

## ABSTRACT

### A Phenomenological Case Study Exploring Rural Hospital Employee Motivation

Corey L. Owens, Ed.D.

Mentor: Tony L. Talbert, Ed.D.

American rural hospitals are in the midst of an unprecedented closure crisis. Historically low-volume, remote hospitals have survived on tax revenue and government programs; however, recent cuts in government funding and declining local property values are forcing many organizations to close. In remote communities located an hour or more away from the nearest clinic or trauma center, hospital closures leave residents with limited, and in some cases, no access to healthcare.

Rankin County Hospital District (RCHD) is located in Rankin, TX, a town of 800 residents in rural West Texas. Three years ago, RCHD was on the verge of falling victim to the rural hospital crisis. A closure would have devastated the community. Not only would residents lose access to medical care, but as one of the town's leading employers, over 100 people would lose their job. To increase revenue, RCHD began offering new services. As intended, these new services increased profitability; however, staffing these new positions has become a problem. One group of employees has taken on most of the new responsibilities, while the other group is content in their current roles. As the

organization continues to grow, the likelihood of sustaining current momentum is low without contributions from the entire staff. To ensure continued progress and meet employee needs, this study examined which factors contribute to employee motivation at RCHD.

Existing research provides a strong base for understanding employee motivation at RCHD. However, current healthcare employee motivation studies take place in large health systems with thousands of employees. While motivating factors among healthcare employees may be similar across regions regardless of organization size, no rural healthcare employee motivation research exists.

Following a phenomenological case study design, RCHD employees representing all twelve departments completed a paper-based survey and participated in one-on-one interviews. Motivation trends surfaced in the areas of leadership, local economy, employee age, job satisfaction, and training requirements. Existing motivation theories, including Maslow's Needs Hierarchy, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and Vroom's Expectancy Theory, provided a solid foundation in examining the findings, exploring implications, and developing a clearer understanding of rural healthcare employee motivation.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	x
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	xi
DEDICATION .....	xii
CHAPTER ONE .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	4
Theoretical Framework.....	5
Research Design.....	7
Definition of Key Terms .....	9
Conclusion .....	10
CHAPTER TWO .....	12
Literature Review .....	12
Introduction.....	12
Healthcare Employee Motivation .....	12
Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation .....	15
Public vs. Private-Sector.....	18
Leadership.....	20
Leadership and Decision-Making Styles .....	21
The Science of Leadership.....	23
Training Requirements.....	24
Training Models.....	24
Employee Age.....	26
Job Satisfaction .....	28
Local Economy .....	30
Conclusion .....	33
CHAPTER THREE .....	35

Methodology .....	35
Introduction.....	35
Researcher Perspective .....	37
Theoretical Framework.....	39
Research Design.....	42
Site Selection and Participant Sampling .....	44
Data Collection .....	45
Data Analysis .....	49
Ethical Considerations .....	54
Limitations and Delimitations.....	55
Conclusion .....	56
CHAPTER FOUR.....	58
Results and Implications .....	58
Introduction.....	58
Qualitative Data Findings .....	59
Discussion.....	83
Implications.....	87
Summary and Conclusion .....	90
CHAPTER FIVE .....	93
Distribution of Findings.....	93
Executive Summary .....	93
Data Collection and Analysis.....	94
Summary of Key Findings .....	95
Informed Recommendations .....	99
Findings Distribution Proposal .....	101
Conclusion .....	102
APPENDICES .....	104
APPENDIX A.....	105
RCHD Employee Motivation Questionnaire .....	105
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	106

## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1.1.</i> Percent of hospitals vulnerable to closure.....	3
<i>Figure 1.2.</i> Maslow’s need hierarchy .....	5
<i>Figure 1.3.</i> Herzberg’s two-factor theory .....	6
<i>Figure 1.4.</i> Vroom’s expectancy theory .....	7
<i>Figure 2.1.</i> January 2017–2019 U.S. crude oil production and projected changes .....	31
<i>Figure 2.2.</i> The Midland-Odessa regional economic index January 1996 through March 2019 .....	32
<i>Figure 3.1.</i> Flowchart showing the impact of employee motivation on the survivability of Rankin County Hospital District .....	39
<i>Figure 3.2.</i> Maslow’s need hierarchy applied to employee motivation and engagement .....	41
<i>Figure 3.3.</i> Phenomenological case study design as used in this study .....	44
<i>Figure 3.4.</i> This study’s interview protocol.....	48
<i>Figure 3.5.</i> Graph showing how often each theme emerges in this study’s employee age data .....	51
<i>Figure 3.6.</i> Diagram showing this study’s data analysis process .....	53
<i>Figure 4.1.</i> Graph showing how often each theme emerges in this study’s leadership data .....	60
<i>Figure 4.2.</i> Graph showing how often each theme emerges in this study’s local economic data .....	66
<i>Figure 4.3.</i> Graph showing how often each theme emerges in this study’s training requirements data .....	70
<i>Figure 4.4.</i> Graph showing how often each theme emerges in this study’s job satisfaction data.....	75

*Figure 4.5.* Representation of a participant illustration showing how job satisfaction levels impact motivation and productivity .....77

*Figure 4.6.* Graph showing how often each theme emerges in this study’s employee age data .....80

*Figure A.1.* This study’s questionnaire .....103

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 <i>Alignment of Research Questions with this Study's Theoretical Framework</i> .....	8
Table 3.1 <i>Alignment of Research Questions with this Study's Theoretical Framework</i> ...	40
Table 3.2 <i>Steps in the Interview Participant Process</i> .....	46
Table 3.3 <i>Alignment of Questionnaire and Interview Questions with Main Research Questions</i> .....	48
Table 3.4 <i>Example of a Codebook Entry in this Study</i> .....	51
Table 3.5 <i>Alignment of Leadership Findings with Theoretical Framework</i> .....	52
Table 4.1 <i>Alignment of Leadership Findings with Theoretical Framework</i> .....	64
Table 4.2 <i>Alignment of Local Economic Findings with Theoretical Framework</i> .....	69
Table 4.3 <i>Alignment of Training Requirements Findings with Theoretical Framework</i> ...	74
Table 4.4 <i>Alignment of Job Satisfaction Findings with Theoretical Framework</i> .....	78
Table 4.5 <i>Alignment of Employee Age Findings with Theoretical Framework</i> .....	82



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAH: Critical Access Hospital

IA: Interviewee A

IB: Interviewee B

IC: Interviewee C

ID: Interviewee D

IE: Interviewee E

IF: Interviewee F

IG: Interviewee G

IH: Interviewee H

IJ: Interviewee J

IK: Interviewee K

IL: Interviewee L

IM: Interviewee M

RCHD: Rankin County Hospital District

TORCH: Texas Organization of Rural and Community Hospitals

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family, friends, and everyone at Rankin County Hospital District for supporting my journey. I would also like to thank Dr. T for the consistent encouragement and guidance along the way. Oh, and Jenn Guerra for always answering my ridiculous questions.

## DEDICATION

To Cody, Carter, and Cai. Thank you for loving me.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

In general, motivation can be described as something intangible, a trigger/drive inside a person that stimulates that person to specific actions or to certain behaviors. This indicates a constant movement; thus, motivation is always directed towards something or away from something. Employees continually seek or/and are encouraged to become better, faster, etc. This implies that there is no final goal in motivation, making it a moving target that is never reached. This might be good for productivity at a workplace, but in a long-term perspective, it can be difficult to motivate employees as their demands for ‘reward/motivation’ continuously grow.

—Zaneta Bernotaite, *Psychological Bulletin*

### *Introduction*

With rural hospital closures on the rise, communities across the country are at risk of losing their only lifeline to healthcare. In the small community of Rankin, TX, this threat is genuine. Located over an hour from the nearest trauma center, Rankin residents could see limited or no healthcare access if the hospital fails to generate new revenue sources. In 2016, Rankin County Hospital District (RCHD) began adding services to help combat these closures; however, a limited available workforce forced administrators to fill these new positions with current employees. Supervisors modified job descriptions, assigned additional responsibilities, and made sacrifices to help ensure organizational survivability. While these changes have increased profitability, a trend in employee motivation has surfaced. One group has embraced the change and assumed most of the additional duties, while the other group remains content with their current workload. Through employee participation, this study explores how job satisfaction, organizational climate, and external factors contribute to employee motivation.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Nearly 21% of rural hospitals are in danger of closing in the next five years. According to Mosely (2019), in states like Mississippi, Alabama, and Alaska, close to 50% of rural hospitals face imminent closure. Research conducted by the North Carolina Rural Health Research Program found that most closures occur in Southern states. “Seventeen hospitals in Texas have closed since 2010, the most of any state. Tennessee has seen the second-most closures, with nine hospitals closing since 2010. In third place is Georgia with seven closures” (Rappleye, 2018, para. 3). In February of 2019, Navigant Healthcare conducted a study that examined “essential rural hospitals,” which serve isolated communities or vulnerable populations. As shown in Figure 1.1, 453 essential rural hospitals are currently vulnerable to permanent closure (Chartis Center for Rural Health, 2020). In a 2018 United States Governmental Accountability Office report to Congress, researchers found that 83 percent of total rural hospital closures between 2013–2017 occurred in states that failed to expand Medicare.

Three years ago, Rankin County Hospital District was on the verge of falling victim to the rural hospital crisis. Low reimbursement rates, low patient volume, failure to expand Medicare, and lack of preparation for impending government funding cuts had depleted the general fund balance. Not only would closure have left an isolated community without access to medical care, but it would also have left more than 100 people jobless.

Like many other rural hospitals, RCHD began expanding the scope of its services to increase profitability. The problem with adding services in rural areas lies in the ability to staff new positions appropriately. In a community of only 800 residents, the workforce in Rankin is minimal. Recruiting qualified individuals from other towns is an option, but

they usually demand higher pay to compensate for travel expenses and time. With these challenges in mind, Rankin County Hospital District staffed these new positions with existing employees willing to add new responsibilities to their existing roles. Since the addition of these new services, RCHD has seen a significant increase in revenue; however, a new problem is beginning to emerge that threatens RCHD’s momentum.

## Rural Hospitals Vulnerable to Closure

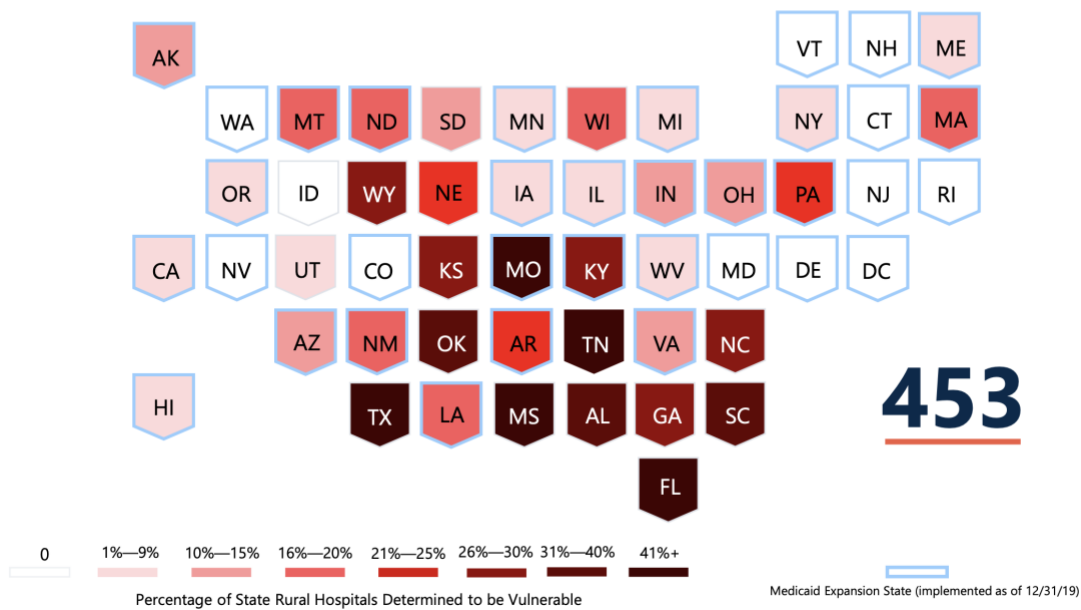


Figure 1.1. Percent of hospitals vulnerable to closure. Reprinted from “The Rural Health Safety Net Under Pressure: Rural Hospital Vulnerability Report,” 2020. Copyright 2020 Chartis Center for Rural Health. Reprinted with permission.

Each time supervisors present RCHD employees with new responsibilities or duties, the same employees volunteer to take on the additional load. These employees are beginning to feel stressed, overworked, and also concerned about their ability to take on more responsibility in the future. Despite pay increases, tuition reimbursement, and other perks associated with many of these new positions, a vast majority of the staff are content

with their current responsibilities, showing no desire or motivation to expand their roles within the organization. To remain profitable and serve the community at the highest level, examining factors influencing employee motivation is necessary.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to understand the factors driving employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District. By examining individual realities through in-depth interviews and questionnaires, a clearer picture of factors impacting employee motivation will emerge. This study will answer five research questions:

- 1) How does leadership contribute to employee motivation? Do departmental managers, administrative staff, or any other individuals in charge play a role in the employee's overall motivation?
- 2) What does the current economic climate of the area lend to employee motivation? Located in the largest oil-producing region in the United States, high-paying jobs are plentiful. Does this create a scenario where money is not a motivating force?
- 3) How is employee motivation directly related to job satisfaction? If an employee is satisfied or dissatisfied with their job, is their level of motivation impacted in any way?
- 4) How do training requirements impact the decision to take on an increased workload? If classes or training are required, are employees less motivated to take on additional roles?
- 5) How does an employee's age impact their level of work motivation? Are younger employees more motivated to take on additional responsibilities? Does employee motivation decrease after a certain age?

Greenberg and Baron (2003) note that for an organization to operate at the highest, most effective level possible, the organizational structure and culture must reflect employee needs. By accurately identifying and addressing needs and motivating factors, an environment that services both the employee and the organization emerges. As a

result, the likelihood of Rankin County Hospital District, or any rural hospital surviving the hospital closure crisis, is much higher.

### *Theoretical Framework*

While several factors contribute to employee motivation, exploring existing theories helps address this study's research questions. This phenomenological study draws upon three theories. Maslow's Need Hierarchy, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and Vroom's Expectancy Theory provide a solid foundation for examining employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District.

Maslow (1943) developed a need-hierarchy theory used in determining motivation (see Figure 1.2).



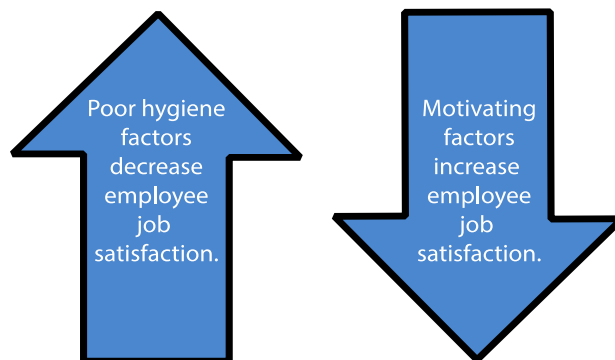
*Figure 1.2.* Maslow's needs hierarchy.

The hierarchy consists of five need levels and contends that each level requires fulfillment before moving to the next. Physiological Needs are the basic needs to stay alive such as food, water, warmth, rest, and oxygen. Safety Needs involve the desire to feel safe or secure in one's surroundings. Social Needs represent intimate relationships



and feelings of community. Esteem Needs stems from feelings of self-worth and respect from others. Lastly, Self-Actualization Needs involve achieving one’s full potential and finding their place in the world. Maslow (1954) suggests that when employees view their needs as a top organizational priority, they are more likely to put forth their best effort. Conversely, if an employee finds their needs neglected, their job performance is more likely to suffer.

Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory contends that motivators and hygienes drive employee motivation and job satisfaction (Herzberg, Mausner, & Synderman, 1959). Intrinsic factors such as recognition, achievement, or personal enjoyment serve as “motivators” and create job satisfaction. Extrinsic factors such as pay, benefits, and job security serve as “hygienes” and produce job dissatisfaction. Herzberg contends that each employee is motivated by either motivators, hygienes, or a combination of both. Figure 1.3 illustrates Herzberg’s Theory.

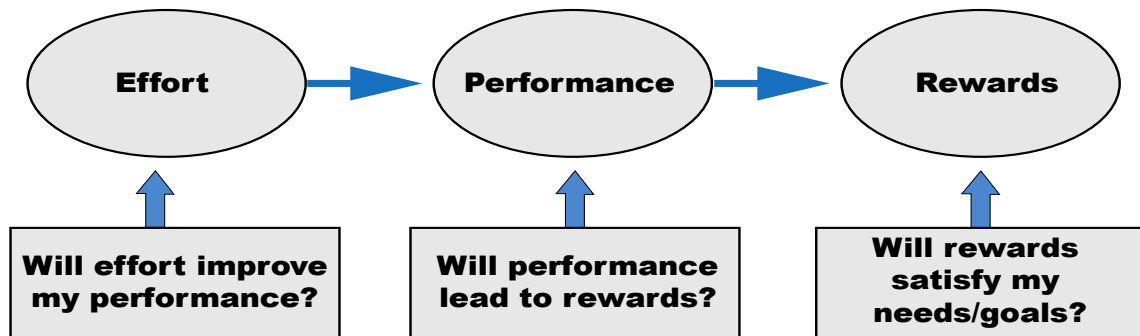


*Figure 1.3.* Herzberg’s two factor theory.

Vroom’s Expectancy Theory (1964) suggests that employees remain motivated if they believe the following three ideas to be true.

- 1) The employee identifies a positive correlation between efforts and performance.
- 2) The employee recognizes that favorable performance results in a desirable reward that satisfies a critical need.
- 3) The employee's desire to satisfy the need is strong enough to make an effort worthwhile.

Figure 1.4 displays how Vroom connects effort, performance, and rewards.



*Figure 1.4. Vroom's Expectancy Theory.*

Throughout this study, the ideas presented by Maslow, Herzberg, and Vroom serve as a basis for exploring employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District. While these general theories describe human motivation at a basic level, they also help understand motivation from an employee perspective. As shown in Table 1.1, this study's research questions align with the theoretical framework. The research question and theoretical framework alignment provide a foundation for the data collection and data analysis portion of this study.

### *Research Design*

This study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological case study design to explore motivating factors among RCHD employees. As discussed by Creswell and Poth (2018),

the use of qualitative research proves most appropriate when a problem or phenomenon cannot be quantified. This study aimed to capture the essence of employee motivation by examining participant experiences.

Table 1.1

*Alignment of Research Questions and Theoretical Framework*

Research Question	Maslow's Need Hierarchy	Vroom's Expectancy Theory	Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory
How does leadership contribute to employee motivation?	How does the extent to which leaders are aware of employee needs impact employee motivation?	How does the extent to which leaders recognize the importance of aligning rewards with effort impact motivation?	How does the extent to which leaders utilize intrinsic and extrinsic incentives contribute to motivation?
What does the current economic climate of the area lend to employee motivation?	In an area where high-paying jobs are plentiful, competition among employers allows employee needs to be easily addressed. Does this impact motivation?	In an area where high-paying jobs are plentiful, do employee rewards align with employee effort? Does this impact motivation?	In an area where high-paying jobs are plentiful, do extrinsic or intrinsic rewards create motivation?
How is employee motivation directly related to job satisfaction?	How does the extent to which employee needs are met contribute to job satisfaction?	How does the alignment of employee effort and rewards contribute to job satisfaction?	How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivators contribute to job satisfaction?
How do training requirements impact the decision to take on a more significant workload?	How does the extent to which employees' basic needs are met contribute to their willingness to take on additional roles or advance their careers?	Does the effort involved with required trainings need to align with the end reward?	How do extrinsic and intrinsic incentives contribute to an employee's decision to undergo further training or take on additional work duties?
How does an employee's age impact their level of work motivation?	An employee's age helps determine their specific needs. How does the extent to which employee needs are met impact motivation?	An employee's age can impact how they view reward and effort. How does this contribute to motivation?	Does an employee's age determine if they are motivated by intrinsic or extrinsic factors?

Conducted at Rankin County Hospital District, 30 employees representing twelve departments took part in this study. To begin, each employee completed a brief, open-ended questionnaire. Next, based on the information participants provide in the questionnaire, one participant from each RCHD department moved forward to the interview portion of the study. Using a note-taking template, audio recorder, and interview protocol, researchers recorded participant experiences and cross-checked data for accuracy.

This study's analysis section began by attributing each piece of data to one of five themes derived from this study's research questions: leadership, local economic climate, job satisfaction, training requirements, and employee age. Next, researchers utilized a coding system to help organize trends within each theme. Finally, ideas from codes were described within the narrative and then compared to this study's theoretical framework.

### *Definition of Key Terms*

*Critical Access Hospital (CAH):* Rural hospital with 15 beds or less that earn CAH

designation through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. This designation allows hospitals to participate in specific government programs that reduce financial stress on rural healthcare organizations (Rural Health Information Hub, 2018).

*Essential Rural Hospital:* Rural hospitals that serve isolated communities with limited access to healthcare.

*Hospital District:* A government taxing entity that provides healthcare services to a community or specific area.

*Local Property Values:* A rural hospital's tax revenue is based on the value of the surrounding property. The higher the property value, the more tax revenue a hospital district receives. Conversely, low property values generate very little tax revenue.

*Patient Volume:* The number of patients a facility typically cares for at any given time. Rural hospitals are typically considered low volume (15 beds or less).

*Permian Basin:* An oil-producing region in West Texas and Southern New Mexico responsible for the vast majority of United States oil production.

*RCHD:* Rankin County Hospital District

*Rural Hospital:* A small hospital that provides medical care in rural communities.

*Reimbursement Rates:* Rural hospitals are eligible for government programs that reimburse organizations for uncompensated healthcare (services provided but never paid for).

### *Conclusion*

As rural hospital closures continue to rise, it is imperative to identify factors impacting employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District. To prevent closure, all employees must be willing to take on responsibilities outside of their normal roles. Guided by the theories of Maslow, Herzberg, and Vroom, this phenomenological case study uses participant experiences to identify employee needs. Furthermore, this research provides leaders with the insight needed to develop effective policies and incentives that motivate employees to expand their roles.

The next chapter of this study explores existing research in the realm of employee motivation. The findings of current studies construct the foundation for employee motivation research at Rankin County Hospital District. Determining how leadership, training requirements, employee age, job satisfaction, and the local economic climate

impact employee motivation provides a context in developing research tools such as questionnaires and interview questions. Furthermore, identifying gaps or deficiencies in current research reinforces the need to examine employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### *Introduction*

The recent increase in rural hospital closures poses a severe threat to the one-in-five Americans who receive their healthcare from rural hospitals (Becker's Hospital Review, 2020). As rural healthcare organizations scramble to remain profitable, the need for reliable, motivated employees remains pertinent. The studies examined in this literature review focus on the unique factors contributing to employee motivation at RCHD. While a thorough analysis of existing research allows trends and patterns in employee motivation to emerge, rural healthcare research deficiencies become apparent. The exploration of current motivation research begins by examining general healthcare motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and public vs. private-sector employee motivation. Next, the review explores five themes derived from this study's research questions: leadership, training requirements, employee age, job satisfaction, and local economy.

#### *Healthcare Employee Motivation*

In general, patient care lies at the center of every healthcare organization. A hospital's policies, procedures, and organizational structure all come back to patient care. Although general employee motivation studies provide useful information, in this particular study, an examination of healthcare employee motivation is necessary.

In examining motivating factors among healthcare workers, Oladotun and Ozturen (2013) share responses to a 59-question survey designed to provide insight into the working lives of 106 hospital employees. Participants include physicians, nurses, nursing assistants, therapeutic and diagnostic staff, and administrative staff. The results identify four specific factors as major contributors to employee motivation: connectedness to the organization, job security, stress, and work environment.

As humans, Raghuram et al. (2001) contend that an employee's connectedness to the organization depends on how close an employee feels to the organization's center. According to Oladotun and Ozturen (2013), "an employee's connectedness to the organization entails their commitment, care, pride, and sense of belonging to the place of work. Employees' commitment to their place of work lies in their belief of the company's values, goals, and strategies" (p.114). Results show higher motivation levels in employees with a strong sense of connectedness to the organization (Oladotun & Ozturen, 2013, p. 114). Similar research indicates that employees long to be part of the organization's community and depend on that organization for support, communication, and friendship (Baueister & Leary, 1995).

Job security creates a sense of stability, allows employees to reach their full potential, and positively impacts motivation (Oladotun & Ozturen, 2013). Conversely, job insecurity creates anxiety, stress, and overall job dissatisfaction, which is unhealthy for both the employee and the organization. Additional research suggests that job insecurity negatively impacts relationships with family, friends, and coworkers (Wiley, 1997).



Konstantinos and Christina (2008) posit that stress, specifically in the healthcare setting, can have a devastating impact on both the employee and the quality of care employees provide patients. Stressed workers are more likely to report overall job dissatisfaction and lack of motivation; however, stress can also motivate some employees. As Oladotun and Ozturen (2013) discuss, some employees use the pressure to perform at a high level as a tool to reach their full potential.

Other research suggests that the work environment (morale and relationships with coworkers and supervisors) significantly impacts healthcare worker motivation. Utilizing a cross-sectional examination of nurses, physiotherapists, radiology and laboratory technicians, operating room staff, and pharmacy staff from two general hospitals, results show that good working relationships with colleagues and supervisors in a supportive work environment positively impact employee motivation (Zarei et al., 2016). Conversely, poor relationships with supervisors due to insufficient management skills negatively impact healthcare worker motivation (Robbins et al., 2013).

Current research in healthcare employee motivation shows strong congruence with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959). Positive motivating factors like connectedness to the organization, work environment, and relationships with supervisors represent what Herzberg refers to as "motivators" and ultimately create satisfaction. Factors shown to impact motivation, such as job insecurity and stress negatively, represent "hygienes" and create job dissatisfaction.

Maslow's Need Hierarchy (1943) also applies to the findings of current healthcare employee motivation research. The "social" level of Maslow's hierarchy suggests that a sense of community and belonging must be present before an individual can progress to

the next level. Zarie et al. (2016) contend that positive relationships with peers in a supportive working environment have a tremendous impact on employee motivation. Applied in Maslow's theory, these positive relationships and the motivation they create represent the individual's realization of the "social" level and ability to advance within the hierarchy.

While existing research identifies a wide range of factors contributing to healthcare employee motivation, none of the existing studies explore healthcare motivation in a rural setting. Additionally, current healthcare motivation research excludes employees who work in non-medical departments such as human resources, billing, maintenance, housekeeping, or dietary. Additional research is needed to understand employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District.

#### *Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation*

Employee motivation factors generally classify as intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivating factors involve being inspired by additional duties, the feeling of recognition and accomplishment, the meaning in tasks, and the desire for recognition by the organization. Extrinsic motivating factors involve rewards such as pay, benefits, retirement funds, and advancement opportunities. By identifying intrinsic and extrinsic motivation trends among healthcare workers, facility leaders become better equipped to address employee needs and strengthen the organization as a whole.

A 2013 Morgan, Dill, and Kalleberg study examines intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors among frontline healthcare workers. In this particular study, nursing assistants, respiratory therapist assistants, social and human service assistants, home health attendants, mental health counselors, and medical transcriptionists constitute

“frontline healthcare workers.” Frontline workers provide a high level of patient care, earn less than \$40,000 a year, and have undergone very little training. Researchers examine employee perceptions of certain intrinsic and extrinsic factors and display responses in a table for analysis through a series of surveys. Extrinsic qualities include financial gain, benefits, promotion opportunities, workload, and supervisor support. Intrinsic rewards include designing job tasks, finding joy in a job’s meaning (is the job meaningful), quality of coworkers, and overall work experience. Results indicate that while most employees surveyed find their careers to be very meaningful, low wages and high workload directly contribute to job dissatisfaction, which causes low levels of motivation (Morgan et al., 2013). Additionally, these results suggest that extrinsic rewards are the primary driving force in frontline healthcare worker motivation.

A 2017 study examines how extrinsic and intrinsic factors impact employee motivation and overall performance. Results show that extrinsic and intrinsic motivating factors vary greatly from employee to employee, with no clear indicator that one or the other create a more substantial impact on employee motivation (Turner, 2017). A similar 2007 study involving public organizations states that “employees want to perform their jobs well, to increase their capacity and opportunity to add value and be part of an effective and humane organization” (Robertson et al., 2007, p. 72). These findings suggest that extrinsic and intrinsic factors need examining when structuring organizational programs.

Berdud, Cabases, and Nieto (2016) examine how intrinsic factors motivate physicians. Through in-depth interviews and 642 statements from participating physicians, respondents identify factors providing the most significant amount of

motivation. Results indicate that intrinsic factors play a considerable role in physician motivation and suggest that organizations should consider intrinsic motivation when structuring employee incentives (Berdud et al., 2016). Suggestions for policy structuring include creating an environment conducive to research and exploration, providing high-quality professional development, allowing physicians to take part in defining objectives and goals, and providing more opportunities for recognition.

Toe, Murhadi, and Lin (2013) examine the correlation between job satisfaction and employee motivation at IBM, a software corporation employing over 40,000 individuals. Based on the responses of surveys distributed to 120 employees representing a wide range of departments, results indicate a direct correlation between intrinsically motivated employees and their willingness to volunteer or take on more responsibility without a change in pay or other rewards (Toe et al., 2013). Further analysis shows that merely adding responsibilities is not necessarily a motivating factor; however, “fostering the intrinsic motivation through giving the employee higher responsibility tasks in the work situation” reveals a significant impact on overall motivation (Toe et al., 2013, p. 148). While this research suggests that intrinsic incentives positively motivate employees, it identifies a need for employers to recognize when employees shift from motivated to overwhelmed.

Existing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation research is deeply rooted in Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory (1959). As previously stated, results show that employees are motivated when given opportunities for recognition, advancement, and a chance to make a difference in the organization (Berdud et al., 2016). These findings align with Herzberg’s idea that intrinsic factors, or “motivators,” produce job satisfaction, which in

turn, enhances motivation; however, results also show extrinsic factors such as a heavy workload and low pay to create negative attitudes and lower motivation levels (Morgan et al., 2013). These findings align with Herzberg's idea that extrinsic factors, or "hygienes," produce job dissatisfaction and cause employees to be less motivated.

Overall, research indicates that extrinsic and intrinsic rewards contribute to healthcare employee motivation; however, existing research fails to account for differences in local economies or recent medical coverage availability changes in the United States. Additionally, current research does not examine intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors outside of the work environment. Rural hospital settings operate in unique local economic situations under different external factors than found among urban hospitals. Further research is necessary to understand intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors in rural healthcare.

#### *Public vs. Private-Sector*

The public-sector employs a wide range of professionals, from utility workers to politicians. Many hospital districts across the United States are also public institutions. These government-funded, non-profit organizations derive the majority of their revenue from tax dollars and other government programs. The private-sector, or for-profit organizations, does not depend on tax dollars or government funding as a source of operating revenue. The following studies examine differences between public and private-sector employee motivation.

Dan (2015) examines differences in motivating factors between 138 public-sector employees and 221 private-sector employees. Using a Likert Scale questionnaire ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," participants indicate their feelings towards

work environment, motivation by authority, motivation by self-esteem, motivation by appreciation, and benefits. Results show benefits to be less of a motivating factor for public-sector employees than private-sector employees. In contrast, private-sector employees show a higher level of commitment to the organization. Overall, these results show no significant differences in motivating factors between public and private-sector employees (Dan, 2015).

A 1990 University of Alabama study explores whether or not stereotypes associated with public-sector employee motivation were consistent with existing research comparing public and private-sector employee motivation. The study begins by examining a stereotype that suggests public-sector (government) employees are motivated by pay, power, and job security, not by intrinsic factors such as job meaning or relationships with coworkers and the public they serve (Baldwin, 1990). A comparison of findings from existing empirical studies over public and private-sector employee motivation confirms stereotype validity. While job security shows to motivate public-sector employees slightly more than private-sector employees, overall, factors contributing to employee motivation among both groups appear near-identical. Furthermore, results indicate no validity to the public-sector employee motivation stereotypes. Additionally, Baldwin (1990) suggests that these stereotypes may be a result of the ongoing contentious relationship the general public has with the government.

A 2010 Peters, Chakraborty, Mahapatra, and Steinhardt study utilizes a cross-sectional design to examine public and private-sector healthcare workers' motivation by asking respondents to identify variables associated with an ideal work environment. Participants include 1,916 randomly selected doctors and nurses from three healthcare

districts, three large hospitals, 20 small hospitals, and 25 primary health clinics. Results suggest that training and career advancement opportunities are of great importance to both public and private-sector employees. Findings also indicate that employee recognition serves as a significant source of motivation and encouragement, with 41% of public-sector and 35% of private-sector workers finding it extremely important (Peters et al., 2010). As a whole, the motivating factors creating an ideal work environment remain consistent between public and private-sector employees; however, each variable's importance shows minor differences from organization to organization. With this in mind, Peters et al. (2010) suggest that supervisors should develop plans and policies based on their organization's unique needs rather than structuring policies based on the findings of more extensive studies.

Studies show few differences between public and private-sector employee motivation; however, current research does not account for government funding cuts, declining local property tax values, or other situations that threaten an organization's survivability. It remains unclear as to how an uncertain organizational financial future impacts public and private-sector employee motivation. Research exploring motivating factors among financially-fragile public and private institutions would be most helpful in this study.

### *Leadership*

Leadership plays a crucial role in the success of healthcare organizations. Tasked with ensuring employees provide quality healthcare, managers and supervisors provide the primary source of employee support. With leaders serving as a direct link between

facility goals and employees, the review of studies exploring the impact of leadership on healthcare employee motivation is crucial to this study.

A 2014 study examines the impact of leadership on nursing staff motivation and the subsequent relationship to burnout. Papathanasiou et al. (2014) define leadership as “the process of influencing the actions and behavior of individuals from their leader so voluntarily and spontaneously work together to achieve their goals” (p. 407). “Burnout” can be described as a lack of motivation due to the physical, emotional, and mental demands of specific tasks. Results show that leadership from head nurses has a significant impact on nursing staff motivation. Additionally, findings suggest that nursing staff members derive a vast majority of their overall confidence and empowerment from head nurses, which directly results in nursing burnout (Papathanasiou et al., 2014). Cherniss (1980) contends that poor leadership is a direct cause of burnout in healthcare professionals. Conversely, Rousseau and Tijorwala (1999) posit that leadership built upon loyalty, inclusive decision-making, and constructive feedback has a significant positive impact on healthcare employee motivation and helps prevent burnout.

#### *Leadership and Decision-Making Styles*

A 2016 mixed-methods study in a private chemical company explores the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation (Algahazo & Al-Anazi, 2016). The survey portion of the study utilizes 60 employee participants from two departments, while the focus group portion consists of ten more employees who provide verbal feedback on the survey results (Algahazo & Al-Anazi, 2016). While unrelated to medicine, this study’s centers around leadership styles commonly used by healthcare leaders.



Alghazo and Al-Anazi (2016) focus on two main leadership styles commonly used by organization leaders. Transactional leadership occurs when the individual in charge rarely interacts with employees and expects the performance every time. Supervisors who practice Transactional Leadership rarely, if ever, motivate employees or promote the idea of growth within the organization (Alghazo & Al-Anazi, 2016). Conversely, Transformational Leadership is completely employee-centered. Supervisors who practice Transformational Leadership continually provide support and motivate employees to reach their full potential.

After analyzing leadership styles, Alghazo and Al-Anazi (2016) examine four common decision-making styles. First, the Autocratic method occurs when the individual in charge makes the decisions without input from others. Second, the Consultation method occurs when the leader makes decisions after first discussing details with their employees. Third, joint decision-making happens when the leader and the employees share equal representation. The fourth method, delegation, occurs when the leader gives complete decision-making power to an employee (Alghazo & Al-Anazi, 2016).

Results indicate that leaders who practice Transformational Leadership and use the Consultation and Joint methods of decision-making positively impact employee motivation. Conversely, those who practice Transactional Leadership and use the Autocratic process of decision-making negatively impact motivation. Additionally, employees report being motivated by supervisors who put employees' needs before their own. Overall, results suggest that supervision focused on creating a supportive, inspirational work environment is a critical component in employee motivation.

## *The Science of Leadership*

Rock and Schwartz (2006) examine human nature and behavior as a basis for providing effective leadership and motivating employees.

Managers who understand the recent breakthroughs in cognitive science can lead and influence mindful change: an organizational transformation that takes into account the physiological nature of the brain and how it predisposes people to resist some forms of leadership and accept others. (The Neuroscience of Leadership, para. 5)

One significant aspect of employee cognitive research focuses on the impact of fostering employee goal visualization. Rather than conducting an inventory of everything an employee needs to improve or modify to reach their full potential, Rock and Schwartz (2006) suggest that managers create a bigger picture of organizational goals, allowing employees to visualize how they can contribute. As Mengesha (2015) discusses, employees are substantially more motivated by leaders who acknowledge specific employee skills and strengths as being a part of organizational goals and success.

Overall, research indicates that leadership has a significant impact on healthcare employee motivation. Additionally, specific leadership styles and decision-making strategies have also proven effective in motivating employees; however, existing research does not explore these techniques' effectiveness in a small setting. In some cases, rural hospitals consist of departments with one or two employees. Furthermore, current research does not explicitly align with the theoretical framework provided by Maslow or Vroom. However, findings do validate Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory in regard to employee recognition. As Herzberg's theory contends, employee motivation is based on either intrinsic factors or extrinsic factors. In this case, recognition from supervisors serves as an intrinsic motivator. Nonetheless, further research is necessary to understand the impact of leadership on rural healthcare employees.

### *Training Requirements*

Organizations continually develop appropriate staff training to ensure employees can effectively do their jobs. Technology, safety, professional development, and new-task orientation training are essential in the workplace. Research indicates that training programs specifically developed to meet employee needs positively impact overall employee motivation; however, training programs that lack structure or clear purpose have the opposite effect on employee motivation (Gullu, 2016). Additional findings suggest that training programs designed through the collaborative efforts of experts and employees participating in the training create a greater sense of motivation among staff.

### *Training Models*

Healthcare organizations utilize a wide range of training techniques based on training needs. Zahra, Iram, and Naeem (2014) examine differences and similarities among eight conventional training models used in healthcare facilities:

- 1) System Model- Identify training needs, followed by developing a step-by-step training plan to meet those needs.
- 2) Instructional System Development Model- Develop training plans based solely on the required tasks of the job or position.
- 3) Transitional Model- Develop training plans based on the goals and objectives of the organization as a whole.
- 4) Training Cycle for Magistrates (Administrators)- Training geared towards administrators. In a precise step-by-step process, the administrator identifies training needs through the careful examination of position duties, employee capabilities, and organizational goals. The administrator then determines the quality or effectiveness of the training before administered to employees.
- 5) Model of the Training Process- Based on training needs, the plan carefully monitors effectiveness at each stage. Evaluation occurs with each step rather than the end.

- 6) The Process of Learning Model- Designed with the idea of developing a relationship between the trainer and trainee to create a positive, comfortable learning environment. Trainers and trainees then work together to develop an effective training plan.
- 7) The North Star Eight Point Training Model- This model centers around the idea of bringing positivity to the workplace. After identifying training needs, each employee receives an individualized plan. If employees struggle during the training, the trainer provides additional help until the employee is confident in the task.
- 8) Bramley's Individual Model of Training- This model first conducts a preassessment of employee strengths and weaknesses, then identifies whether the employee is motivated to gain more knowledge. The development of individual plans increases knowledge and fosters motivation.

In conclusion, results show key similarities between the models, each being a crucial component of effective training. First, the initial step in each model involves the identification of training needs. Next, each model utilizes a designing phase that involves setting goals and objectives for the training. After the designing stage, each model incorporates an "implementation" or training delivery step where the bulk of employee learning occurs. As the final step in each model, implementing an evaluation or reflection tool helped gain a sense of training effectiveness (Zahra et al., 2014).

Researchers identified five distinct differences between the training models:

- 1) The Transitional Approach is the only model that takes the organization's values, goals, and mission statement into account when designing each training step.
- 2) The exact responsibilities of the trainer and trainee are only clearly stated in the Process of Learning Model.
- 3) Employee assistance after the completion of the training is only available in the North Star Eight Point Model.
- 4) Training that involves the simultaneous growth of the employee and the organization is only present in Bramley's Individual Model of Training (Zahra, Iram, & Naeem, 2014).

While no single model shows to be more effective than the others, results indicate that employees are more positively motivated by clear, concise training that helps develop the skills needed to succeed in the workplace (Zahara, Iram, & Naeem, 2014). Findings also suggest that organizational leaders should motivate employees to learn and expand their skill sets. “Before program implementation, trainers should motivate learners to learn for their own and organizational benefits” (Zahar, Iram, & Naeem, 2014, p. 65). By encouraging employees to expand their capabilities, leaders allow employees to reach the pinnacle of Maslow’s Need Hierarchy (1964), the “self-actualization” level. Finally, the thorough evaluation of each training appears to be one of the most crucial components in implementing impactful programs. Organizational leaders determine whether training programs employees and company needs.

### *Employee Age*

When examining variables contributing to employee motivation, exploring how age impacts employee motivation is necessary. While an employee’s age can potentially impact work-related capabilities, age also affects the attitudes and work-related beliefs an individual holds. Identifying age-related differences impacting employee motivation allows leaders to structure policies, procedures, and organizational goals more appropriately.

Hertel et al. (2013) research differences in employee age and motivation level by conducting 25 field studies with over 12,000 participants. Survey questions explore five areas: age and explicit work values, age and person-organization fit, age and congruency between implicit and explicit motives, age differences in stress experience, and age differences in coping strategies and control. Results show older employees to be

positively motivated by emotion-oriented values, while younger employees report being motivated by career-oriented values. The findings also suggest that as an employee's age increases, their implicit motives (nonconscious cognitive and affective processes) and explicit motives (conscious cognitive and affective process) become more congruent (Hertel et al., 2013).

Inceolgu et al. (2012) examine age-related differences in the work motivation of over 10,000 participants. Survey questions explore energy-related variables, intrinsically rewarding variables, and extrinsically satisfying variables. Energy-related variables include coping with stress, working in a competitive environment, fear of failing, profit-orientated work, and personal growth. Intrinsically rewarding variables include interacting with coworkers, interest in work, individual work principles, the flexibility of work-related roles, and autonomy. Finally, extrinsically-rewarding variables include financial reward, opportunity to advance, work-related status, recognition, and job security (Inceolgu et al., 2012). Results show that factors involving job-related competition, power, career progression, and materialistic rewards motivate older individuals less. Conversely, intrinsic rewards such as autonomy and personal values create a more positive impact on older employees' work motivation than in younger employees. Overall, neither group show more motivation than the other, only motivated by different factors (Inceolgu et al., 2012).

Overall, current research suggests that older individuals are more positively motivated by intrinsic factors, while extrinsic factors more positively drive younger employees. These findings align with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which contends that people are motivated by either "hygienes" (extrinsic factors) or "motivators"

(intrinsic factors); however, Herzberg's theory also suggests that "motivators" create job satisfaction and "hygienes" create job dissatisfaction. This literature review does not explore studies concerned in determining the attitudes or level of joy created by any identified factors. Furthermore, current studies involve substantial sample sizes of employees from a wide range of professions. Further research is necessary to understand how age impacts employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District.

### *Job Satisfaction*

A 2010 study interviews healthcare professionals from three large hospitals, 20 small hospitals, and 25 health clinics to understand the relationship between job satisfaction and employee motivation among healthcare workers. After receiving a list of fifteen job characteristics, participants rank the items in order of importance. Results show five job components as the most important in creating their "ideal job:" training opportunities, advancement opportunities, tools to strengthen on-the-job skills, good income, and facility conditions (facility cleanliness, location, condition of equipment, etc.). Three of the top five ideal job components involve training, advancement, and skill strengthening, indicating that, in general, healthcare employees are motivated to reach their full potential. Peters et al. (2010) suggest that these findings indicate a strong relationship between job satisfaction and employee motivation.

To identify specific motivating and non-motivating factors among public healthcare workers, Rad and Moses (2009) examine job satisfaction levels among 814 employees of twelve large public hospitals. Working conditions, loyalty, pay, benefits, recognition, and promotion are all top employee motivators. However, as Rad and Moraes (2009) discuss, in public organizations, pay, benefits, and promotions are often

handled by boards or individuals much higher up the organizational ladder. As a result, managers and supervisors have the opportunity to pay particular attention to areas they can impact.

Managers could make effective efforts in other areas of motivation to improve employee morale and satisfaction. A good working environment is important to most employees. Creating a pleasant working environment with adequate resources and facilities reduces employees' job-related stress and increases satisfaction. (Rad & Moraes, 2009, p. 59)

Of the top reported motivators, the opportunity for promotion was of particular importance to participants and also a reliable indicator of overall job satisfaction.

Employees who have more career advancement opportunities reported higher levels of job satisfaction (Rad & Moraes, 2009). Similarly, recognition and respect emerged as significant components of job satisfaction. Being recognized by managers and organizational leaders for a job well-done, motivates employees to continue working at a high level. Conversely, lack of recognition and respect has the opposite effect. Without respect and acknowledgment of good work, employees are less satisfied and subsequently less motivated to perform at a high level (Rad & Moraes, 2009).

Current research examining the relationship between job satisfaction and employee motivation strongly ties to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959). The "motivators," or intrinsic factors discussed in previous sections of this literature review, are nearly identical to the job satisfaction variables shown to drive employee motivation. Results identify recognition, respect, and advancement opportunities as significant job satisfaction components, which ultimately drive motivation (Rad & Moraes, 2009). The consistent visibility of Herzberg's ideas in the results of nearly all current employee motivation studies examined proves the Two-Factor Theory to be valid and relevant.



Overall, results suggest a strong relationship between job satisfaction and healthcare employee motivation; however, the studies examined utilized more expansive healthcare settings. Additional research is necessary to understand how job satisfaction impacts rural healthcare employee motivation. Furthermore, job satisfaction questionnaires must align with Rankin County Hospital District departmental structures to accurately portray job satisfaction.

### *Local Economy*

While current employee motivation research explores a wide range of motivating factors, the local economic climate's impact on employee motivation remains unexamined. Analyzing regional economic data helps uncover links between the local economy and employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District. Examining the Permian Basin economy and oil-related careers lays the groundwork necessary for research.

### *Permian Basin*

The West Texas Permian Basin is the leading oil-producing region in the United States. A United States Energy Information Agency report shows a daily U.S. oil production rate of 9,200,000 barrels a day in 2018. Of those 9,200,000 barrels, 2,200,000 (24 percent) came from the Permian Basin. Projections indicate an increase of 600,000 barrels a day by the end of 2019.

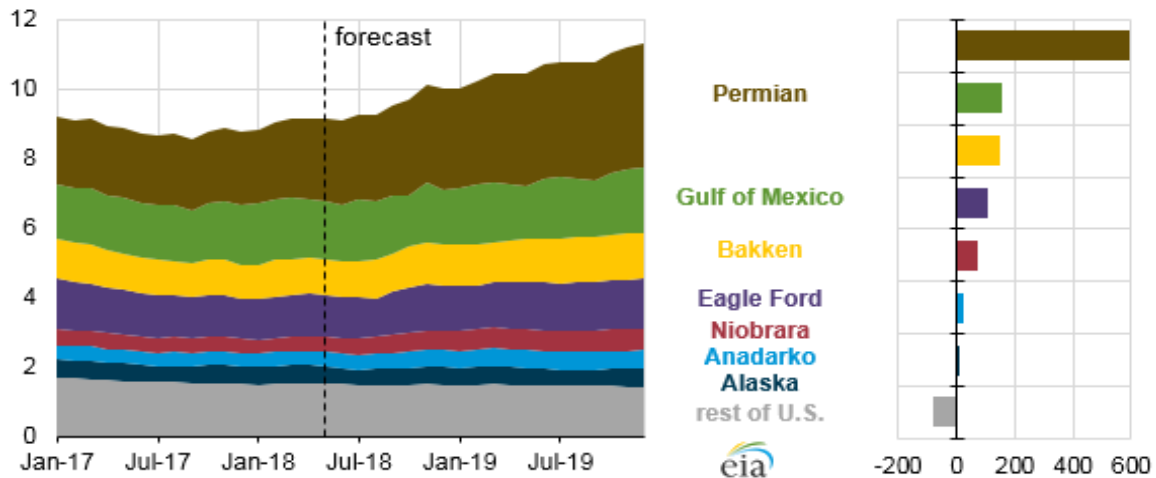


Figure 2.1. January 2017–July 2019 U.S. crude oil production and projected changes. United States Energy Information Administration (2019).

The Midland-Odessa Regional Economic Index examines specific economic factors that indicate growth or decline in the local economy. The elements used in determining growth or decline include taxable spending, dollars spent on automobiles, value of existing structures, average home sale price, residential real estate sales, wage and salary average, and the local unemployment rate. Figure 2.2 shows the economic growth in the Midland-Odessa area from 1996 to March 2019. Overall, the Midland-Odessa economy has grown by 14.6 percent since 1996.

With plentiful jobs and an unemployment rate of 2 percent below the national average, the Permian Basin economy remains consistently strong. Employers pay salaries well above the national average to attract quality employees in an extremely competitive market. According to the 2017 U.S. Census, Midland County, Texas, has an average household income of \$75,815. This average is \$15,479 above the national average household income of \$60,336 and \$18,243 above the state average household income of \$57,572. Only Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and the District of

Columbia have higher average household incomes than Midland County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

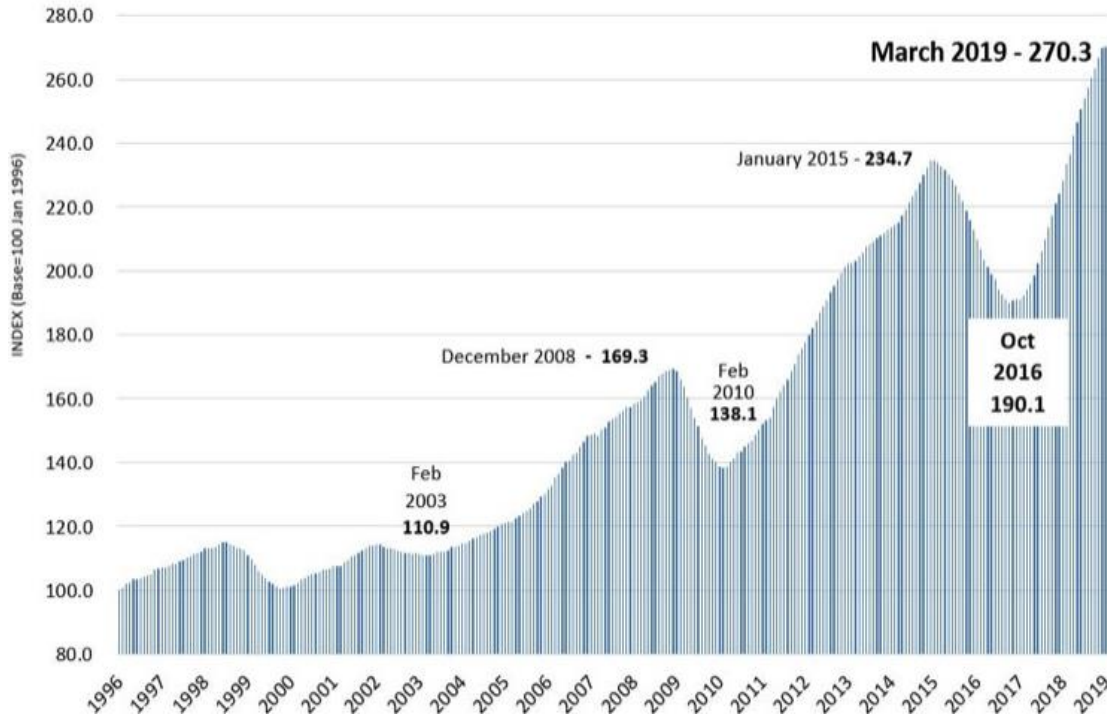


Figure 2.2. The midland-odessa regional economic index January 1996 through March 2019. Midland Development Corporation (2019).

### *Careers in Oil-Production*

A 2012 CNN article investigates oil-field careers and the associated pay. While challenging and sometimes dangerous labor, jobs on drilling rigs show an average salary of \$99,175 in 2011. Drilling consultants see even bigger paychecks, averaging \$235,586, with reservoir engineers earning an average of \$139,868 per year. Oil-field workers with no prior experience show an entry-level pay of \$66,923 (Hargreaves, 2012).

A drillers.com salary survey across all oil-related positions highlights inflated pay in oil-related careers. In addition to manual laborers, the behind-the-scenes oil-related

jobs are also high-paying positions. Training and development managers show an average salary of \$172,980, while accountants and auditors average \$89,090 annually. Oil-related legal occupations report a salary of \$107,730 per year (Janneman, 2017).

### *Permian Basin and Impact on Employee Motivation*

While research exploring employee motivation in the Permian Basin is nonexistent, the area's economic data shows businesses and residents to be thriving financially. The research conducted in chapter three of this study investigates how living in a region of wide-spread, high-paying jobs impacts work motivation. By determining how the Permian Basin economy impacts employee motivation, a clearer picture of forces driving employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District unfolds.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the results of current research exploring employee motivation produce six key findings:

- 1) While intrinsic and extrinsic rewards both impact healthcare employee motivation, intrinsic rewards create a more positive impact.
- 2) Leadership shows to have a significant impact on employee motivation.
- 3) A strong relationship exists between employee motivation and job satisfaction.
- 4) Appropriate employee training is dependent upon job requirements, organizational goals, and delivery methods.
- 5) Employee age impacts which motivators employees find important.
- 6) Current employee motivation research utilizes Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959).

While existing literature explores healthcare employee motivation at great length, several important aspects of this study remain unanswered. To begin, the studies

examined in this literature review use large sample sizes in urban settings. It is unclear as to whether or not the same results would emerge in a rural setting. Next, current research samples do not represent financially vulnerable organizations susceptible to closure. And finally, while the Permian Basin economy is thriving, no information exists concerning how it impacts employee motivation.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) is visible throughout current employee motivation research; however, Maslow's Need Hierarchy (1943) and Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964) never emerge. The intricate, personal aspect of Maslow and Vroom's theories requires an in-depth examination on a much smaller scale than those used in existing research. The overall study design must be appropriate to explore Maslow's Need Hierarchy (1943) and Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964).

The results of existing employee motivation studies support the need for further research exploring factors impacting employee motivation in the rural setting. The key findings and deficiencies of recent employee motivation research create a foundation for this study's research design. The following chapter describes the research tools and processes necessary to understand employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### *Introduction*

The rural hospital closure crises threaten the survival of small community hospitals across the nation. Not only do dwindling rural populations fail to produce the patient volume required to remain profitable, continued cuts in government healthcare funding force rural hospitals to create a solution or face closure. At Rankin County Hospital District (RCHD) in Rankin, Texas, new services are bolstering revenue and improving the odds of surviving the closure crises; however, a lack of employee motivation makes it difficult to staff new positions created through the addition of these services. While some employees willingly accept more duties and new responsibilities, most remain content in their current roles with no desire to take on additional tasks. To survive the closure crisis, administrators must ensure that all RCHD employees stay motivated. This study explored the following five research questions:

1. How does leadership contribute to employee motivation? Do departmental managers, administrative staff, or any other individuals in charge play a role in the employee's overall motivation?
2. What does the current economic climate of the area lend to employee motivation? Located in the largest oil-producing region in the United States, high-paying jobs are plentiful. Does this create a scenario where money is not a motivating force?
3. How is employee motivation directly related to job satisfaction? If an employee is satisfied or dissatisfied with their job, is their level of motivation impacted in any way?

4. How do training requirements impact the decision to take on a more significant workload? If classes or training are required, are employees less motivated to take on additional roles?
5. How does an employee's age impact their level of work motivation? Are younger employees more motivated to take on additional responsibilities? Does employee motivation decrease after a certain age?

Conducted at Rankin County Hospital District, 30 employees representing twelve departments took part in this study. To begin, each employee completed a brief, open-ended questionnaire. Next, based on the information participants provided in the questionnaire, one participant from each RCHD department moved forward to the interview portion of the study. Using a note-taking template, audio recorder, and interview protocol, participant experiences were recorded and cross-checked for accuracy.

This study's analysis section attributed each piece of data to one of five themes derived from this study's research questions: leadership, local economic climate, job satisfaction, training requirements, and employee age. Next, researchers utilized a coding system to help organize trends within each theme. Finally, ideas from codes were first described within the narrative and then compared to this study's theoretical framework.

As Stake (1995) discusses, case studies utilize an all-encompassing approach in examining the complexities of the phenomenon in question. To understand employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District, chapter three examines the researcher and theoretical perspective, research design, participant sampling, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and limitations of this phenomenological case study. Other discussion areas include the use of measurement tools, coding systems, notetaking methods, and interview parameters.

### *Researcher Perspective*

Creswell and Poth (2018) note that the researcher's position, or lens through which they view the phenomenon at the center of the research, plays a vital role in any study. A researcher's life experiences, work experiences, and role in the community help shape their positionality within the research. As the researcher in this study, my evolving, ten-year association with RCHD has allowed me to view the organization from three unique perspectives: as a patient, board member, and employee. Overall, I subscribe to an interpretivist worldview (Carson et al., 2001), which contends that reality differs from person to person based on context, culture, experiences, and timing.

As an RCHD patient, I understand the importance of the patient experience and maintain high expectations during my family's visits. I expect interactions with and services provided by medical providers, administrators, business office staff, and other hospital employees to be of high quality. I also understand that without RCHD, my family and community would not have access to emergency medical care, primary medical care, ambulance services, a pharmacy, a workout facility, or in many circumstances, a healthy meal.

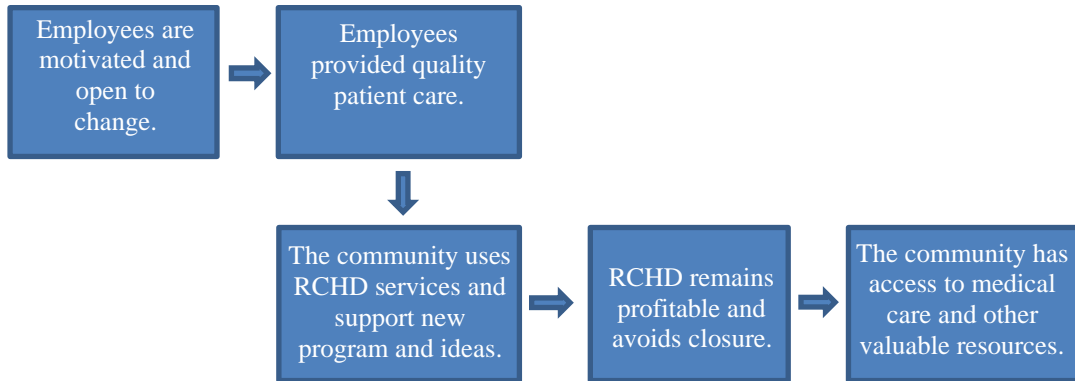
As a former RCHD board member, I made difficult decisions that directly impacted our employees and our community. Examining employee bonuses, incentives, tax rates, medical services, finances, and policy changes were everyday agenda items that required a great deal of thought and discussion. However, the most important role I played as an RCHD board member was that of a listener. I listened to community members who had bad experiences in the hospital, disgruntled employees, and patients who were struggling to pay their bills. I also listened to the community praise our staff,



our employees thank me for their bonuses, and our patients cry tears of joy because RCHD paid their medical bills.

As an RCHD employee, I see the incredible work that goes into making our hospital great. I see talented employees who drive over three hours to work each day because they love their job. I watch employees continually taking their education and training to the next level. However, as the HR Director, I also see employees resistant to change and unwilling to explore new roles. I listen to employees who are becoming overwhelmed and unmotivated from continually picking up the slack. Over the past eight years of direct involvement with RCHD, I focused my efforts on building relationships. “We build and sustain trust through a number of mechanisms, including developing relationships and demonstrating a track record that shows accountability, shared interests, and a concern for the best interests of others” (Horn et al., 2011, p. 839). Fortunately, I have developed a high level of trust with my peers, which supports this qualitative study's data collection needs.

While my experiences as a patient, board member, and employee differ, they lend a rich layer of information to this study that one single perspective cannot provide and quantitative tools cannot measure. Additionally, each perspective informs the idea shown in Figure 3.1, displaying how RCHD's survivability begins with motivated employees. RCHD is the backbone of our community. With the rural hospital closure crises looming, it is imperative that our staff remain motivated and working towards common goals. The positive, trusting relationships I have built with my coworkers, board members, and community members serve as the foundation for exploring specific factors impacting employee motivation.



*Figure 3.1.* Flow chart showing the impact of employee motivation on the survivability of Rankin County Hospital District.

### *Theoretical Framework*

As a basis for examining employee motivation, this study focused on three main motivational theories: Maslow’s Need Hierarchy (1943), Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory (1959), and Vroom’s Expectancy Theory (1964). Historically, the theories of Maslow, Herzberg, and Vroom provided researchers with a unique lens for viewing human motivation on a basic level. However, in this study each theory helped uncover the shared, motivation-related experiences of RCHD employees. The following section discusses how these ideas relate to this study’s research questions, data collection process, and data analysis procedures. Table 3.1 shows the alignment of the research questions with this study’s theoretical framework.

Maslow’s Need Hierarchy (1943) suggests that humans are motivated through five levels of need, asserting that individuals must fulfill the lowest need before progressing to the next. Though referring to human motivation in general, Maslow’s theory is easily applied in the realm of employee motivation, as shown in Figure 3.2. When examining this study’s research questions, specifically how leadership, job

satisfaction, and training requirements related to employee motivation, Maslow’s ideas provided a lens for analyzing the phenomenon at a basic human level.

Table 3.1

*Alignment of Research Questions and Theoretical Framework*

Research Question	Maslow’s Need Hierarchy	Vroom’s Expectancy Theory	Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory
How does leadership contribute to employee motivation?	How does the extent to which leaders are aware of employee needs impact employee motivation?	How does the extent to which leaders recognize the importance of aligning rewards with effort impact motivation?	How does the extent to which leaders utilize intrinsic and extrinsic incentives contribute to motivation?
What does the current economic climate of the area lend to employee motivation?	In an area where high-paying jobs are plentiful, competition among employers allows employee needs to be easily addressed. Does this impact motivation?	In an area where high-paying jobs are plentiful, do employee rewards align with employee effort? Does this impact motivation?	In an area where high-paying jobs are plentiful, do extrinsic or intrinsic rewards create motivation?
How is employee motivation directly related to job satisfaction?	How does the extent to which employee needs are met contribute to job satisfaction?	How does the alignment of employee effort and rewards contribute to job satisfaction?	How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivators contribute to job satisfaction?
How do training requirements impact the decision to take on a more significant workload?	How does the extent to which employees’ basic needs are met contribute to their willingness to take on additional roles or advance their careers?	Does the effort involved with required trainings need to align with the end reward?	How do extrinsic and intrinsic incentives contribute to an employee’s decision to undergo further training or take on additional work duties?
How does an employee’s age impact their level of work motivation?	An employee’s age helps determine their specific needs. How does the extent to which employee needs are met impact motivation?	An employee’s age can impact how they view reward and effort. How does this contribute to motivation?	Does an employee’s age determine if they are motivated by intrinsic or extrinsic factors?

Maslow’s theory also contributed to the data analysis portion of this study. Emerging themes in RCHD employee motivation applied to a specific level of Maslow’s Hierarchy, which allows stakeholders to visualize staff needs and understand where employees exist in the quest for self-actualization.



Figure 3.2. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs applied to employee motivation and engagement.

Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory (1959) suggests that factors influencing employee motivation fall into one of two categories: “hygienes,” which produce job dissatisfaction, or “motivators,” which create job satisfaction. Herzberg’s Theory labels every aspect of employee motivation, including the variables examined in this study’s research questions, as either a hygiene or a motivator. The ability to distinguish which variables commonly contributed to job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction before data collection began helped guide and strengthen this study’s questionnaire and interview outline. Additionally,

classifying participant-identified motivation variables during the data collection process allowed for a smooth transition to the analysis phase.

Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964) contends that an employee's motivation to perform well is based entirely on the reward. In this study, Expectancy Theory (1964) reinforced the importance of identifying employee needs and aligning them with incentives to maintain long-term motivation. Furthermore, Vroom's theory helped answer the two following research questions, which aim to understand if an employee's effort is worth the reward:

- How do training requirements impact the decision to take on a greater workload? If classes or training are required, are employees less motivated to take on additional roles?
- What does the current economic climate of the area lend to employee motivation? Located in the largest oil-producing region in the United States, high-paying jobs are plentiful. Does this create a scenario where money is not a motivating force?

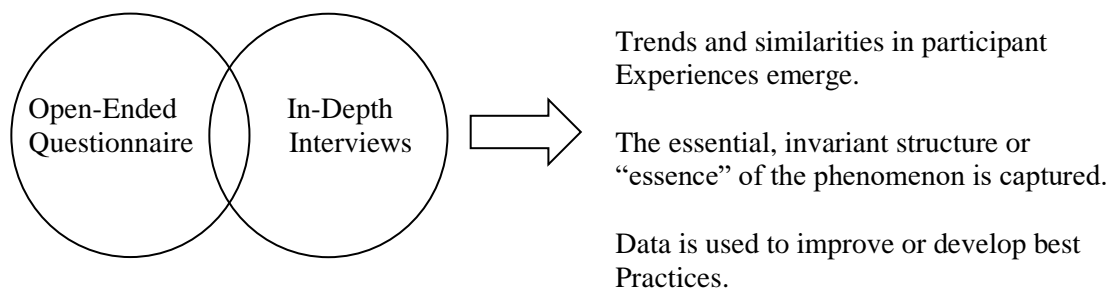
Maslow (1943), Herzberg (1959), and Vroom (1964) provide three unique perspectives for viewing employee motivation. While these theories helped shape the research questions, data collection, and data analysis portions of this study, they also aided in interpreting findings in Chapter Four. Furthermore, this theoretical framework served as a guide for developing recommendations to address this study's problem of practice.

### *Research Design*

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological case study design. As Creswell and Poth (2018) describe, phenomenological research helps understand the meaning of lived or shared experiences among a group of individuals. Using a phenomenological case study design to understand employee motivation at RCHD, allowed for rich,

individual experiences to emerge that cannot be quantified. Yin (2009) adds that in phenomenological case studies, the researcher has little or no control over participant experiences, which also proved true in this study. Ebneyamini et al. (2018) suggests that researchers who utilize the case study design should also consider the setting, historical background, and the social and organizational factors contributing to the nature of the phenomenon. As discussed in the Researcher Perspective section of this study, my history with RCHD uniquely positioned me to incorporate the organization's setting, historical background, and social structures throughout the research design process. For example, several department managers failed over the past five years due to poor leadership. Knowing that RCHD struggled with supervisory issues in the recent past, the theme of “leadership” appeared in the research, questionnaire, and interview questions. Overall, utilizing a phenomenological case study design allowed the essential, invariant structure or “essence” of employee motivating factors to emerge.

A phenomenological case study design proved appropriate in this study for two main reasons: First, this study aimed to understand a phenomenon- the factors impacting motivation among RCHD employees. Second, a case study or an in-depth examination of specific individual experiences is required to understand the phenomenon. Additionally, Creswell and Poth (2018) note that a phenomenological design is useful when conducting research to improve or develop best practices. In this study, determining motivating factors among employees allowed administrators, managers, and stakeholders to align incentives, policies, and procedures with employee needs. Figure 3.3 describes this study’s phenomenological case study design.



*Figure 3.3.* Phenomenological case study design as used in this study.

### *Site Selection and Participant Sampling*

Rankin County Hospital District served as the research site in this study. Overall, RCHD is a very secure campus, donning a state-of-the-art security system and regular on-site law enforcement. Each RCHD department remains separated by electronic, badge-reader-controlled double doors, which helped ensure privacy during data collection. Employees also had access to several other areas that provide privacy, including unused meeting rooms, transcription rooms, and empty offices. Easy access to multiple private areas allowed participants to complete questionnaires in anonymity without distraction. A sound-proof meditation room served as the location for the interview portion of this study. The meditation room, which sits at the end of a rarely used hallway, was only accessible with one key assigned to the researcher.

While most existing research in healthcare motivation centers around employees who provide medical care, the participants in this study represented the hospital as a whole. Some employees work directly with patients, while others operate behind the scenes. Participants represented 12 departments, including Nursing, Emergency Room, Physical Therapy, Maintenance, Housekeeping, Dietary, Ambulance, Wellness Center, Outpatient Lab, Radiology, Business Office, and Administration.

As Creswell and Poth (2018) describe, utilizing purposeful sampling allows the researcher to choose participants best positioned to inform the problem at hand. By using full-time RCHD employees as participants, the reliability of this study increased in two ways. First, full-time employees are eligible for benefits and other incentives intended to improve employee motivation. Second, full-time employees spend the most time at RCHD, which increased both the number and diversity of experiences.

The interview portion of this study utilized a criterion-based, stratified sampling strategy to select participants. Kim et al. (2013) state that “a stratified sample is one resulting from the classification of a population into mutually exclusive groups, called strata, and choosing a simple random sample from each stratum” (p. 186). As shown in Table 3.2, one employee from each department was chosen based on three requirements. First, the participant checked the box on the questionnaire indicating their desire to participate in an interview. Second, the participant provided detailed feedback on the questionnaire. Third, the participant gained full-time status a minimum of two years before completing the questionnaire.

#### *Data Collection*

To fully understand a phenomenon, qualitative researchers rely on several data collection methods to capture the rich details of participant experiences. Yazan (2015) states that “it is incumbent upon the case study researchers to draw their data from multiple sources to capture the case under study in its complexity and entirety” (p. 142). This phenomenological case study used open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews to explore factors impacting employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District.



Table 3.2

*Steps in the Interview Participant Selection Process*

Step One: Questionnaires are separated by department:	Step Two: One employee from each department is chosen based on three requirements:
Nursing Emergency Room	1. The participant checked the box on the questionnaire indicating their desire to take part in an interview.
Physical Therapy Maintenance	2. The participant provided detailed feedback on their questionnaire.
Housekeeping	3. The participant gained full-time status a minimum of two years before completing the questionnaire.
Dietary	
Ambulance	
Wellness Center	
Outpatient Lab	
Radiology	
Business Office	
Administration	

Questionnaires support qualitative research in several ways. According to McGuirk and O’Neil (2016), questionnaires serve as cost-effective, flexible tools that help researchers gain insight into the phenomenon in question. In this phenomenological case study, the questionnaire helped identify the employees most likely to provide in-depth descriptions of employee motivation. This study’s questionnaire asked the following questions:

- 1) In your opinion, how does leadership (management/supervisors) contribute to employee motivation at work?
- 2) In the Permian Basin, the largest oil-producing region in the country, high-paying jobs are plentiful. In your opinion, how does this contribute to motivation at work?
- 3) In your opinion, how do training requirements (professional development, certifications, degrees) influence an employee's decision to take on additional work duties?
- 4) In your experience, how does an employee's level of job satisfaction contribute to their motivation in work-related tasks?
- 5) In your experience, how does age impact employee motivation at work?
- 6) How long have you worked for RCHD?
- 7) Would you be interested in taking part in the interview portion of this study?

Once completed, researchers separated the questionnaires by the department. Employees who provided detailed feedback, noted their interest in participating in an interview, and gained full-time status before completing the questionnaire qualified as interview candidates. Of these candidates, one employee from each of the twelve RCHD departments took part in the interview portion of this study. This sampling method aligns with the findings of Kuper et al. (2008), which suggest that in qualitative research, participants who best inform the research questions make the most appropriate study subjects.

Creswell and Poth describe interviews as “attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 3). The interviews in this study used the information provided by employees in the questionnaire to explore participant

experiences. The protocol shown in Figure 3.4 helped guide the researcher through the interview process.

Exploring Rural Hospital Employee Motivation  
Interview Protocol

Date:

Time:

Employee:

Interviewer:

Employee Details: (*job, department, length of employment*)

Study Overview: *Thank the employee for participating and ensure them that confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Provide the participant with an overview of the study and answer any questions they may have.*

Questions: *(Ask the employee to elaborate on the responses provided on questions 1–5 of the questionnaire. Use note-taking template and audio recorder.)*

*Figure 3.4.* This study's interview protocol.

Utilizing a protocol helps the researcher stay organized, ensures that each interview is conducted in the same manner, and adds reliability to the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In addition to the interview protocol, this study's researcher utilized a notetaking template, an audio recorder to help log participant responses, and a chart, as shown in Table 3.3, to ensure that both questionnaire questions and interview questions aligned with the main research questions. The template, located on the interview protocol document's backside, designated space for each of the five research questions, plus an area to list other details and emerging trends. Upon completing each interview, the researcher recapped responses with the employee to ensure accuracy before data analysis began.

Table 3.3

*Alignment of Questionnaire and Interview Questions with Main Research Questions*

Main Research Questions	Questionnaire Questions (open-ended)	Interview Questions
How does leadership contribute to employee motivation?	In your opinion, how does leadership (management/supervisors) contribute to employee motivation at work?	
What does the current economic climate of the area lend to employee motivation?	In the Permian Basin, the largest oil-producing region in the country, high-paying jobs are plentiful. In your opinion, how does this contribute to motivation at work?	Interview questions ask participants to expand on the answers provided on the questionnaire.
How is employee motivation directly related to job satisfaction?	In your experience, how does an employee's level of job satisfaction contribute to their motivation in work-related tasks?	
How do training requirements impact the decision to take on a more significant workload?	In your opinion, how do training requirements (professional development, certifications, degrees) influence an employee's decision to take on additional work duties?	
How does an employee's age impact their level of work motivation?	In your experience, how does age impact employee motivation at work?	
<i>Question unrelated to research or interview questions.</i>	<i>How long have you worked for RCHD?</i>	

*Data Analysis*

In stark comparison to quantitative data analysis, qualitative data interpretation evolves based on the study's needs. In describing qualitative data analysis, Suter states that “One begins with a sharp, flexible focus, recognizing that refocusing may be required to extract the greatest meaning and most trustworthy conclusions from the data”

(Suter, 2012, p. 350). To better understand employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District, the data analysis portion of this study followed five specific steps:

- 1) Prepare and organize the data.
- 2) Read all of the data.
- 3) Code the data.
- 4) Identify themes.
- 5) Decide how themes and trends will be displayed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In addition to these five steps, the following section also discusses data security and validation strategies used.

This study's participant experiences created rich, meaningful data that helped reveal employee motivation factors. However, a coding system was necessary to organize, classify, and understand the data derived from the questionnaire and interviews. Creswell and Poth (2018) make three recommendations when creating codes. First, each code requires a short, unique name. Second, the code identifies clear boundaries and criteria for code assignment. Third, the codes utilize examples from the study. In this study, five initial themes emerged that guided codebook development: leadership, job satisfaction, local economy, employee age, and training. From these five overarching themes, specific trends surfaced that uncovered details of participant experiences and attitudes. Table 3.4 provides an example of how the leadership was coded. The first column lists the main theme's name. Next, shortened code names of trends emerging from each theme is listed. Next, a definition of each code name is listed, followed by a description detailing when to use the code. Finally, the last column provides an example from the data.

Table 3.4

*Example of a Codebook Entry in this Study*

Trend From Main Theme (Leadership)	Code Name (Shortened)	Definition	When to Use	Example From Study
Poor Leadership	(Poor)	Evidence suggesting that poor leadership contributed to the employee's motivation.	Use when participants indicate that poor leadership contributes to employee motivation.	"Without good leadership, the desire to do more is never there."
	(Morale)	Evidence suggesting that the morale created by leaders contributed to the employee's motivation.	Use when participants suggest that the morale created by supervisors impacts employee motivation.	"Supervisors are responsible for building a positive morale that helps motivate people."

After coding, conducting a cross-case comparison allowed trends to emerge within the data. Using the note-taking template and a simple tally method, the researcher organized the data, grouped the data by theme, then presented trends and ideas in both graphic and narrative form. Figure 3.5 shows an example of employee age trends presented in visual form.

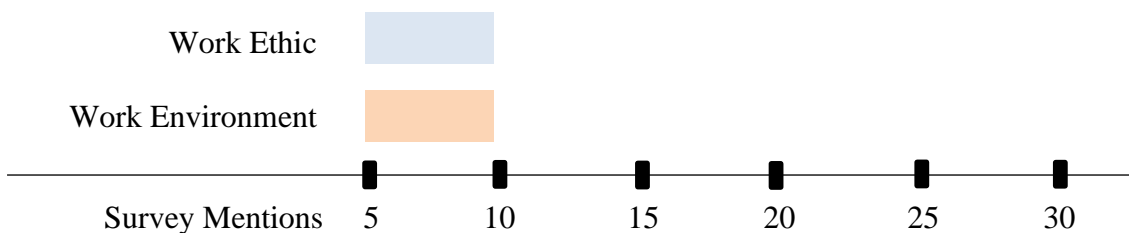


Figure 3.5. Graph showing how often each theme emerged in this study's employee age data.

The final phase of the data analysis process compared the findings to the theoretical framework's ideas. Table 3.5 shows an example of a research question aligned with the theoretical framework, an analysis of the findings, and an example from the data.

Table 3.5

*Alignment of Leadership Findings with Theoretical Framework*

Theoretical Framework	Alignment with Research Question	Findings	Example from Data
Maslow's Need Hierarchy	How does the extent to which leaders are aware of employee needs impact employee motivation?	Maslow's theory proved true in this research. Results showed that when leaders are aware of employee needs (mentoring, recognition, morale management, promoting teamwork), employees experience high motivation levels. When leaders fail to meet these needs, employees keep lower levels of motivation.	"When leaders provide mentorship and promote teamwork, I am excited and motivated to do my job. When leaders do not care about these things, I usually start looking for a new job."
Vroom's Expectancy Theory	How does the extent to which leaders recognize the importance of aligning rewards with effort impact motivation?	Based on participant responses, Vroom's theory was not applicable in this research. Responses centered around specific leadership characteristics rather than effort/reward alignment.	"If a manager is willing to work alongside their employees, is a great communicator, and leads by example, then employees will want to work harder and do more for their boss."
Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory	How does the extent to which leaders utilize intrinsic and extrinsic incentives contribute to motivation?	The ideas presented in Herzberg's theory were visible in this aspect of the research. 43% of respondents noted that recognition (an intrinsic incentive), or lack thereof, increased or decreased their motivation level.	"Good leaders appreciate employees that work hard. When employees are recognized for their work, it motivates employees to do more and improve their performance."

As discussed by Creswell and Poth (2018), "in the final phase of analysis, researchers represent the data, a packaging of what was found in the text, tabular, or

figure form” (p. 196). By utilizing both a narrative and visual structure to display results and then comparing them with the theoretical framework, readers develop a clear interpretation of research findings. Figure 3.6 provides an overview of this study’s data analysis process.

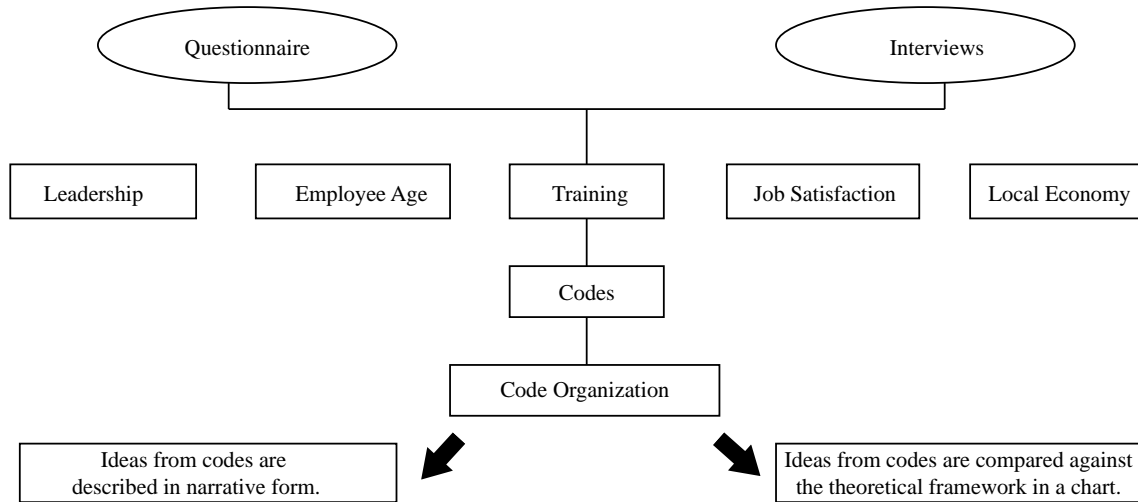


Figure 3.6. Diagram showing this study’s data analysis process.

The use of an interview protocol, notetaking template, and coding system all contributed to this study’s reliability. To ensure data validity, a research assistant confirmed that the researcher's notes match the audio recordings' information. Additionally, the research assistant also cross-referenced the study’s codebook with the researcher's notes. Throughout the data analysis process, all notes, documents, recordings, and other research documents remained under lock-and-key in the central research office.



### *Ethical Considerations*

Qualitative research methods require the researcher to have close, candid, and sometimes emotional interactions with study participants. Sanjari et al. (2018) state the following regarding ethical considerations in qualitative research:

In qualitative studies, researchers have a great responsibility and play many different roles. It is argued that qualitative research that deals with sensitive topics in-depth can pose emotional and other risks to both participants and researchers. Clear protocols for dealing with distress should be in place so that both parties involved in research can use them if necessary. (p. 4)

Safeguards must be in place for two main reasons. First, to ensure the safety of study participants. Second, to ensure that participants feel comfortable describing personal experiences.

This study's research questions asked participants to describe personal experiences that often involved other RCHD staff members. Due to the potential ethical concerns with discussing sensitive subject matter, participant responses were kept anonymous. One research question asked participants to describe how leadership (managers and supervisors) contribute to employee motivation. If a supervisor found out that an employee made negative statements about them or their management style, the supervisor may retaliate against the employee. While this study's other research questions concerning employee age, training, job satisfaction, and local economy did not elicit responses seen as offensive to others, they did explore personal experiences requiring the same level of anonymity.

While this study aimed to uncover employee motivation factors at Rankin County Hospital District, the overall goal of this research centered around improving working conditions and assisting in the development of new incentivization methods. Utilizing

findings for any purpose other than workplace improvement could raise ethical concerns and void employee trust.

### *Limitations and Delimitations*

While qualitative research allows for rich, descriptive data to emerge, the design is not without drawbacks. Small sample sizes, lack of scientific methods, and researcher perceptions can pose challenges to qualitative researchers. In this study, two specific limitations threatened the reliability of the results: my employment with RCHD and the emergence of COVID-19.

As an RCHD employee, I have the advantage of understanding the day-to-day processes currently in place. However, being an RCHD employee also posed limitations to this study. Orb et al. (2018) contend that “The researcher may get better results because of knowing the situation and having the participant trust. However, the known researcher may get less information. Staff members may feel coerced to participate and may limit the information they give” (p. 96).

Similarly, my friendships with coworkers outside of work may have prevented participants from being honest or forthcoming in their responses. For example, I have outside friendships with several RCHD department heads. Their employees may have been reluctant to share specific experiences for fear of their supervisor finding out.

The emergence of the COVID-19 virus also placed several limits on this study’s research. To begin, many hospital areas were off-limits to staff members who did not work directly in that department, making it difficult to conduct interviews or answer questions from participants. The onslaught of new hires during the pandemic also created barriers within the data collection process. Since new employees follow a vigorous

training and orientation schedule fast-tracked by the health crises, taking part in this research ranked low on their priority lists. Finally, the grueling hours paired with the mental and physical strain hospital employees endured throughout the pandemic created a less than ideal research environment. During employee shifts that would typically be optimal for conducting interviews or completing surveys, any downtime was now used for employees to rest and collect their thoughts. The ordinarily positive morale among RCHD staff members had now morphed into a sense of dread and concern. Though several participants still showed enthusiasm during the data collection process, the COVID-19 pandemic certainly impacted many aspects of this research.

Several delimitations also exist within this study. To begin, the employees who participated in the interview portion of this study have worked at RCHD for at least two years. Employees with less than two years of RCHD employment did not participate in the interview portion since they have fewer relevant experiences to describe. Next, each interview participant represented a different RCHD department. Utilizing only one employee per department may not have captured the true scope of motivating factors among the entire department. Finally, this study examined rural hospital employees that work in one of the most prosperous regions of the United States. The motivating factors among this study's participants do not necessarily represent rural hospital employees as a whole.

### *Conclusion*

As rural hospital closures rise across the county, rural medical providers continue to develop unique strategies to maintain their community's access to healthcare. At RCHD, leaders have identified a need to utilize employees in more than one role. To use

employees more efficiently, organization leaders must first understand what motivates employees.

In summary, this study employed a qualitative, phenomenological case study design to explore factors impacting employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District. Through a questionnaire and in-depth interviews based on the original research questions and theoretical framework, employee experiences emerged, providing rich, descriptive data. Several processes contributed to this study's reliability and validity, including using an interview protocol, notetaking template, coding system, data security procedures, and accuracy checks. Overall, these methods provided a strong base for examining the various participant experiences discussed in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results and Implications

#### *Introduction*

This study's fourth chapter serves two purposes. First, it analyzes information gathered during the data collection process. Next, it discusses the implications of these findings and answers this study's central research question: which factors contribute to employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District?

The results section unfolds in five parts based on this study's subsequent research questions.

- 1) How does leadership contribute to employee motivation?
- 2) What does the current economic climate of the area lend to employee motivation?
- 3) How is employee motivation directly related to job satisfaction?
- 4) How do training requirements impact the decision to take on an increased workload?
- 5) How does an employee's age impact their level of work motivation?

Each section contains descriptions of trends identified from two data sources- a questionnaire completed by thirty full-time RCHD employees and twelve one-on-one interviews. A comparison between these results and this study's theoretical framework completes each section.

In two specific parts, the final portion of this chapter examines what these findings mean for RCHD. The first section analyzes the data against existing policies,

norms, and current employee incentives to uncover needed changes. The second portion discusses future research needs in the realm of rural healthcare employee motivation.

### *Qualitative Data Findings*

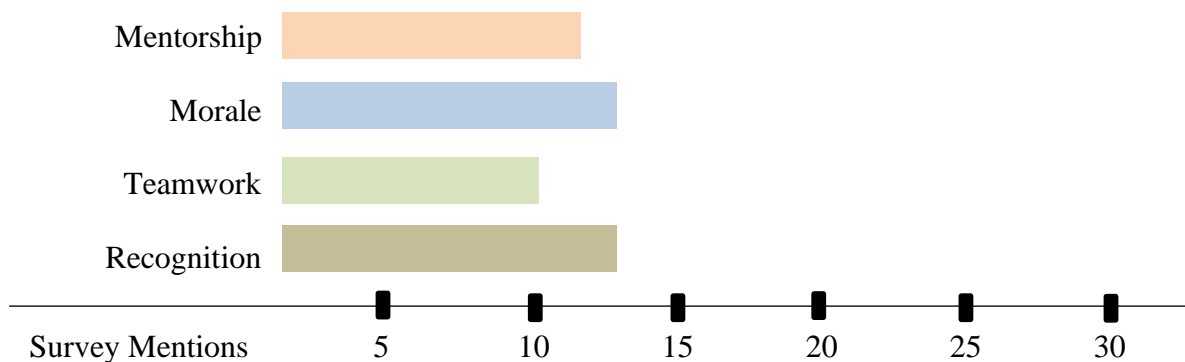
This chapter's findings center around five themes derived from this study's main research questions: leadership, local economy, job satisfaction, training, and employee age. Each section first describes participant experiences and feedback, then compares this information to this study's theoretical framework. Of the sixty full-time RCHD employees, thirty completed the questionnaire. One employee from each of RCHD's twelve departments took part in the one-on-one interviews.

#### *Leadership*

Of all the identified motivating factors at Rankin County Hospital District, participants described leadership with the most enthusiasm and passion. While several trends emerge, each participant shared the same general sentiment: poor leadership results in less motivation among employees, while strong leadership results in high motivation levels. Participants also identified four leadership characteristics that either negatively or positively impact motivation: the ability to mentor, create morale, promote teamwork, and give recognition. Figure 4.1 shows each characteristic's number of survey mentions.

*Mentorship.* Over 40% of participants noted higher motivation levels when leadership centered around consistent guidance and teaching. Conversely, when leaders failed to teach and provide guidance, employees experienced lower motivation levels. This idea aligns with the findings of Rock and Schwartz (2007), which asserts that

managers must create a bigger picture of organizational goals, allowing employees to visualize how they can contribute. When asked to describe how supervisors impact motivation at work, one participant gave this response: “Mentoring and teaching from leaders is the key to motivation. People get burned out when they get stuck in a routine, but when leaders challenge them and help them learn new things, it is much easier to stay motivated” (personal communication, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020). Out of the twelve one-on-one interviews conducted, only five employees reported ever having a supervisor who also served as a mentor. Interviewee G (IG) notes that “A few of my former bosses had the potential to be great mentors, and maybe they were mentors for other employees. Unfortunately, for some reason, I never saw them as anything more than someone who told me what I needed to do” (personal communication, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020).



*Figure 4.1.* Graph showing how often each identified leadership characteristic emerged in survey responses.

*Morale.* The idea that “morale” impacts motivation and leaders control staff morale surfaced in 43% of participant responses. As one respondent stated, “Morale is the key to good leadership. When leaders create a safe, positive environment, employees are willing to do more to help each other out.” Responses also suggested that the

workplace morale and attitudes directly exhibited by those in leadership roles impact the entire organization's success. One employee noted that “When leaders are happy and supportive people get along, the group's overall mood is positive, and good things happen. But when the mood is typically negative, productivity drops, and the quality of work suffers.” This idea aligns with the findings of Papathanasiou et al. (2014) who contend that leaders’ actions and behavior influence the group’s ability to work together and achieve goals.

Interviewee J (IJ) explained how in many instances, the overall “feel” of the work environment comes down to the energy projected by one or two people. This energy has the potential to impact all aspects of the organization. As Rad and Moses (2009) contend,

Managers could make effective efforts in other areas of motivation to improve employee morale and satisfaction. A good working environment is important to most employees. Creating a pleasant working environment with adequate resources and facilities reduces employees’ job-related stress and increases satisfaction. (p. 59)

IJ described a former employer who repeatedly blamed other employees when things went wrong. This “blame game” created a hostile work environment, and eventually, every employee became defensive and grew distrustful of their coworkers. Meanwhile, productivity plummeted, and the organization came close to shutting down. “All of this happened because of one person. One person who set a negative tone for an entire group of people which nearly dismantled everything we spent years building” (personal communication, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*Teamwork.* Results showed that over 33% of participants feel a higher sense of motivation when leaders promote teamwork and collaboration. One participant, Interviewee B (IB), shared a story about two different supervisors they had over a five-



year period. The first supervisor gave individual orders to employees and required each staff member to turn in a completed checklist of duties at the end of each shift. IB noted that not only was teamwork not promoted by the supervisor, but it was discouraged. Employees worked to complete their list. Nothing more, nothing less. IB described the work environment as “hostile” and “cold.” Algahazo and Al-Anazi (2016) describe this type of leadership as “transactional,” noting its failure to promote teamwork or motivate employees. When this supervisor left the organization, the entire department was in turmoil. Soon, a new supervisor with a complete opposite leadership style took over. This supervisor treated each shift as a team. Instead of giving each employee their own set of orders, they gave the entire team a set of orders and said, “figure out how to get it done.” IB noted how difficult this was at first. Everyone was used to doing their own thing, so it took a while to get in the habit of helping each other out and doing more than expected. IB stated that it did not take long for morale and employee motivation to improve, and soon, departmental production rose substantially (personal communication, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*Recognition.* Of all the leadership characteristics mentioned in participant responses, the ability to recognize employee accomplishments appeared the most. Over 43% of respondents noted higher levels of motivation when their supervisor recognizes achievements and hard work. As one respondent put simply, “When appreciation is noticeable, it is easier to stay motivated and strive for more.” Interviewee C (IC) noted that even the slightest bit of recognition from leaders is enough to keep employees engaged, motivated, and willing to go the extra mile. In describing the “best” supervisor

they ever worked under, IC explained how this particular supervisor went out of their way to recognize the entire staff.

She would make an effort to look for something that each employee did well. Then she would randomly bring the qualities up in staff meetings or other group situations. I am not sure if anyone else ever caught on to this, but I did. I think it showed it her character and what a great leader she was (personal communication, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020.)

Berdud et al. (2016) note similar findings, suggesting that when organizational leaders create an environment with consistent opportunities for recognition, employee motivation levels increase.

### *Leadership Findings and Theoretical Framework*

Two of this study's theoretical framework theories surfaced in the leadership-related data: Maslow's Need Hierarchy and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. Results showed Vroom's Expectancy Theory to be inapplicable in the leadership aspect of this research. Table 4.1 first displays the specific research question's alignment with the theoretical framework, followed by the findings and a corresponding example from the data.

Maslow's Need Hierarchy explored how leaders' awareness of employee needs impacts overall motivation. As shown in Table 4.1, respondents indicated that when leaders remain aware of employee needs and work to address those needs, employee motivation is high. As Maslow's Theory (1954) discusses, when employees view their needs as a top organizational priority, they are more likely to put forth their best effort. Conversely, when leaders fail to understand employee needs, employee motivation drops. As shown in Table 4.1, one participant stated that "When leaders provide mentorship and promote teamwork, I am excited and motivated to do my job. When leaders do not care

about these things, I usually start looking for a new job.” These findings support Maslow’s basic idea that human needs drive motivation.

Table 4.1

*Alignment of Leadership Findings with Theoretical Framework*

Theoretical Framework	Alignment with Research Question	Findings	Example from Data
Maslow’s Need Hierarchy	How does the extent to which leaders are aware of employee needs impact employee motivation?	Maslow’s theory proved true in this research. Results showed that when leaders are aware of employee needs (mentoring, recognition, morale management, promoting teamwork), employees experience high motivation levels. When leaders fail to meet these needs, employees keep lower levels of motivation.	“When leaders provide mentorship and promote teamwork, I am excited and motivated to do my job. When leaders do not care about these things, I usually start looking for a new job.”
Vroom’s Expectancy Theory	How does the extent to which leaders recognize the importance of aligning rewards with effort impact motivation?	Based on participant responses, Vroom’s theory was not applicable in this research. Responses centered around specific leadership characteristics rather than effort/reward alignment.	“If a manager is willing to work alongside their employees, is a great communicator, and leads by example, then employees will want to work harder and do more for their boss.”
Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory	How does the extent to which leaders utilize intrinsic and extrinsic incentives contribute to motivation?	The ideas presented in Herzberg’s theory were visible in this aspect of the research. 43% of respondents noted that recognition (an intrinsic incentive), or lack thereof, increased or decreased their motivation level.	“Good leaders appreciate employees that work hard. When employees are recognized for their work, it motivates employees to do more and improve their performance.”

Vroom’s Expectancy Theory did not apply in the leadership aspect of this research. As shown in Table 4.1, Vroom’s theory centers around employee motivation levels when leaders align incentives or rewards with effort. While responses did mention effort, no participants discussed how a leader’s ability to align efforts and rewards impact

motivation. Instead, responses mirrored the example shown in Table 4.1: “If a manager is willing to work alongside their employees, is a great communicator, and leads by example, then employees will want to work harder and do more for their boss.”

One aspect of Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory emerged from participant responses. In terms of leadership, Herzberg’s theory examined how leaders’ use of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators impacts employee motivation. Table 4.1 shows that employees report higher motivation levels when leaders recognize employee achievements (an intrinsic motivator). As one employee notes, “Good leaders appreciate employees that work hard. When employees are recognized for their work, it motivates employees to do more and improve their performance.” The findings in this section support Herzberg’s claim that people, in general, require intrinsic, extrinsic, or both to be motivated (Herzberg, et al., 1959).

### *Local Economy*

Rankin County Hospital District sits in the middle of the Permian Basin, the country’s largest oil-producing region. Because of the consistent oil production, competitive high-paying jobs are plentiful in various industries. The first portion of this section examines how a strong job market impacts employee motivation at RCHD. Through this examination, three main ideas emerged- compensation, cost of living, and work ethic. The second part of this section compares these findings to this study’s theoretical framework. Figure 4.2 shows each theme’s number of survey mentions.

*Compensation.* Results indicated that competitive compensation motivates 40% of this study’s participants. According to respondents, competitive pay and other benefits creates more motivation among employees, while non-competitive pay creates a lower

motivation level. An RCHD employee of six years stated that “When an employee is compensated well for their work, they want to work hard and give their absolute best, but when the compensation is poor, so is the motivation.” Over 25% of participants dub competitive pay as the single-most-important motivating factor at work, with one employee stating that “Cash is king and people are motivated by money. I think that if people know they will be compensated well for their time and work, they will always be motivated.” Morgan et al. (2013) name extrinsic motivators like compensation as the primary driving force in frontline healthcare worker motivation. Conversely, over 33% of this study’s participants noted that compensation does not impact their work motivation as much as intrinsic motivators like respect, recognition, and love for what they do.

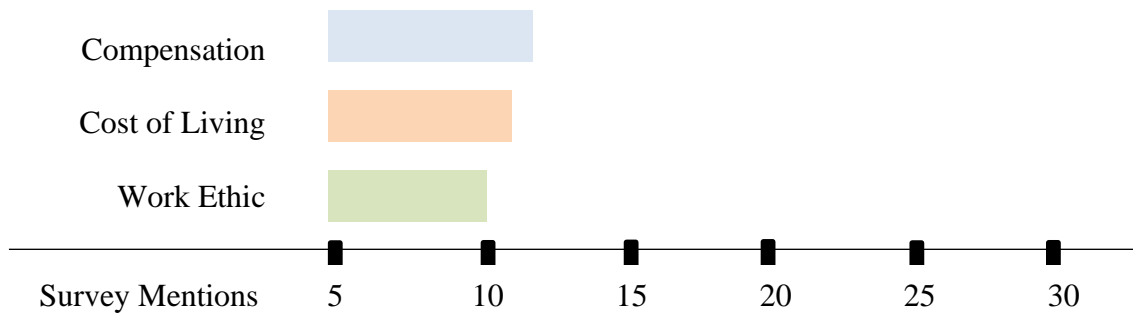


Figure 4.2. Graph showing how often each theme emerged in local economy survey responses.

*Cost of living.* While oil production brings high-paying jobs to West Texas, responses indicated that it also increases the cost of living in the area. Over 36% of participants mentioned the area’s high cost of living as a motivating factor at work. As one respondent states, “My high mortgage is the main thing that motivates me to work hard every day and take on new responsibilities. Yes, we have plenty of jobs that pay really well in this part of the state, but they have to pay well when the cost of living is so

high.” The area’s rising living costs correlate directly with the economic growth findings published by the Midland Development Corporation (2019) which showed a 14.6% economic growth rate since 1996. Interviewee K (IK) described their experiences adapting to the Permian Basin cost of living as a “rollercoaster ride.” IK noted that the continuous rent increases never allow them to feel comfortable or secure in the workplace. “I always feel like I have to keep an eye out for higher-paying jobs because another rent increase is just around the corner. Just when things start to feel stable, the price of oil skyrockets, along with my rent” (personal communication, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*Work ethic.* Over 33% of participants suggested that the local economy and high-paying jobs have nothing to do with work motivation. Instead, these respondents felt that motivation stems directly from individual work ethic. As Interviewee L (IL) noted,

People have poor work ethics these days. You see workers in this area jumping ship left and right because they simply do not want to work. People develop bad attitudes because they can easily go find another job that pays the same or even more. This turnover is bad for employers because they are forced to keep increasing pay and benefits just to keep employees on board who likely already have one foot out the door anyway. (personal communication, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Of the ten participants who identified work ethic as a motivating factor, four respondents credited their strong work ethic to the desire for improving their families’ quality of life. Using details from their upbringing, Interviewee IA (IA) described how poverty creates a “ripple effect” in the lives it consumes—according to IA, being poor impacts much more than a family’s ability to pay for things.

Not having money was not the worst part about being poor. The worst part was the way that people looked at us and the way we were treated. The feeling of embarrassment and hopelessness I experienced growing up is what created my

strong work ethic. I would die before I let my family experience that heartache and despair (personal communication, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

As a whole, the participant responses in this section exuded a strong sense of gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity to work in a prosperous area.

#### *Local Economy Findings and Theoretical Framework*

Elements of Maslow's Need Hierarchy emerged in this study's local economic data. As shown in Table 4.2, 40% of participants felt that high wages and attractive incentives increase employee motivation levels. Since money and other benefits help meet each need in Maslow's Hierarchy (1954), this theory aligned with local economy findings. Interviewee C (IC) noted that "High-paying oil jobs force all employers to pay well and provide nice incentives. This motivates employees to work hard to meet their basic needs, but it also helps provide education or other opportunities that minimum wage cannot support" (personal communication, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

Vroom's Expectancy Theory proved inapplicable from a local economic perspective. Participants indicated that hard work warrants competitive pay, increasing motivation. As one respondent mentioned, "Employees will always give their best effort if they are well compensated." However, respondents never explicitly stated that local high-paying jobs align employee rewards with effort. The absence of a rewards/effort comparison confirmed Vroom's Theory's irrelevance in this portion of the study.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory appeared in this study's local economic data. Participants identified intrinsic and extrinsic factors impacting employee motivation in the Permian Basin. Results show that 40% of respondents felt that compensation, an extrinsic benefit, impacts motivation. As one participant stated, "I will always work harder when a job pays more because there is more to lose." Over 33% of participants

identified work ethic, an intrinsic factor, as a motivating factor. Interviewee E (IE) claimed that “Pay does not affect motivation as much as the desire to perform a job well” (personal communication, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020). These findings supported Herzberg’s Theory (1959) stating that employees are motivated by extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

Table 4.2

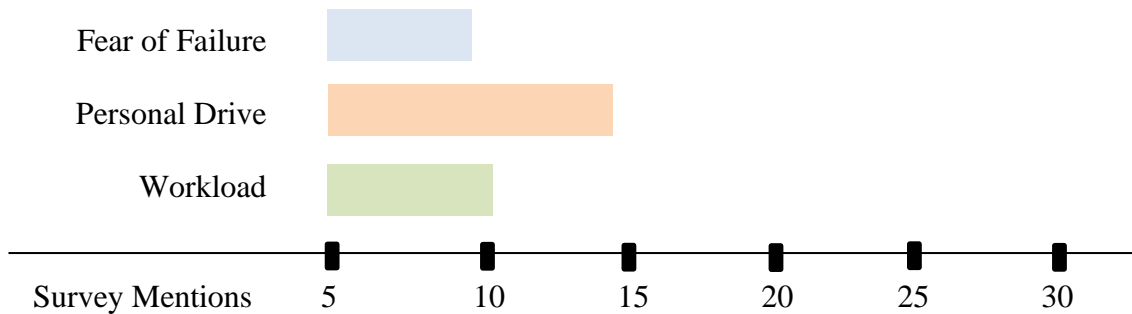
*Alignment of Local Economy Findings with Theoretical Framework*

Theoretical Framework	Alignment with Research Question	Findings	Example from Data
Maslow’s Need Hierarchy	In an area where high-paying jobs are plentiful, competition among employers allows employee needs to be easily addressed. Does this impact motivation?	40% of participants feel that high wages and attractive incentives increase levels of employee motivation. Since money and other benefits help meet each need in Maslow’s Hierarchy, this theory aligns with local economy findings.	“The high-paying oil industry jobs in the area force all employers to pay well and provide nice incentives. This obviously motivates employees to work hard to meet their basic needs, but it also helps provide things like education or other opportunities that minimum wage cannot support.”
Vroom’s Expectancy Theory	In an area where high-paying jobs are plentiful, do employee rewards align with employee effort? Does this impact motivation?	Participants indicate that hard work warrants competitive pay, which in turn increases motivation. However, respondents do not explicitly state that local high-paying jobs align employee rewards with effort.	“Employees will always give their best effort if they are well compensated.”
Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory	In an area where high-paying jobs are plentiful, do extrinsic or intrinsic rewards create motivation?	Participants indicate that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors impact employee motivation in the Permian Basin. 40% of respondents note that “compensation,” an extrinsic benefit, serves as a motivating force. Over 33% of responses identify “work ethic,” an intrinsic factor, as a motivating factor.	“I will always work harder when a job pays more because there is more to lose.”  “Pay does not affect motivation as much as the desire to perform a job well.”



### *Training Requirements*

Hospital jobs, regardless of department, often require specific degrees, certifications, and other training requirements. The first portion of this section examines how training requirements impact an employee’s motivation to advance their career or take on additional duties. Through this examination, three main themes emerged- fear of failure, personal drive, and workload. This second part of this section compares these findings to this study’s theoretical framework. Figure 4.3 shows each theme’s number of survey mentions.



*Figure 4.3.* Graph showing how often each theme emerged in this study’s training requirement data.

*Fear of failure.* Results indicated that 30% of participants chose not to earn new degrees, certifications, or take on additional work duties based on their fear of failing. Interviewee D (ID) described how the fear of failing intensifies in a hospital setting. “In a hospital, you have smart, highly-trained people in almost every position. The fear of looking bad in front of skilled co-workers can be extremely daunting” (personal communication, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020). Other employees indicated that leaving one’s “comfort zone,” regardless of the industry, outweighs the desire for career advancement. As one respondent notes, “People fear the unknown, regardless of the rewards it might

bring.” Zahar et al. (2014) suggest that leaders carry the responsibility to ease fears and show employees how their efforts will help the organization in the long run. Interviewee F (IF) also discussed the safety of an individual’s “comfort zone” by sharing the details of a recent conversation with a coworker.

I was talking with a friend and coworker about how cool it is that RCHD will help pay for tuition if an employee wants to go back to school. Another employee chimed in and asked if we had plans to go back to school. My friend and I just stared at each other. I wanted to say yes, and so did my friend, but we both ended up saying that we were too scared. We are comfortable with our jobs. There is no way we could get our brains back in school mode. It has been way too long (personal communication, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020.)

*Personal drive.* Over 46% of participants felt that the decision to seek degrees, certifications, and other training depends on the employee’s drive. Responses indicated that people who possess drive and determination remain motivated despite the work associated with earning degrees and certifications. According to one respondent, “It comes down to each individual’s personal beliefs. Some people constantly want to improve themselves by developing new skills, while others do the minimum to get by and then go home.” Of the fourteen people who felt that the pursuit of further training depends on an individual’s drive, five respondents identified job security as the motivating force fueling their drive and determination. Interviewee H (IH) explained how the idea of job security pushed him to pursue a bachelor’s degree in nursing. “I had a family to support, and at the time, the oil industry in West Texas had just busted. I needed a career in an industry that would never bust, so I went into healthcare” (personal communication, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*Workload.* Over 33% of participants indicated that the workload associated with earning degrees or certifications impacts employees' motivation to advance their careers. Six of the ten respondents who identified workload as a motivating factor feel that the effort required to earn certificates or degrees must be worth the reward. As one participant stated, "I think that employees naturally want to learn new things or take on more responsibility, but if it takes a lot of time energy, they want something valuable in return." One respondent suggested that life "timing" determines the amount of work an individual is willing to take on. "Getting an education or learning a new skill as a working adult is hard. You have to be in a place in your life where you can dedicate time to something that might not pay off right away." Having worked in healthcare for close to twenty years, Interviewee L (IL) provided a unique perspective on the work involved with pursuing degrees and certifications.

Working in healthcare is tricky. You start in one position, busting your tail day after day. Soon, you begin to notice people in higher-paying jobs. You watch what they do and realize that you can do what they do, maybe even better. The problem is that without the training or experience needed to get that job, you only have two options. You can either put in the work, or you just accept the fact that people with more training will always make more money than you. It comes down to what you can live with. More times than none, people usually choose the path of least resistance (personal communication, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

Toe et al. (2013) suggest that employees' work and life duties must maintain balance, noting that employees can easily shift from "motivated" to "overwhelmed," resulting in poor performance and overall dissatisfaction. In examining motivating factors among frontline healthcare workers, Morgan et al. (2013) report similar findings, noting that an unbalanced workload directly contributes to employee dissatisfaction.

### *Training Requirements and Theoretical Framework*

In this portion of the study, Maslow's Need Hierarchy explored how an employee's basic needs impact their decision to seek further education or training. Results showed no evidence of Maslow's Hierarchy in the training requirements data. As presented in Table 4.3, participants never suggested that an employee's willingness to take on additional duties or advance their career relates to the fulfillment of their essential needs. While some employees indicated that the decision to advance one's careers depends on the end reward, participants never explicitly mentioned the basic needs described in Maslow's Hierarchy.

Vroom's Expectancy Theory sought to determine if the work involved with pursuing further training aligned with the end reward. In this specific section, Vroom's Theory proved true. Six of the ten respondents who identified workload as a motivating factor felt that the effort required to earn certifications or degrees must be worth the reward. These findings support Vroom's idea that the desire to satisfy a need is strong enough to make the effort worthwhile (Vroom, 1964). As shown in Table 4.3, one respondent noted that "Employees naturally want to learn new things or take on more responsibility, but if it takes a lot of time energy, they want something valuable in return."

In examining the impact of training requirements on employee motivation, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory explored how extrinsic and intrinsic incentives contribute to an employee's decision to undergo further training or take on additional work duties. While not explicitly stated, elements of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory appeared in the training requirements data. Participants indicated that extrinsic and intrinsic incentives impact an employee's decision to seek further training and advance their career. As

shown in Table 4.3. one participant stated that “Everyone is different. Some people go back to school so they can earn more money. Some go back so they can get a job with more flexible hours. Some just want to be the best at what they do.” These findings align with the idea that each employee is motivated by extrinsic factors, intrinsic factors, or a combination of both (Herzberg et al., 1959).

Table 4.3

*Alignment of Training Requirements Findings with Theoretical Framework*

Theoretical Framework	Alignment with Research Question	Findings	Example from Data
Maslow’s Need Hierarchy	How does the extent to which employees’ basic needs are met contribute to their willingness to take on additional roles or advance their careers?	Results show no evidence of Maslow’s Need Hierarchy in this portion of the study. Participants never suggest that an employee’s willingness to take on additional duties or advance their career relates to the fulfillment of their basic needs.	N/A
Vroom’s Expectancy Theory	Does the effort involved with required trainings need to align with the end reward?	Vroom’s Expectancy Theory proves true in the training requirement findings. Six of the ten respondents who identify workload as a motivating factor feel that the effort required to earn certifications or degrees must be worth the reward.	“I think that employees naturally want to learn new things or take on more responsibility, but if it takes a lot of time and energy, they want something valuable in return.”
Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory	How do extrinsic and intrinsic incentives contribute to an employee’s decision to undergo further training or take on additional work duties?	Elements of Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory appear in this portion of the study. Participants indicate that extrinsic and intrinsic incentives impact an employee’s decision to undergo the training required to take on additional roles or advance their career.	“Everyone is different. Some people go back to school so they can earn more money. Some go back so they can get a job with more flexible hours. Some just want to be the best at what they do.”

*Job Satisfaction*

As this study’s literature review showed, a strong relationship exists between job satisfaction and healthcare employee motivation; however, current healthcare job

satisfaction research excludes rural healthcare. The first portion of this section examines the connection between job satisfaction and work motivation among RCHD employees. Through this examination, three central themes surfaced, including work happiness, productivity, and love for the job. The second part of this section compares these emerging themes to this study’s theoretical framework. Figure 4.4 shows each theme’s number of survey mentions.

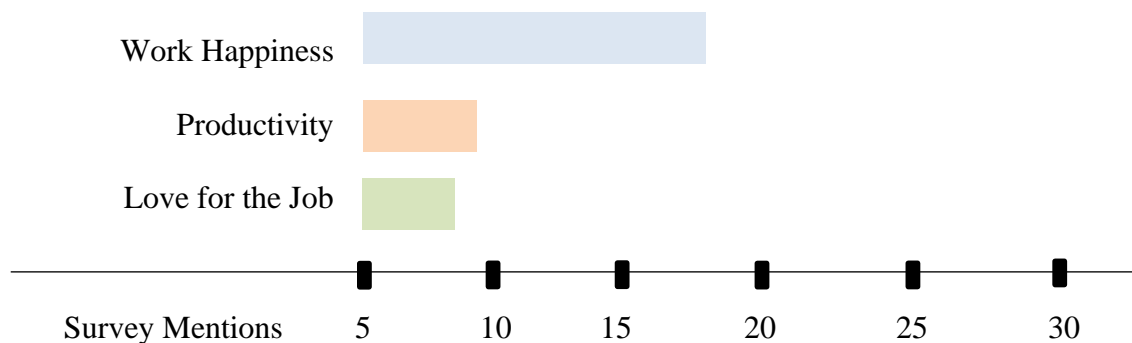


Figure 4.4. Graph showing how often each theme emerged in this study’s job satisfaction data.

*Work happiness.* Over 56% of participants felt that an employee’s level of work happiness directly impacts motivation. Each of the 17 respondents who identified a connection between work happiness and motivation shared the same sentiment: happy, satisfied employees experience higher motivation levels than unhappy, dissatisfied employees. Interviewee A (IA) described two jobs, each of which they held for three years. The first description involved a low level of work happiness, with IA stating that “The first real job I had after graduating from college was awful. Everyone who worked there had a negative attitude, and I never felt comfortable. I started dreading going to

work and stopped trying when I was there” (personal communication, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020). The second job that IA described involved high levels of work happiness.

I finally decided to leave that job and was lucky enough to land at a company with great morale. The people were friendly, and everyone seemed to have passion for what they did. I always thought that it was the positive energy that kept people motivated and eager to be better, but now I see that we were all just happy. The positive energy was definitely part of why we were happy, but our happiness is what made it such an awesome place to work (personal communication, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020.)

*Productivity.* Close to 30% of respondents suggested that a high level of job satisfaction positively impacts motivation, thus increasing employee productivity. Conversely, participants also felt that low levels of job satisfaction negatively impact motivation and cause a decrease in employee productivity. Interviewee M (IM) described an experience where low job satisfaction impacted their production.

I worked in medical records for a very unorganized hospital. This was tough for me because I am a very organized person. It was impossible to get any work done because it seemed like I had to fix other people’s mistakes before I could do my job. Needless to say, I was unhappy at the job. Soon, I began not to care if my work was good. At that point, I was just collecting a paycheck (personal communication, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

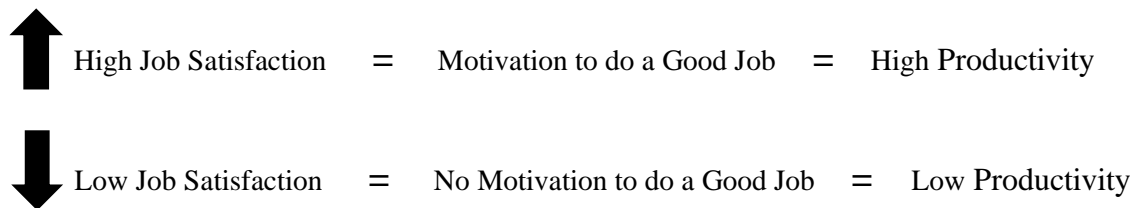
One participant related job satisfaction and productivity to being enthused, noting that “If you are satisfied with your job, you are much more likely to perform most tasks with enthusiasm. When employees are enthusiastic about their job, their productivity is higher, and their quality of work is better.” Figure 4.5 depicts an illustration that one respondent drew as a survey response.

*Love for the job.* In examining how job satisfaction impacts motivation, over 23% of participants felt that employees who love their job experience higher motivation levels than employees who do not love their job. “I strongly believe that everyone has

their niche, and sometimes employees have to figure out where their passion is. Once they figure out where their heart is, employees are naturally motivated and satisfied.” Inceolgu et al. (2012) report similar findings, noting that an employee’s interest in their work directly impacts their motivation. Other respondents suggested that employees who love their job also want to expand their skill set and take on more responsibility.

When someone loves their job, it usually means they are good at what they do. People who are good at their job will do whatever it takes to get the job done. This can mean working harder and longer hours or taking extra classes to learn new skills (personal communication, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

This idea aligns with the findings of Peters et al. (2010) which suggest that healthcare employees hold their jobs in high regard and have a natural desire to reach their full potential. Interviewee J (IJ) indicated that an employee’s love for their job helps keep motivation levels high, even if they have low job satisfaction. “I have had plenty of jobs where I was not completely satisfied, but I always stayed motivated to do a great job because of how much I love being a nurse” (personal communication, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020). This statement aligns with existing healthcare employee research findings suggesting that employees in medical-based careers naturally find joy in the work they do (Morgan et al., 2013).



*Figure 4.5.* Representation of a participant illustration showing how job satisfaction levels impact motivation and productivity.



*Job Satisfaction and Theoretical Framework*

Maslow’s Needs Hierarchy examined how fulfilling basic employee needs impacts motivation. While the first four levels of the hierarchy never appeared in the job satisfaction data, the last level, self-actualization, emerged. The self-actualization level involves an individual’s desire to be the best and realize their potential (Maslow, 1954). Responses indicated that when an employee loves their job, they naturally want to be great. This need for greatness aligns with Maslow’s self-actualization idea (Maslow, 1943). As shown in Table 4.4, one participant noted that “People who love their jobs want to be the best. They want to learn, grow, and discover ways to improve their trade.”

Table 4.4

*Alignment of Job Satisfaction Findings with Theoretical Framework*

Theoretical Framework	Alignment with Research Question	Findings	Example from Data
Maslow’s Need Hierarchy	How does the extent to which employee needs are met contribute to job satisfaction?	An employee’s love for their job and the desire to be the best they can be aligns with the pinnacle of Maslow’s Needs Hierarchy, Self- Actualization.	“People who love their jobs want to be the best. They want to learn, grow, and discover ways to improve their trade.”
Vroom’s Expectancy Theory	How does the alignment of employee effort and rewards contribute to job satisfaction?	Vroom’s Expectancy Theory does not surface in this study’s job satisfaction data.	N/A
Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory	How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivators contribute to job satisfaction?	Job satisfaction data shows employees' work happiness and love for their job, both intrinsic factors, to impact motivation.	“If an employee is satisfied with and happy with the job they are doing, they will be more motivated to give their best effort.”

In this portion of the study, Vroom's Expectancy Theory centered around how the alignment of employee effort and incentives impacts job satisfaction, and ultimately, motivation. While responses suggested a strong relationship between job satisfaction and motivation, the elements contributing to job satisfaction never surfaced. Without understanding which factors contribute to job satisfaction, the ideas presented in Vroom's theory never emerged.

Elements of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory surfaced in this study's job satisfaction data. Herzberg's Theory aimed to understand how intrinsic and extrinsic motivators contribute to job satisfaction. Responses showed employees' work happiness and love for their job, both intrinsic rewards, as factors impacting motivation. As shown in Table 4.4, one participant noted that "If an employee is satisfied and happy with the job they are doing, they will be more motivated to give their best effort." Intrinsic motivating factors appeared in this study's job satisfaction data confirming the findings of Herzberg et al. (1964).

### *Employee Age*

The final section of this study explores how employee age impacts work motivation. Overall, results showed no connection between employee age and employee motivation. Inceolgu et al. (2012) report similar findings noting no difference in motivation levels among employees of different ages. However, this study's data did produce two common themes that provide insight behind participant responses: work ethic and work environment. Figure 4.6 displays how often each theme appears in the employee age data. This section first examines participant experiences and responses and then compares the data against this study's theoretical framework.

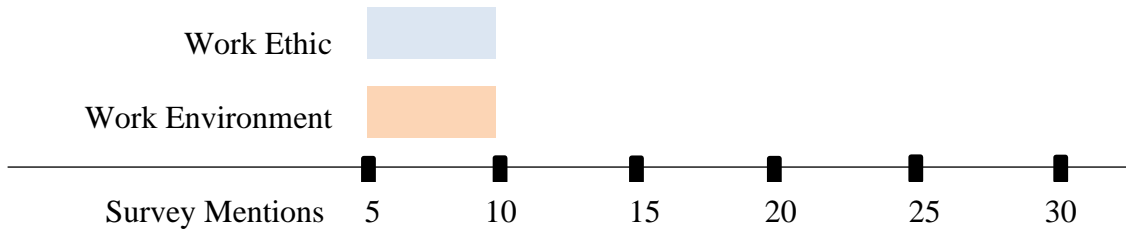


Figure 4.6. Graph showing how often each theme emerged in this study’s employee age data.

*Work ethic.* Over 26% of participants felt that an employee’s age yields no impact on work motivation. Instead, responses indicated that each employee’s work ethic controls motivation, regardless of age. As one respondent noted,

I do not think age has much of an impact on employee motivation. It depends on how the person was raised and their work and life experiences. I have seen employees from 16 to 65 who are very driven and work extremely hard. I’ve also seen employees from 16 to 65 who are lazy and just there to get a paycheck (personal communication, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

Interviewee L (IL), an RCHD employee of ten years, found no connection between age and motivation (personal communication, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020). According to IL, every person, regardless of age, plays a crucial role in reaching organizational goals and remains motivated or unmotivated by their nature.

Age does not matter. If someone is hired for a specific position, it means they are skilled in that area, and management sees them as an asset to the team. After they are hired, their work ethic determines their motivation through their professional life (personal communication, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

Of the eight employees who mention work ethic in the employee age data, three participants felt that work ethic and motivation change throughout an employee’s career. One respondent described how at the beginning of their career, at around age 25, they consistently kept high motivation levels. After five years, they experienced a period of “burnout” and saw an extreme drop in effort until age 32. At this point, they began

working for a new, energizing organization and regained their previous strong work ethic. Other employees who share the idea that work ethic changes throughout an individual's career described similar experiences.

*Work environment.* A quarter of total responses suggested that an employee's work environment drives motivation, regardless of age. According to Interviewee H (IH), a positive work environment naturally motivates employees at any age, while a negative work environment naturally demotivates employees.

In a supportive work environment, you see happy employees of all ages working together with the same vision and dedication. In a non-supportive work environment, it does not matter how old a person is; if there is no teamwork and no shared vision, there is no motivation (personal communication, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

Oladotun and Ozturen (2013) report similar findings, noting that employees' level of commitment to an organization lies in the connectedness they feel to the work environment. One participant suggested that a hostile work environment impacts the opportunity for mentoring experiences. "When the older or veteran employees are miserable at work, it puts the new or younger employees at a disadvantage. They either fail to receive mentoring or develop the same negative attitudes of the older employees." Overall, respondents mentioning work environment emphasized the need for a culture where employees of all ages have the opportunity to flourish. As Zarei et al. (2016) note, good working relationships with colleagues and supervisors in a supportive work environment positively impacts employee motivation.

### *Employee Age and Theoretical Framework*

Ideas connecting to the "belonging" and "esteem" levels of Maslow's Need Hierarchy emerged in the employee age data. As Maslow (1954) contends, an individual

reaches the third and fourth levels of the needs pyramid when they develop feelings of social connectedness and self-worth. Results indicated that all employees need a positive work environment to maintain high motivation levels regardless of age. A positive, inclusive work setting helps fulfill the need to belong within a group and builds self-esteem which directly relates to the final level of Maslow’s Hierarchy. As shown in Table 4.5, one employee noted that “Age does not seem to impact motivation at all. To me, the confidence built up by supervisors and managers is the main motivator.” Overall, Maslow’s Theory proved true in this portion of the study.

Table 4.5

*Alignment of Employee Age Findings with Theoretical Framework*

Theoretical Framework	Alignment with Research Question	Findings	Example from Data
Maslow’s Need Hierarchy	An employee’s age helps determine their specific needs. How does the extent to which employee needs are met impact motivation?	Results indicate that all employees need a positive work environment to maintain high motivation levels regardless of age. These findings align with the “belonging” and “esteem” levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy.	“Age does not seem to impact motivation at all. To me, the confidence built up by supervisors and managers is the main motivator.”
Vroom’s Expectancy Theory	An employee’s age can impact how they view reward and effort. How does this contribute to motivation?	The ideas presented in Vroom’s Expectancy Theory never emerge in the employee age data.	N/A
Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory	Does an employee’s age determine if they are motivated by intrinsic or extrinsic factors?	While responses never explicitly mention extrinsic factors, they do mention the importance of a supportive work environment for employees of all ages, which is an intrinsic motivating factor.	“Clear vision accompanied by organizational support and a positive work environment can keep employees motivated at any age.”

In this section, Vroom's Expectancy Theory examined how an employee's age impacts their view of effort, reward, and the resulting motivation level. Responses suggested that effort and motivation change throughout one's career depending on the work environment and individual work ethic. However, responses never mentioned the reward for effort, making Vroom's Theory inapplicable in the employee age results.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory explored how employee age relates to intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors. While responses never explicitly mentioned extrinsic factors, they did mention the importance of a supportive work environment for employees of all ages, which is an intrinsic motivating factor. As shown in Table 4.5, one employee stated that "Clear vision accompanied by organizational support and a positive work environment can keep employees motivated at any age." Even without the emergence of extrinsic factors, the idea that an employee's motivation stems from intrinsic factors, proved the findings of Herzberg et al. (1964) true in the employee age data.

### *Discussion*

This study's discussion serves two primary purposes. First, this section examines identified themes and compares these findings to the research results explored in this study's literature review. Secondly, this section discusses how this study contributes to the employee motivation knowledge base and examines future research needs in rural healthcare employee motivation.

### *Leadership*

The mentorship component of this study's leadership findings aligns with existing employee motivation research. Rousseau and Tijorwala (1999) contend that leadership

built upon loyalty, inclusive decision-making, and constructive feedback has a significant impact on healthcare employee motivation. In this study, nearly half of all respondents reported higher motivation levels when leadership centers around positive and consistent guidance and teaching.

The idea of recognition as a motivating factor also aligns with this study's literature review findings. Mengesha (2015) discusses how employees are substantially more motivated by leaders who acknowledge specific employee skills and attribute these strengths to organizational success. This study's participants also identified recognition as a motivating factor, with over 43% of participants stating that its presence or lack thereof can positively or negatively impact motivation. Finally, the emergence of recognition as a motivating force aligns with the findings of Berdud et al. (2016), which suggest that organizations should consider intrinsic factors when structuring incentives.

This study's findings provide a unique perspective of leadership as a motivator because it utilized a much smaller sample size than existing research. Most current data stems from a large amount of quantitative data gathered from large healthcare systems and fails to capture the phenomenon's essence. Qualitative data collected from small samples allows for rich descriptions of participant experience to emerge. Research dedicated explicitly to understanding the leadership impact on healthcare employee motivation provides more guidance to rural leaders and supervisors.

### *Local Economy*

With little available research exploring the local economy's impact on employee motivation, similarities between this study's findings and existing research fail to surfaced. However, this study's analysis does help confirm the previously stated finding

that household incomes in the Permian Basin rest over \$15,000 higher than the national average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Over 36% of this study's respondents noted the abundance of high-paying jobs in the region due to oil production. This study's participants also identified compensation, an extrinsic motivator, as a primary motivator at work. This assertion aligns with the previous findings of Morgan et al. (2013), in which they identified extrinsic rewards as the primary driving force in frontline healthcare worker motivation.

This study's local economy data sheds light on a previously unexplored phenomenon. With no existing literature exploring the impact of a booming economy on employee motivation, these findings highlight how economic factors shift employee needs. To develop a more well-rounded understanding of the economy's impact on motivation, research in poor and average economies is necessary.

### *Training Requirements*

The training requirements data in this study's literature review focuses primarily on the types of training employees prefer. Existing research fails to explore how the training requirements needed to earn certifications and degrees impact an employee's decision to advance their career or learn new skills. However, "fear of failure" emerged as a trend in this study's data and aligns with the previously examined findings of Zahar et al. (2014), which note that leaders should motivate and encourage employees to expand their skill sets.

This study's training requirements data uncovered a unique aspect of motivation by examining the factors that prevent employees from seeking further training. Emotions surfaced in this qualitative data set that explain an employee's decision to expand their



knowledge base. Since no existing studies explore employee fears, concerns, and barriers regarding education and training, further research is needed to support this study's findings.

### *Job Satisfaction*

This study's literature review and current findings suggested that an employee's overall job satisfaction level directly contributes to work motivation. However, existing studies examined specific intrinsic and extrinsic components of job satisfaction. As Rad and Moses (2009) discuss, working conditions, pay, benefits, and recognition all contribute to an employee's job satisfaction level. This study's responses focused more on general themes like happiness.

While the "work happiness" section of job satisfaction findings generally supported existing data, this study brought forth the ideas of "love for the job" and "productivity," two aspects rarely examined in job satisfaction research. There appears to be a need for more research exploring how job satisfaction impacts motivation rather than which factors contribute to job satisfaction.

### *Employee Age*

This study's employee age data revealed no connection between employee age and motivation. Instead, results showed work ethic and work environment to be critical motivators, regardless of age. These findings differ from existing research that shows differences in motivation influences between younger and older employees. Hertel et al. (2013) find senior employees more motivated by emotion-oriented values and younger employees motivated by career-oriented values.

Overall, this study's employee age data supported the idea of creating a fair, equitable work environment that meets the needs of all employees. This research is specifically valuable in rural organizations with limited resources to adjust incentives based on employee age. In terms of employee age, rural and urban organizations would benefit from research examining incentive systems that fairly represent all age groups.

### *Implications*

Each of this study's five data sets provided insight into motivating factors among RCHD employees. This section first explores potential policy edits, program development, incentive adjustments, and needed organizational changes. The last portion of this section compares this study's findings to previous employee motivation studies' results and discusses future research needs.

*Mentoring.* Over 40% of respondents indicated that mentoring helps develop and maintain motivation at work. This data suggests the need for a mentoring program consistently utilized by each RCHD department. While the specific program structure will likely vary from department to department, the program's basic goals should remain the same: to provide structured guidance and learning opportunities designed to ensure competency and instill confidence. As Hansman (2001) explains, mentoring programs should reflect the specific needs and skills required to perform a particular job. Department heads and supervisors should work together to develop primary program objectives, outcomes, and an implementation strategy. Finally, conducting periodic program evaluations will help ensure alignment with employee needs and required competencies.

*Recognition.* According to the data, recognition from supervisors impacts employee motivation at RCHD. Participants indicated that acknowledging individual achievements and success creates a sense of self-worth and pushes employees to continue performing well. As Harrison states,

Praise and recognition are essential to an outstanding workplace. People want to be respected and valued for their contribution. Everyone feels the need to be recognized as an individual or member of a group and to feel a sense of achievement for work well done or even for a valiant effort. Everyone wants a 'pat on the back' to make them feel good (Harrison, 2018, p. 1).

Dan (2015) reports similar results, indicating that public-sector employees benefit from recognition and appreciation for a job well-done. These findings suggest the need for an employee recognition program that highlights milestones and accolades. Since department heads best understand the different types of success within their employees' specialty areas, their input remains necessary in a recognition program's implementation and design. As Peters et al. (2015) discusses, supervisors should develop recognition programs based on each department's specific needs and employee duties. However, the hospital's administrative team must enforce program participation among departmental supervisors.

*Competitive compensation.* In examining this study's local economy data, 40% of respondents identified compensation as a significant motivator at work. Responses also indicated that the area's rising living costs make a competitive salary even more critical to RCHD employees. These findings suggest that hospital administrators should monitor healthcare salaries in the area to ensure RCHD's payscale remains comparable. As Morgan et al. (2013) report, low wages among healthcare employees directly contributes

employee dissatisfaction. Additionally, administrators should also follow the region's living costs and make adjustments as needed.

*Workload and fear of failure.* Over 30% of participants identified two main factors impacting the decision to seek further education or additional training: workload and fear of failure. These findings suggest the need for career path counseling that shows employees how to learn, grow, and expand their skill sets without fearing failure or becoming overwhelmed. HR professionals, department heads, and hospital administrative teams should work together to compile resources detailing healthcare-centered career paths and offering solutions to common concerns and dilemmas. As Thew (2016) discusses, career development programs should provide the same opportunities to all employees. By adding the element of counseling, all employees gain access to the same guidance.

*Job satisfaction.* Over half of the study's participants identified job satisfaction as a motivating factor. In general, results indicated that employees with high job satisfaction levels remain significantly more motivated than those with low job satisfaction levels. While several factors contribute to job satisfaction, these results suggest the need to conduct periodic job satisfaction surveys. Without this valuable feedback, issues go unresolved, and satisfaction never improves. Additionally, Myskova (2011) explains how employee job satisfaction changes over time. Role changes and other life events often cause employees to experience a shift in attitude toward their positions. Continually seeking feedback helps managers and supervisors make adjustments before burnout or resentment develops. As Rad and Moses (2019) note, in a quickly-evolving industry like

healthcare, leaders and supervisors should make effective efforts to understand current employee job satisfaction.

*Work environment.* Work environment emerged as a motivating factor in several of this study's data sets. According to participant responses, teamwork, morale, support, and trust contribute to a work environment's overall feel and, ultimately, to an employee's motivation level. Similar results uncovered by Baueister and Leary (1995), suggest that employees long to be a part of the organization's community and depend on the organization for support, communication, and friendship. These findings highlight the need to ensure that RCHD's mission statement, policies, programs, and norms promote a positive work environment. Supervisors and administrators must reinforce the organization's goals and reflect positivity in their actions and best practices. As Farnsworth et al. (2019) note, "By defining acceptable behavior and vigorously facilitating a harmonious environment, management creates a positive workplace environment that can benefit everyone" (p. 2).

### *Summary and Conclusion*

The current rural hospital closure crisis poses a threat to small-town hospitals across the country. As organizations begin to make changes in preparation for probable funding cuts, hospital leaders must bring employees together with a common vision. To facilitate effective teamwork and reach shared goals, a clear understanding of employee needs and factors impacting motivation is essential. With little existing research in rural healthcare, administrators, supervisors, managers, and board members hold an obligation to examine their employees' needs to help develop effective policies and a positive work environment.

Via open-ended survey and one-on-one interviews, this phenomenological case study examined factors impacting employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District (RCHD). Employees from each of RCHD's twelve departments participated in both portions of the study. Five initial themes, leadership, training requirements, local economy, and job satisfaction emerged, giving way to six key findings:

1. Supervisorial mentoring and recognition create higher levels of employee motivation.
2. Competitive compensation motivates employees, especially in areas with high living costs.
3. Fear of failure and the size of individual workloads prevent employees from seeking further education or additional training.
4. Job satisfaction levels directly impact employee motivation.
5. A positive work environment promoting teamwork, growth, and supportive programs creates higher employee motivation levels.
6. Individual work ethic connects directly to employee motivation.

This data provides RCHD administrators, supervisors, managers, and board members with a starting point to understand employee motivation. These findings also highlight a need to revisit existing and possibly outdated policies, procedures, and organizational norms, specifically in the areas of mentoring, recognition, compensation, workload, and work environment. Additionally, this research provides other rural hospitals, specifically in areas experiencing vast economic growth, with a framework for examining employee motivation.

This study's concluding section, Chapter Five, serves two main purposes. First, this section provides an executive summary of this study's research problem, data collection and analysis methods, key findings, and informed recommendations. The final

portion of this study provides a brief description of the two audiences this research aims to reach, followed by an examination of the materials needed to distribute these findings.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Distribution of Findings

#### *Executive Summary*

Recent government funding cuts and declining local property values leave rural hospitals facing closure across the United States. Over the next five years, 21% of facilities providing healthcare to rural communities will no longer generate the revenue needed to maintain day-to-day operations (Mosley, 2019). Southern states appear the most vulnerable to the closure crises, with Texas reporting 17 rural hospital closures since 2010 (Rappleeye, 2018).

Rankin County Hospital District (RCHD) in Rankin, Texas, provides healthcare to a community of 800 people in the rural, western portion of the state. Without RCHD, residents would travel over a 100 miles roundtrip to receive primary and emergency medical care. In addition to traditional health services, RCHD boasts the town's only fitness center, pharmacy, and access to a healthy meal. Should RCHD succumb to financial hardship, essential community health services become inaccessible for a significant portion of the population.

Over the past several years, RCHD has expanded its scope of services to increase revenue and better position the organization to combat the closure crises. While revenue has increased, staffing these new positions has proven difficult. Rankin's small population forces hospital managers and supervisors to fill newly created jobs with existing employees. Some employees willingly embrace these additional responsibilities because they find value in new challenges or increased pay. However, most staff members remain



content in their current roles and see no benefit in an increased workload. To remain profitable and ensure continued growth, RCHD administrators must examine the factors contributing to this phenomenon.

Existing research provides a strong base for understanding employee motivation at RCHD. However, current healthcare employee motivation studies take place in large health systems with thousands of employees. While motivating factors among healthcare employees may be similar across regions regardless of organization size, no rural healthcare employee motivation exists. To understand employee motivation in a rural hospital setting, this study explored how current incentives, policies, and other factors contribute to employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

This phenomenological case study explored the following central research questions:

1. How does leadership contribute to employee motivation? Do departmental managers, administrative staff, or any other individuals in charge play a role in the employee's overall motivation?
2. What does the current economic climate of the area lend to employee motivation? Located in the largest oil-producing region in the United States, high-paying jobs are plentiful. Does this create a scenario where money is not a motivating force?
3. How is employee motivation directly related to job satisfaction? If an employee is satisfied or dissatisfied with their job, is their level of motivation impacted in any way?
4. How do training requirements impact the decision to take on a more significant workload? If classes or training are required, are employees less motivated to take on additional roles?
5. How does an employee's age impact their level of work motivation? Are younger employees more motivated to take on additional responsibilities? Does employee motivation decrease after a certain age?

Utilizing a criterion sampling strategy, researchers identified 30 employee participants representing all twelve RHCD departments. Each employee completed a brief, open-ended questionnaire. Next, based on the information participants provided in the questionnaire, one participant from each RCHD department moved forward to the interview portion of the study. Using a note-taking template, audio recorder, and interview protocol, participant experiences were recorded and cross-checked for accuracy.

This study's analysis section attributed each piece of data to one of five themes derived from this study's research questions: leadership, local economic climate, job satisfaction, training requirements, and employee age. Next, researchers utilized a coding system to help organize trends within each theme. Finally, ideas from codes were first described within the narrative and then compared to this study's theoretical framework: Maslow's Needs Hierarchy, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory.

### *Summary of Key Findings*

The key findings centered around five themes derived from this study's main research questions: leadership, local economy, job satisfaction, training, and employee age.

#### *Leadership*

Of all the identified motivating factors at Rankin County Hospital District, participants described leadership with the most enthusiasm and passion. While several trends emerged, each participant shared the same general sentiment: poor leadership results in less motivation among employees, while solid leadership results in high

motivation levels. Participants also identified four leadership characteristics that either negatively or positively impact motivation: the ability to mentor, create morale, promote teamwork, and give recognition.

This study's leadership findings align with the results of existing employee motivation research. As Rousseau and Tijorwala (1999) contend, leadership built upon loyalty, inclusive decision-making, and constructive feedback has a significant impact on healthcare employee motivation. In this study, nearly half of all respondents reported higher motivation levels when leadership centers around positive and consistent guidance and teaching. Additionally, this study's participants hold organizational leaders responsible for the overall "feel" and comfortability of the workplace. Farnsworth et al. (2019) note similar findings, stating that "By defining acceptable behavior and vigorously facilitating a harmonious environment, management creates a positive workplace environment that can benefit everyone" (p. 2).

Leadership findings also uncovered connections to this study's theoretical framework. Responses indicated that when leaders remain aware of employee needs and work to address those needs, employee motivation is high. As Maslow (1954) suggests, when employees view their needs as a top organizational priority, they are more likely to put forth their best effort.

### *Local Economy*

Rankin County Hospital District sits in the middle of the Permian Basin, the country's largest oil-producing region. Because of the consistent oil production, competitive high-paying jobs are plentiful in various industries. By examining how a

strong job market impacts employee motivation, compensation, cost of living, and work ethic emerged as significant motivating factors among RCHD employees.

These findings suggest that hospital administrators should monitor healthcare salaries in the area to ensure RCHD's payscale remains comparable. As Morgan et al. (2013) report, low wages among healthcare employees directly contributes employee dissatisfaction. Results also revealed elements of this study's theoretical framework, with 40% of respondents noting that compensation, an extrinsic benefit, impacts motivation. These findings support Herzberg's Theory (1959) stating that employees are motivated by extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

### *Training Requirements*

Hospital jobs, regardless of department, often require specific degrees, certifications, and other training requirements. Three main themes emerged in examining how training requirements impact an employee's motivation to advance their career or take on additional duties. Responses indicated that fear of failure, personal drive, and individual workload directly contribute to employees' decision to seek further education or training.

This study's training requirements data aligns with the findings of existing employee motivation research. Toe et al. (2013) suggest that employees' work and life duties must maintain balance, noting that employees can easily shift from "motivated" to "overwhelmed," resulting in poor performance and overall dissatisfaction. In examining motivating factors among frontline healthcare workers, Morgan et al. (2013) report similar findings, noting that an unbalanced workload directly contributes to employee dissatisfaction.

Elements of this study's theoretical framework emerged in the training requirements data. Participants who identified workload as a motivating factor felt that the effort required to earn certifications or degrees must be worth the reward. These findings support Vroom's Expectancy Theory which states that the desire to satisfy a need is strong enough to make the effort worthwhile (Vroom, 1964).

### *Job Satisfaction*

Existing research suggests a strong relationship between job satisfaction and healthcare employee motivation; however, current healthcare job satisfaction research excludes rural healthcare. When examining the connection between job satisfaction and work motivation among RCHD employees, participants identified three central themes: work happiness, productivity, and love for the job.

Other employee motivation research uncovers similar findings. Baumeister and Leary (1995) contend that employees long to be a part of the organization's community and depend on the organization for support, communication, and friendship. These findings highlight the need to ensure that RCHD's mission statement, policies, programs, and norms promote a positive work environment.

Trends identified in the job satisfaction data also confirm ideas presented in this study's theoretical framework. Responses indicated that when an employee loves their job, they naturally want to be great. This need for greatness aligns with the Self-Actualization level of Maslow's Need Hierarchy where an individual desires to be the best and reaches their full potential (Maslow, 1954).

### *Employee Age*

The final section of this study explores how employee age impacts work motivation. Overall, results showed no connection between employee age and employee motivation; however, two common themes surfaced, providing insight behind participant responses: work ethic and work environment. Oladotun and Ozturen (2013) report similar findings, noting that employees' level of commitment to an organization lies in the connectedness they feel to the work environment.

Ideas presented in this study's theoretical framework surfaced in the employee age data. Results indicated that all employees need a positive work environment to maintain high motivation levels regardless of age. A positive, inclusive work setting helps fulfill the need to belong within a group and builds self-esteem. As Maslow Needs Hierarchy (1954) contends, an individual reaches the third and fourth levels of the needs pyramid when they develop feelings of social connectedness and self-worth.

### *Informed Recommendations*

Results indicated that mentoring helps develop and maintain motivation at work. This data suggests the need for a mentoring program consistently utilized by each RCHD department. While the specific program structure will likely vary from department to department, the program's primary goals should remain the same: to provide structured guidance and learning opportunities designed to ensure competency and instill confidence. Department heads and supervisors should work together to develop primary program objectives, outcomes, and an implementation strategy. Finally, conducting periodic program evaluations will help ensure alignment with employee needs and required competencies.

According to the data, recognition from supervisors impacts employee motivation at RCHD. Participants indicated that acknowledging individual achievements and success creates a sense of self-worth and pushes employees to continue performing well. These findings suggest the need for an employee recognition program that highlights milestones and accolades. Since department heads best understand the different types of success within their employees' specialty areas, their input remains necessary in a recognition program's implementation and design.

In examining this study's local economy data, participants identified compensation as a significant motivator at work. Responses also indicated that the area's rising living costs make a competitive salary even more critical to RCHD employees. These findings suggest that hospital administrators should monitor healthcare salaries in the area to ensure RCHD's payscale remains comparable. Additionally, administrators should also follow the region's living costs and make adjustments as needed.

Participants identified two main factors impacting the decision to seek further education or additional training: workload and fear of failure. These findings suggest the need for career path counseling that shows employees how to learn, grow, and expand their skill sets without fearing failure or becoming overwhelmed. HR professionals, department heads, and hospital administrative teams should work together to compile resources detailing healthcare-centered career paths and offering solutions to common concerns and dilemmas.

Over half of the study's participants identified job satisfaction as a motivating factor. In general, results indicated that employees with high job satisfaction levels remain significantly more motivated than those with low job satisfaction levels. While

several factors contribute to job satisfaction, these results suggest the need to conduct periodic job satisfaction surveys. Without this valuable feedback, issues go unresolved, and satisfaction never improves.

Work environment emerged as a motivating factor in several of this study's data sets. According to participant responses, teamwork, morale, support, and trust contribute to a work environment's overall feel and, ultimately, to an employee's motivation level. These findings highlight the need to ensure that RCHD's mission statement, policies, programs, and norms promote a positive work environment. Supervisors and administrators must reinforce the organization's goals and reflect positivity in their actions and best practices.

#### *Findings Distribution Proposal*

This study's findings provide valuable information to two key audiences: the RCHD Board of Trustees and the Texas Organization of Rural and Community Hospitals (TORCH) conference attendees. First, the RCHD Board of Trustees plays an instrumental role in implementing changes to policies, procedures, and organizational norms. Presenting the board with this study's findings is the first step in improving employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District. Finally, attendees of the annual TORCH conference represent rural health organizations from all over Texas. This conference provides an excellent platform for disseminating this study's findings and informing rural healthcare leaders in employee motivation.

The RCHD Board of Trustees presentation will take place in the RCHD Board Room during a regularly scheduled board meeting. Meeting attendees include the RCHD Board of Trustees, department supervisors, and any community members who wish to



attend. Meeting participants will receive a handout that details key findings and corresponds with an accompanying PowerPoint presentation. The thirty-minute slideshow presentation will consist of graphs, tables, and figures that clearly illustrate motivating factors at Rankin County Hospital District. Each slide will help guide an open discussion about the findings, the implications, and the steps to improving employee motivation at Rankin County Hospital District.

The TORCH conference presentation will take place in a hotel event center explicitly designed for speakers and presentations. The TORCH conference utilizes several presentation rooms and allows participants to attend sessions of interest. Conference registrants likely to attend this presentation include rural hospital human resource professionals, administrators, department supervisors, and other small-hospital staff interested in employee motivation factors. This presentation will also utilize a thirty-minute slideshow and participant handout, with fifteen minutes designated to open discussion and questions after the slideshow concludes.

Both presentations will utilize a PowerPoint presentation and an accompanying handout. The slideshow will avoid wordiness by using graphs, tables, and figures to display this study's key findings concisely. The corresponding handout will include the same information and include details about Rankin County Hospital District and the measures used to conduct the research.

### *Conclusion*

This phenomenological case study analyzes rural hospital employee experiences and the impact of these events on work motivation. Moreover, this research helps identify

organizational deficiencies adversely impacting the battle against the rural hospital closure crises. Through this examination, the six following key findings emerge:

1. Supervisorial mentoring and recognition create higher levels of employee motivation.
2. Competitive compensation motivates employees, especially in areas with high living costs.
3. Fear of failure and the size of individual workloads prevent employees from seeking further education or additional training.
4. Job satisfaction levels directly impact employee motivation.
5. A positive work environment promoting teamwork, growth, and supportive programs creates higher employee motivation levels.
6. Individual work ethic connects directly to employee motivation.

Analyzed both independently and also through the theoretical lens of Maslow, Herzberg, and Vroom, these findings create a unique view of healthcare motivation in a small setting.

In closing, this research provides RCHD administrators, supervisors, managers, and board members with a starting point to understand employee needs. These findings also highlight a need to revisit existing and possibly outdated policies, procedures, and organizational norms, specifically in the areas of mentoring, recognition, compensation, workload, and work environment. Furthermore, this research equips other rural hospitals, specifically in areas experiencing vast economic growth, with a framework for examining employee motivation.

## APPENDICIES

## APPENDIX A

### RCHD Employee Motivation Questionnaire

Department: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Years at RCHD: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) How does leadership contribute to employee motivation?
- 2) What does the current economic climate of the area lend to employee motivation?
- 3) How is employee motivation directly related to job satisfaction?
- 4) How do training requirements impact the decision to take on an increased workload?
- 5) How does an employee's age impact their level of work motivation?

*Figure A.1.* This study's questionnaire.

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