a *“tyrant”* on the court, *“he would push and push and push”* (interviewee 3). Interviewee 3 said that maybe he communicates in that manner as his team *“had someone who was unwilling to participate to their full extent”*. Whether he would be considered a bully comes down to *“how it's perceived by the individual receiving that treatment”* (Interviewee 3). Yet the researcher has watched that documentary and found Michael Jordan's style too harsh to watch at times (Netflix, 2020). Maybe this behaviour is accepted more in certain environments as it is similar to a head chef with whom the researcher worked. The head chef was in a fine dining restaurant and he wanted the best, comparable to Michael Jordan. Is it the goal that allows people to condone such leadership?

## 5.5 Trust

The consensus of the cohort about building trust with employees was to *“get to know them on a personal level”* (Pilot). This finding rose in the pilot interview and then kept emerging throughout interviews 1 – 5. Interviewee 2 said *“Try and connect with them on a personal level”* as this will build trust. Interviewee's 1 and 3 admitted to training new staff. Interviewee 1 states *“Try to get to know them a little bit, try and do the training as much as I can, myself.”* This is so he can build a strong bond with them and new employees learn that their manager wants to *“invest time”* in them. While interviewee 3 said *“I am the person to train them, so I have the chats, maybe share some information about myself or some anecdotes.”* This is so employees know she *“isn't some scary manager who you can't talk to.”*

Most of the leaders (Pilot, 4, 5, 6) spoke about trusting the employees to do their jobs. The pilot interviewee said *“You have to trust the individual. I don't believe in babying anybody. I don't believe in micromanagement. I believe that's often the road to miscommunication.”* While interviewee 4 does not believe in micromanagement, he stated *“you can't micromanage yourself even. I think that can be detrimental.”* As stated above interviewee 5 is not a micromanager, while Interviewee 6 stated *“you can't be breathing over employees either. You have to allow them to grow within your business.”* There is a common pattern present that micromanagement can be detrimental to the employee, the leader, and the trust.

However, it was interviewee 6 that highlighted an intriguing perception about new employees. She said *“They're all wonderful when they walk into you in your office. When you interview them. After I've noticed probably going into the next week, that's when you really see the real person. Because they start to let their guard down.”* She did not address building trust with employees, instead she maintained as *“an employer you're always on.”* This is significant as it may suggest that there is a lack of trust present because of previous experiences. Hence her statement *“look, a lot of the time the people have been amazing. But I've had some quite difficult people, to say the least.”* The *“always on”* comment reflects an awareness of the position of a leader, that they are observed with a level of scrutiny by the followers (Fleming and Delves, 2017; McCall, 2017).

## 5.6 Stress

Stress arose in the findings in two different scenarios: stress on the leaders and stress on the employees. In relation to the leaders, the pilot states *“you shouldn't be stressed, if you're panicked, The team becomes panicked.”* This was reiterated by Interviewee 1 saying *“The team might be stressed out, if the team are very stressed, if you're stressed, it just contributes more to the stress.”* Interviewee 2 said *“if I felt stressed that didn't impact my staff, I try and hide it from them. I wouldn't like to let them know because I wouldn't want the whole team to be stressed over something that was my problem.”* Considering this evidence, we can conclude that the leaders are very aware of not affecting their staff with their own stress.

While other interviewees spoke about stress in relation to their staff. Interviewee 3 said *“I try to make sure people don't get overwhelmed.”* She stated clearly that she

believes that *“the job at hand is important, but it is all manageable and needs to be manageable and it won't get done if people are overwhelmed and stressed.”* Interviewee 5 speaks about an experience of giving an employee advice as she *“was stressed out of her head”* about a home situation. All these factors allow us to conclude that these leaders are aware of the impact of stress upon their employees and their productivity. Hence, they protect and assist their employees to manage stress to maintain productivity, so we can conclude that this is effective leadership.

All the leaders addressed helping employees in any distress or unhappiness. Most of them spoke about being the first contact if an employee was having an issue, the leader would assist in finding a solution. The pilot interviewee said *“I believe that you should be able to spot when somebody is unhappy. And obviously, there's really simple tell-tales, we all know when somebody's unhappy.”* Interviewee 1 said *“I think it's very important as a manager to kind of be able to predict these things.”* He admitted to examining their workload and offering the person a day off to *“relax and come back to me.”* This is to give them *“space to kind of recharge their batteries.”* Both interviewee 2 and 3 also said that they would examine the *“workload”* to help the employees. Interviewee 4 said that *“they would often come to me”* as he is very *“straight up”* when talking through issues. More solutions were given from the top managers like interviewee 5 will talk through issues as *“you want to actually help”* and Interviewee 6 spoke of paying for a *“couple of therapists”* to help the person if necessary.

## 5.7 Retention

This theme was extremely interesting because when asked if the leaders make a conscious effort to retain staff, the researcher was expecting a resounding yes. But that was not the case as 3 out of the 7 interviewees said *“no”*. Most of the leaders (Pilot, 1, 5, 6) that said yes were in the higher management area. Both top level interviewees valued staff, interviewee 6 who runs her own business said, *“Without a doubt, it's one of the major things.”* She stated that *“people don't work for me; they work with me.”* and that *“the turnover staff isn't high.”* While interviewee 5 who runs a large division emphasised *“oh yeah, of course.”* Within his two years in the company, no one has left. He has successfully retained all his staff. The pilot interviewee states that *“I've worked very hard to make sure that people have stayed”*. In the animation business, it can be quite difficult to *“find people that are good, it's incredibly difficult to get them*

*to come back because other companies know how good they are.”* So, his competitive industry pushes him to retain staff. Interviewee 1 was the only middle manager that said he works on retention, *“we don't get paid very well. It's a very competitive environment. So, we have to look at alternatives to keep the staff.”*

However, amongst the remaining participants phrases like *“So retaining staff hasn't really been part of my remit because it's always been more the higher management”* (Interviewee 3) and *“I wouldn't consciously do anything to make them stay there.”* (Interviewee 2). Yet Interviewee 2 admitted she has not had *“any staff move teams or leave the company, not on my team anyway.”* Maybe it is an issue she has yet to face. Interviewee 4 answered one word, which was *“no”*. However, he then proceeded to explain that *“you want to keep them on because trying to train new people up is difficult.”* These findings resonated with the interviewer. In probing further, it did seem as if while consciously these individuals did not explicitly work on retaining staff, that subconsciously they were aware of its importance. Collectively, they all spoke about being approachable. Another consideration worth noting is these leaders were middle management, and as such considered staff retention the onus of the company rather than them as individuals.

## 5.8 Interesting findings

When asked about a person they admired for leadership, the most prominent traits spoken about were *“supportive”* (Interviewee 1, 2, 3), *“honesty”* (Pilot, 4) and *“communication”* (5,6). These traits impacted the leaders as they hoped to emulate the same. Phrases like *“I hope that I'm the same”* (Interview 2) as the person they admired for effective leadership, which was also stated by Interviewee 3 and 4. Interviewee 1 is considering leaving management as the position can be hard, *“you have the responsibility of dealing with a team. It's quite difficult to deal with sometimes”*. He is the youngest of the interviewees, being mid-twenties and in middle management. He expressed a desire to take a little break and see if he wants to return in the future.

Interviewee 6 was the only person who spoke about dealing with an ineffective employee, that factor along with how she spoke about trust, these unique perceptions came from the only leader who owes her business. She admitted to *“screaming”* and *“shouting”* at the employee but because she was *“pushed”*. She *“had to go away and work”* on herself and use it as a *“big lesson”* to be more objective in future. Admitting

this incident gave us an example that leaders can make mistakes which may display ineffective leadership. There was disappointment and regret in her voice, but she chose to learn from the experience.

This research also examined the HR aspects of the companies. The American multinational has “*a formalised HR Department*” (Interviewee 5) and they had quarterly evaluations with employees. The leader spoke about getting feedback in the form of a 360 review, basically people from different levels of the company gave anonymous feedback on his performance. Two companies do not have a HR department, Interviewee 3 said there is just the managing directors. While Interviewee 6 spoke about having “*a retainer with an outside HR company*” since dealing with her ineffective employee. Interviewee 4 admitted they had a HR department however they “*are quite oblivious to the function*” of his department, so they remain separate. Which was like Interviewee 2, she “*wouldn't know*” about HR. The pilot interviewee spoke about connecting with HR, “*I often think it's really important that your HR department know how your management feel about the staff.*”

Inhouse training is provided by the HR department in the company of interviewee 1, which is like interviewee 3, 4, and 5. They view upskilling and education as vital. There is no training in the workplaces of Interviewee 2 and 6. Interviewee 2 spoke about when she joined the company she was “*kind of thrown into the deep end and expected to swim.*” A majority of the leaders (Pilot, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) agreed that more training is required, whether it is to address “*ever changing political correctness*” (Pilot interviewee) or “*for people management side of things to understand how to deal with perhaps difficult situations like grieving*” (Interviewee 3). Interviewee 5 said training in Ireland is “*just appalling by comparison to the multinational companies.*” While Interviewee 1 spoke about requiring training in different leadership styles, “*it's good to understand the different styles of leadership that people can have.*” He believes it will help people recognise if they have any ineffective traits and possibly improve their own style.

## 5.9 Conclusion

The interviewees spoke with openness within their own psychological mindset, this is supported by their willingness to take part. They could identify different styles of leadership and describe which traits are attributed to the different styles. They were

highly aware of integrating what qualities that they liked and admired among their peers, for example strong communication, trust, and approachability into their own styles. They recognised the negative impact of ego, unapproachability and blame on employees. This leads us to conclude that the participants are effective leaders. Perhaps ineffective leadership can be a positive as it teaches people what traits to avoid. Interviewee 6 stated about the time that she was bullied, “*it was one of the best times because it shows me of how I would never treat another person that I'm managing*”. Now we shall consider the findings considering the literature reviewed so far.

## 6 CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

The results of this research are threefold. First, the findings add important new dimensions to our understandings about leadership and specifically ineffective leadership within the Irish services sector.

### 6.1 Effective Leadership

This study concurs with Yan *et al.* (2014) and Avolio and Gardner (2005) concerning the importance of openness as a trait of effective leadership. Most of the leaders in this study explicitly used the word “*openness*” which indicate the necessary transparency that Cutler (2014) stipulates to build trust. Hadian Nasab and Afshari, (2019) recognise that a high level of trust, positive feelings and optimism is developed among authentic leaders and followers. Again, this aligns to the findings in this study whereby one participant (interviewee 5) referred to improved productivity by his team in the last two years. This also accords with Hadian Nasab and Afshari, (2019) hypothesis that authentic leadership has a significant effect on employee performance.

Interviewee 2 admitted to not having anyone leave her team and Interviewee 6 spoke about having a low turnover of staff. Also, Interviewee 5 has not had anyone leave in his two years as their leader. All these answers support the finding of Hadian Nasab and Afshari, (2019) that authentic leadership has a significant effect on organisational commitment. Due to the lack of available information, the results cannot confirm if the leadership style was directly related to employees’ job satisfaction. This is similar to study one of Braun *et al.*, (2018), however, their results were diluted which led them to believe that authentic leadership was not directly related to an employee’s job satisfaction. Thus, if we recognise the statement of George and Zakkariya, (2015) that employees with low satisfaction are more likely to quit, we could speculate that the leaders’ employees do possess some level of job satisfaction, but this would warrant further in-depth analysis.

### 6.2 Ineffective Leadership

The results from this research suggest that what the leaders perceive as ineffective leadership is a manager that lacks approachability and support. For some participants, anger and discomfort was evident, particularly when participants reflected upon their own experiences. Such experiences led them to have very specific understandings about the deep-rooted negative effects of abusive leadership. For example, Interviewee



2 supports the findings and hypotheses of Pyc *et al.*, (2017) and Tepper, (2000). She considered requesting to move teams and said that her manager's negative style would make her reconsider staying with the company. Her intentions were seen as in line with Jha (2019) and Pyc *et al.*, 's (2017) quantitative research that found data that fully supported a hypothesis that abusive supervision would be related to employees' outcomes including an intention to quit. Also, her description of being treated as a robot adds to the existing evidence of Tepper (2000) proving the hypothesis that "*subordinates justice perceptions will mediate the relationship between abusive supervision and the employee's voluntarily leaving their jobs*" (Tepper, 2000, p. 180).

Interviewee 6's voluntary information of anxiety that she experienced in previous jobs is important as it confirms the findings of Mullen *et al.* (2018) that there is a direct negative relationship between abusive leadership and employee psychological health. This is consistent with what has been found in previous research by Uysal (2019) that a toxic leader influences an employee's job stress levels. While Interviewee 3's clear example of laissez-faire leadership style having a negative effect on the team supports the results of Skogstad *et al.* (2014) that this style can have a substantial negative impact on employees feeling unsupported. Laissez-faire may have an effective role in the medical profession (Pahi and Hamid, 2016), but based on Interviewee 3's experience, it has an ineffective role in the service sector.

### 6.3 Traits of ineffective leadership that emerged

Ego and blame emerged when the interviewees spoke about ineffective leadership. Ego is to consider yourself the greatest and that you have nothing left to learn. Ego is what makes a person believe that they are superior to others (Holiday, 2016). To lead an authentic life and leadership, a person needs to put their ego aside (Holiday, 2016). This is quite prominent in the interviewees' belief that ego can alienate the staff. These results contradict the claims of Chou (2018) that participants assessed ineffective leaders as possessing more power and were better leaders. Chou's (2018, p. 638) research investigated the effect of a criticising role known as "*naysaying*" against a supportive role known as "*cheerleading*". The participants were willing to accept negative leadership as it appears more powerful. This links back to the admiration that Interviewee 3 had for Michael Jordan's abusive style of leadership (Netflix, 2020). However, it is beyond the scope of this study to be able to present a more concrete

assessment on ego. Future research should consider the power and egos of leaders to carry out a more thorough analysis.

Blame was also seen as a negative trait of ineffective leadership. These findings contribute a clearer understanding to the research of Lakshman, Gok and Vo (2018). They found that managers across 5 countries who attributed poor team performance to them as a leader will obtain higher perceptions of leadership from employees (Lakshman, *et al.*, 2018). When the manager is prepared to take the responsibility for negative outcomes of their team, they will have a more satisfied team (Lakshman, *et al.*, 2018). We add to this finding by discovering that when managers use blame, they can create scary work environments.

#### 6.4 Objectives

It was clear that leaders' perceptions of (in)effective leadership were very defined, which was our first objective for this study. The fact that they had experiences with ineffective leadership allows them to strive for a different style, a more open and approachable one. These experiences matter because maybe ineffective leadership has a role in the workplace to teach aspiring managers on what traits are best avoided. Interviewee 6 spoke about ineffective communication with one employee. She admitted to screaming and shouting at the person. This mistake though made her address this reaction within herself and showed a high level of self-awareness. Avolio and Bass (2002) state that every leader has the potential to display each style of leadership to some extent. It is the authentic trait of self-awareness that will ensure that the leaders will aim to be approachable. But Interviewee 6 proved that even if the manager attempts to be a positive effective leader, on certain occasions this may falter into ineffective leadership. The fact that she declared that she learned from this incident demonstrates a high level of emotional intelligence. A factor which is said to be a major component of authentic leadership (Miao *et al.*, 2018; Goleman, *et al.*, 2013).

Secondly, this study fills the gap of personal experiences of the leaders that previous research is lacking. The chosen methodology of subjective interpretive interviews provided this research with personal insights into the lives of the managers. Stories of taking time to train new employees emerged as many of the leaders chose to build trust by being personable. Alkaabi and Wong (2019, p.27) confirmed that the relationship

between authentic leadership and trust in the manager can be compromised by the manager being uncivil. But Alkaabi and Wong (2019) findings draw from 3,000 surveys over 2 years with nursing graduates, it focused mainly on the perceptions of the sub-ordinates. This study focuses on the managers and how they build trust by investing time in employees. They gave personal stories that created positive relationships with their authentic style and employees. This supports the findings of Alkaabi and Wong (2019) but from a different perspective, the leader. Leaders who promote informal communication with the employees are more likely to create positive attitudes from them (Kelly and MacDonald, 2019). We can conclude that all the managers interviewed strive for authentic leadership and that they understand how they impact their employees, answering two objectives of the study.

## 6.5 Retention

Thirdly, we investigated the leaders, own attitudes toward retention within their workplaces. While we can conclude that the leaders successful retain their employees by having a genuine style that is approachable as they are aware when an employee is unhappy. Three participants (Interviewee 2, 5, 6) have high levels of retention and two openly admit (Pilot, 1) to working on retention. This leads to the conclusion that the open effective style of leadership is positively related to the retention of staff, which answers the final objective the study. This is consistent with what has been found in the research of Rehman *et al.* (2020) that there is evidence to support leadership behaviour of a project manager is positively related to an employee's job retention. Again, this study focused on large numbers to survey (757 people), which gives a broad picture. Where these results go beyond Rehman *et al.* (2020) study wherein the interviews provided a further in-depth picture of a qualitative nature.

Findings emerged that the managers build trust, and that most of the leaders (Pilot, 4, 5, 6) avoid micromanagement as they believe it can be detrimental to the overall performance. When pairing these discoveries about the leaders' avoidance of micromanagement with the leaders' high levels of retention, we can compare these results to the findings of Quade *et al.*, (2019). They concluded that turnover intentions were higher when there was a presence of higher supervisor-induced hindrance stress, we can verify that retention is higher where there is lower supervisor-induced hindrance stress.

It was a very unexpected finding to discover that the majority of the middle management leaders (interviewees 2, 3, 4) do not consider retention as part of their remit. They openly admitted that they do not consciously work on retention, yet all leaders were approachable and spoke about genuine connections with employees. If employees came to them with any issues, they would all help that person. Foy *et al.* (2019) determined that support from leaders has a positive effect on employees, hence they are likely to feel less stress. These findings are directly in line with the information revealed by interviewees when they spoke about helping unhappy employees in distress. Also, Foy *et al.* (2019) observed that employees with low levels of social support are likely to have higher workplace stress. A similar conclusion was reached in this study, due to the angry reaction of interviewee 2 when speaking about her current ineffective manager. The role of HR was discussed, and it was noted that a pattern continued with these leaders (interviewee's 2, 3, 4). While 2 and 4 admitted that their positions were extremely separate to their HR departments. Interviewee 3's company does not have a HR department. This finding may attribute to the lack of the leader's realisation of the importance of retention.

The main limitation of this study is the lack of employee input. However, it is accepted that all the leaders are effective due to what information they presented about being approachable. One can speculate that employee retention is positively influenced by effective leadership. Yet it remains unclear to which degree that effective leadership contributes to employee retention. Further research is needed to establish the perspectives of the employees. This raises concerns about whether the employees believe the leaders are effective, which would need to be addressed in future employee interviews. Although the limitation of Covid-19 greatly changed the method of this study, the rich information gained from interviews has been invaluable and is what makes this study unique.

## 7 CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

### 7.1 Introduction

This research contributes to the existing leadership literature. In particular it indicates a void in management training in the service sector, especially in relation to the importance of retention. It fills a significant gap in previous studies as it focuses on the managers themselves and their perceptions.

We brought to light the experiences and perceptions of the leaders' thoughts on (in)effective leadership and how their leadership style influences (does not influence) retention. Openness and approachability were the main traits that are effective leadership styles. Both are highly linked with authentic leadership. While ineffective leadership is unapproachable, ego driven and blames others for poor performance of the team. These understandings support effective leaders as they strive to treat their teams with respect, openness, and honesty. Further research is needed to establish if the leaders actually have an effective style, how authentic are they? Future studies could consider the employees' perceptions alongside the employer, thereby allowing for triangulation of the findings across all stakeholders (Creswell, 2009), Such an approach would yield extensive information and allow the research to cross-validate the different attributes of the leadership phenomenon.

We concluded that effective leadership helps retain staff within the Irish service sector. Yet a significant admission surfaces that most of the middle management did not believe that retention of staff was within their remit. Organisations need to be aware of this belief in Irish service sector. Another factor to consider is the role of HR in these companies, two leaders have no practical inhouse HR departments. There was a pattern of an absence of HR in three companies. Human resource management should act as a team with the leaders to ensure the organisation has a positive work culture that is built on a high level of trust. Part of this culture should be retention of employees (Lucas, and Grant, 2018).

### 7.2 Limitations

As mentioned, 2020 was hit with Covid-19 and the impact of this virus greatly changed how this study was conducted. Focus groups or a larger sample size would have been the researcher's original choice, however the pandemic limited the interaction allowed with candidates. Lockdown and social distancing were imposed for public safety,

changing how the data was collected. The research methodology was a mono method approach, interviewing 7 people in total over the phone/via MS Teams. This practical application was the most appropriate and safest way to conduct the research due to the corona virus.

### 7.3 Originality and value

It is important to recognise that previous research greatly relied upon surveys, where this study focuses mainly on the personal input of experienced leaders. It is that free flowing conversation that gives the interviewee more freedom to provide rich information (Walle, 2015) that gives this research originality, value, and depth.

### 7.4 Further research

The association of leadership style and their impact on employees could be examined on a larger scale. However due to the rich findings like managers thinking that retention is not their responsibility, the use of some form of personal interactive tool would be advised. Focus groups within companies that question employees and managers separately at first, followed by a second focus group where both parties are involved would be an excellent method to broaden the scope of this paper. Focus group interviews could provide a dynamic response and evaluate a number of leadership themes, which could be a distinct advantage (Saunders *et al.*, 2009, p. 346).

### 7.5 Future recommendations

Future recommendations would be for Irish companies to establish a HR department that highlights to managers that retention is within their remit. To set up support for the managers to strive for the most effective leadership style and to promote a culture that recognises the importance of retention. Currently, this fundamental influence seems to absent within the Irish service sector. Which may be detrimental towards the success of any business.

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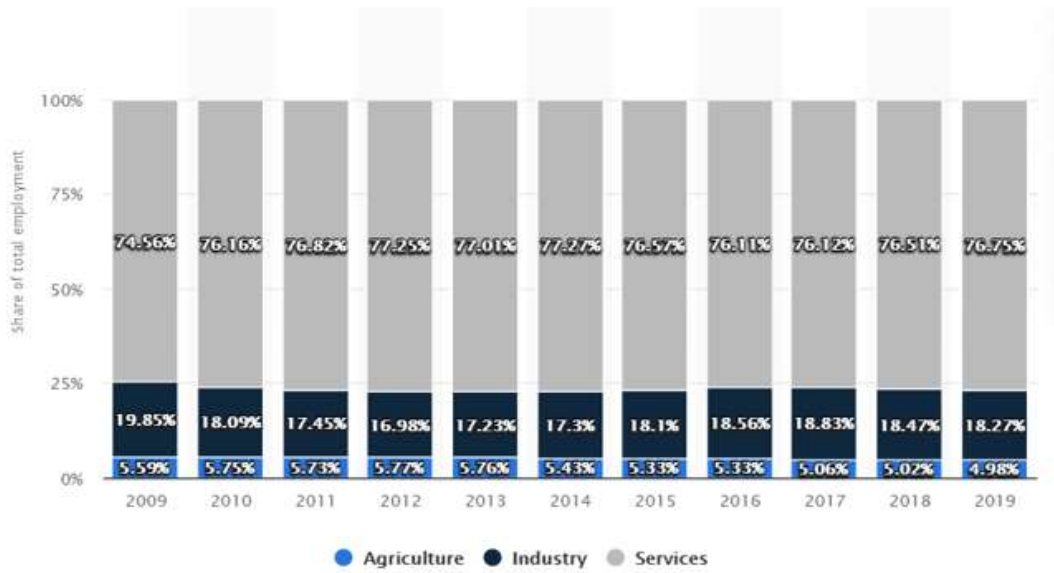
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## 9 APPENDICES

### 9.1 Appendix A

Ireland: Distribution of employment by economic sector from 2009 to 2019

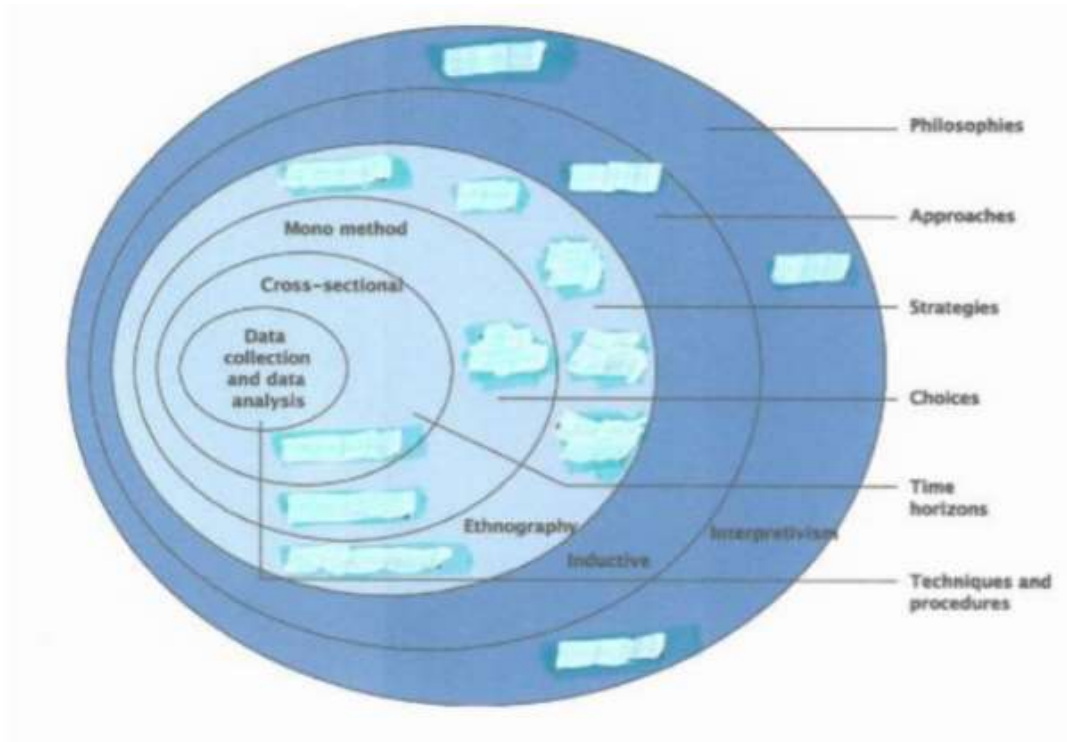


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## 9.2 Appendix B

Saunders Onion – broken down for this study.



(Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2009, p. 108)

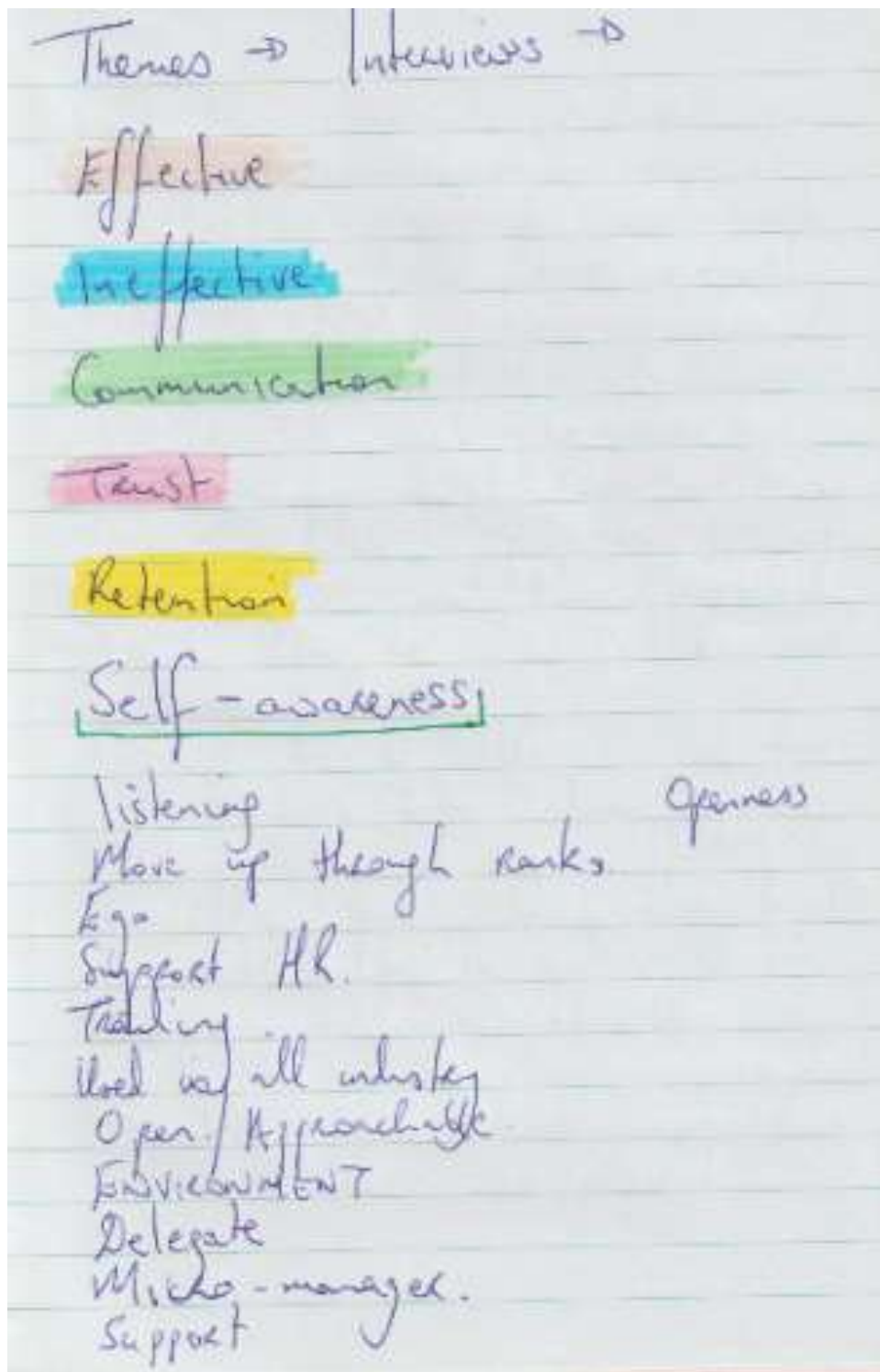
## 9.3 Appendix C

Questions asked in the semi-structured interviews.

- What has been your path to leadership? What positives do you recall? What difficulties have arisen?
- What traits do you consider most valuable to your leadership style? Why?
- Who as a leader you most admire and what do you like about their style? do you think they are effective? why/why not
- How would you describe your style of leadership with your fellow employees?
- What impact do you think your style has on employees? in terms of motivation, teamwork, empowerment, retention etc.
- Do you make a concise effort of evaluating your style, and how often would you do this? What does this evaluation look like?
- How would you describe your communication style at work? Does it change in any stressful situations? What is the most important communication skill in a stressful situation?
- How would you build trust with new employees? Does this work? How do you maintain trust with existing employees?
- Did you ever have an ineffective leader? What traits made them 'ineffective'? what did you learn from them?
- Do you consciously work on retaining staff? is there any traits of your style that help with retaining staff? why? Have you had support or the opportunity to engage in development around this from your HR team- what tools/training might help with this?
- When an employee is unhappy/distressed or under stress at work and reports this to you, how do you deal with this kind of situation?
- Where would you most like support in terms of leadership development
- In terms of your specific sector, do you feel being a leader and the traits you need are the same/different to other sectors/managers in other industries?
- Does your company provide any training in regard to leadership or is it external to the organisation?
- Any information you would like to add or anything you wish to say about leadership before we finish?

## 9.4 Appendix D

Breakdown for coding, colour coding for sub-themes.



## 9.5 Appendix E

Consent letter sent to all interviewees.

Linda Teehan dissertation research

Consent to take part in research

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves taking part in an interview ranging from 30 minutes– 1 hour long.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in a dissertation which will be submitted to National College of Ireland.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in an audio file in a password coded folder on the interviewers laptop until the exam board confirms the results of their dissertation and for 2 years after. (1 year is fine)
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the exam board.
- I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information. Names, degrees, affiliations and contact details of researcher Linda Teehan and supervisor Corina Sheerin.

Signature of research participant

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Signature of participant Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

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Signature of researcher Date

## 9.6 Appendix F

Sample of coding part of an interview. Page 1

Quiet

huge amount of work to do. So, I need to remind myself then not to go quiet, and to make sure that I'm, I'm being vocal that people can talk to me if they're struggling.

Interviewer: So, you keep more that's the open kind of level headed approach you try keep it flowing through stressful time?

Interviewee 3:

Stress

Yeah, yeah like I try to make sure that people don't get overwhelmed. Because, you know, at the end of the day, the job at hand is important, but it is all manageable and needs to be manageable and it won't get done if people are overwhelmed and stressed. So, I just try to make sure people are taking a bit of a break, that I see, if I see people who are maybe working longer hours than they should of. I would just say to them like look, you know, call it a day. It'll be there tomorrow, don't worry about it and just trying to kind of like alleviate some of the pressure for them.

Interviewer: Yeah. And you're tuned into your team to be aware of who might do those things like overwork the hours?

Interviewee 3:

Yeah, definitely like, because a lot of the time I'm there later aswell. So, if I see them later than they should be I, you know, I'm very aware that they should be already gone home so and even if people are, like, like the way I would go quiet if I'm feeling a bit stressed, I notice that other people might be a little bit you know loud in the morning, and then towards the evening you can tell that the work is getting on top of them. So, you know, just trying to make sure that people are taking enough air and you know that they're hydrated and everything like that because it's very easy to just get consumed by your computer screen.

Interviewer: How would you build trust with new employees?

Interviewee 3:

So usually when I have a new employee, I am the person to train them, so I would kind of just I suppose have the chats with as we're going through the process. Maybe share some information about myself or some anecdotes about the, the job or the team or whatever like obviously nothing too personal. We're just trying to let them know that like, you know, I'm not some scary manager who you cant talk to. So I think like sharing something of myself and my own experience, and asking questions. You know, open ended questions so it's not just a yes and no answer, and to try and let them have a bit of a chat with me so and then I'd usually say like, we'll go for lunch or within your first week or like, we'll go grab a coffee in the morning and just to try and kind of build a bit of camaraderie and then, I think, trust follows with that.

Interviewer: And how do you like maintain that or do you maintain that with your own team, like you say there about going, and having coffee or tea or, or lunch you know?

Interviewee 3:

Self awareness

Yeah, like I'm also aware that not everybody wants to be pals with the manager. That could become difficult if you were pally with the manager. So I generally just say to, like, say if we

Detachment awareness



*Team lunch* } have a group of the team and I'd be like, right you know about we have a team lunch or whatever and if, if people don't want to get involved, then that grand. I would make a point then of trying to catch up with that individual to make sure that everything is okay with them, that they're not feeling left out or anything like that, or understand and be respectful, if they're not necessarily too much into being heavily involved in the team, if they're a bit of an introvert. I need to be aware of that as well.

Interviewer: Do you think it's, it's actually a really effective kind of thing for the manager to train new people in? Do you think that's, like, what do you think about it, essentially? *Like Interview 1*

Interviewee 3:  
I think it depends on the resources. So, in the role that I have had it has been the manager who's trained them but I know obviously in other places they have dedicated trainers and that's their role. For me, being the person who has, every job that I've been able to get to a senior level in or management level, I have started at the entrance level of it, so I've learned the role, and I know the pitfalls of it. So I think that that is a good way for me as a manager to train somebody. Because I don't think from my experience, managers who come in who are just the manager and don't actually know the job, a lot of staff don't actually respond well to them because they think, Well, you know, I know more about this job than you do, kind of thing.

*Interview 2* } Interviewer: So you think it's an advantage if you've trained up to the ranks and you know the roles, but it's also an advantage that as a manager, you know the role inside out and you can train someone new?

Interviewee 3:  
Yeah, I do think it's an advantage. Based on my current, my own experience, but I also know that fresh eyes on something is also really effective. If you've got somebody who can bring new perspective, you know, to the role that's also good, just always being kind of open to learning from the people around you is, is really effective.

Interviewer: Did you ever have an ineffective leader?

Interviewee 3:  
Yes I did. My manager in one of my previous jobs, she just seemed to be very us or them, and was unsupportive if there was any grievances within the team. So if people were maybe raising some issue of a lack of the workload being shared evenly, or maybe people taking advantage of them. Like, other people who are willing to work harder and then they would just kind of like sit back and let them pick up the workload. I just found that the managers that I had in that role, she just didn't really want to know, and they just felt like she didn't support or escalate the query, you know the grievances that people had at all.

Interviewer: Do you think she was ineffective, or did she ever do any kind of things that might've aired on the side of Michael Jordan a little bit like some people could interpret it as abusive or?

## 9.7 Appendix G

Sample of the coding grid created for research.

Themes	Sub-themes	Pilot	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4	Interviewee 5	Interviewee 6
Age		Late 30's	Mid 20's	Mid 20's	Mid 30's	Mid 40's	Early 50's	Early 40's
Gender		Male	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female
	note on voice	enthusiastic	Calm	to the point, shortest interview	Precise, calm	jokey, clear, relaxed	descriptive, uses constant stories, hard to cut across - longest interview	descriptive, open
Effective leadership	Openness	open and honest	very open and laid back	approachable and open	level headed approach	open, very open person		open to staff, door always open
	Approachable	always approachable	sounds approachable	sounds approachable	approachable	keeps himself approachable. Lenient	sounds approachable	sounds approachable
	Delegate	hire - don't babysit	most important	does	does		delegates - he is the dashboard while staff are the engine	
	Supportive	be personable	you support them	empathize with staff	changes daily aspect of work to help staff	don't be afraid to ask questions, if they have a direct issue go to him	give team what it needs to carry out job "and more"	teamwork and communication is key
	Use across all industries	relatively the same	would apply	would - same style in grocery as financial	transferable into a lot of sectors	everything is transferable, read area and deliver slightly differently	definitely, rules of any business is similar	worked in most industries
	about staff		staff work with you	know what support they need	understands how people responds to her, helps get the best out of staff	seniors feel they can go to him to ask for advice	employees are the difference between success or failure	people don't work for me, they work with me
Ineffective Leadership	Ego	a huge issue - dismissive			role might be in a superior position however people don't respond well people feeling superior	opinion a lot higher than it should have been	ego - they hold the company back because their ego is bigger than the company. Leadership doesn't change or evolve with the company	was abused because of a man with an ego
	Unapproachable	admires Gordon Ramsey	created scary work environment	actual manager right now is unapproachable, treats staff like robots	notoriously bossy but causes animosity, doesn't give support	arrogant, unapproachable, authoritarian		if unapproachable you won't retain your staff
	Micro-management	Doesn't believe in it				you can't micro manage yourself even	does not micro manage	you can't be breathing over employees either
	Blaming others	blaming undermines leadership	blame was used	Avoids - no blame culture			no blame culture	blame was pushed on top of her, which was a horrible feeling