Leadership Development at DreamSpring

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Acknowledgements

EVEN solo pursuits like free climbing El Captain in Yosemite National Park or trying to summit Mt. Everest truly cannot be done entirely alone. While climbing a mountain is a test of individual grit, determination and spirit, it also requires help and tremendous support from a large, dedicated cast. So too is completing a demanding doctoral program…I did not reach this summit alone!

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A very special thank you to Anne Haines, President & CEO; Metta Smith, VP for Client Experience & Lending and my primary contact through the years, and finally Grace Lerner, DreamSpring's former Human Resource Manager and one of the best in the business.

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The amazing staff at Vanderbilt's Heard Library for helping me track down obscure reference material I needed when I don't live anywhere close to Nashville - thank you! Naturally, a major thanks to the all-star lineup of other-worldly talented professors that have guided us through this journey in this program, with a special shoutout to Eve, Hank, Christine, Corbette, Bart, Matthew, Barb and finally my advisor Cynthia…you all are the best!

Finally, my own family who has been quite patient with the innumerable number of missed evenings, weekends, holidays, gatherings just outside with the neighbors and even "vacations" with me head down in a laptop on the hotel's premium Wi-Fi packages or in printed out articles and books to complete this program. I am ever mindful of the message Eve gave us at the start of this journey: as you commit yourself to this program, you will miss all of these things in pursuit of this degree…but it's OK, as it will still be there at the end.

Cheers to all for reaching the successful end and seeing what the outside looks like again!

Executive Summary

DreamSpring has an incredible history in building up underserved communities across the United States, leveraging over 25 years of success filled with an innumerable number of client success stories. Starting in 2019, DreamSpring has embarked on a journey to build even stronger communities going forward into the 21st century by extending its helping hand to even more start up businesses and entrepreneurs (DreamSpring, 2019). At the same time however, internal dynamics need attention as well. Turnover and leadership development have been rightly identified as needs of the organization, potentially hindering its maximum potential of performance.

This study started with the central problem of practice: Turnover. From 2011 through 2020, employee turnover has an overall rising trend line, spanning from a low of 12% in 2013 to a high of 32% in 2019. Over this span, an average of 20% of the DreamSpring workforce leaves each year, which can cause numerous organizational issues.

Three Research Questions were developed to examine and recommend a solution to this problem of practice, using leadership as a through line to improvement:

1) **What is the nature of the perceptions of leadership at the various employment tiers at DreamSpring?**

   1a) What is the relationship between employee perceptions of leadership and turnover?

2) **What is the nature of the leadership at DreamSpring?**
3) **Is DreamSpring currently aligned in a High-Performance Work System (HPWS) structure across the organization?**

To determine root causes, two surveys were created and distributed to the DreamSpring workforce. Using both a transformational leadership survey (Griffith, 2010) and an adaption of the UK Employee Relations Survey (WERS98, 2002), academic and practically-tested instruments were brought to bear to ascertain and subsequently map findings and recommendations out of the corresponding data.

Data from the Employee Relations survey allowed for an examination of two distinct cohorts, based on how much time they have been at DreamSpring. Cohort A represents team members who have less then 5 years, with three distinct year groupings. Cohort B represents team members who have 5 or more years at DreamSpring, with two distinct year groupings.

The following tables summarize the key findings. For the Key Takeaways, a stoplight chart coloring scheme (Green, Yellow, Red) is intentional to depict areas that can use more improvement.

Table 1: Executive Summary Key Takeaways

Key Takeaways
The DreamSpring workforce perceives its leadership as being inspiring, providing a sense of purpose and mission, being respectful and caring about each employee.
Supervisor engagement with employees can be better on "big-picture" items facing DreamSpring.
The DreamSpring workforce feels leadership promotes and delivers empowerment, professional development and caring.
DreamSpring is aligned under a HPWS structure across the organization.

The following recommendations were developed to address the areas for improvement at Dream Spring:

Table 2: Executive Summary Recommendations

Recommendation	Rationale
1: Implement a Supervisor Training Program	There is room for more focused engagement with Cohort A, as there is an unbalance on supervisor engagement across the year-groups. The 2 ~ 5-year group section in some cases had less engagement with those who have only been with DreamSpring for under a year. This points towards an opportunity for standardized supervisor training.
2: Routinely Survey employees annually, to include exit interviews when appropriate	Finding reasons for varying commitment levels, burnout, and the why behind voluntary departures through the use of exit interviews become key information for leadership to use to improve.
3: Focus on the employees who have been at DreamSpring from 2 ~ 5 years first	This group's responses indicate a need for closer attention as underlying issues may be driving lower average scores indicative of some dissatisfaction – and may be a driver of turnover.

Introduction

This study seeks to improve the pressing problem of practice of turnover at DreamSpring, a leading non-profit micro-lender based in Albuquerque, NM through the lens and application of leadership development. Voluntary turnover threatens the viability of profit and non-profit firms alike. Disruption of the team, recruiting and training costs, the loss of talent, and the productivity losses to get new members up to speed can drive high expenses for firms (Greatwood, 2016). Several reasons drive voluntary turnover, and perhaps surprisingly, they are not always centered around salary (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001).

In this study, we will examine the potential linkage between leadership practices at DreamSpring and turnover. A well-known axiom tells us that "people do not quit their jobs, they quit their bosses" (Goler, Gale, Harrington & Grant, 2018). Structured around employee perceptions of leadership, this study will examine the climate to establish if this linkage exists at DreamSpring, and offer recommendations to improve its current turnover rate.

Organizational Context

DreamSpring (formerly Accion Southwest) is a 26-year-old non-profit micro-lender headquartered in Albuquerque, NM, primarily serving the southwest region of the U.S. (Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas), but recently has also expanded into Georgia and North Carolina. DreamSpring provides business loans and access to credit markets to prospective and current small business owners who often do not qualify for services provided by major lenders. To date, it has disbursed over 210 million dollars through over 17,000 loans in over 685 communities, supporting over 25,600 jobs (DreamSpring, 2020).

Ninety percent of DreamSprings' clients are in what are considered typically underserved groups of entrepreneurs in the United States: low to moderate income clients, immigrants, minority and or women entrepreneurs, and are usually located in communities that lack goods and services these prospective owners wish to provide (DreamSpring, 2020). Originally the Southwest regional lead as a part of the Accion US micro-lending network, DreamSpring became an independent entity in 2019, seeking to preserve its core mission and local community focus. The migration to independence was smooth, and services provided to its clients have not changed (M. Smith, personal communication, 4 February 2020).

DreamSpring is a four-star rated charity, with a 92.92 rating out of a 100 for the overall operation, boasting a perfect 100 for accountability and transparency (Charity Navigator, 2020). As a non-profit it strives to maximize the donations it receives to fund its loan portfolio to support clients - with total administrative costs held to only 3.4 percent of overall costs (Charity Navigator, 2020). At the end of 2020, DreamSpring staff demographics were as follows: 54.7% female and 41.5% male, 37.7% Latino, 37.7% White, 11.32% Black, and 1.89% Asian. The board is evenly split between males and females and is currently 50% White, 25% Black, 12.5% Latino, and 12.5% Asian (M. Smith, personal communication, November 30, 2020).

Problem of Practice

Data is available for the last nine years at DreamSpring, encompassing calendar years 2012 through 2020. Over this time frame, turnover averages 22%, which is a devastating percentage for an organization that at its highest count employed 56 people (M. Smith, personal communication, January 20, 2021). From 2015 to 2019, the turnover pace at DreamSpring accelerated each year, growing from 14% to a recorded high of 33%. This followed 2014's previous high of 27% turnover. On a small team, each departure creates a major impact. As this has accelerated, it has left this 26-year organization with a current workforce where currently 68% of the team has been with DreamSpring less than 5 years (M. Smith, personal communication, January 20, 2021).

Excessive turnover is a difficult problem for any firm to conquer, but this can be more problematic at a non-profit. One reason people do leave jobs is centered around salary. Conventional wisdom suggests those at non-profits make less, but research shows there is mixed economic evidence surrounding the size or impact of the non-profit vs. for profit pay gap (Bishow & Monaco, 2016). Controlling for industry and job type, research found non-profit workers earn up to 96% of wages of their for-profit counterparts, and while benefits and total compensation can be better, there is a lower level of compensation for management and professional workers at non-profits, thus bringing employees who tend to exhibit a higher level of altruism and dedication to the firm's purpose into this setting (Malani & Posner, 2007).

In a for-profit firm context, there can be benefits to some turnover if low-performing employees are replaced by new, higher performing ones. It is not the case that all turnover is bad, as in the right amount, it can lead to the generation of new ideas, change and innovation that new people may bring to the organization (Johnson et al., 2000). While the same holds true in a non-profit context, the additional burden of a potential reduction of performance of the organization and challenges to sustainability over time (Selden & Sowa, 2015) make turnover a bigger loss, given employees are usually attracted to the non-profit sector out of a sense of service and not financial gain; they are committed people wishing to make a difference (Malani & Posner, 2007)

Ongori (2007) notes that employee turnover is quite expensive from the organizational point of view, as it represents an exodus of human capital investment - the time, energy and resources put into that employee. Research indicates that hiring and training a replacement can drive costs up to half of that employee's annual salary, and inside of for-profit enterprises, that is only the start of the tally, not the total cost to the organization (Johnson, Griffeth, & Griffin, 2000).

According to my contact, DreamSpring has not been able to take sustained, solid action surrounding this problem. In some cases where exit interviews have been conducted, they have identified a major need that surfaces in feedback from current and former employees: supervisor training. From a broader perspective, this brings us to overall leadership development within the organization, and has consistently been a major goal of further exploration and development by leadership at DreamSpring (M. Smith, personal communication, November 30, 2020).

Subsequently, I was asked to develop a supervisor training program as this was the number one ask from our initial meetings about this capstone. Therefore, the goal of this capstone project was to explore the quality of supervisor training and leadership development at DreamSpring as a possible avenue for improving turnover.

Literature Review

Simply stated, the research clearly and continually indicates that how a firm manages its workforce can have a positive impact on firm performance (Becker & Huselid, 1998). Yet, defining turnover in research has not always been straightforward. For this study, it is used to indicate a permanent move away from the organization – not a temporary hiatus in either a voluntary or involuntary context (McEvoy & Cascio, 1985). To help fully drive home the impact to businesses large and small, some work has been done over the years to put a price tag on the cost of turnover. A meta-analysis of 20 studies came up with a range of $400 to $4,700 per employee (in 1980 wages) in overall productivity loss. At the highest end of this range, a firm could potentially save up to $79,000 a year if they are able to retain 100 employees instead of losing them to turnover (McEvoy & Cascio, 1985).

One can easily extrapolate how much more expensive turnover is today beyond that cost: even when those employees are replaced, it can take on average about three months to close the gap in lost productivity in new employees versus older more experienced ones (Johnson et al., 2000). Excessive turnover can also act as a red flag to potential employees or other firms, as it can start to raise questions as to why employees leave so quickly. In some cases, high turnover sends a signal of instability of the firm itself.

A study across 210 companies in the United Kingdom looked for reasons a firm would choose to change its auditor. Three of the top seven factors showed turnover as an approximate cause for a firm to look for a new partner – changes in top management, high turnover of audit engagement staff and inexperienced staff were cited frequently (Beattie & Fearnley, 1995). This can be another cost to an organization beyond the lost internal productivity – it can jeopardize relationships with existing clients.

Like all organizations, DreamSpring has a clear need to retain high performing individuals on staff. As is the case in many non-profits, the staff is the most critical input in terms of producing the organizational output - where the organization interfaces with its clients to accomplish its work (Selden & Sowa, 2015). Thus, a departure of experienced high-performers delivers a blow to the organization that cannot be easily overcome, even when a replacement is sourced, hired and on-boarded onto the team. The available data suggests employees are leaving around the five-year mark, given the low percentage of current DreamSpring staff (31%) who have at least 5 years of seniority.

Moreover, while detrimental to the firm, it should also be noted that turnover exacts a toll on the employees themselves. Opportunity costs, job searches and stress can run high, as well as the breakup of the emotional bonds most workers have with their jobs (Brockner, Grover, Reed & Dewitt, 1992).

Empirical studies of turnover across the private, public and non-profit sectors have demonstrated little variation in the factors that affect turnover across this spectrum. Generally speaking, three main sets of factors come into play: economic conditions – the broader job market where firms are competing for talent, individual factors, and organizational conditions (Selden & Sowa, 2015).

Economic conditions will always be a variable. It lies outside the span of control for nearly all non-profits and DreamSpring would be similar in this regard. Primarily, other firms may be able to offer higher salaries, particularly when DreamSpring is competing for talent against a for-profit firm, as it will not always be able to pay market-rate salaries.

Individual factors include age and time in position - which, according to the research held more influence over turnover than race and gender (Selden & Sowa, 2015). As discussed in more detail below, the data collected in this study follows this trend, as gender and race demographics did not predict turnover. Accordingly, organizational factors are ones firmly in DreamSpring's span of control.

Understanding the costly nature of high turnover means there must be an examination of the human resource practices to see how employees are treated as a part of the organization. Finding the right vector in which to channel the energy and thrust of these efforts then becomes essential in order to not only maximize a firm's performance, but also to increase employee commitment and reduce turnover. Excessive turnover continually decrements overall performance gains (Way, 2002).

By the mid-1980s, a scholarly look at workforce management advanced the idea of the importance of human resource management. Moving from a traditional 'control' ethos to one of 'commitment', focusing on employee quality of work life showed how powerful a committed workforce could be for a firm's performance (Walton, 1985). This was considered a departure from the Taylorist model of pure job design to maximize performance, often exclusive in industrial settings (Zacharatos, Barling & Iverson, 2005).

Walton (1985) highlighted well-known manufacturing firms like General Motors, Proctor & Gamble and Cummins Engine adopting a new approach to human resource management beginning in trial phases in the late 1970s. This new movement towards a more proactive, commitment focused human resource philosophy also provided a template in which firms could choose to start with from the ground up.

To great fanfare surrounding this new approach to human resource management, Don Burr started People Express airline - a low cost carrier - with an explicit aim to be extraordinarily effective in developing and utilizing his workforce (Walton, 1985). This example highlighted an implementation of this new approach in both union and non-union settings. As a result, it showed proactive human resource policies and practices that promote trust, collaboration and communication were found to be the most effective in delivering employee commitment to a firm (Walton & Lawrence, 1985).

Over time, this has been continually borne out by the research: in a meta-review of 36 quantitative studies published from 1995 to 2010, 54 discrete data points were used to assess areas of commitment, satisfaction, happiness, employer relationships (such as organizational support), work climate and health-related well-being (Van De Voorde, Paauwe, & Van Veldhoven, 2011). The results demonstrated that human resource management practices had a positive effect on employee well-being in nearly 70% of the data points, coupled with a 60% positive effect for firm performance - all across various industries and firms (Van De Voorde et al., 2011).

It is from this understanding that high performance work systems - or HPWS - grew. HPWS is defined as group of separate but interconnected Human Resource management practices, which include comprehensive recruitment and selection procedures, incentive compensation and performance management systems and extensive employee involvement and training (Takeuchi, Chen, & Lepak, 2009). HPWS aims to use these tools to enhance employee skills, commitment, and productivity, all of which then provide the firm with a competitive advantage and increased performance (Qiao, Khiliji, & Wang, 2009).

Simply put, HPWS aims to give a sustainable, repeatable framework for organizations to implement to increase communication among tiers, sustain employee buy-in and provide for continued, focused employee development. As each firm is different, the specific applications may differ, but the undergirding pillars are the same. Ultimately, the processes using these fundamentals are put into place so these systems are not dependent on any one person, manager or leader.

Many firms in the for-profit sector have adopted a HPWS schema as part of their human resource management approach to help combat voluntary turnover. Robust HPWS constructs include many of the following features, tailored to each organizational context:
- Internal promotions
- Performance (vs seniority) based promotions
- Skill-based pay
- Group or team-based profit or gain sharing
- Employee stock ownership
- Employee participatory programs
- Information sharing
- Attitude surveys
- Teams
- Cross-training and/or cross utilization
- Training focused on future skill requirements (Guthrie, 2001).

In the non-profit world, the literature indicates that spending money on overhead is minimized. In fact, what any non-profit spends on overhead is tracked, particularly non-profits that ask for donations. As a consequence, this drive to keep overhead spending low lead many non-profit organizations to under-invest in their staff. This can drive a decrement in organizational outcomes, performance and in some cases, even sustainability over time (Selden & Sowa, 2015). Research not only indicates that adoption of some HPWS features can improve

employee retention and reduce voluntary turnover in the non-profit sector (Selden & Sowa, 2015), but is also not expensive to implement, helping to keep overhead costs low (Way, 2002).

There is one connective tissue that helps tie both turnover and HPWS together: leadership. Researchers highlight five basic reasons that drive voluntary employee turnover: Hiring practices, managerial style, lack of recognition, lack of competitive compensation systems; and finally, toxic workplace environments (Abassi & Hollman, 2000). It is important to note that focused leadership can impact all of these issues, to include compensation.

The transformational leadership component of HPWS brings to bear a powerful approach to organizational leadership that has been tested in crisis situations (Pillai & Williams, 2004). Seeking maximum engagement with the workforce as a foundation of improvement, transformational leadership practices can bring teams into closer integration and foster innovative ideas (Bass, as cited in McCall, 1986). If HPWS is the vehicle, leadership is the driver.

A study of Australian nurses provides a good case study on the effect of a strong pairing of leadership inside a well-functioning HPWS in practice. Nurses often suffer from emotional burnout, given the balance they must maintain between their own emotional states and the behaviors expected of them by patients, families, and their own employers. Implementation of HPWS components were found to act as a buffer between job demands to arrest emotional burnout in this study (Bartram, Casimir, Djurkovic, Leggat & Stanton, 2012). As emotional labor in this study proved to be a precursor of the intent to leave (turnover), transformational leadership practices in place at all management levels reduced burnout, which in turn reduced turnover.

While the level of emotional investment may differ from the nursing profession to other fields, the level of commitment and personal identification with one's job can approximate the emotional investment noted by the researchers. To wit, burnout in any job can often lead to the same outcomes: emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment and a feeling of being too drained to perform at one's best (Bartram et al., 2012). In a completely different setting and culture, HPWS has been successfully implemented in several Chinese factories. Here, there was a positive effect on job satisfaction, increased commitment and overall better performance for the firm, which reduced turnover (Mao, Song & Han, 2013).

Conceptual Framework

"You can't just hire people who bring difference to an organization. You have to support them. You have to mentor them. You have to teach them how to advocate for themselves. You have to advocate for them." (Stengel, B., 2020).

Sample (2002) observes that the most successful leaders adopt a philosophy of "Working for those who work for you". HPWS' focus on employee concerns encompasses a wide range of

behaviors, key among them training and development. From here, we know that such human resource polices deliver a sustained competitive advantage to for-profit firms (Wright, McMahon & McWilliams, 1994).

As demonstrated across a wide, varying range of contexts, cultures and locations, evidence shows time and again that HPWS reduces turnover and grows employee development. To this end, this framework was used to see the degree to which DreamSpring is utilizing HPWS.

The HPWS framework encompasses a wide array of tools available to organizations with regards to leadership and development. Combined with focused leadership, these tools can be applied to reduce turnover. Accordingly, transformational leadership styles feature greatly among these tools, leading into an understanding that the HPWS framework can lead organizations to a reduction in turnover (Bartram et al., 2012). Figure 1 below shows an illustration of a HPWS framework, and where those impacts land at the leadership and individual levels.

Figure 1: Visual Model of HPWS framework (adapted from Takeuchi et al., 2009)
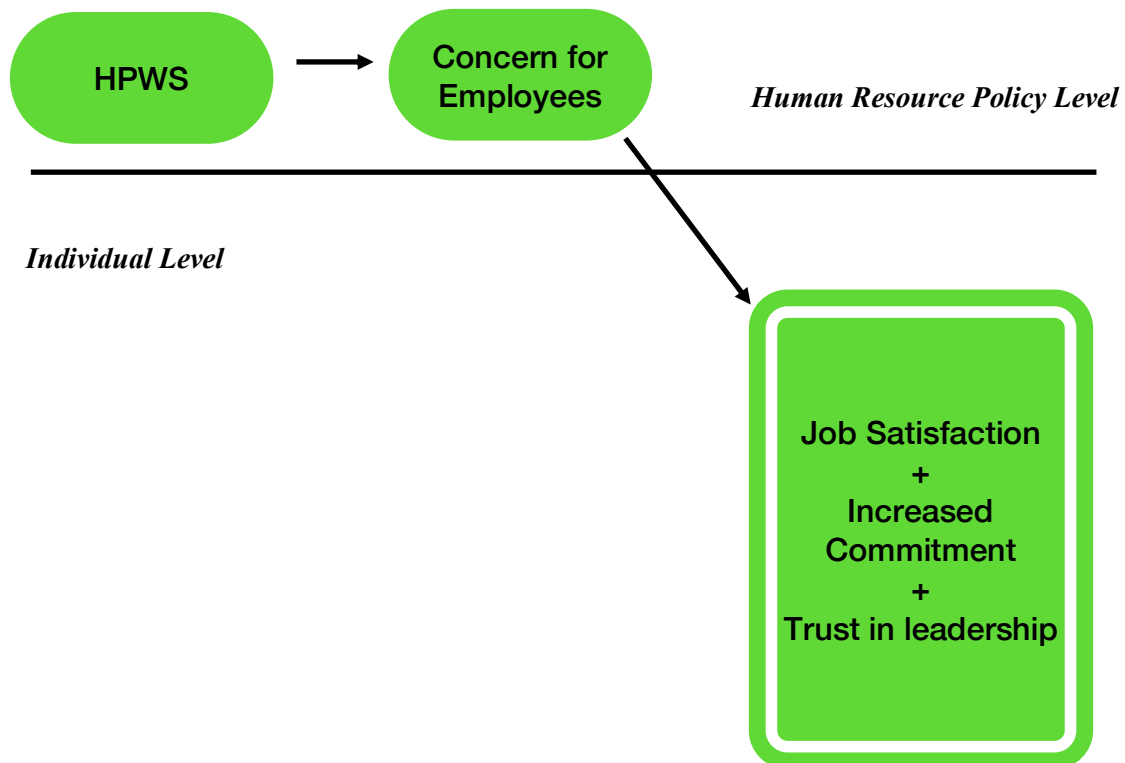
No program or theory can truly prove be a one-size-fits-all solution in a dynamic workplace environment. HPWS is no exception, as for instance, not all employees will likely appreciate or value training the same way, as HPWS is heavily focused on training and development (Andersén & Andersén, 2018).

Gender and management positions in a hierarchy have shown to have some influence on how people and originations have responded to HPWS implementations, with a key lesson being it cannot just be the human resource managers who drive adoption of HPWS. Middle management, supervisors and leaders at all levels in all departments must be on board for the implementation to be successful (Andersén & Andersén, 2018). This helps drive home the importance of focused leadership in this endeavor that is required achieve DreamSpring's goals.

Research Questions

Three main research questions were developed to guide this inquiry into DreamSpring's problem of practice and also assess how the DreamSpring workforce felt about the organization, their supervisors and the leadership they experience.

Each question links to specific questions in the data instruments used and ties into the conceptual framework. Coming to understand the current style of leadership at DreamSpring as experienced by the current workforce was critical, and led to the construction of the Research Questions 1, 1a and 2, before probing whether or not DreamSpring was already aligned under a HPWS structure (Question 3).

1) **What is the nature of the perceptions of leadership at the various employment tiers at DreamSpring?**
   a) **What is the relationship between employee perceptions of leadership and turnover?**
2) **What is the nature of the leadership at DreamSpring?**
3) **Is DreamSpring currently aligned in a High-Performance Work System (HPWS) structure across the organization?**

Methods

Two surveys were distributed among DreamSpring's workforce of 56 employees: a Transformational leadership survey consisting of 9 questions and an Employee relations survey with 50 questions. For data collection and analysis, these survey instruments suited to this research inquiry and purpose were selected and then adapted from their original forms to the specific needs of this study.

Starting with the DreamSpring Transformational leadership survey, respondents answered a nine-question survey using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Overall design elements and features of a transformational leadership approach in human resource development nest under the high-performance work-center elements and design (Lauver & Quinn-Trank, 2012).

This transformational leadership survey originated with the US Army, looking for the effects of small unit (squad) leadership (Griffith, 2010). Used as a way to ascertain varying styles of leadership in search of an effective way to motivate soldiers, the survey was used to determine the qualities of successful squad leaders by finding out what made their units perform better. This instrument was adapted to inquire about the level of engagement employees felt from their supervisors.

The Employee relations survey was adapted from the British government's employee relations survey (WERS98, 2002). This survey was the fourth in a series conducted among a cross section of establishments in the UK with at least 10 employees. The establishments cover a wide range of industries and trades, as the questions are examining general workplace relations across the country (WERS, 2002). For this instrument, respondents answered both 5 and 7-point Likert scale questions in addition to demographic questions about age, race, gender, education and family status. Finally, an open field at the end was provided for comments.

Overall response rates were excellent, with 38 out of 56 employees responding to the Employee relations survey, and 40 out of 56 responding to the second survey. Each survey was posted in a discreet link, as to avoid an overly lengthy survey, and to provide flexibility and ease to at least capture some data on the shorter survey. The transformational survey did not include demographic data, as that is part of the longer survey. Combined, this represents a 70% return rate on the survey instruments.

Additionally, qualitative data in the form of interview notes from my primary contact and free-form responses to an open-field question at the end of the first survey were also collected (See Appendix B). This was an intentional mixed-methods design approach, as both quantitative and qualitative data was sought to fully round out and inform the research questions for this project (Creswell & Clark, 2007). This allowed for the capture of qualitative comments to help inform patterns seen in the quantitative data whenever possible.

I relied on my primary organizational point of contact, Metta Smith, the Vice President of Client Experience, and Grace Lerner, the Director of Human Relations, to distribute an e-mail to the entire Dream Spring workforce with links to both surveys. We discussed this issue during a meeting (M. Smith, personal communication, 14 Aug 20) on the best way to distribute the survey. Rather than me obtaining the e-mail list service from the organization and emailing everyone as an "outsider", we agreed on an internal approach.

Thusly, the DreamSpring workforce received an email and endorsement from two senior leaders in the organization. This was aimed at the goal for being the best method for success in obtaining a high level of participation/return rate for the surveys. Additionally, I was able to speak to the coming survey during my last Zoom appearance into a DreamSpring staff meeting (M. Smith, personal communication, 25 Aug 20).

Data Analysis

A complete list of the instruments and response data per question is included in Appendix B. Here, I have pulled some relevant comparisons from these responses to discuss and illustrate where the DreamSpring workforce stands in relation to each of the research questions.

With the focus on our problem of practice with turnover, the current snapshot shows that 69% of the DreamSpring workforce has been on the team for a total of less than five years. Inside of this newest group of employees, it is a near even split gender-wise at 13 Males and 12 Females, with 2 not answering this demographic question (M. Smith, personal communication, January 20, 2021).

*Figure 2: DreamSpring Workforce Longevity*
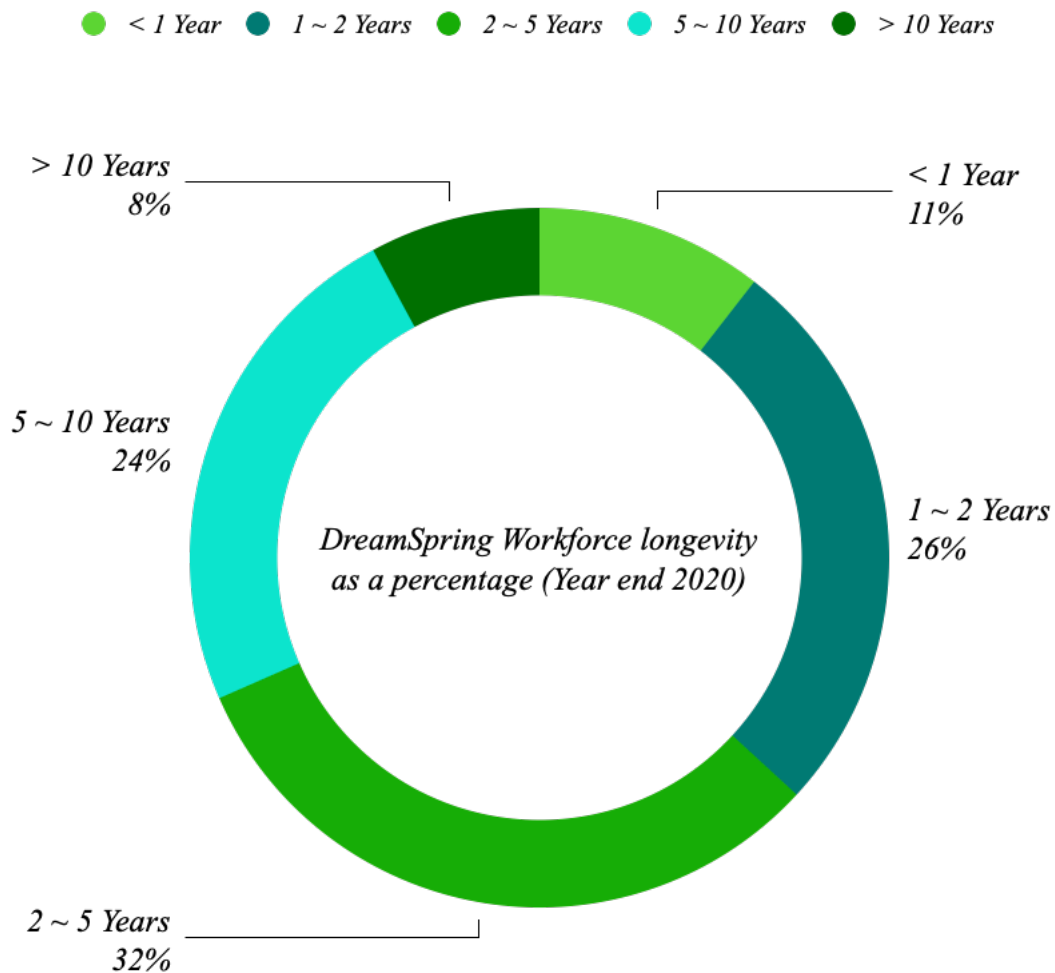
For a 25-year-old organization, having nearly a third of the workforce with the team under five years is significant, as it illustrates the long-term effect of turnover. Something is driving team members to leave prior to the five-year mark. Beattie and Fearnley (1995), noted

that high turnover of staff can act as a warning sign. In fact, it influenced the behavior of British firms in selecting financial auditors across the UK. Technical competence of a firm was ranked highest on the most important characteristic of an auditor, while knowledge and stability were the primary factor in gauging performance – attributes which excessive turnover can threaten (Beattie & Fearnley, 1995).

Below is a look at DreamSpring's turnover from the available data over the last nine years from 2012-2020. While 2020 saw a downturn from a year after year rising trend, it is still higher at any point since 2013. Over the nine-year span, this is a 21% average, however the last three years from 2018-2020 come in at 28% - approaching a third of the workforce, in an organization that had its largest team in 2020 of 56 employees (M. Smith, personal communication, January 20, 2021).

Figure 3: DreamSpring Turnover, 2012-2020 (numbers are in percent)
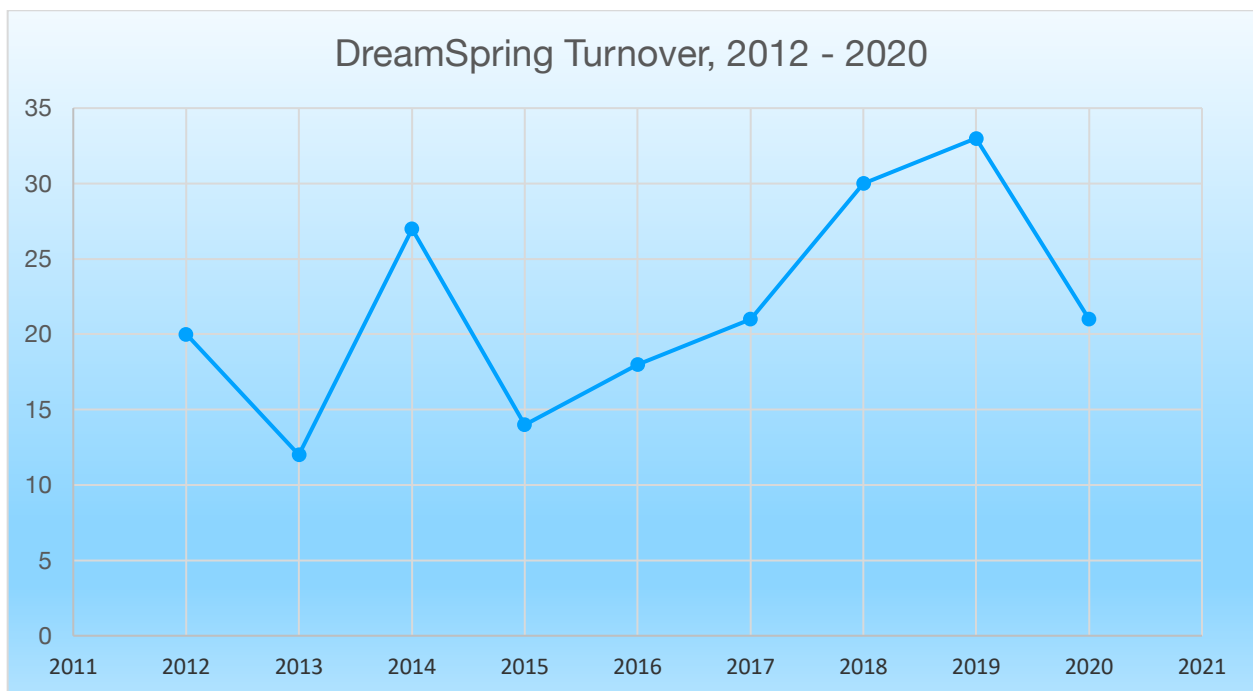
Some studies suggest that higher turnover is becoming a normal feature in successive generations in today's workforce. Evidence is emerging that an overall rising turnover rate is becoming an international trend (Greatwood, 2016). This presents a major challenge to leaders, as the high costs of turnover are ever present, and securing talent is key to a firm's overall performance. Greatwood (2016) points out millennial workers may be apt to leave an organization in two years, compared to an average of 4 ~ 5 years for their generation X counterparts.

When examining the demographic data culled from the instruments, it closely aligns to this finding: 19 out of the 26 employees in the 69% of DreamSpring staffers with less than five years are aged 39 or younger, placing them in the millennial generation designation (born between 1985 – 1995 as noted in Greatwood, 2016). This offers us two primary methods of

comparison, from both a generational and longevity perspective. As turnover speaks to longevity, we can use the data from the instruments to look at longevity differences in how questions are answered first, and explore along generational lines as well.

Starting with longevity, selected answers from the full instrument can be compared to see if there are noticeable differences between the cohorts. Accordingly, the data is divided up as follows: the 69% with five years or less will be cohort A and the remaining 31% with five or more years is cohort B. Here are three questions from the employee relations survey that are aligned to help answer Research Question 1:

A18: How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your job? The respect you get from supervisors/leadership.

B15: How often are you and others asked by supervisors/leadership for your views on the following? (1 of 5 in series). Future plans for the workplace

B21: How good would you say your supervisor is in the following areas? (2 of 5 in a series) Providing everyone with the chance to comment on proposed changes.

*Table 3: Average scores for selected survey questions, I of III*

Cohort	Question A18	Question B15 (1-5 Likert Scale)	Question B21
A	5.62	3.00	5.08
B	6.08	3.08	5.25

The numbers are an average calculation of each Cohort subset. This provides a way to open the discussion with a quick visual to establish the overall position of each cohort on a selected question, while allowing a deeper dive in into the nuance behind the overall numbers. From the outset, the positioning of both cohorts is close and generally trend towards the positive answers of the instrument.

Cohort A did have a large proportion by average score to answer that they are at least moderately or extremely satisfied with the respect they get from their supervisors and leadership (question A18), and the biggest sub-component of this group are those who have been with DreamSpring from 1 ~ 2 years. In the same question, Cohort B has a higher average score for in these two categories. Moreover, Cohort B reported a lower dissatisfaction percentage.

Setting up a trend throughout this study, it seems those who have been at DreamSpring are generally more satisfied, and answer with more positive weighted answers then Cohort A. Figure 4 shows both Cohorts in a visual to following graphs offer a visual of the data which include a comparison of both cohorts at a glance. The differential in the 'Extremely satisfied' category show below highlights this clearly.

*Figure 4: Cohort A & B comparisons to Question A18*
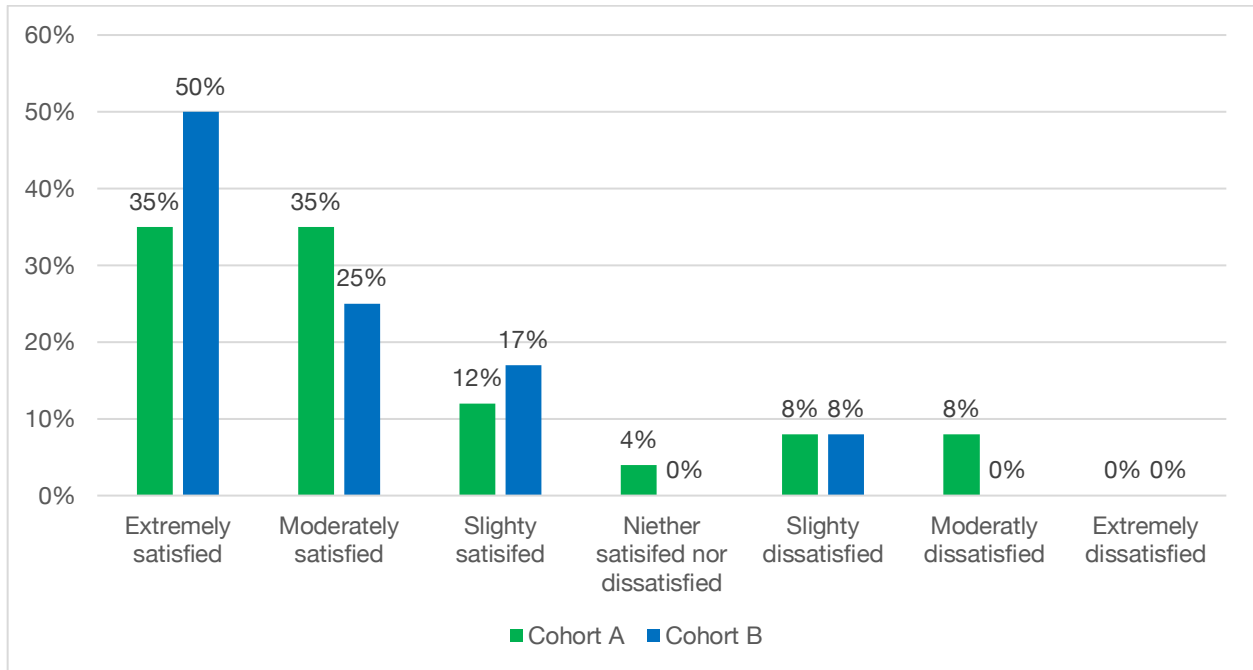
The following graph (Figure 5) shows Cohort A's age breakdown. When diving in further by age, that same group of 19 employees aged 39 and under answered A18 with 9 of the total 15 responses for "extremely satisfied".

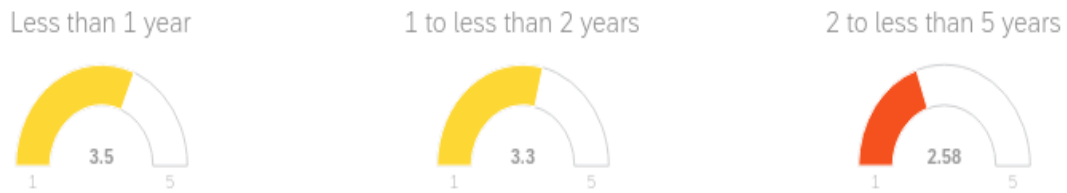*Figure 5: Cohort A satisfaction broken down by age group*
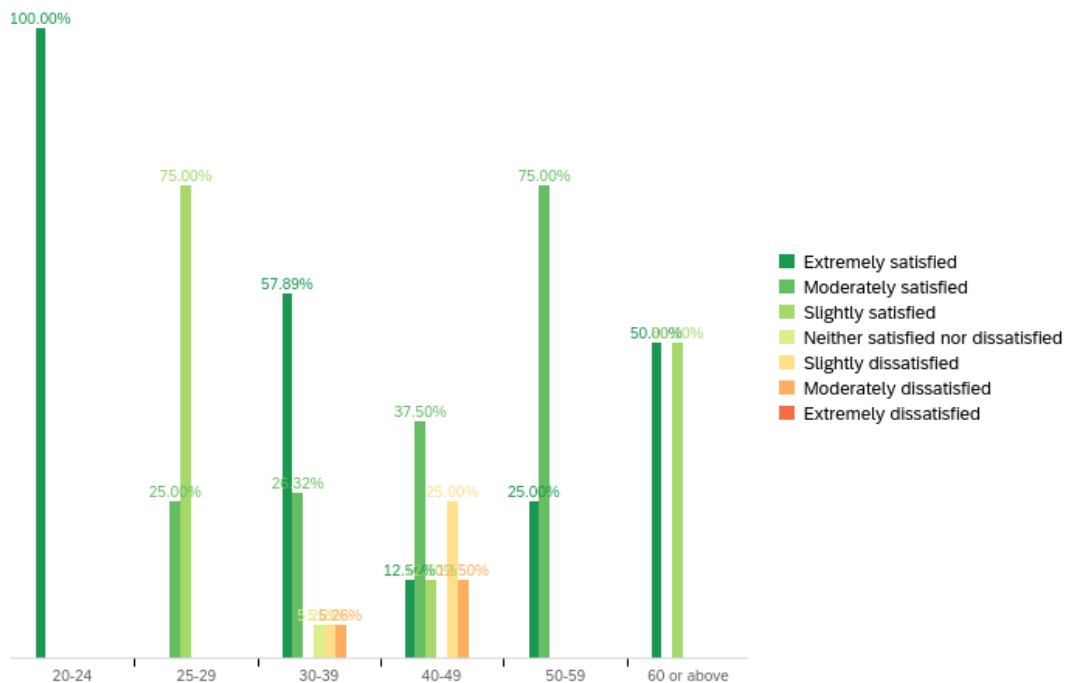
Questions B15 and B21 also continue on this trend, from the standpoint of both the year group and age demographics. This prompts a closer look at Cohort B. Cohort B also contains a mix of generations, with 5 members aged 39 or younger, and the other 7 members are 40 and up – it is not a definitive dividing line with regards to ages/generational categories between the cohorts, as Cohort B is not *solely* made up of older members.

*Figure 6: Cohort B satisfaction broken down by age group*
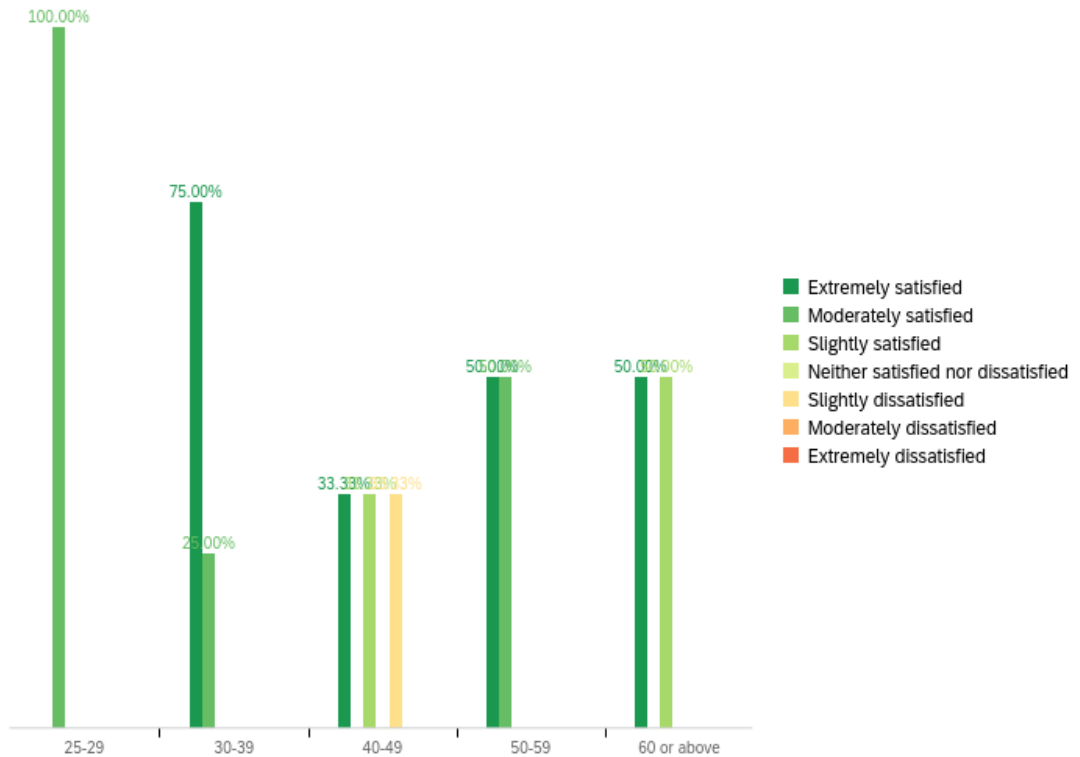
Question B15 speaks to supervisor engagement – and here we see a higher incidence of no input from Cohort A when it comes to offering views on future plans for the workplace. While intuitively it may seem fair to not ask those who just joined the DreamSpring about their views/inputs on plans for the future of the organization, the data shows that within Cohort A, those in the 2 ~ 5-year range were more likely to answer they were not consulted at all. This is a contrast from those sub-groups with less time, all of whom indicated there was at least some engagement with this topic as shown on the following graph.

Staying with supervisor engagement, question B21 is a similarly styled direct employee-engagement type of question, looking for comments from the workforce on proposed changes. Here we find some interesting contrasts between cohorts when it comes to this kind of engagement and how it aligns to research question 1, the nature of the perceptions of leadership at various tiers at DreamSpring. Cohort A reported 100% of the "extremely good" answers – indicating a good level of engagement among each of the sub-tiers of this cohort.

Figure 8: Cohort A& B contrast on engagement for proposed changes(Question B21)
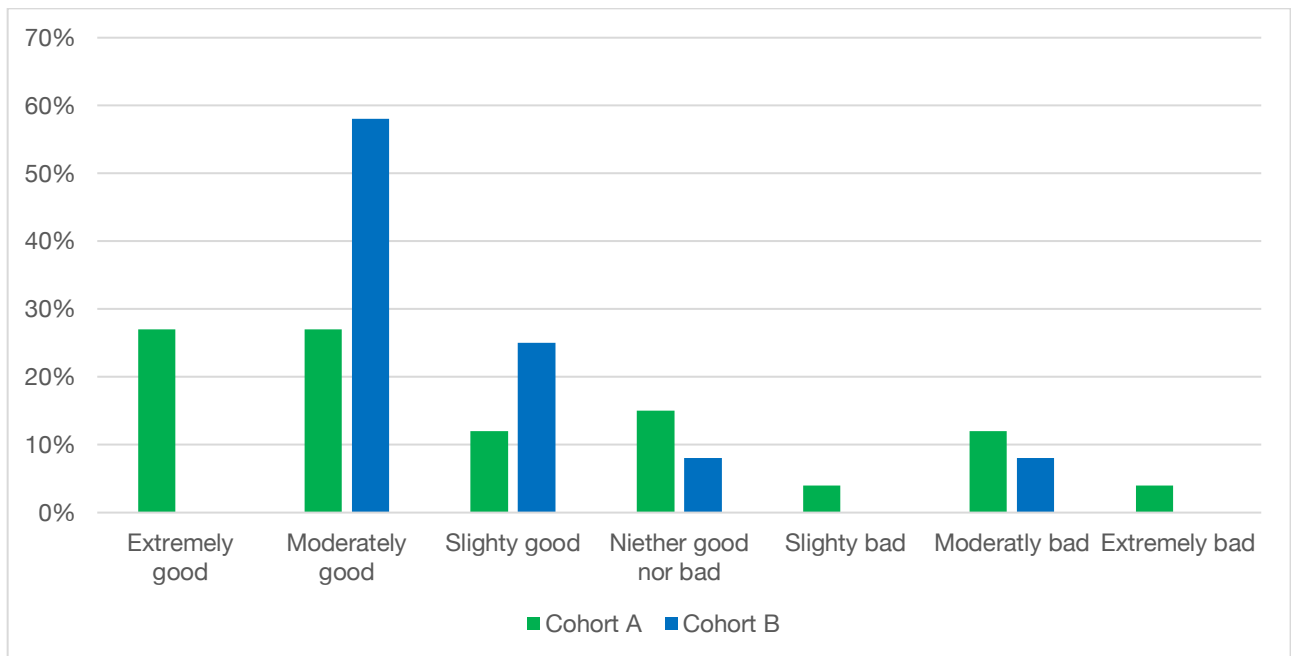
Cohort B reported 0 "extremely good" answers to this question, with 7 "moderately good" responses. At the same time, Cohort A reports nearly all of the negative responses (save for 1 in Cohort B). This aligns with the data from B15, where regular, deliberate engagement on changes are not made into all groups.

These results appear to illustrate that some of the more experienced team members in Cohort B are not being engaged/asked about proposed changes on a regular basis, compared to their counterparts in Cohort A. This may indicate a need for a uniform, deliberate engagement strategy for supervisors and leaders at all levels.

Next, our data analytics looks towards research questions 1a (*What is the relationship between employee perceptions of leadership and turnover*) and 2 (*What is the nature of the leadership at DreamSpring*). Staying with the Cohort A/B contrast/comparisons, six questions are sampled with three per research question, staying consistent with the analysis:

B16: *"How often are you and others working here asked by supervisors/leadership for your views on the following? (2 of 5 in a series) Staffing Issues, including layoffs"*

B24: *"How good would you say your supervisor is in the following areas? (5 of 5 in a series) Treating employees fairly"*

B25: *In general, how would you describe relations between supervisors and employees here?*

For Research Question 2:

A10: *"Do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your job?*
I feel my job is secure at DreamSpring"

B7: *"Do you agree, or disagree, with the following statements about working here at DreamSpring? People working here are encouraged to develop their skills"*

B20: *"How good would you say your supervisor is in the following areas? (1 of 5 in a series) Keeping everyone up to date about proposed changes"*

*Table 4: Average scores for selected survey questions, II of III*

Cohort	Question B16*[1]	Question B24	Question B25	Question A10	Question B7	Question B20*
A	2.27	6.00	4.12	4.58	5.92	3.88
B	2.42	6.25	4.25	5.75	5.58	4.08

Just as in the first Research Question selection, the close distance between these average scores between cohorts shows an overall parity in how they feel – generally towards the positive end of the spectrum. Selecting one question from each Research Question series helps to bring out the most relevant pieces for our discussion here. For Research Question 1a, question B25 speaks to how the current workforce describes relations between supervisors and employees.

Starting with those who have been with DreamSpring the longest, the view is the most positive, based on the percentage of the highest rated answer of 'extremely good'. Even within Cohort B, as you move into the 5 ~ 10-year subgroup, the overall positivity starts to walk back from the highest end of the scale:

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[1] Starred questions in this table denote a 1-5 Likert Scale, hence lower numbers.

Figure 9: Cohort B breakdown on supervisor/employee relations
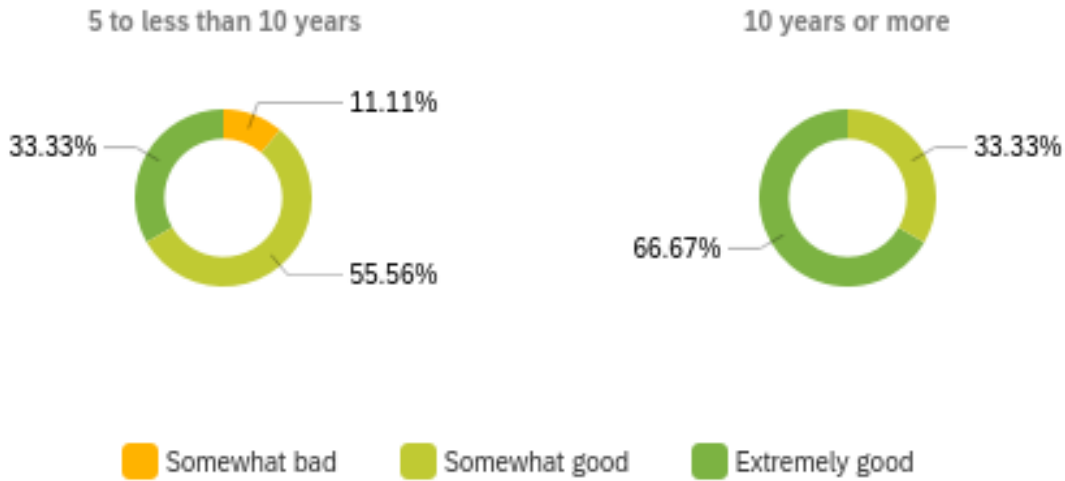
When viewing Cohort A, we see this same overall trend of answering lower on the positive scale in two out of the three subgroups. Interestingly, as Cohort A gains experience and longevity after that second year, more negative answers show up in the data returns.

Figure 1: Cohort A breakdown on supervisor/employee relations
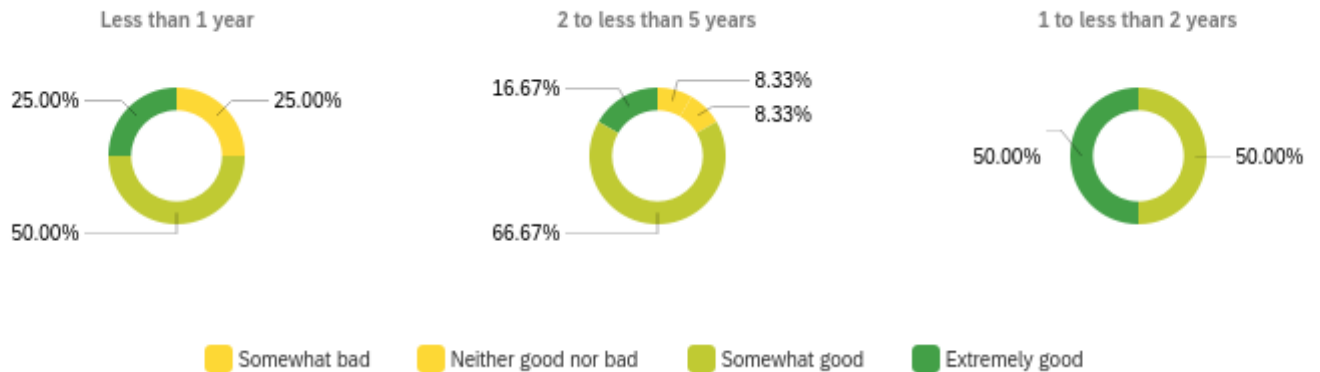
Taken in this expansive view with all the Cohort subgroups, the most junior and then mid-tier members feel the least positive about this question. While still an overall positive result, this illustrates specific year groups in which to monitor or focus improvement efforts.

For Research Question 2, Question B7 asks about team members being encouraged to develop their skills – pointing towards attitude and communication from leadership. This is the cohort with the experience and longevity to affect change, so one might have expected to see a higher percentage at strongly agree.

Figure 11: Cohort A & B contrast on question B7 responses
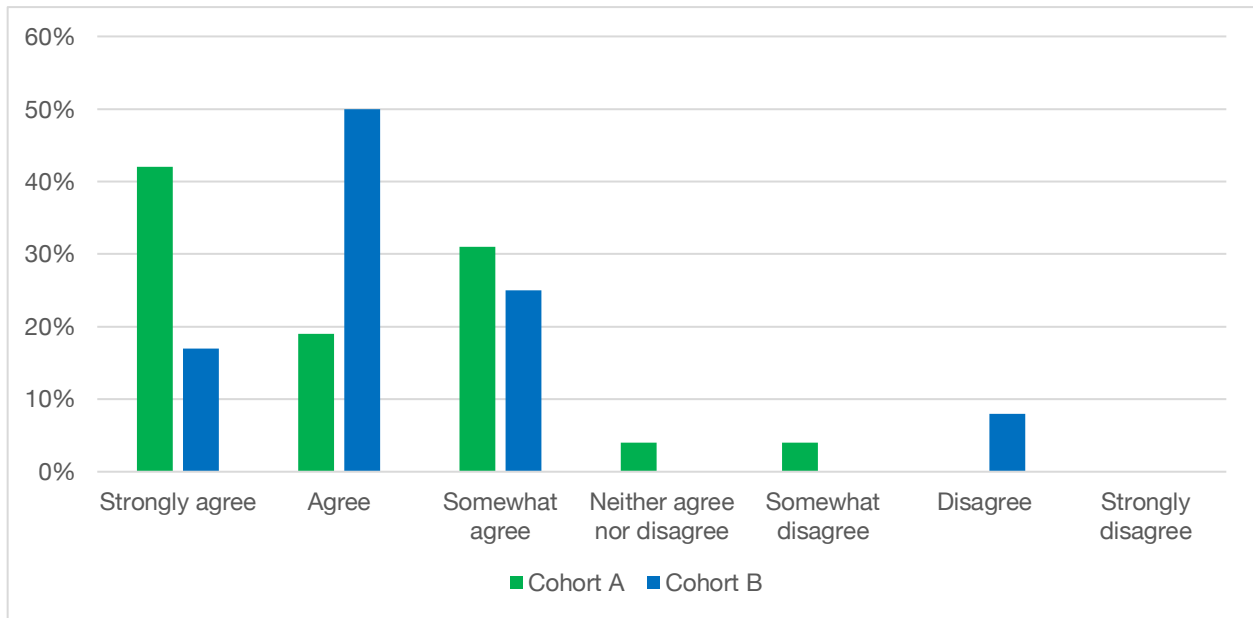
Cohort A had a good positive response to this question, which is a great sign they do feel supported. Cohort A's overall higher average shows it is balanced by a very high return on both strongly agree and somewhat agree. This may indicate a need for a uniform approach across the board as the levels of perceived support may not be landing evenly across the Cohort. Curiously, the only disagreement on this question comes from the more experienced side of Cohort B.

Research Question 3 brings us into the High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) framework. A quick glance at the average scores for the selected sub questions shows a higher overall average for Cohort B, keeping with the overall trend of seeing more positive answers from the more senior members of the organization.

Table 5: Average scores for selected survey questions, III of III

Cohort	Question A12 (1-5 Likert scale)	Question A17	Question B8
A	2.88	5.77	5.85
B	3.58	6.25	6.25

Question A12 asks employees how much influence they exert over the range of tasks they complete in their job. The data shows that 2 of the 3 none at all responses in red on the chart above come from team members after one year of service. This may be normal that Cohort A would have less control, given the newcomer status they have to DreamSpring.

When viewed against the newest DreamSpring teammates, this may be function of job design and roles not easily ascertained here[2]. Cohort B expresses more overall control, which would align with intuition – the more senior folks with regards to longevity have more leeway and range of control of how they perform their roles.

Figure 2: Cohort A & B contrast on question A12 response
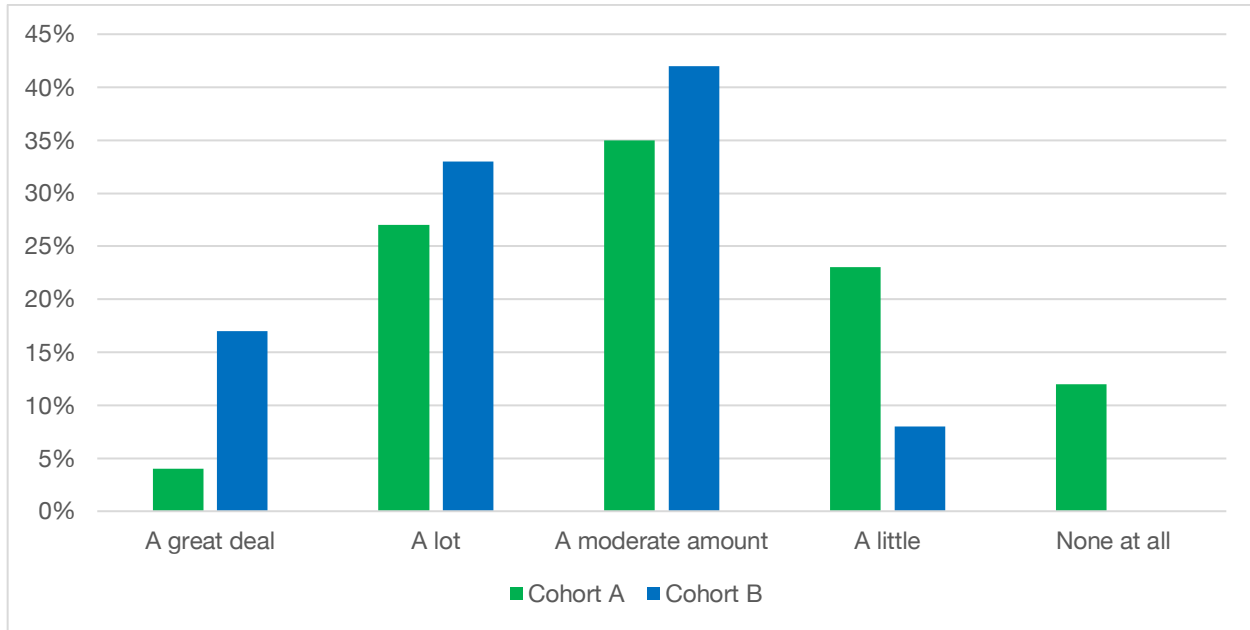
Data from the second instrument – the transformational leadership survey – did not include demographic data. This instrument consisted of nine questions, and the complete scoring and detailed instrument data can be found in appendix B. General themes that comport with the discussed data from the first instrument provide additional support to the findings discussed in the next section as well as amplifying some general trends discussed to this point. Highlights include:

- 27.5% of respondents do not think leaders challenge them to do assigned tasks in new and different ways. This follows the immediate previous discussion from A12.
- 12% of respondents do not think leaders develop a strong sense of loyalty and commitment.
- 15% of respondents do not think leaders inspire members to do their best.
- 17.5% of respondents do not think leaders give every team member personal attention.
- 95% of respondents agree to some degree that leaders do provide a clear sense of mission or purpose.
- 92.5% of respondents agree that leaders treat every team member as a unique individual.

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[2] As a Financial lender, some roles at DreamSpring would need to satisfy local, state and federal reporting requirement, narrowing the degrees of flexibility in reporting requirements and government requirements.

Only DreamSpring can define where an acceptable rate of dissatisfaction can land on a scale. These rates above conform to the overall trend seen in both surveys: the majority of the DreamSpring workforce reports satisfaction across the board, although it leaves room for improvement. Reaching those in Cohort A who do not experience or perceive the same levels of support as others on the team may be the right place to start.

The open-ended comments on the survey highlight some of the data we've seen charted above with respect to Cohort A and what may be an uneven level of impact and support received from their supervisors. Three comments help capture the critical feedback provided that speak to this perception among some in this Cohort:

- *"Mid-level leadership functions exceptionally well. Upper level management and our executive team are often out of touch with the other teams involved in the organization. Remote workers see fewer opportunities then main office workers"*

- *"DreamSpring intentions are in the right place but there is a lack of strategy. It makes it hard to communicate and get everyone on board when there isn't a defined goal we are all shooting for. Everything is last minute and a top priority"*

- *"If your opinions or suggestions fall in line with management vision, it is well received. If not, though it is said we have a voice as part of our values, it is not true."*

Findings

Finding 1: Overall, The DreamSpring workforce perceives its leadership as being inspiring, providing a sense of purpose and mission, being respectful and caring about each employee – but needs work in the 2 ~ 5-year group.

The returns provide evidence about leaders providing a clear sense of mission or purpose, although this scores higher in Cohort B then it does in Cohort A. Overall communication from leadership to staff about the organizational roles, mission and purpose are effective. However, work is needed in the 2~5 year subgroup of Cohort A, which has a lower overall average than any other grouping. One of the more critical comments comes from this grouping, demonstrating some uneven impacts from leadership across everyone at DreamSpring.

Van De Voorde et al., (2011) noted in a comprehensive review of 36 studies, data points separated out to measure employee-employer relationships showed a positive effect on employee performance. Trust, organizational support and a positive work climate as well as overall employee well-being were found to be keys to stability (Van De Voorde et al., 2011).

This is critical to the stability and growth of any organization, as trust in management and supervisors enable a stable workforce and productivity gains for the firm (Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2018). Essentially, workers tend to work harder for organizations and leaders they trust. It is clear the DreamSpring workforce places value in their interactions with their supervisors.

Finding 1a: Supervisor engagement with employees can be better on "big-picture" items facing DreamSpring.

Cohort B's averages are higher across the board in this area, continuing a trend of the more senior members of the organization answering more positively. It is likely that the more senior members make up a majority of upper level management and may be viewing this from a perspective not shared uniformly across Cohorts. Cohort A's lower averages, combined with a critical comment about upper level management may explain part of this difference in score averages.

Results from across the globe in a span of multiple industries demonstrate the need for organizations to ensure supervisor engagement to employees is essential for increased employee commitment and overall performance: for both individuals and collectively for the organization (Qiao et al., 2009).

The two lowest rated areas relate to questions about supervisor engagement: specifically, inputs about future plans for the workplace and pay issues. While pay issues can be contentious in a multitude of settings and industries, the basic tenet of supervisor engagement is the highlight here and suggests room for improvement.

One of the lowest rated areas in the results come from a pair of questions designed to measure employee input into strategic matters affecting the organization, when asked directly by their supervisors. The data suggests this type of engagement does not occur on a regular basis up and down the organization.

This level of engagement can work to increase trust levels of employees, and supervisors can be trained to do this. While this forms only one part of supervisor engagement, line supervisors may not be privy to or feel they can speak confidently about strategic aims of DreamSpring.

A study of the Greek banking sector found raising the awareness of organizations' intentions toward service quality raised the satisfaction and commitment levels of employees (Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2018). Adapted to DreamSpring, ensuring each employee regularly understands the journey of where the organization is in its mission to serve the community can provide the same effect seen in the study - in other words, increased supervisor engagement as the core item to leverage.

Although it can seem like an upside-down concept, working for those who work for you can be of immense benefit to a leader. Leaders at the top of an organization need able, thoughtful and high-quality people around them. Ideally, the leader is choosing people who compliment the leaders' blind spots to form an effective team. At the same time, the leader should also be doing all that they can to help their subordinates succeed (Sample, 2002).

This level of engagement need not only be focused at the top of the organization - it can be practiced and scaled down through the organization. Trust must be earned, and continual engagement and activation of the broader awareness of leadership in the organization is essential for growth. Some of the greatest leaders in history are remembered as great because they had a talent to choose excellent followers, whom they developed further (Sample, 2002).

Finding 2: The DreamSpring workforce feels leadership promotes and delivers empowerment, professional development and caring.

The overall positive nature of the returns across both instruments indicate a high degree of employee engagement, caring and skills development. This area is highly effective for Cohort B, and effective for Cohort A. In addition to robust support for professional development providing mentors has also shown to a have a positive effect on employee retention (Mitchell et al., 2001). As experience is required to be a mentor, this may explain why the 2~5-year group of Cohort A has a slightly lower average compared to other subgroups, as they may be the ones tasked in this initial supervision tier while also searching out mentorship.

"*The most important single factor in employee satisfaction is the quality of the supervisor*" (Sample, 2002).

In a tie for the highest single rated response in the survey, and the second highest average score out of the questions aligned to this finding, employees demonstrate and answer in the affirmative about an overall positive relationship with their supervisors. While the returns show this happens overall, the data also demonstrates an uneven impact across Cohort A.

The strongest result was from a question measuring supervisor understanding of giving employees time and space to meet family responsibilities. This is an outstanding example of supervisors focused on the personal dimensions of an employee's life that may impact their professional duties - and giving them the latitude required.

This foundation is key, as the emotional support that comes from caring about employees is vital: Bartman et al., (2012) find burnout and emotional labor have a linkage to turnover. Reducing the emotional component of burnout can reduce the urge to leave for employees, as a function of increased caring by supervisors (Bartman et al., 2012).

It is important to consider that care for employees is not relegated to an on the job performance factor or what is going on in an employee's life as distinct silos - rather, it is a combination of both: the *whole* person. Personal and professional engagement is required of leaders and supervisors to bring out the best of each person, with the supervisor taking the lead in this engagement (Sample, 2002).

Empowerment has also shown to be a vital component of establishing trust in employees. Mao et al., (2013) found that employees allowed to work autonomously and under their own

initiative and decision-making boost employee commitment to the organization, offering a component in which to reduce turnover.

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Finding 3: DreamSpring is aligned under a HPWS structure across the organization.

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Staying on trend with the data returns, Cohort B has higher averages in this area across the board. Cohort A returns show that there is a discrepancy in how some view opportunities to improve skills and exercise a range of control on how they perform their job tasks. Taken as a whole across both instruments, it is clear that some HPWS elements are in place and functioning inside of DreamSpring.

Walton and Lawrence (1985) noted that management philosophies that inspire commitment from their workforce typically contain inspiring and compelling content, and are normally embodied in a written statement. DreamSpring does this in several forms, from each annual report published to the values prominently displayed: Passion, Pioneering Spirit, Integrity, Excellence and Accountability (DreamSpring, 2020).

One of the key features in a HPWS framework for organizations include extensive training and development, developmental and merit-based performance appraisals and flexible job assignments (Andersén & Andersén, 2019). Studies dating back from the mid-1980s on HPWS also indicate positive impacts on organizational turnover, productivity, sales and overall improved organizational performance (Lauver & Quinn-Trank, 2012).

HPWS focused human resources management does not just provide value to the employees. The human capital growth - or the increase in staff productivity - in this context will also be captured by DreamSpring. When employees are encouraged to act on interests other than increasing their own wealth, employers generally capture the value in the increased output they produce (Molloy & Barney, 2015).

Using a resource-based view of the labor marketplace, DreamSpring's gains from increased human capital provides a pathway to a sustainable productivity gain over time, provided turnover can be kept low (Andersén, Jansson & Ljungkvist, 2016). Reduced turnover slows the mobility of that human capital to other firms, stabilizing potential productivity gains made by adopting a HPWS structure.

Finding the right mix for DreamSpring will include elements of both leadership styles to ensure a robust HPWS structure is in place. This answers the call for reducing turnover while also systematically growing future leaders. Research indicates that the positive impacts to DreamSpring's productivity in the adoption of this practice will increase performance (Huselid & Becker, 1997). In this case, ensuring a process is in place to ensure impacts are felt evenly across the board will help take this area into highly effective for both Cohorts, and again a special focus into the 2~5-year group of Cohort A.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1: IMPLEMENT A SUPERVISOR TRAINING PROGRAM

There is room for more focused engagement with Cohort A, as there is an imbalance on supervisor engagement across the year-groups. The 2 ~ 5-year group section in some cases had less engagement with those who have only been with DreamSpring for under a year. This points towards an opportunity for standardized supervisor training.

The lowest averages to questions, paired with some critical comments about supervisors show this particular sub-group needs focus. As this group may likely be the first field from which supervisors are developed, understanding how to grow and select supervisors becomes key. Training and development of the workforce should also include a systematic, deliberate talent pipeline that identifies employees in the workforce that will produce the right kinds and number of leaders needed to ensure DreamSpring's continued success (Selden & Sowa, 2015).

Paying greater attention to employee development is not just a passing fad: the growth of human resource development has exploded in both the U.S. and around the world since the 1950s. This trend has greatly increased since the turn into the 21st century, with many firms now adding the development and learning of staff into the hands of a managers' roles and responsibilities (Marquardt, Berger & Loan, 2004).

This training and development process becomes part of the HPWS framework, as we know from the literature that promotions, communication and training form part of a robust HPWS focus in a firm's human resource management. As noted in the literature review previously, extensive employee involvement and training are keys to success (Takeuchi, Chen, & Lepak, 2009).

Turnover and leadership engagement are linked issues - training supervisors to develop transformational leadership styles can and should be accomplished. Takeuchi, et al., (2009) found that under a HPWS focused environment, employee commitment to the organization is increased. Inside of the HPWS construct, transformational leadership's core blocks: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration is the key framework for supervisors that can be taught (Bass, 1990).

These should form the outline of the supervisor training curricula at all levels. A new employee's first supervisor can make a big difference in subsequent career success - be it at the management or initial entry levels (Bass, 1990).

We know from the literature that the degrees of HPWS success is context specific to the firm and the managers charged with implementing it (Qiao et al., 2009). A similar approach can be followed with respect a supervisor training program, borrowing from the best of what is available and contextually similar and then tailored to meet DreamSpring's culture.

One such program implemented at a larger scale was used by the Ford Motor company, when it actively sought to spread the use of transformational leadership from its top tier down into middle management ranks in order to become more competitive in a changing worldwide market (Spreitzer & Quinn, 1996). A second relevant example exists at the The Container Store.

The Container Store developed an in-house training program to prioritize communication and servant leadership. These pillars helped build a company-wide culture that is trained to foster care for employees aligned to a "just cause" by training leadership to adopt an infinite mindset, seeking to focus on the greater good and not immediate performance targets (Sinek, 2019).

Seeking a resource-neutral or minimal impact, this will primarily involve time: a specific supervisor needs survey to ascertain what areas current supervisors wish they had prior to assuming supervisory roles, which can be cross referenced with the two data instruments done for this study.

Following the Ford example, once needs are identified, curriculum can be developed, implemented in a workshop of up to one-week instruction, and then follow up sessions can be conducted six months later (Spreitzer & Quinn, 1996). This allows a feedback loop after initial implementation for both supervisors and employees.

Over a 2-year period, the program should realize benefits and then begin to form the basis of constant, deliberate improvement in training and development of supervisors. This recommendation addresses the two lowest scores in the survey, and this extended timeline is a guide to ensure the changes and improvements made harness lasting, meaningful change. A suggested outline is available in Appendix A.

✿ Recommendation 2: Routinely survey employees annually, to include exit interviews when appropriate

The 2 ~ 5-year group of Cohort A reported a higher dissatisfaction in pay, while Cohort B did not have an overwhelmingly positive response for the encouragement of training development and supervisor relations. As these data points start to scatter across the map, capturing the why behind departures will help DreamSpring focus in on any central themes or trends to help narrow efforts to improve.

The use of surveys is common and a cost-effective way to collect information, and can lead to important discoveries about the workforce (Bartram et al., 2012). Being able to see where employee needs are over time helps form a baseline and monitor long-term trends. This should

come through direct employee engagement, and provided anonymously without fear of retribution.

As Recommendation 1 is implemented, over the same 2-year time frame annual surveys should be conducted across the workforce. This will facilitate DreamSpring's leadership to see how the changes are being felt across the board and also building a data set in which to identify trends. Not all employees or supervisors will value the implementation of new changes in the same way, and not all organizations that have implemented a HPWS schema have employees who are fully committed to it (Andersén & Andersén, 2019).

Finding reasons for varying commitment levels, burnout, and the why behind voluntary departures through the use of exit interviews become key information for leadership to use to improve. Moreover, building components of trust with employees has been positively linked to increasing commitment and reducing turnover, thusly asking for their opinion and then utilizing that information to improve can greatly enhance trust, a key feature of a well-functioning HPWS in an organization (Qiao et al., 2009).

Over time, employees may feel that up-channeling their concerns through supervision is sufficient. However, as deliberate supervisor training is being developed and implemented over a 2-year period, this same time frame can be used for direct, anonymous surveys. This comes at little cost to the organization, and can be run annually at the same time.

This internal survey can be executed around the same time the annual report is published, to give leadership an internal look at the organization as it presents its public-facing work to its external stakeholders.

Recommendation 3: Focus on the Cohort A 2~5 year group

Across both Cohorts, Cohort A's 2~5-year tier consistently has lower average score responses across the instruments. This points the way towards increased attention and finding out what this group needs. This can be accomplished via focus groups or targeted survey's, but direct engagement is called for here.

Training and development of the DreamSpring workforce should lead to positive outcomes, enhancing employee satisfaction and commitment leading to a reduction of turnover (Takeuchi, Chen & Lepack, 2009). It is with this group that this effort should begin in earnest. Attending to the needs of this group should be a priority, with the goal of uniform impacts and communication from upper level management. This will ensure this core group understands they have leadership support to address concerns they may have not reflected exactly in these results, but may be the source of the lower average scores.

Conclusion

This project sought to identify and proscribe the problem of practice at DreamSpring: excessive turnover. The overwhelming majority of DreamSpring's workforce has only been on the job for less than 5 years, even as DreamSpring celebrates 26 years of serving the community. Findings in the data collected revealed that DreamSpring employees rate leadership at a slightly above average score when averaged across two surveys. Leadership has been extremely supportive of this effort in time and access to data.

DreamSpring has committed employees from top to bottom who participated in large numbers in the data collection phase. Findings show that while supervisors are inspiring, respectful and care about employees, overall engagement across a wider range of issues can be improved.

The key recommendation for improvement is for DreamSpring to develop and implement a supervisor training program to properly train and equip supervisors in a transformational leadership style to primarily combat the turnover issue. This approach has enjoyed success across the globe, and can be done "in-house" (Spreitzer & Quinn, 1996). Following this, recommendations include an annual survey of the workforce and fully building out DreamSpring's HPWS construct in its well-functioning human resources policy construct.

Limitations are with the survey response rate of 70%. While excellent, this is still a third of the workforce missing, potentially adjusting scores. Only a few respondents chose to provide comments in the second survey, giving a very low qualitative data set in which to analyze and compare against the quantitate set available.

Moving forward, implementation of the recommendations should put DreamSpring on a path to deliberate supervisor development. It all starts with the supervisor and ensuring there is a sustainable and robust pipeline for talent development that arms this key group of committed DreamSpring employees is the first recommendation to help signify its criticality.

Solving this problem of practice of turnover is routed through this critical step: ensuring a sustainable and well-developed supervisor tier will produce not just a higher performing organization…but one that enjoys improved retention as a natural result as well.

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Appendix A: Supervisor Training Program Outline

Organized in an in-person workshop setting, the ideal supervisor training program would start with the following topics, pending results of the supervisor needs inquiry as discussed in Recommendation one. Subsequent needs can be bolted onto the core program outline below.

Routine updates and refresher blocks can and should also be built into the program, in the form of hour-long blocks that can be conducted on a quarterly basis.

Block I:

- Leadership styles and introduction to Transformational leadership
- Leading subordinates
- Group development
- Stress Management
- Employee Welfare
- Motivation
- Self-Management
- Empowerment
- Leading Change
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Block II:

- Communication techniques
- Counseling
- Coaching and Mentoring
- Conflict management
- Servant Leadership
- Task and project management
- Lessons learned process

Block format and selected topics adapted from NATO professional development curriculum (NATO, 2013)

Communication techniques, counseling and conflict management would include "in-class" practical examples to give supervisors practice in a learning role-played environment, complete with feedback to improve.

Appendix B: Survey Instrument data tables

For scoring, the standard Likert-scale convention has been implemented with the lowest value answer (*Strongly disagree)* at 1, and the highest value answer (*Strongly agree)* at 7. Thus, the higher the score, the better the result as a higher number is closer to a positive answer from the question. Given the strong return rate for both surveys, the sample size was sufficiently high enough for stringent data testing and validity in these results using this methodology and analysis (Norman, 2010).

Accordingly, scoring data for this survey is broken down per question in Table 3 as follows:

Table 6: Transformational Leadership Survey Scoring

Transformational Leadership Survey Question	*Score data*
1) My leaders provide me with a clear sense of mission or purpose 2) My leaders inspire me to do my best	1) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 6.08**; Std Dev = 1.10; Variance = 1.22 2) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.78**; Std Dev = 1.23; Variance = 1.52
3) My leaders develop a strong sense of loyalty and commitment in me	3) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.55**; Std Dev = 1.34; Variance = 1.80
4) My leaders might tell me what to do but they want me to figure out how to do assigned tasks 5) My leaders encourage me to "think outside the box" 6) My leaders challenge me to do assigned tasks in new and different ways	4) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean 5.25**; Std Dev = 1.43; Variance = 2.04 5) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.35**; Std Dev = 1.26; Variance = 1.58 6) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.80**; Std Dev = 1.14; Variance = 1.31
7) My leaders provide experiences for my professional and personal growth 8) My leaders give every team member personal attention 9) My leaders treat every team member as unique individuals	7) Min = 1; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.50**; Std Dev = 1.50; Variance = 2.25 8) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.80**; Std Dev = 1.25; Variance = 1.56 9) Min = 1; Max = 7; **Mean 5.22**; Std Dev = 1.49; Variance = 2.22

When averaged across the entire 9 question survey, the mean is 5.59, which on these 1 to 7 scale states that the overall takeaway is a positive one: this places the overall sentiment

between "Somewhat agree" and "Agree". At the same time, this also leaves room for improvement and offers targeted areas of leadership development to focus on first, which will be further discussed in detail in the findings and recommendations sections.

The second survey featured 50 questions divided into three sections: 18 questions in *About your Job (section A)*; 25 questions in *About working at DreamSpring (section B)*; and finally, the remaining 7 questions in *Demographics (section C)*. This survey uses a mix of 5 to 7-point Likert scale responses, multiple choice and finally demographic identifier questions.

Table 7: DreamSpring Employee Relations Survey Scoring

Research Question	DreamSpring Employee Relations Survey Question	Score data
1) What is the nature of the <u>perceptions</u> of leadership at the various employment tiers at DreamSpring?	A11 - Do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your job? I worry a lot about my work outside working hours	A11) Min = 1; Max = 7; **Mean = 4.03**; Std Dev = 1.70; Variance = 2.90
	A18 - How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your job? The respect you get from supervisors/leadership	A18) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.77**; Std Dev = 1.44; Variance = 2.07
	B15 - How often are you and others working here asked by supervisors/leadership for your views on the following? (1 of 5) Future Plans for the workplace	B15) Min = 1; Max = 5; **Mean = 3.05**; Std Dev = 1.41; Variance = 2
	B18 - How often are you and others working here asked by supervisors/leadership for your views on the following? (4 of 5) Pay Issues	B18) Min = 1; Max 4; **Mean = 2.10**; Std Dev = 1.13; Variance = 1.27
	B21 - How good would you say your supervisor is in the following areas? (2 of 5) Providing everyone with the chance to comment on proposed changes	B21) Min = 1; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.15**; Std Dev = 1.63; Variance = 2.64
	B23 - How good would you say your supervisor is in the following areas? (4 of 5) Dealing with work problems you or others may have	B23) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.92**; Std Dev = 1.16; Variance = 1.35

Table 7: DreamSpring Employee Relations Survey Scoring

Research Question	DreamSpring Employee Relations Survey Question	Score data
1a) What is the relationship between employee <u>perceptions</u> of leadership and turnover?	A16 - How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your job? The amount of pay you receive B4 - If you needed to take a day off work at short notice, for example to look after a sick family member, how would you usually do it? B16 - How often are you and others working here asked by supervisors/leadership for your views on the following? (2 of 5) Staffing Issues, including layoffs B19 - How often are you and others working here asked by supervisors/leadership for your views on the following? (5 of 5) Health and safety at work B22 - How good would you say your supervisor is in the following areas? (3 of 5) Responding to suggestions from employees B24 - How good would you say your supervisor is in the following areas? (5 of 5) Treating employees fairly B25 - In general, how would you describe relations between supervisors and employees here?	A16) Min = 1; Max = 7; **Mean = 4.85**; Std Dev = 1.81; Variance = 3.26 B4) Min = 4; Max = 6; **Mean = 5.79**; Std Dev = 0.46; Variance = 0.21 B16) Min = 1; Max = 5; **Mean = 2.36**; Std Dev = 1.14; Variance = 1.31 B19) Min = 1; Max = 5; **Mean = 3**; Std Dev = 1.18; Variance = 1.38 B22) Min = 3; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.67**; Std Dev = 1.14; Variance = 1.30 B24) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 6.10;** Std Dev = 1.08; Variance = 1.17 B25) Min = 2; Max = 5; **Mean = 4.15**; Std Dev = 0.80; Variance = 0.64

Table 7: DreamSpring Employee Relations Survey Scoring

Research Question	DreamSpring Employee Relations Survey Question	Score data
2) What is the nature of the leadership at DreamSpring?	A1 - How many years have you been working at DreamSpring? A10 - Do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your job? I feel my job is secure at DreamSpring A15 - How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your job? The amount of influence you have over your job B6 - Do you agree, or disagree, with the following statements about working here at DreamSpring? Managers/Supervisors here are understanding about employees having to meet family responsibilities B7 - Do you agree, or disagree, with the following statements about working here at DreamSpring? People working here are encouraged to develop their skills B17 - How often are you and others working here asked by supervisors/leadership for your views on the following? (3 of 5) Changes to work practices B20 - How good would you say your supervisor is in the following areas? (1 of 5) Keeping everyone up to date about proposed changes	A1) Min = 1; Max = 5; **Mean = 2.87**; Std Dev = 1.14 ; Variance = 1.29 A10) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 4.97**; Std Dev = 1.35; Variance = 1.82 A15) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.33**; Std Dev = 1.51; Variance = 2.27 B6) Min = 5; Max = 7; **Mean = 6.59**; Std Dev = 0.63; Variance = 0.40 B7) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.85;** Std Dev = 1.17; Variance = 1.36 B17) Min = 1; Max = 5; **Mean = 2.92**; Std Dev = 1.23; Variance = 1.51 B20) Min = 2; Max = 5; **Mean = 3.95**; Std Dev = 0.93; Variance = 0.87

Table 7: DreamSpring Employee Relations Survey Scoring

Research Question	*DreamSpring Employee Relations Survey Question*	*Score data*
3) Is DreamSpring currently aligned in a High Performance Work System (HPWS) structure across the organization?	A8 - Do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your job? My job requires that I work very hard A9 - Do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your job? I never seem to have enough time to get my job done A12 - In general, how much influence do you have about following? The range of tasks you do in your job A13 - In general, how much influence do you have about following? The pace at which you work A14 - In general, how much influence do you have about following? How you do your work A17 - How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your job? The sense of achievement you get from your work B5 - Do you agree, or disagree, wth the following statements about working here at DreamSpring? I share many of the values of DreamSpring B8 - Do you agree, or disagree, wth the following statements about working here at DreamSpring? I feel loyal to DreamSpring B9 - Do you agree, or disagree, wth the following statements about working here at DreamSpring? I am proud to tell people who I work for	A8) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.95**; Std Dev = 0.94; Variance = 0.89 A9) Min = 1; Max = 7; **Mean = 3.92**; Std Dev = 1.77 ; Variance = 3.15 A12) Min = 1; Max = 5; **Mean = 3.13**; Std Dev = 1.04; Variance = 1.09 A13) Min = 1; Max = 5; **Mean = 3.62**; Std Dev = 1.08; Variance = 1.16 A14) Min = 1; Max = 5; **Mean = 3.74;** Std Dev = 1.03; Variance = 1.06 A17) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.92**; Std Dev = 1.16; Variance = 1.35 B5) Min = 6; Max = 7; **Mean = 6.59**; Std Dev = 0.49; Variance = 0.24 B8) Min = 2; Max = 7; **Mean = 5.97**; Std Dev = 1.25; Variance = 1.56 B9) Min = 3; Max = 7; **Mean = 6.29**; Std Dev = 0.92; Variance = 0.84