

PERFORMANCE-BASED INCENTIVES RELATIVE TO ORGANIZATIONAL
OBJECTIVES IN THE UNIONIZED RAILROAD INDUSTRY

BY





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ABSTRACT

Researchers have reported a direct correlation between motivation and extrinsic incentives to increase performance in the workplace. Extrinsic motivators such as compensation, promotion opportunities, and professional development entice employees to exceed their work expectations for these opportunities. Employing three theoretical frameworks including job characteristics theory, Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, and Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory, the perceptions of agreement and nonagreement were examined in this qualitative study. The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which unionized employees are incentivized to perform in relation to achieving organizational objectives. Class I railroad employees were interviewed to determine if performance-based incentives would increase motivation in the workplace. Ethnography was used in this research as it is imperative to observe the behaviors, beliefs, and patterns of railroad employees in their specific work culture to understand the current and historical behavioral patterns that drive performance and the motivating factors that motivate their actions. In-person and phone interviews with unionized and managerial employees were used to collect data, which was transcribed for analysis through convenience sampling. The interview responses were transcribed using NVivo to identify trends in specific words, phrases, sentiments, and expressions and were reported in narration and comparative tables. Interviews took place in the employee's workplace to allow the unbiased collection of data in the unionized culture. Recommendations for practical application include how management can incorporate non-monetary incentives to encourage performance relative to organizational objectives and foster a positive work environment. A better understanding of unionized employee perceptions of performance-

based compensation can facilitate future research with different classes of railroads or other unionized industries to incorporate performance incentives in order to achieve organizational goals.

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DEDICATION

For my family, Lindsay, Alexander, and Henry. Thank you for your patience and understanding throughout this endeavor. During this journey together we have spent a lot of time apart and I have missed several milestones. Lindsay, you are my rock. Alexander and Henry, you can accomplish anything. I love you all.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Regardless of the industry, there are several motivational factors that lead to employee performance which include: (a) compensation, (b) autonomy, (c) resource availability, (d) opportunity for personal development and advancement, and (e) clear expectations of the end result (Lee, 2019). Railroad employees are motivated to perform to specific expectations due to the extreme safety-sensitive environment (Giles, 2011), the constant shifting of operational assets to facilitate the movement of customer products on trains (Cej, 2016), and ensuring the railroad maintains their operational schedule to ensure customer satisfaction.

Managers and unionized employees who work for the railroad are compensated differently and therefore have varying motivational factors that influence performance. The railroad environment is already contentious with the perception managers and employees are out to defraud one another (Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen [BLET], 2016). There is no common identity between management and the union craft except for maintaining a safety climate with the shared values that safe working practices take precedent over expeditious working practices (Hemphill & White, 2018).

Compensation for railroad managers and unionized railroad employees are packaged with varying performance criteria, which leads to differences in motivational factors in performance. Railroad managers are typically compensated with salaries, bonuses, and stock options. The latter two forms of compensation directly reflect achievement of performance objectives stipulated in their respective goals. Performance objectives for a manager are typically related to safety initiatives and ensuring unionized

employees are compliant with the operating rules in addition to key organization-wide operational metrics including velocity, terminal car dwell, and train speed. These performance objectives contribute to the railroad manager's compensation and motivation to meet or exceed the objectives for the year. Other extrinsic and intrinsic motivators influencing a manager are praise, establishing a name, avoiding ridicule, and the simple joy of running a fluent operation (Robescu & Iancu, 2016).

Union employee compensation is complex and depends on the collective bargaining agreement negotiated by their labor union. Other factors contribute to overall compensation such as reduction of pay for removal from service, leave of absences, and performing additional work outside of their contractual agreement for compensation. Unionized railroad employees face many demotivational hurdles such as (a) efficiency testing by managers, (b) irregular hours which includes being on call and having the difficulty of balancing work and home life with an inconsistent work schedule, and (c) the possibility of being furloughed if one's seniority is low in comparison to their peers (Ziobro, 2018).

Railroad managers are operationally acute and have working knowledge of the network, resources, and assets available to achieve operational metrics, whereas unionized employees are licensed and certified through the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) which entails a unique skillset that allows the operation and transportation of assets, people, equipment, and commodities to transport via rail (Vantuono, 2019). Conductors and engineers are the key assets that facilitate the movement of goods over rail, and to succeed as an organization, both managers and unionized employees have a high job satisfaction level. The reoccurring theme in the

workplace environment is resentment, hostility, and an uncomfortable atmosphere that exists between management and union employees (Reinach & Gertler, 2002) resulting in miscommunication, a misalignment of goals for the organization, and competing ulterior motives, ultimately affecting job satisfaction levels. These factors lead to the assumption that productivity between the two factions deteriorates in the face of miscommunication, a lack of goal alignment, and a lack of job characteristics theory, which includes the attitude of employees, levels of motivation, and job satisfaction (Oerelemans & Bakker, 2018).

According to Oerelemans and Bakker (2018), job characteristics theory identifies skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback as the key characteristics directly related to work outcomes to include job satisfaction. If resentment and hostility exist in a railroad environment between management and union employees, the task significance, task identity, and autonomy on the union employee are affected, which ultimately affects the operational goals of management.

Introducing the concept of compensating unionized employees through measurable objectives mutually benefits the employee and organization. As a method to improve railroad operational performance erodes the discord between management and unionized employees, compensating unionized employees can increase task identity, task significance, and autonomy between management and union employees. Compensating unionized employees also introduces a motivational factor for both factions to increase the railroad and employees' performance.

Background of the Problem

Compensation directly influences the employee's motivation and achievement (Sudiardhita et al., 2018). When workplace satisfaction and compensation are low, it affects the employee's overall performance to accomplish the task whereas high compensation improves work performance, morale, and motivation (Barliana et al., 2018). The factors that improve job satisfaction and performance include compensation, working conditions, and job stress (Pandey & Gertler, 2002). Organizations with a compensation policy relative to performance increases job enthusiasm, opens communication channels, and makes employees more receptive of a reward policy (Lee & Lin, 2014).

The information pertaining to motivation, compensation, and increasing job characteristics is not applicable to every railroad, railroad employee, and manager, but there is a common theme in the railroad industry that a lack of communication, lack of guidance, and misuse of human assets as it pertains to organizational objectives is evident (American Rights at Work, 2011). A chaotic environment is not inherent in the railroad industry; however, when employee communication channels are disrupted and there is no alignment between managers and employees, the result of achieving corporate objectives disrupts productivity and innovative job behavior (Černe et al., 2017). This organizational dysfunction results in employee hesitancy to propose creative ideas to accomplish objectives, the suppression of innovative ideas to perform the work more safely and efficiently, and ultimately the degradation of organizational performance (Florea et al., 2017).

Unionized employees receive compensation to perform a job stipulated in their contract, regardless of the outcome if the job is performed safely and efficiently.

Unionized employees are not compensated to achieve organizational objectives relative to the metrics management must plan and strategize to accomplish. Management compensation includes using unionized employees to achieve organizational objectives. This could lead to the presumption that incentivizing unionized employees for their performance could serve as a motivational factor related to achieving organizational goals.

Employees with higher job satisfaction tend to be the most productive workers due to job characteristics, favorable work environment, and employee engagement (Joo & Lee, 2017). When employees have no work objective or purpose they feel no urgency to complete the task at hand due to the lack of transparency which can result in an unfavorable work environment (Aries, 2017). Factors contributing to a favorable work environment that influences actual behavior and performance include initiative, cooperation, and communication (Sudiardhita et al., 2018).

Unionized employees are the critical asset facilitating the transportation of customer goods, equipment, and people across the railroad network, yet unionized employees are not rewarded for performance relative to the measurable objectives that may lead to increased railroad performance. Initiative and cooperation through extrinsic motivators such as performance-based compensation through measurable objectives can lead to increased productivity, increased communication throughout the organization, and an amicable working environment (Lazear, 2018).

Problem Statement

Despite research on employee work motivation, job autonomy, productivity, and performance—characteristics needed for an optimally efficient organization—there is a gap in research examining performance-based incentivization for unionized railroad employees to increase productivity relative to performance measures of the organization. Gaps in the literature referenced the railroad industry's attempt at pay for performance, although other transportation industries such as trucking have performance initiatives for their employees that reduce operational costs and increase performance to retain and attract employees (Lilja, 2018). Lilja (2018) identified several performance-based incentives to retain quality employees to include fuel solution compliance, driver availability, and miles per gallon standard. No literature existed that identified performance-based incentives for unionized railroad employees relative to those in the trucking industry.

Unionized railroad employees require a specific skillset which requires arduous training certified in compliance by the FRA for both conductors and engineers (FRA, 2008). Their expertise and knowledge of field operations (e.g., operating locomotives, operating switches, understanding customers' work orders) are imperative to complete the task at hand. Essentially, unionized employees are the subject matter experts when performing the job their qualifications allow them to perform. The fact that unionized employees are the subject matter experts and they are not incentivized for using their knowledge and skillset to increase operational performance is disconcerting. Sudiardhita et al. (2018) concluded compensation has a significant effect on work motivation and job satisfaction. Although unionized employees are compensated to perform work

contractually stipulated in their labor agreement, there are no incentives for increased performance and productivity to achieve corporate objectives, and as Lazear (2018) pointed out, incentives affect behavior.

Performance-contingent rewards are distributed to achieve a specific objective in respect to the goals of the organization (Hur & Nordgren, 2016). Although fixed compensation satisfies the employee's physiological needs, Locke and Schattke (2018) suggested that extrinsic motivators, such as money, are the primary tool of exchange and increasing motivators such as incentives intensify the desire for self-development, task significance, and job satisfaction. Lazear (2018) alluded performance-based compensation is associated with higher levels of output which in turn reduces absenteeism and increases job efforts. The problem in the railroad industry is due to a lack of performance incentives for unionized employees. There is an unknown potential increase in productivity and performance that can be captured if unionized employees were incentivized to achieve the same organizational metrics as railroad managers. The objective of this research is to determine if unionized railroad employees would favor a performance-based compensation system that would reward employees for their performance, relative to the contribution of the objectives and metrics of the organization.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to explore the ways in which unionized employees are incentivized to perform in relation to accomplishing organizational objectives and metrics. Currently, there is limited research and data available to contradict the norm that unionized employees are contractually compensated to perform work outlined in their labor agreement with no performance-based

compensation to achieve organizational metrics. That said, there is a significant gap in the literature to determine if incentivizing unionized employees to achieve organizational metrics is mutually beneficial for the organization, management, and unionized employees. It is the intention of this study to look at the way in which the performance of unionized employees interacts with monetary rewards and operational performance of the railroad.

The norm in the railroad industry is union employees are compensated to perform work stipulated in their contract without incentives based on their performance and regardless of optimal efficiency and effective work habits. Introducing motivators such as performance-based compensation ultimately increases productive behavior (Lazear, 2018). The study aims to analyze the work environment and gather information from the employees that perform the work to determine if performance incentives would increase work performance.

Methodology Overview

The research design used in this research was ethnography (Wolcott, 2008), which is a specific research design in qualitative methodology. Franz Boas's work in anthropology may be helpful to understand those human behaviors that influence a social group or specific subculture in an organization (Swyers, 2016). Boas is considered the father of anthropology and was one of the most influential social scientists of the early twentieth century (Lewis, 2019). Although anthropology is a comparative study of human behavior in societies and cultures, ethnography is an extension of anthropology (Wolcott, 2008) that studies the entirety of people's lives in a specific culture to include work, habits, jargon, and the environment. Ethnographic design requires the assimilation of the

researcher into the culture with the result of describing life as lived experienced (Ingold, 2017).

One of the critical required components of ethnographic research, developed by Boas, is participant observation over time to collect raw data of a specific culture (Darnell, 2018). There is no fixed method of conducting ethnographic research because participant observation requires steadfast and detailed collection of unbiased qualitative data (Ingold, 2017). Shah (2017) identified four core aspects of participant observation to include (a) long duration, (b) revealing social relations of a group of people, (c) holism, and (c) intimacy and estrangement. Participant observation and holism will be the primary focus of this study to understand the culture of the group and their social processes and to study all aspects of social life in the group (Shah, 2017) due to the uniqueness of the railroad industry and the various types of working relationships between management, unionized employees, and stakeholders.

Conducting ethnographic research, specifically in the railroad industry, is imperative because it requires understanding the subculture in the unionized environment that one might not understand in different work environments. Wolcott (2008) asserted the underlying idea culture is revealed through discerning patterns of socially shared behavior. Observing and understanding the behavior, values, and historical relationship with management from the unionized employee perspective will provide an understanding of their perspective as it relates to compensating employees relative to operational objectives and metrics.

The railroad industry is a unique culture that has very few employees. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020, there are approximately 210,500 employees who

work in all departments of the railroad industry, which includes Class I through Class III. Departments in the railroad industry include (a) engineering, (b) mechanical, (c) transportation, and (d) administrative. The population of this study will focus on engineers and conductors which total roughly 71,000 transportation employees in the railroad industry (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Considering the fact 155.76 million people are currently employed in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), 0.001% of the U.S. workforce is currently employed in the railroad industry. Social relations amongst unionized employees and holism were the focus of participant observations in this study due to the fact the nature of the railroad industry is unique in the sense several types of relationships exist to include positive, negative, and ambivalent relationships between managers, unionized employees, union officials, and other stakeholders. Ethnographic research in this study was imperative to analyze the lifestyles, patterns, and social construct of this subculture in the labor force (Goulding, 2005).

Ethnography allowed for observation of current behaviors, beliefs, and patterns that affect the current culture (Patton, 2015). Ethnographic inquiry was used to understand the culture of unionized employees including the current and historical behavioral patterns and beliefs that drive performance with respect to management-employee relations and motivation to complete the task at hand given the current compensation of unionized employees. Additionally, using ethnography in the employee's setting allowed for the unfiltered collection of data in a unionized culture. The union culture, often beset with managerial disdain, union official influence, job insecurity due to infractions or threat of furloughs, varying degrees of motivation, and a

variety of other stressors (Smit et al., 2016) requires the use of ethnographic research to ascertain the motivations and behaviors of the railroad environment.

Patton (2015) suggested the sample size depends on what the researcher wants to know, what will yield the most information relative to the inquiry, and what will have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge with time and resources available. The population included 50 unionized conductors and engineers and 10 transportation management employees from varying Class I railroads in the Midwest, primarily from Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana. The minimum sample required 25 unionized employees and five transportation management employees. Convenience sampling was used due to unionized employees and other railroad employees having to respect Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), which states the FRA and all carriers must comply with and not disturb the rest of a unionized railroad employee after a tour of duty (FRA, 2019). Convenience sampling was necessary to respect the hours of service for unionized employees who completed a tour of duty. Management employees were convenience sampled based on availability considering transportation management employees are not confined to a desk and are often in the field conducting efficiency tests, responding to network disruptions, or engaging with employees on the topic of safety related issues. The rationale behind using a management population and unionized employee population was due to the internal conflict in the railroad industry. Management's intent to achieve operational metrics in a demanding environment, mandatory efficiency testing by management on unionized employees, and the lack of thorough communication (Mendoza, 2017) often leads to discontent with the unionized workforce.

The instrumentation included structured one-on-one interviews using the same set of open-ended questions (see Appendix A) designed to gather initial information allowing the researcher to ask additional questions to the participant's response allowing a broader range of follow-up questions. The interviews occurred at a place of convenience and familiarity for the participant, preferably the employee's home terminal, inside a breakroom, or in a crew room free of distraction and peer influence. With the employee's consent, notes were taken and the interview was recorded and later transcribed to identify key words, nonverbal behavior, repeated phrases, cultural jargon, and other identifiable trends. Focus groups were highly avoided to ensure confidentiality and undue influence from other union employees. The transcription software used to identify themes and patterns was NVivo. Unstructured interviews allowed themes and reoccurring verbal patterns to be identified through open-ended questions (Wolcott, 2008) relating to: (a) compensation, (b) management, (c) work/home balance, (d) the union, and (e) other key words that influence unionized employee behavior.

Railroad operational performance indicators for the railroad that were measured included (a) train speed and velocity, (b) human factor related incidents pertaining to safety (e.g., run through switches, derailments, side swipes), and (c) customer service performance and accurate reporting. The operational factors that influence train speed and velocity include crew availability, initial terminal departure, and unnecessary terminal delays which all relate to the performance of unionized employees. Safety factors include the actions taken by unionized employees to ensure the reduction of preventable safety related incidents when moving equipment and ensuring compliance in operating rules. Customer service and accurate reporting are those actions taken by

employees to ensure any work performed at a customer facility are accurately reported to include any reasoning behind not performing the work at a customer facility. Although performance measures are quantitative in nature, an ethnographic inquiry allowed for an understanding of the unionized railroad culture and a determination of whether performance-based compensation would influence behavior to achieve these organizational metrics.

Research Questions

Although research on motivation, compensation, and cooperation suggests incentivizing unionized employees for achieving operational metrics would be beneficial for both the organization and employee, the chance of performance-based compensation for unionized employees to have overall rejection is possible with both agreement and nonagreement employees. Although the interviews were open-ended, the research questions were framed around the following principal research question and secondary questions:

1. What are unionized railroad employees' perceptions of an incentive system based on their performance and availability?
2. How do employees perceive a compensation package with performance-based incentives tied to operational performance based on their efforts?
3. What other employee benefits or incentives can influence employee performance aside from monetary incentives?

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses in the study the researcher has no control over relating to the research design method and apparent research constraints that shape

the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2017). The first limitation in this research was the shortage of participants due to time constraints, unavailability due to unionized employees' hours of service, and potential discouragement from union officials or local management. Union officials and management oftentimes have ulterior objectives, so coercion and persuasion through word of mouth of participating in a research study could be perceived by their peers as working with management and serve as a limitation. Railroads reduce union employment when unionized employee wages increase (Wilmers, 2017) or when car volumes fall ultimately impacting those still employed and resulting in a work/life imbalance for union employees due to an increased workload with the remaining employees. Union officials insist on an increase of unionized employees to achieve a manageable work/life balance; however, management optimally tries to find a balance between operation costs versus revenue relative to the number of employees on the payroll. These are the ulterior motives of union officials and management who put unionized employees in the crosshairs.

The most significant limitation was finding employees currently not working and not affected by their current hours of service on a tour of duty. Conducting an interview with a unionized railroad employee currently not on a tour of duty was optimal, but unlikely, largely due in part that this would be a convenience sample through pure coincidence if the research were to be ethical. Interviewing a participant who is currently on their hours of service must be succinct, direct, and to the point to not interfere with the railroad's operations.

Delimitations

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2017) asserted delimitations are consciously set by the author and mainly concerned with the study's theoretical background, objectives, and variables of the study sample. Delimitations of the research included agreement employees with at least five years of experience and management with at least three years of experience. Agreement employees with at least five years of experience were ideal because they more than likely had experienced a contract negotiation and had vested railroad experience. Managers with three years of experience were ideal because of the experience gained and the probability they were moving to their next assignment at another terminal or another position with a railroad. Finding managers with over three years of experience was imperative as they are knowledgeable of the motivational techniques to encourage employee work behavior in addition to being knowledgeable of labor agreements. The last delimitation was the participants of this research were limited to Class I railroads located in the Midwest. Although the results of the study capture this specific group of railroad employees, the findings and results of this study may not necessarily generalize to other subjects, locations, future time periods, or other collective bargaining agreements.

Definitions

Some of the key terms and concepts used in this research include the following:

Class I railroad: Class I railroads are regulated by the Surface Transportation Board and have a revenue, as of 2019, of \$447,621,226 or more. Class I railroads include Union Pacific (UP), Burlington Northern and Santa Fe (BNSF), Canadian National

Railway (CN; 2017), Canadian Pacific (CP) Railway, Norfolk Southern Railway (NS), CSX Transportation (CSX), and Kansas City Southern Railway (KCS; Prince, 2016).

Conductor: A conductor is a train crew member ultimately responsible for the operational and safety duties of the train but does not physically operate the train. Conductors work with customers to ensure accurate placement of cars, read and understand operating bulletins, receive and perform work instructed from train dispatchers, yardmasters, and supervisors, and ensure safety compliance from the organization and FRA (Armstrong, 2008).

Derailment: A derailment is an event in which equipment designed for rail movement leaves the rail for a variety of reasons to include network disruptions or human factor incidents (Armstrong, 2008).

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA): A department of the Department of Transportation, the FRA enforces rail safety regulations for the carriers and the general public (FRA, 2019).

Efficiency testing: Prescribed by the FRA, all unionized employees are subject to efficiency testing by qualified managers to ensure compliance with operating rules (Mendoza, 2017).

Engineer: An engineer operates the locomotive of a train. Overall responsibility includes train speed, mechanical operation of the locomotive, ensuring safety compliance of the locomotive, and adhering to train handling rules enforced by the carrier and FRA (Armstrong, 2008).

Hours of service: A term used by unionized railroad employees and enforced by Title 49 of the CFR that the FRA must adhere to not allowing unionized employees, in

this case unionized transportation employees, to work beyond their 12th hour in one tour of duty (Mitchell, 2018).

Precision scheduled railroading (PSR): PSR is a railroad operating model centered on streamlining train schedules focused on efficiency, asset utilization, and velocity. This model of railroading builds longer trains in compliance with horsepower availability to reduce asset utilization (Blaze, 2019).

Run-through switch: A run-through switch occurs when a train crew traverses through a yard, main line, or customer facility with a switch not lined through the intended route causing the switch to be damaged and unusable (Roth et al., 2018).

Switching operations: Switching operations refers to how railroad employees breakdown trains and reclassify cars in rail yards for outbound trains or local customers (Roth et al., 2018).

Terminal: A terminal is the location where train crews report hours of service, report to work, and, in many instances, perform work operations to include classifying and switching trains (Armstrong, 2008).

Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR): Title 49 of the CFR includes the rules and regulations issued by the Department of Transportation. The FRA (2019) abides by parts 200-299.

Summary

The purpose of this ethnographic research study was to explore the possibility of performance-based compensation for unionized employees where incentive opportunities based on personal performance are aligned with the goals of the organization. Stakeholders view the railroad's operating ratio as the benchmark metric for determining

the health and efficiency of the railroad in comparison to its competitors (Curran, 2019). This essentially means moving more freight with less resources and generating more revenue than the competition.

Railroads are highly efficient when resources are kept to a minimum, asset utilization is optimal, and the network has no disruptions. Network disruptions include (a) derailments, (b) locomotive and mechanical failure, (c) weather related issues that degrade track conditions, and most importantly, (d) crew availability to move trains. Conductors and engineers periodically mark off unavailable for work for a variety of reasons that require operation managers to make tradeoffs if a crew base is insufficient.

The purpose of this ethnographic research was to determine if performance-based compensation was a feasible option to promote motivation from both management and union employees to achieve performance objectives. The intention of this research was to ascertain through interviews with agreement and nonagreement employees if incentivizing employees for their performance would increase productivity, resource agility, and motivation to facilitate a fluid network that allows the organization to exceed performance objectives.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a foundational context to the discussion of performance-based incentives for unionized train employees to increase operational performance. The first section of the literature review includes empirical research to highlight the key theoretical frameworks pertaining to performance, which are the job characteristics theory (JCT), Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, and Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory. Each theory may influence work performance and could support performance-based incentives for railroad union employees. The second section of the literature review includes information pertaining to railroad operations that affect operational efficiency, asset optimization, and the factors influencing the culture of the railroad from a unionized perspective.

Search Strategy

The information from this review was derived from database searches to include peer reviewed and scholarly journals from Business Source Complete, Google Scholar, professional books and dissertations, ABI Inform Global, and ProQuest. Domestic and international journals were sought pertaining to JCT, Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, and Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory to capture transcending data from various industries and circumstances relating to work performance and performance-based incentives. Key words and phrases when performing Boolean searches relating to the railroad and operations included "railroad," "culture," "compensation," "organization," "leadership," "efficiency," and "incentivization." Additional resources and references pertaining to the transportation were cited from the Surface Transportation

Board (STB), FRA, Department of Transportation (DOT; 2018), and the Association of American Railroads (AAR).

Theoretical Framework Relating to Performance

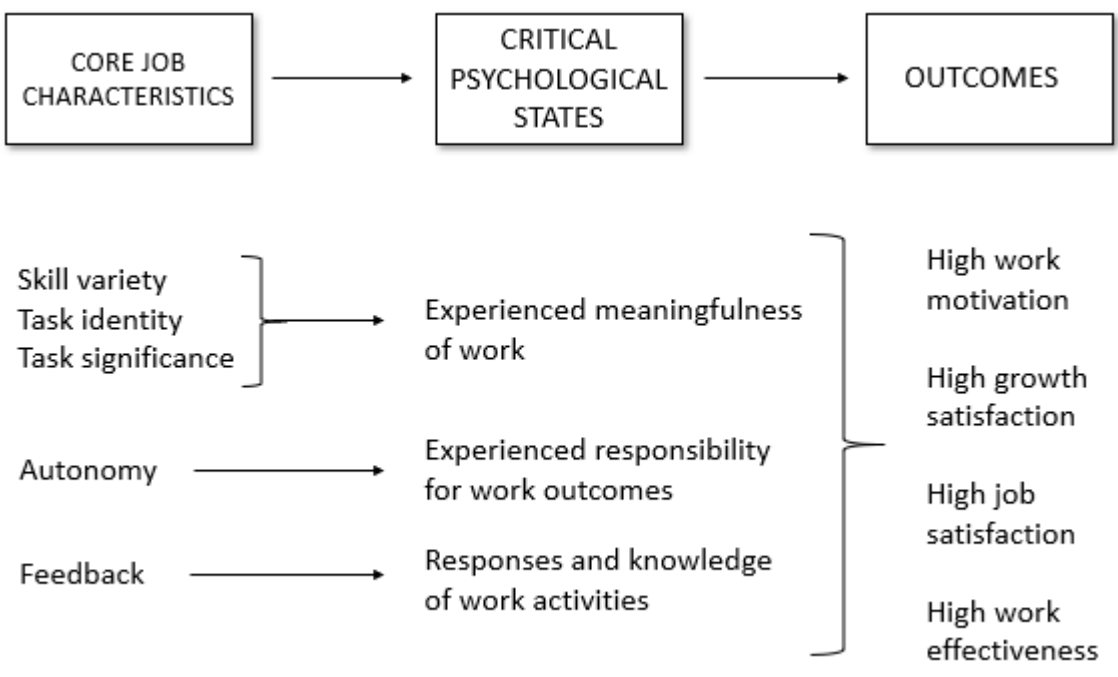
There are several theories used to understand the research problem, but only the most relevant pertaining to this study were included. A brief description of the ethnographic research is included to emphasize the importance of studying human behavior in a subculture and collection of unfiltered data.

Job Characteristics Theory

Job characteristics theory (JCT), originally developed by Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham (1975) with their Job Diagnostic Survey, identifies five core dimensions pertaining to critical psychological states of experienced meaningfulness of work. Those five core dimensions are (a) skill variety, (b) task identity, (c) task significance, (d) autonomy, and (e) feedback, which have been identified as positively correlated through work outcomes (Oerlemans & Bakker, 2018). The premise behind JCT is how job satisfaction and job characteristics influence the outcomes of a particular work event (Acquah, 2017). Each of the five core dimensions posited by Hackman and Oldham affect psychological states and outcomes of work design. Figure 1 depicts the three psychological states that facilitate work performance: experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibility, and knowledge of results (Hackman & Oldham, 1975).

Figure 1

Conceptual Diagram of Job Characteristics Theory



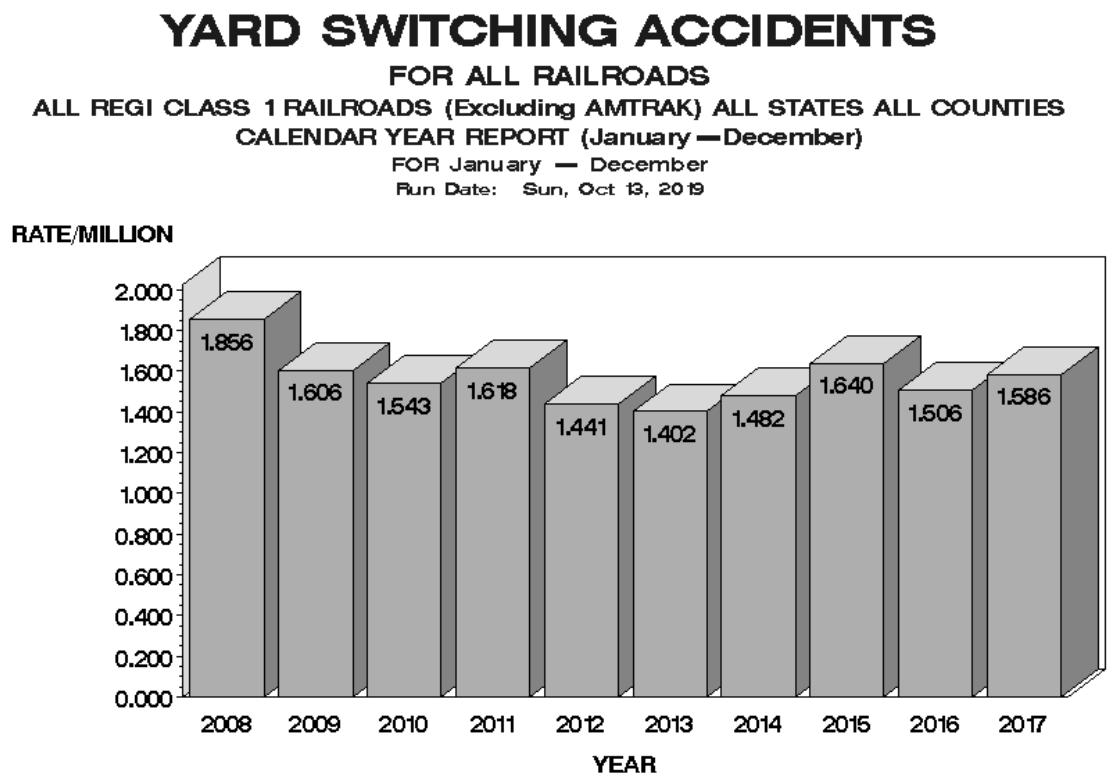
Note. Adapted from *Work Redesign* (p. 90) by J. R. Hackman and G. R. Oldham, 1980, Addison-Wesley. Copyright 1980 by Hackman and Oldham.

Skill Variety

Skill variety is a core job characteristic of JCT that references the extent a job requires a variety of different activities to perform the work requiring different skills and capabilities to perform the job (Wegman et al., 2018). Railroad operations from the perspective and work obligations of a conductor or engineer are simplistic in nature, where the work at hand is understandable and not complex. However, the more experience transportation employees gain, the more they can troubleshoot issues without the assistance of managers or peers to expedite the work process. All new hire transportation employees attend a rules class and on-the-job training to learn the basics of railroading (FRA, 2018). Experience and encountering unfamiliar circumstances are where transportation employees can develop effective methods for troubleshooting and performing work expeditiously to circumvent foreseeable events that could hinder operations (Musica, 2019). As illustrated in Figures 2 and 3, operating rules knowledge and on-the-job training in a controlled environment allows new hire employees to learn how avoid injuries, specifically in yard operations where manual labor is most frequent and accident rates are most common.

Figure 2

Yard Switching Accidents

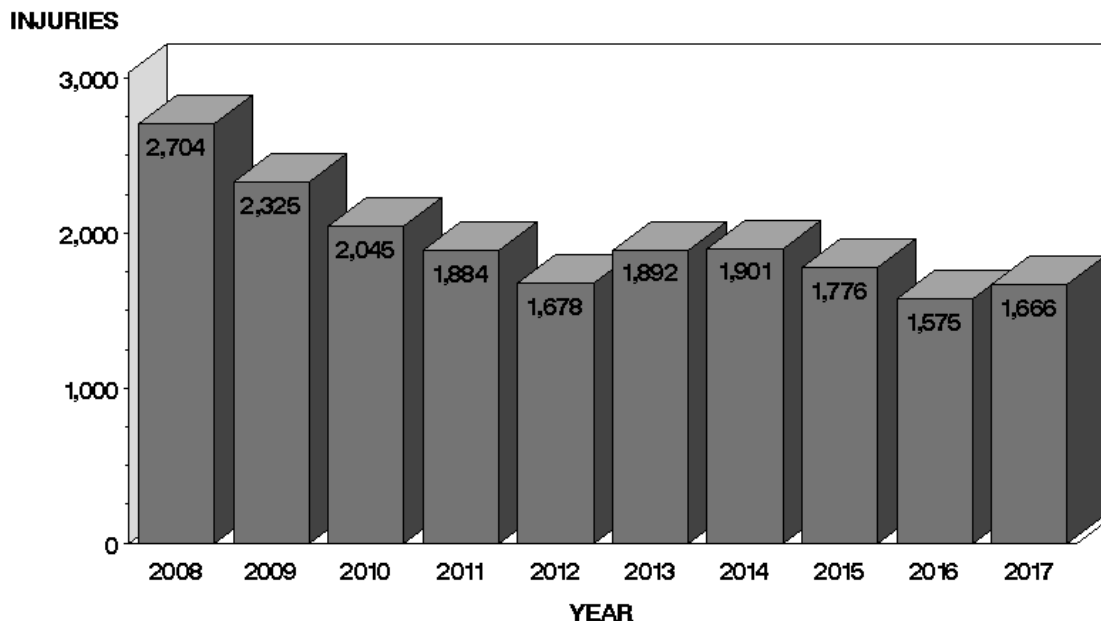


Note. Yard switching accidents for all railroads from 2008-2017. Adapted from *Office of Safety Analysis*, by Federal Railroad Administration Office of Safety Analysis, 2019 (<https://safetydata.fra.dot.gov/OfficeofSafety/default.aspx>).

Figure 3

Employee on Duty Inquiries for Class I Railroads

EMPLOYEE ON DUTY INJURIES
FOR ALL RAILROADS
ALL REGI CLASS 1 RAILROADS (Excluding AMTRAK) ALL STATES ALL COUNTIES
CALENDAR YEAR REPORT (January — December)
 FOR January — December
 Run Date: Sun, Oct 13, 2019



Note. Employee on duty injuries. From *Office of Safety Analysis*, by Federal Railroad Administration Office of Safety Analysis, 2019

(<https://safetydata.fra.dot.gov/OfficeofSafety/default.aspx>).

The advancement of new railroad technology presents both challenges and opportunities to increase the skill variety of unionized railroad employees. The implementation of positive train control (PTC) mandated by the FRA includes GPS navigation to monitor and control train movements as an additional safety precaution to aid with the human element of train handling (DOT, 2018). Although some railroad employees believe PTC will endanger jobs due to technology reducing the workforce

(Arunchand & Ramanathan, 2013), incorporating PTC on trains is an added element of safe railroad operations that increases the skill variety of transportation employees due to incorporating technology with hands-on operations.

Task Identity

Task identity is the degree to which the position of the employee requires the employee to identify and complete a piece of work from the beginning to the end with an identifiable outcome (Hackman & Oldman, 1975). Essentially, the more an employee finds their job meaningful, the more they will be involved in the process. Unfortunately, the railroad industry consists of predetermined work based on customer demands, which provides less autonomy to deviate from the structured work processes involved and could affect train speed and customer service. Robescu and Iancu (2016) pointed out supervisor involvement that limits the capabilities of employees reduces employee motivation, which can have an impact on employee performance. Seasoned employees who perform the work on a regular basis know what methods are most efficient. Managers who do not perform the work threaten productivity when they dictate how employees perform their work (Artz et al., 2016). Railroad employees are keenly aware of the implications involved with performing their work to a specific standard from beginning to end, but the added stressors of performing the job at a rate that creates job dissatisfaction (Smit et al., 2016) limits the task identity and ultimately reduces task significance.

Task Significance

Task significance refers to the degree to which one's work contributes to other people's success, which itself is directly related to job performance (Allan et al., 2016). Employees with high levels of task significance are more engaged with their work and

take more pride in their work knowing the end result has an impact on the organization (Ferreira et al., 2017). The operating ratio of a railroad is the key metric used by stakeholders to measure efficiency (i.e., use less assets to generate more revenue; Cosgrove, 2018). Railroad employees know part of the operation ratio incorporates customer service and on time delivery of customer goods, and when these factors start to erode due to operational degradation it impacts the operating ratio (Lopez, 2017). Railroad employees have substantial task significance and understand their work has a direct impact on the operating and financial health of the organization. When employees have a clear understanding of the task and purpose behind the work to be performed, the prospect of counterproductive work behavior decreases and productivity increases (Morf et al., 2017).

Autonomy

In the JTC, autonomy refers to the extent an individual possesses the independence to carrying out assigned task without outside intervention (Zhang et al., 2017), specifically from outside influences such as managers or subject matter experts in the railroad industry. Employees who receive high levels of job autonomy practice knowledge transfer which is transferred from one source to another in the organization (Tho, 2017). Knowledge management and job autonomy are critical in railroad operations because employees who perform the work daily know which methods of railroad operations are more efficient and productive.

Managers with minimal operational experience who provide direction have the potential to create work interruptions, which include psychological reactions to interruptions of the primary task at hand and interrupting efficient flow of how the work

should be performed (Zide et al., 2017). These interruptions in efficient work practices ultimately lead to operational inefficiencies. Tognazzo et al. (2017) noted leaders who warrant higher autonomous latitude often exhibit higher emotional intelligence and gain more knowledge of the processes required to increase sustained performance. Employees with higher levels of job autonomy exhibit higher adaptive performance in the organization and increase employees' interest in being more creative (Tabiu et al., 2018). Increased autonomy is imperative as railroads look for more efficient methods of productivity in an industry where competitive advantage is hard to obtain.

Feedback

Employee feedback is the engagement related to work practices that facilitates conversation pertaining to job-related objectives designed to enhance performance (Hawass, 2017). Feedback, regardless of how provided, allows both the manager and employee to engage with topics related to work performance, safety concerns, operational opportunities to increase efficiencies, and employee identity (Price & Whiteley, 2014). Feedback is used by leaders within the organization to improve work systems, increase employee satisfaction, and increase engagement correlation with the objective to increase organizational outcomes (Derickson et al., 2019).

Feedback from subordinate employees in the railroad industry is crucial due to the complexity and magnitude of safe railroad operations, particularly from unionized employees that perform the work. Underperforming train speed, disruptions to network operations, failed customer service reporting, and not communicating in the organization all have severe implications in the operating department. Communicating the results and best practices of work activities can assist both managers and employees of which work

practices are safe or unsafe. Communication can uncover greater opportunities for process efficiencies, and most importantly it can increase job satisfaction as it allows relationship building between management and unionized employees. Feedback, whether positive or negative, can garner employee appreciation due to their work being recognized by management and it facilitates safety and operational engagement from agreement and non-agreement employees (Heller, 2017).

Feedback shared between management and employees increases engagement and communication, resulting in operational efficiency. Employees who perform the work are most knowledgeable of what is most efficient, and it is crucial feedback occurs among employees and management to expose the wealth of knowledge management employees have for efficient operations. Most importantly, the exchange of vital information empowers employees to influence operations (Abualoush et al., 2018) and allows the group to formulate an effective and efficient operating plan.

Vroom's Expectancy Theory

Expectancy theory, advanced by Vroom (1964), asserts employers can enhance overall employee motivation with clear expectations for organizational rewards such as pay and promotion (Lee, 2019). Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory is based on three variables: (a) expectancy, (b) instrumentality, and (c) valence, known as the VIE model. This model incorporates individual factors such as personality, knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience and ultimately influences performance and motivation (van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). Furthermore, Vroom asserted although employees may have different goals from the organization, employees can still be motivated through rewards,

alignment of performance and efforts, and the overall benefit of satiating the employee's needs (Carnes & Knotts, 2018).

Valence

Vroom defined valence in his model as the importance, attractiveness, desirability, or anticipated satisfaction with outcomes (van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). Kurt Lewin was the first to use valence in field theory to describe a force that attracts individuals to desirable objects and repel undesirable ones (Shuman et al., 2013). The notion behind valence relative to Vroom's expectancy theory is there must be an urge strong enough to satisfy oneself, proving their efforts worthwhile. To satisfy valence in Vroom's expectancy theory, there must be something desirable for the person to perform to a specific expectation (Carnes & Knotts, 2018). Taking into consideration the railroad industry, extrinsic motivators motivate employees, such as continued employment and consistent income for performing the work stipulated in their labor agreement. Unionized railroad employees can relate valence to these extrinsic motivators for consistent performance, but to increase valence in any industry, employees know there must be an expected outcome (e.g., reward, compensation, recognition) for their additional efforts to achieve a desired outcome.

Instrumentality

Instrumentality is the belief performance will lead to desired outcomes (Carnes & Knotts, 2018). Although similar to valence, the basis of instrumentality is the perception of employees as to whether the rewards promised by the manager or organization will come to fruition. Vroom's (1964) theoretical explanation behind instrumentality is an outcome-outcome association where (a) a clear understanding of the outcome must be

established, (b) there must be trust in the relationship to fulfill the agreement, and (c) there must be transparency in the process that decides the outcome (van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). Lee (2019) further elaborated instrumentality is the subjective probability the promised rewards will be given when performance objectives are achieved.

Expectancy

The central tenet to expectancy theory, Vroom defined expectancy as the subjective probability an action or efforts will lead to a desired outcome (van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). Several components in Vroom's definition of expectancy theory include resources available to achieve the objective, capabilities of actors (e.g., knowledge, skills, and abilities), and support from management to allow employees to complete the objective (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). The individual must understand the expectancy and determine if that expectancy is enough that is worth the increased performance (Acikgoz & Sumer, 2018).

Expectancy can be fulfilled by employees if managers are cognizant of their employees' abilities with the expectation of a realistic outcome. Training, autonomy, and recognizing the current capabilities of an organization's employees allows managers and human resources professionals to provide resources to employees to increase their skillset, gain more experience, and engage in greater positive work-related behaviors (Tabiu et al., 2018). An employee who lacks certain capabilities and is expected to perform a task with an anticipated outcome greater than the employee's perceived competence, reduces expectancy of the objective. All unionized operating employees are provided training on current operating rules and practices when they are first hired to ensure compliance with the company, the DOT, and the FRA. The accumulation of work

hours, experience, and learning from peers allows employees to interpret which practices are efficient. This increase in job competency allows railroad managers to make crucial operating decisions to influence expectancy of an employee's contribution to the objective.

The relevance of expectancy theory to unionized railroad employees is their compensation package does not provide additional motivation opportunities in the union construct. Unionized employees do have the opportunity to apply for managerial positions outside of the union craft to achieve pay and promotion merits, but, in the unionized work craft, those motivational opportunities are negligible. Opportunities such as special assignments and training opportunities exist, but no additional compensation is provided and employees are still compensated within the scope of their agreement. Hur and Nordgren (2016) asserted exposure to performance incentives ultimately affects one's motivation for the reward objective.

Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory

Frederick Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory, also known as two-factor theory, states there are two main factors in the workplace that create both satisfaction and dissatisfaction, work autonomously of each other, and are characterized as motivation and hygiene factors (Alshmemri et al., 2017). Herzberg's two-dimensional model was constructed to determine the factors affecting people's attitudes about their work and environment (Gawel, 1997). According to Gawel (1997), the hygiene factors Herzberg referred to include (a) supervision, (b) peer relationships, (c) salary, (d) company policy, and (e) working conditions. The motivating factors influencing the work performed and the work environment include achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility,

and advancement (Gawel, 1997). Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory has a central focus on work environments with motivation and hygiene factors as the foundation of the study (MacDougall, 2019).

An aspect of Herzberg et al.'s (1959) work focused on job enrichment, in which management delegates work to an employee previously reserved for management to perform. Herzberg's job enrichment allows employees to improve both task efficiency and employee satisfaction by influencing employees to take ownership of their own job with the expected outcome of recognition, potential advancement, and the pride of completion of a challenging task (Paul et al., 1969).

The prospect of job enrichment in the railroad industry is significant because it can amplify the motivating factors needed to help create a more meaningful work environment. To increase the motivation factors through job enrichment, Herzberg (1968) included several recommendations to include (a) advancement opportunities, (b) recognizing people's contributions, (c) creating rewarding work, (d) increasing responsibility, and (e) offering training opportunities. The monotonous and repetitive work requirements of unionized railroad workers do not offer much opportunity for creating new methodologies to perform the work outside of management granting union employees more autonomy in the work they perform. Granting employee autonomy to perform work without management interference can increase motivation (Robescu & Iancu, 2016) and serves as a form of job enrichment through increased employee responsibility.

Herzberg et al.'s (1959) motivation-hygiene theory of motivation essentially explains how employees are compelled by intrinsic (development, training, and

recognition) and extrinsic (salary, bonuses, and benefits) motivators that influence behavior in the workplace. These intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence work behavior and can either increase or decrease work satisfaction which can ultimately impact the organizational culture, work relations, and work effort (Alshmemri et al., 2017). The job design of unionized work provides little autonomy and lacks creativity which can lead to dissatisfaction in the workplace (Parker et al., 2019). Creating an effective job design increases employee motivation and job satisfaction (Ebrahim et al., 2019). By increasing job satisfaction, employees' motivation and hygiene factors increase, which supports a positive work environment and increases the relationship among employees (Alfayad & Arif, 2017).

Railroad Operating Performance

There is little distinguishability between the Class I railroads. Class I railroads have little competitive advantage among their competitors with the main advantage being the geographical proximity of their respective railroad network. Although mass transportation of consumer goods is most cost effective through rail, competitive advantage for the entire railroad industry continues to erode as the trucking industry progressively implements technological improvements to enhance supply chain logistics and provide more reliable customer service (Kuehn et al., 2017). Despite the trucking industry slightly impacting railroad operating metrics, competitive advantage among the Class I railroads is fought between efficiency, customer service, and safety.

Efficiency is the primary objective for operational performance in the railroad industry. The implementation of PTC, the centralization of network operations to collate real-time data, and effective use of asset utilization in field operations have improved

efficiency through mitigating network disruptions and implementing proactive network forecasting approaches to reduce variable costs (Chirls, 2018). Variable costs such as fuel, labor, and other operating expenses tie into the key operating evaluation metric in the railroad industry, which is the operating ratio. The operating ratio is the major measure of profitability, efficiency, and performance in the railroad industry (Simpson, 2011; Stephens, 2019). The operating ratio is closely monitored in the railroad industry among the Class I railroads (Stephens, 2019) and will be even more closely monitored now that CSX Transportation and UP Railroad (2018) have implemented PSR. Table 1 depicts the operating ratio for the Class I railroads in 2017 and 2018.

Table 1

Class I Railroads Ranked by 2018 Operating Ratio

Class I railroads	2018	2017
CSX Transportation	60.3	66.3
Canadian Pacific	61.3	58.2
Canadian National	61.5	57.4
Union Pacific	62.7	62
Kansas City Southern	64.3	64.3
Norfolk Southern	65.4	67.4
BNSF Railway	66.9	65.7
Class I average	63.2	63

Note. Class I railroads ranked by 2018 Operation Ratio. From Class I Average Operating Ratio Inched Upward in 2018, by B. Stephens, 2019, *Trains*, (<https://trn.trains.com/news/news-wire/2019/02/27-class-i-average-operating-ratio-inched-upward-in-2018>).

The premise behind the PSR model is to improve efficiency through operating longer trains (Moody's, 2018). Operating longer trains in the PSR model reduces asset

utilization (e.g., locomotives, manpower costs, fuel consumption), improves car velocity, decreases the number of times a railcar is handled at smaller terminals, and ultimately minimizes the number of trains operating on the network in an effort to lower operating costs (Ashe, 2019). All Class I railroads have a vested interest in the operating ratio of their respective railroad because, regardless of the volume, railroads that efficiently use their assets to shape the operating ratio can promote a streamlined operation (Simpson, 2011).

Operating Metrics

The importance of the railroad's operating ratio from Table 1 and PSR were discussed to illuminate the priorities of Class I railroads, which are cost reduction, efficiency, and profitability. There are several metrics used by railroads as a benchmark to determine operability, efficiency, and safety. Although the names of these metrics vary by railroad, the common railroad operational performance indicators are train speed, human factor related incidents and operating practices relating to safety (e.g., run through switches, derailments, side swipes), and customer service performance. These metrics are crucial as they allow stakeholders to monitor the rate at which railcars move, how safely employees practice work behaviors, and the commitment to ensuring excellent customer service (Business Wire, 2019).

Train speed is the rate at which railcars move along their network. Factors affecting train speed are network disruptions (e.g., weather, infrastructure maintenance, locomotive failure), asset availability (primarily locomotives and required components), crew availability, and excessive car dwell in terminals. Train speed and car dwell are components of railroad efficiency (i.e., how fast does the railcar move from one

destination to the next). Bowers (2018) stated reducing dwell time and increasing train speed will positively impact customer service, which is a prime factor in efficiency. Norfolk Southern CEO, Jim Squires, stated in past interviews train speed and car dwell are the two most analyzed metrics railroad managers use to evaluate railroad performance (Sneider, 2017). Reducing dwell and increasing train speed are heavily dependent on crew availability because it requires qualified trainmen and engineers to move and classify railcars for their next destination in a safe and efficient manner to make on-time train performance for the first available connection at its next destination.

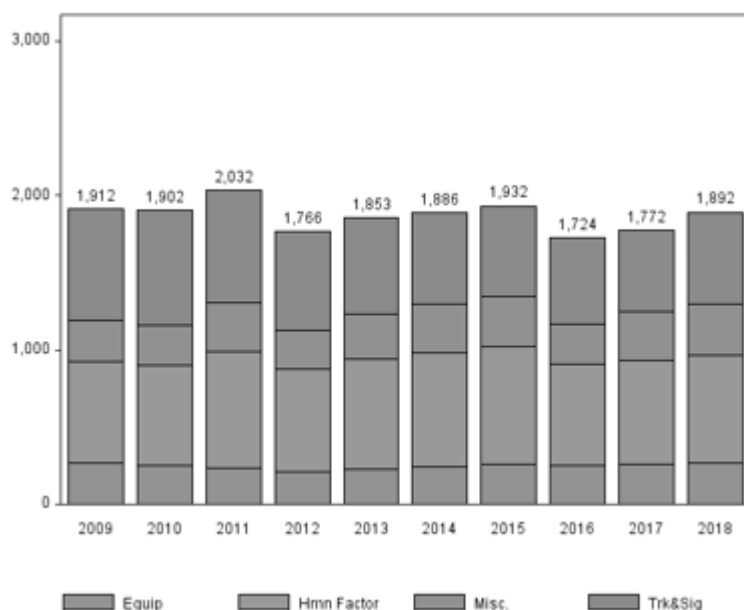
Safe and efficient railroad operating practices not only appease stakeholders but also provide safety to the public, particularly in train handling of hazardous goods, at railroad crossings, and in public safety awareness campaigns (Galford, 2019).

Informational nonprofit websites, such as Operation Lifesaver, are designed to educate the public on the importance of railway safety to reduce collisions, reduce fatalities and injuries at railway crossings, and provide the public with educational and awareness material.

At railroad terminals, management and unionized safety teams lead safety initiatives through education, efficiency testing, and industry audits to ensure safeguards are in place to eliminate potential workplace hazards that can lead to injuries, network disruptions, or failing to fulfill customer demands. Rod Doerr, UP Vice President and Chief Safety Officer, proudly reported UP was voted safest Class I railroad according to FRA data for the third consecutive year through employee empowerment, safety stand downs, and candid discussions between executives, management, and unionized employees with the importance of safe operations (UP Railroad, 2018).

The importance of safe railroad operating practices has operational impacts that facilitate train speed and car dwell. Most importantly, safe operating practices reduce employee injuries and reduce human factor related incidents such as run-through switches, derailments, and damage to infrastructure. According to the FRA (2019), there were 16,712 reportable on the job injuries for the 2018 operating year. Safe operating practices relating to infrastructural damage also have significant financial implications. The FRA (2019) reported \$304.4 million in reportable damage due to derailments to include \$75.04 million as a result of human factor related incidents due to unsafe working practices.

There are several contributing factors leading to safety related incidents, particularly human factor incidents resulting in injuries and network disruptions. Fatigue and inexperience are the obvious notable factors relating to human factor safety incidents; however, according to the FRA (2018), human factor related incidents are most common in railroad employees failing to apply applicable railroad operating rules. Figure 4 illustrates the number of train accidents in the railroad industry and the primary causes between 2009 and 2018, with human factors as the primary cause of accidents.

Figure 4*Train Accidents by Primary Cause*

Note. Train accidents by primary cause. From *Office of Safety Analysis*, by Federal Railroad Administration Office of Safety Analysis, 2019

(<https://safetydata.fra.dot.gov/OfficeofSafety/default.aspx>).

The repercussions for human related incidents by railroad employees vary by the individual railroad. Suspension, additional training, and termination are typical for employees who fail to adhere to operating rules and practices resulting in human factor related incidents. To combat human related incidents, the FRA (2019) mandates all managers conduct efficiency testing on employees according to 49 CFR §217.9 (a), which states:

Each railroad to which this part applies shall periodically conduct operational tests and inspections to determine the extent of compliance with its code of

operating rules, timetables, and timetable special instructions, specifically including tests and inspections sufficient to verify compliance.

Other safety initiatives implemented to ensure rule compliance are peer to peer engagement. UP implemented a voluntary-led initiative called Total Safety Culture to teach employees safe behaviors with observational feedback. This initiative was developed to empower union employees to voice their concern of at-risk behavior with support from senior management (UP Railroad, 2018). CN initiated Looking Out For Each Other in 2014 with the objective of having management and union employees raise awareness of risk mitigating behavior, provide constructive feedback between peers, and identify and review safe working procedures (CN, 2019). When leadership is engaged with employees on promoting safety through communication and exhibiting safe behaviors in front of employees, workplace safety increases and workplace incidents decline (Mattson Molnar et al., 2018). The efforts by UP and CN managers and union employees prioritized their work practices on safety to ensure safe working practices and reduction of human factor related incidents.

Summary

The literature noted in this chapter focused on theoretical concepts influencing employee behavior specifically through motivational aspects of performing work, workplace satisfaction, and the associated psychological states to facilitate work performance. The literature review provided a foundational context for the discussion of performance-based incentives for unionized employees in an effort to increase operational performance on variables unionized employees can impact such as car dwell, on-time train performance, and safe working practices. The theoretical concepts

discussed in the literature review address factors managers in the organization have the capacity to influence with their unionized subordinates to increase operational performance such as efficiency, asset utilization, and a safe working environment. A discussion of the foundational theories was necessary to inform the reader of workplace factors, motivators, and required engagement that can influence the necessary behaviors to support performance-based incentives in a unionized work environment.

Railroad operating performance and metrics were discussed to provide insight on how Class I railroads are operationally measured from the stakeholder's perspective in addition to the key factors influencing operational efficiency in the work environment. The railroad's operating ratio was discussed in detail to identify this metric as paramount in the railroad industry (Prince, 2017). To reiterate, the operating ratio is the ratio of operating expenses to net sales (Strickland, 2018). Operating expenses in the railroad industry are driven upward due to the high costs to maintain infrastructure and assets such as the railroad network, maintaining and purchasing locomotives, and the labor costs involved to facilitate movement of goods from one destination to the next.

Unionized employees have a direct impact on the operating ratio because their labor facilitates the movement of railcars in a terminal, they expedite trains over the network, and their work behaviors and practices have direct influence on the entire organization both operationally and in the culture of the work environment. Motivational factors differ between management and unionized employees with the only certain commonality being compensation and influencing a safe work environment. Management employees are responsible for achieving operational metrics and influencing a safe work environment, and their performance is typically measured with their annual bonus.

Unionized employees, typically uninterested to the operating metrics that influence the health and efficiency of their respective terminal or organization, are not compensated for their efforts whether the organization fails or achieves their organizational goals.

It was imperative to discuss the theoretical framework and the significance of the operation ratio as it relates to the work practices of unionized employees to illustrate the behaviors and factors that influence operational efficiency. The intent was to emphasize the railroad industry is an expense-laden industry with several factors that impact the operating ratio, and unionized employees have direct influence on the ratio. The foundational theories visited in the literature review highlighted the behavioral and psychological aspects of work performance, the work environment, and the motivational factors that influence these behaviors in the workplace. Chapter 3 addresses the methodology used in this study and describes the design, participants, methods of collection, and procedures for data analysis.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to determine if performance-based compensation for unionized employees can serve as a motivational incentive for increased performance relative to operational performance in alignment with the objectives of the organization. This research was inspired by the notion that work behaviors can be influenced by extrinsic motivational factors that can positively stimulate other aspects of the working environment, encourage positive discourse in a contentious unionized culture, and encourage goal alignment between the managerial and unionized factions to achieve organizational goals.

Ethnography was chosen for this study because immersion into this culture would be required for participant observation. Understanding the unionized railroader subculture, including jargon, beliefs about union officials and local management, and understanding the social relations of the unionized trainmen was crucial to determine if the prospect of performance-based incentives can exist. Observing participants in their natural setting allowed the data collection to include observation of emotional behavior and capture real-life stories (Shah, 2017) from a subculture representing one one-thousandth of the U.S. workforce.

The foundational research pertaining to motivation, expectations, and meaningfulness of work contained in the literature review lends itself to the possibility of incentivizing union employees for achieving operational metrics. Although the prospect of incentivization for achieving organizational metrics may seem appealing, the research questions were designed for both agreement and nonagreement employees to candidly express their rationalization. The open-ended interview questions allowed for the

possibility of follow-up questions and allowed participants to reveal more information previously unknown to the researcher, providing further insight into a culture with potentially different perspectives on pay for performance. The following research question framed the study:

1. What are unionized railroad employees' perceptions of an incentive system based on their performance and availability?
2. How do employees perceive a compensation package with performance-based incentives tied to operational performance based on their efforts?
3. What other employee benefits or incentives can influence employee performance aside from monetary incentives?

The focus of this chapter includes the research method used in this study, the research design, and the specific instrument used to collect and analyze data. An overview of the participants contains general demographics, measures taken to ensure protection of participants, and confidentiality of participants. A brief discussion of the data analysis methods, including the rationale behind the software package used, the categories and themes created to capture specific data, and the overall analysis of the content are also included. Last, there will be further elaboration on limitations previously discussed in Chapter 1 followed by a summary of Chapter 3.

Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore how agreement and nonagreement employees viewed performance-based compensation aligned with the performance objectives of the organization. An enhanced understanding from the agreement and nonagreement employee perspective of performance-based compensation can facilitate

discussion in the organization that can potentially increase the operational metrics of the organization and increase employee motivation in the workplace. This study was based on the following research questions designed to facilitate engagement between with transportation employees to further understand the current operating environment and other factors that can influence the outcome of this study:

1. What are unionized railroad employees' perceptions of an incentive system based on their performance and availability?
2. How do employees perceive a compensation package with performance-based incentives tied to operational performance based on their efforts?
3. What other employee benefits or incentives can influence employee performance aside from monetary incentives?

By exploring these questions, this study can contribute to the employee's sentiment of performance-based compensation for unionized employees, a topic largely unexplored in an industry that historically compensates unionized employees under a collective bargaining agreement with no performance incentives.

A quantitative study of performance-based compensation can collect data on employees who favor such incentivization, illustrate a breakdown of demographics, and graphically illuminate other factors that would provide support or oppose performance-based compensation. A quantitative approach lacks the interpersonal element required to engage with agreement and nonagreement employees in their natural work setting and understand the daily railroad operations and dialogues held between peers and management. This qualitative study provided employees with a sounding board to

describe their daily interactions and provided an opportunity to share input, through open-ended dialogue, on the feasibility of performance-based compensation.

Using a qualitative approach allowed interpretation based on observations and capturing the human experience (McLeod, 2019). Using qualitative inquiry provided the opportunity to select a sample of agreement and nonagreement employees and engage participants in a conversation about the work environment relating to the prospects of performance-based compensation and how that could impact the organization. A quantitative study would neglect the opportunity for open-ended questions that could facilitate further discussion into other unknown motivational or demonstrative aspects that could impact this study.

A qualitative study is appropriate for researching performance-based compensation in the unionized railroad environment due to the contemptuous relationship between agreement and nonagreement employees, understanding the unionized railroad employee's perspective on performance incentives given the railroad work environment, and the motivations and behaviors of employees in the railroad environment.

Research Design

Ethnography was selected as the research design to observe behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs in the culture (Patton, 2015). Ethnographic inquiry promotes social engagement to understand the culture of unionized employees and interpret the behavioral patterns and beliefs in relation to the work environment and organizational culture. Use of ethnography allows for interaction with people in their natural setting, provides multiple sources of data collection for a single phenomenon, and explains the way a culture can exist through behaviors and experiences (Goulding, 2005).

Ingold (2017) defined ethnography as describing life as it is lived and experienced by a people at somewhere and at some time. The life of unionized railroad workers can lead to unusual circumstances most workers in other industries find undesirable as a profession. Railroad workers stay at terminals away from their home terminal and encounter unusual work-related circumstances and incidents ranging from railroad crossing fatalities while on a train, to being stranded on a train in the dead of winter due to expiring on their hours of service and waiting for the relief crew to show up in a taxi in blizzard-like conditions. Railroad workers experience isolation, discontent toward management and their union officials, animosity toward the organization for having to follow rules they disagree with, and most importantly, sacrificing time with their family due to the inconsistent needs of the railroad by having to work unorthodox hours (Ziobro, 2018).

Immersion into the culture allows for interaction within the environment to live the experiences of the participants of that culture (Swyers, 2016). Swyers (2016) stated the use of ethnographic research allows preconceived worldviews that are unfamiliar to be confronted. This realization of challenging preconceived worldviews presents the opportunity to explore the native point of view (Darnell, 2018). Shah (2017) recognized two tenants for effectively implementing ethnography: duration and relationships. The duration of the observation of the culture allows for establishment of long-term relationships to understand the beliefs and lifestyle of participants (Shah, 2017).

Each railroad employee, whether unionized or management, gathers the history and past treatment from varying peers and officials and can create their own history from the railroad lifestyle with accompanying circumstances, which creates a unique picture of

their own experiences thus developing their own history of the railroad. Using ethnography enabled participant observation (i.e., understanding a group of people in a shared culture through engagement, observations, and understanding the relationships in a group of people; Shah, 2017).

Ethnographic research is imperative to understand the unionized railroad employees' history, shared experiences, thoughts, and feelings toward certain members in their organization and experience how their lifestyle ultimately impacts their work/life balance in addition to their perceptions toward the organization. The same situation applies to nonagreement employees because railroad transportation managers have significantly different roles and responsibilities while running the operation of their terminal or managing the line of road. Although railroad managers infrequently stay at locations away from their home terminal or experience the same unusual circumstances as unionized employees, railroad managers experience the stress of running a fluent operation while managing the needs of unionized railroad employees to ensure fluid operations and also attempting to achieve operational metrics.

Instrumentation

For this ethnographic research to be successful, this study used in-person and phone interviews with participants. Although in-person interviews were the primary method of interviews to fully gauge the work environment and culture of the participants in the study, telephone interviews were conducted as another form of initial and follow-up interview to ascertain information regarding the purpose of this study. Obtaining telephone numbers of agreement and nonagreement employees was voluntary after informing the potential participants of the nature and intent of my study. Literature

supports the use of in-depth telephone interviews in qualitative research as a viable option due to increased privacy of respondents, reduced distraction, and overall convenience for both the respondent and interviewer (Drabble et al., 2016). The telephone interviews did not deviate in substance or depth that would occur in a typical qualitative study. The research questions and interview questions remained the same in an effort to facilitate open-ended discussion. These interviews were recorded with the permission of participants and later transcribed through NVivo.

Digital recordings were used during each interview with the consent of the railroad employee to ensure they had complete awareness the interview was being recorded and transcribed for analysis. After each interview, the audio recording was transcribed and entered into the NVivo software program for analysis. The purpose of using NVivo software was to process data from the transcriptions into a document and identify specific words and trends. The purpose behind identifying specific words and trends was to identify patterns in behavior, expressions, or sentiments regarding a specific topic. Again, the preferred method of interviewing participants is in-person to capture nonverbal body language which cannot be obtained from digital recordings and can be transcribed through NVivo.

Reliability

Reliability is the extent to which an assessment produces a similar result in similar situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Reliability in a qualitative study is extremely difficult to measure because it lacks quantitative measurables; therefore, reliability in qualitative research resides in consistency of interview responses from the questions of the researcher (Leung, 2015). Using interviews, trustworthiness is the

decisive element to ensure consistency with all of the participants. When assessing reliability, determining the credibility of participants through interviews can be enhanced through constant data comparison, which can be accomplished using NVivo to transcribe and pick up key phrases, key words, and patterns.

Validity

Validity refers to the integrity and application of the methods used to accurately reflect the data collected (Noble & Smith, 2015). Due to the statistical methods incorporated to establish validity in quantitative research, the daunting task of establishing validity in qualitative research lies with incorporating methodological strategies to ensure integrity throughout the collection process. Noble and Smith (2015) suggested validity strategies such as data triangulation, accounting for personal biases, and demonstrating consistency in documenting responses from the posited research questions. To ensure validity of the interview, once concluded, each participant received questions and responses to ensure accurate documentation and allow the participant to elaborate on their responses if needed.

Participants

The participants of this study included a population of 50 unionized employees, including engineers, trainman, and yardmasters in the Midwest region of the United States, specifically Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana. Yardmasters, despite having supervisory authority in yard operations, were also considered for this research because it is a unionized craft. Yardmasters have direct contact and influence with trainmen and engineers in yard operations and potentially have deeper relationships with both agreement and nonagreement employees that could provide valuable insight on whether

performance-based compensation would be a viable option to support a combined effort to increase railroad operational metrics. Of the 50 unionized employees comprising the population through convenience sampling, a sample of 25 participants was selected, and their responses transcribed through NVivo. Each participant was randomly assigned a number, and the transcribed interview were collated for the sample based on the randomly assigned numbers.

The same sampling process was used when interviewing railroad nonagreement employees. The population of managerial railroad employees included 10 employees with a sample of five employees. An additional criterion used when vetting the population of managerial railroad employees was having at least three years of railroad experience. This additional restriction was implemented because most railroad managers do not have prior experience from the unionized craft and are typically hired off the street with no experience. Three years of managerial experience was used as a filter for nonagreement employee participation because it is the typical timeframe a manager has gained experience in efficiency testing, becomes well-versed in the contractual interpretation of union collective bargaining agreements, and has a developed knowledge of railroad operating metrics pertaining to network operations.

Data Collection

A key characteristic of ethnographic research involves the immersion of a researcher in the lives of those under study, typically on-site or in the participants' natural setting, which allows a researcher to collect data and formulate conclusions based on observations documented over time (Sangasubana, 2011). The two main data collection methods in ethnography include observations and interviews. These methods allow a

researcher to become immersed in the environment and to observe the language, behavior, and values of participants (Jones & Smith, 2017).

Archival research is another form of data collection in ethnography that allows for understanding the narrative of the culture through material that is already documented (Schmidt, 2016). Archival research provided an understanding of past and current cultural dynamics that shape and influence unionized employee and managerial behavior in the workplace. Understanding the historical context of the culture through archival research allowed identification of the motivating factors and linkages of employee motivation in relation to productivity and effectiveness.

Raw data were collected primarily through observations and interviews in the participants' natural settings, which were primarily railroad terminals and railyards. Through immersion in the culture of the railroad industry, data were recorded on observed behaviors of participants, documented shared language, interactions between management and unionized employees, transmitted radio interactions used by all crewmembers and managers, and body language in response to both favorable and unfavorable receipt of information. Documenting observed verbal and nonverbal behavior allowed for follow-up questions to understand their reactions. Understanding motivational characteristics of employees allowed investigation into whether compensation for a certain behavior or desired organizational objective (e.g., organizational metrics, employee performance) would alter the behaviors of railroad employees.

Data collection from each participant followed a consistent protocol prior to the interview. Prior to the interview each participant stated their years of service in the

railroad industry and acknowledged their participation was voluntary and would receive no compensation for their input.

- Appendix B outlined the invitation to participate in the study which was disseminated to local union officials, unionized railroad employees, and immediate supervisors. Once completed, this informed consent form acknowledged voluntary participation, no compensation for participating, and agreeing to participate in questions at their own will.
- Data were collected through in-person interviews or phone interviews of Class I employees.
- To identify patterns and themes in this qualitative analysis, thematic analysis was used to compile and report the qualitative results (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes in a specific data set (Nowell et al., 2017).
- Contact was initiated in-person at terminals or via telephone by contacting employees, with their permission, for a follow-up interview to expand on their answers or provide further clarity.
- All participants were permitted to review the questions and provided answers. Participants were allowed to make additional statements or refine their answers to ensure both accuracy and validity of their responses.
- All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Handwritten notes were used to document body language or other nonverbal cues based on participant responses.

- Participants' identities were allowed to remain anonymous to ensure utmost confidentiality. Participants were allowed to withhold their name and title at their request; however, participants were asked to state their agreement status (unionized employee or manager), if their employer is a Class I railroad, and the years of experience on the railroad to ensure compliance with the research criteria.
- The duration of the interviews were not limited by time or by scope. Participants were encouraged to be candid and unfiltered to encapsulate their responses and elicit additional open-ended follow-up questions.
- A contingency plan was built in place in the event of insufficient participants or time constraints. In the event the sample size was not achieved or the allotted time had elapsed before covering all relevant interview questions for the study, it was acceptable to schedule phone interviews with willing participants as soon as possible and no later than 2 weeks following the initial date and time. Additionally, if there were questions requiring clarification based on the analysis of the results, the participants were asked these questions within a month of the original interview by phone call or email. This possibility was stated at the close of each interview encouraging participants to follow-up with any questions or additional comments they may have during the coming weeks about the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures for collecting data from the participants mirrored the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix C) recommendations for data collection in addition to the guidelines set forth by the Collaborative Institutional Training

Initiative, which focuses on behavioral and social research. Participants were informed the information disclosed through interviews would be held in strict confidentiality and would not be disclosed to their peers, employees in their organization, their union representation, or other officers of the railroad. The relevance of this research was disclosed to participants and any questions participants had were thoroughly explained to ensure rapport during the interview. Participants had the option to decline any question proposed to them and had the opportunity to review the questions at the end of the interview and edit their responses.

Data Collection and Preservation

Prior to each interview a consent form was provided to ensure acknowledgement of participation and the answers of the interview will be collected and collated as part of the research findings. Digital data were stored on an encrypted hard drive and stored in a password-protected safe. Handwritten notes were also contained, sealed, and stored in a password-protected safe to ensure confidentiality. The identities of participants will remain anonymous at the request of the participant. The identities of participants will not be revealed to anyone except the IRB and specific entities to whom the board grants access. Five years following the completion of the study all sensitive data will be destroyed from the hard drive.

Data Collection Methodology

Two important factors unionized railroad employees have a significant impact on are train velocity and safety. These two critical factors influence the operational performance of a terminal from a micro perspective of the organization, and, if collectively implemented across all terminals, they have the potential to impact the entire

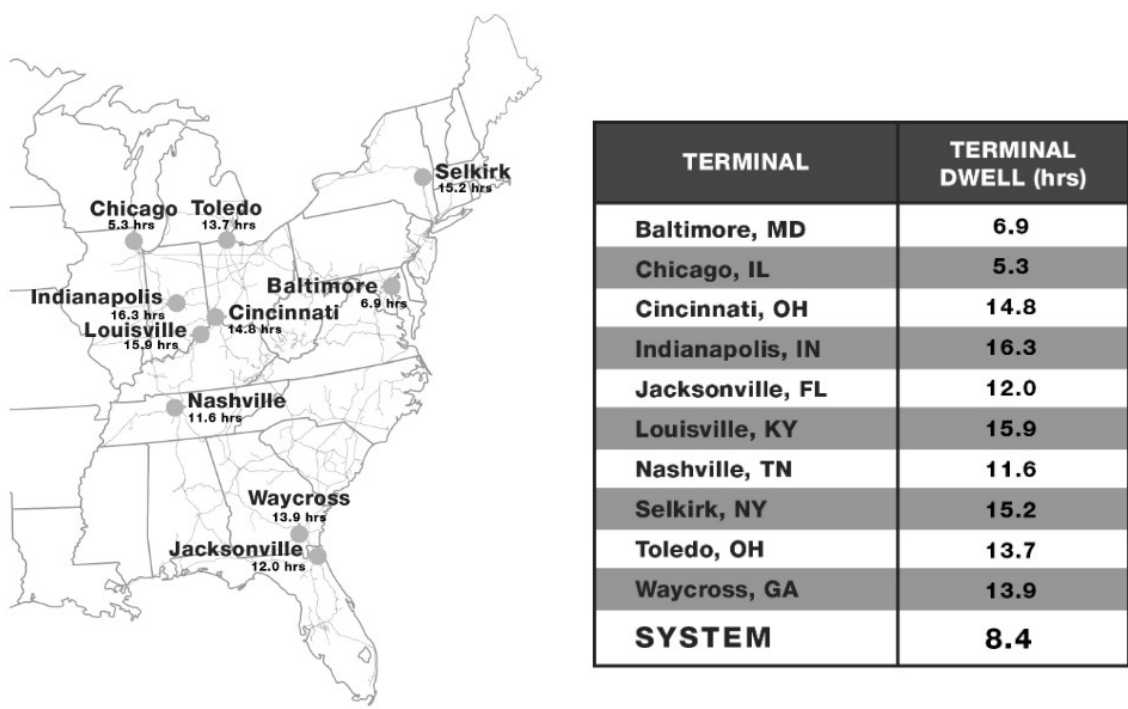
organization. To measure the effectiveness of performance-based compensation with respect to car velocity and safety, it is vitally important to know how unionized employees can impact these operational metrics.

Train Velocity

Train velocity and car dwell are railroad operational metrics measuring the fluidity of the network or how fast a car travels across the network from originating terminals, to intermediate terminals, and to its destination. Although the metric is not measured consistently throughout the varying Class I railroads of the industry, stakeholders of the industry focus on the efficiency of the network. Although these metrics are measured differently among each Class I railroad, the general definition of train velocity is the average velocity between the train's origin and destination to include intermediate locations (Samaha, 2019). Car dwell is the average time a car spends at a terminal location (Samaha, 2019) and is the most unpredictable to control based on volumes, asset availability, and crew availability (Kingston, 2018). The lower the car dwell, the faster the car moves to its destination. Figure 5 depicts CSX's Week 42 terminal car dwell for 2019 at their major terminals.

Figure 5

CSX System-Wide Dwell Average



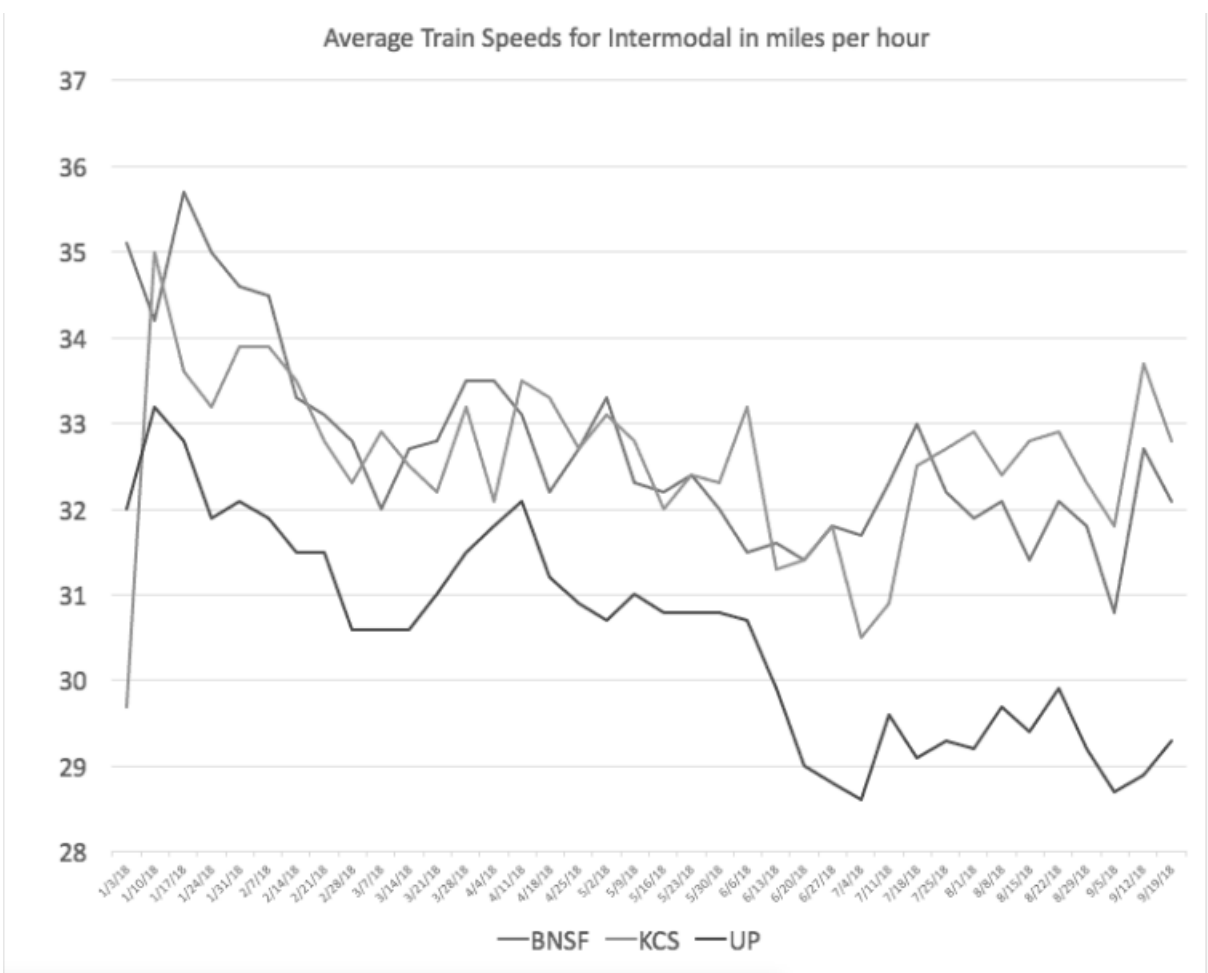
Note. Terminal dwell. From CSX Performance Measures, 2021 (<https://csx.com/index.cfm/customers/performance-measures>).

Unionized railroad employees impact train velocity and car dwell from many facets to include availability for work, working safely and efficiently, and job briefings with peers. Train speed and car dwell are significantly reliant on crew availability (Kingston, 2018) because if operations managers do not have the manpower to operate trains or switch cars in a terminal, there is no productivity and work will accumulate thus clogging the network. Major network disruptions include planned track maintenance, inclement weather, derailments, or crossing accidents. From an operational standpoint, network disruptions can be attributed to crew unavailability if staffing is appropriately maintained for projected volumes (Robinson, 2018).

A method of measuring train velocity and car dwell from an operational standpoint is to ensure crew availability. Performance-based incentives to reflect availability to work can be reflected in train speed and car dwell. Incentivizing an employee for attendance reduces the chance a train will sit and wait on crew availability and decreases the chance of high car dwell as employee availability will facilitate cars to be switched in the terminal. By analyzing Figure 5, operational performance and the effectiveness of implementing performance-based incentives can be measured. Assuming network disruptions do not exist, if employees remain available for work, the average dwell on these cars will decline because the availability of crews dictate how fast cars are switched out for next available connection and how fast a train can depart terminals. If there is a lack of crews available to operate trains to the next terminal or switch cars in the yard then car dwell will increase until management has the availability to put a crew on duty for that specific job. The same rationale applies for train velocity. If crews are immediately available to operate a train at the next terminal, train velocity will sustain or increase (again, assuming no other network disruptions exist). Figure 6 depicts the average intermodal train speed for the BNSF, Kansas City Southern Railroad, and UP Railroad.

Figure 6

Average Train Speeds for Intermodal in Miles per Hour



Note. From BNSF looks to turn around intermodal speeds as ecommerce powers freight growth, by M. Angell, 2018, *Freight Waves* (<https://freightwaves.com/news/bnsf-intermodal-projects>).

Safety

Employee safety is paramount in railroad operations due to the safety-sensitive environment where employees work. Injuries, incidents, and damage to infrastructure are all reportable to the FRA (2018) and are compiled to identify trends. As discussed in

Chapter 2, Figure 4 depicts train accidents by primary cause, which shows human factor incidents as the most common cause (FRA, 2019). Although unionized railroad employees work odd shifts in a variety of elements, effective employee communication and situational awareness in their operating environment contribute to causes of employee safety (Multer et al., 2018). Operating managers regularly efficiency test their employees as prescribed by the FRA to ensure rule compliance (Mendoza, 2017). Unsafe operating practices by unionized employees can lead to network disruptions to include run-through switches, broken rails, damage to equipment (e.g., locomotives, railcars), and most importantly injury to themselves or their fellow employees.

These network disruptions can lead to investigations, excess dwell time on cars, and a possible reduction in crew availability if directed to clean-up efforts, which can also impact train velocity. An effective way to measure employee safety is through efficiency testing and commitment to safety by reporting unsafe acts to their peers and management and participating in safety teams. Through an employee's focus on safety and abiding by the operating rules prescribed by the railroad, network disruptions can be minimized, which can result in an increase in train speed, a reduction in car dwell, and most importantly, an increase in the safety of their own work environment for fellow employees. Compensating employees for their safety performance is measurable through their safe working practices and behavior at the workplace, which can be reflected in minimal efficiency test failures and increases to train velocity as network disruptions would be minimized.

To measure the effectiveness of implementing performance-based compensation relative to safe operating practices is to determine the amount of safety related accidents

before and after the implementation of performance-based compensation. Referencing Figure 4, which represents the amount of train accidents by primary cause, 2018 had 1,892 reportable incidents, of which 701 were caused by human error (FRA, 2019). This study is to determine if railroad managers can measure an employee's commitment to safety and safe operating practices by measuring the frequency of human factor incidents before and after implementation of performance-based incentives to determine if compensation is a motivational tool to increase safe operating practices.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is how researchers gather large amounts of data and incorporate concepts, behaviors, and phrases into broad ideas (Bhatia, 2018). Qualitative data typically includes interview transcripts from open-ended and exploratory interviews with a focus on the human experience from a subjective and unbiased stance (Thorne, 2000). To understand the data collected from both in-person and telephone interviews, all information (i.e., recorded media, verbal communication, and nonverbal communication) was documented to thoroughly encapsulate all data transcription on NVivo software.

Interviews conducted in-person and over the telephone were recorded with a digital voice recorder. The interviews were uploaded into NVivo for transcription and analysis. NVivo has the capability to gather large amounts of unstructured data from multiple sources (text, image, and audio) and identify themes and coding reports for analysis. From the interviews conducted, nodes and references were identified using NVivo software. Coding from transcribed interviews informed the creation of visual depictions of relationships, interactions, themes, and comparisons from selected data.

Handwritten notes gathered from both in-person and telephone interviews were incorporated into NVivo to supplement the data collected from the respective interviews. The overall objective was to gather as much data as possible from these respective interviews for collation and transcription and organize the data into an analysis that supports the overall research.

Limitations

As stated in Chapter 1, there were several limitations including (a) a lack of willing participants, (b) discouragement from union officials or local management, and (c) union employees who were unavailable due to federal regulation hours of service requirements. The most significant limitation was finding employees currently not working and expired by their current hours of service on a tour of duty. Conducting an interview with a unionized railroad employee currently not on a tour of duty was optimal and attainable by working with the respective Class I railroad local chairman to see who was not on undisturbed rest. Out of respect for the unorthodox work/life balance of railroad employees, cold calling employees through their local chairman was not a desirable option; therefore, to fully encapsulate the ethnographic method of research, the most viable option was to interview employees in their work culture and document their shared meanings, cultural setting, and shared beliefs.

Another limitation was the potential for exaggeration if the interviews were conducted in an open public environment in the workplace. Although focus groups were not used, conducting interviews in front of another participant's peers could have influenced and exaggerated responses to illicit further responses from peers in a group environment. Ensuring the interviews followed a specific interview protocol while also

encouraging storytelling and facilitating responses through open-ended questions yielded candid responses pertaining to their specific culture (Huddle, 2018). Adhering to strict interviewing protocol in such environments reduced the limitation of exaggeration and generated sincere responses to sensitive topics such as compensation and their work environment.

Another potential limitation was the use of both in-person and phone interviews to collect data. Although ethnographic design requires immersion into the environment to interpret the behavior of the participants (Thorne, 2000), the use of phone interviews for follow-up questions is acceptable in qualitative research to collect data for identifying themes, codes, and trends and develop an analysis from the data collected (Drabble et al., 2016).

Last, the sample was restricted to Class I railroads with varying operating unions which cannot be generalized for the entire railroad industry. Each Class I railroad is unique with its own operating rules, efficiency testing procedures, managerial influence on daily operations, and varying compensation packages as negotiated through their union. The information gathered from this population will not generalize the entire railroad industry. Instead, the information gathered will elicit data from the largest railroads with the convenience of interviewing participants regardless of their union affiliation.

Summary

The research design followed an ethnographic approach using both in-person and telephone interviews to ascertain sentiments, collect data, and transcribe gathered information to identify trends, patterns, and shared beliefs (Shah, 2017) in the unionized

railroader subgroup. Using an ethnographic approach captured emotions, data through interviews and storytelling, and the passion of real-life stories told through a small group of unionized railroad employees. Ethnography in the railroad culture provided understanding of the industry, experience with the culture and phenomenon of a complex work environment wrought with influencing factors that shape the operational environment, and understanding of the outside influences outside the work environment that shape the employee's perception of the organization.

Convenience sampling was used to accommodate the lifestyle of the railroad employee in addition to experiencing the operational maelstrom that comprises the human element of operations, safe operating practices in a strenuous work environment, and respecting an employee's hours of service mandated by the FRA. Of the population of 50 unionized employees and 10 managerial employees, a sample of 25 employees and five managerial employees from a Class I railroad located in Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois were used to collate and transcribe data for the findings.

The ethical considerations included the guidelines set forth by the IRB with regard to human subjects. Participants were informed their disclosed information would remain in strict confidence and would not be released to anyone within their organization including peers, company officials, and anyone affiliated with the organization. At the end of the interview, participants were allowed to review the posed questions and their responses to omit, change, or elaborate on their responses. Additionally, participants were free to decline any question. The digital and handwritten collection of data were stored in a password-protected safe with the digital data stored on an encrypted hard drive. The

identities of the participants will remain anonymous, and all data collected will be destroyed after five years has elapsed from the completion of the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The research findings described in Chapter 4 start with a recap of the research questions that navigated this study, followed by a review of the methodology, analysis process, and the summarization of findings in this research. The findings are organized by three significant themes that appeared from the coding process using NVivo. The most significant theme was the organizational culture and its influence on employee motivation. The second theme was the relationships between agreement and nonagreement employees. The last theme focused on the perceived manipulative or uncaring intent of the organization of unionized employees. This chapter will close with a brief summarization of the three major themes and a synopsis of Chapter 4.

Research Questions

Several factors influence the motivation of employees to perform work to include compensation, merit, reward, and the work environment. Employee motivation is critical in the performance of the organization because of increased productivity and higher morale, and the efficient use of assets reduces expenses and improves operational metrics. However, there is a lack of research about incentivizing unionized railroad employees as it pertains to their performance, as it relates to obtaining operational goals of the organization. The purpose of this study was to determine the employee's perspective of performance-based incentives by pursuing the answers to three research questions:

1. What are unionized railroad employees' perceptions of an incentive system based on their performance and availability?

2. How do employees perceive a compensation package with performance-based incentives tied to operational performance based on their efforts?

3 What other employee benefits or incentives can influence employee performance aside from monetary incentives?

Methodology

Ethnography was the research design used to understand the daily experience of unionized railroad employees in their work environment to gain insight and understanding of how their performance is affected by their work culture and surroundings. The research, interviews, and assimilation into the culture took place in Class I terminals, railyards, and crew rooms.

The sample consisted of in-depth, open-ended interviews with five Class I railroad managers and 25 unionized railroad employees. After each interview, the participant was randomly assigned a number. The population consisted of 10 railroad managers and 50 unionized railroad employees, and the sample was collected through selecting the random numbers associated with each interview. The samples selected were entered into NVivo for coding and transcription.

Throughout this research, other sources of data were collected to understand the culture and environment from an ethnographic perspective including: (a) note-taking, (b) employee interactions with management and coworkers, (c) archival records, (d) observing artifacts, (e) logos, and (f) company and union circulars. NVivo was used to transcribe and identify themes from the interviews and notes by identifying several nodes as the foundation of categorizing the major themes. Member checking was used to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of each transcript (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which

allowed each participant to review the interpretation of the findings to ensure there was no misunderstanding.

In the NVivo program, word clouds were created to identify keywords and word counts to identify nodes and major themes. Major themes were identified by the triangulation of data from participant interviews and notes developed from employee interactions, archival records, and documented artifacts, logos, and circulars.

Overview of Findings

This ethnographic study identified three distinctive themes that emerged from the coding analysis of the experiences of unionized railroad employees through interviews, observations of the culture and work environment, and daily interactions with those in their environment as they perform their job. The major themes generated were: (a) the industry culture and work environment, (b) the employee perspective on effective employee performance incentives, and (c) employee distrust of the organization to follow through on performance-based incentives.

These major themes were generated from 33 subthemes based on 42 preliminary codes from the analysis of data from 25 interviews with unionized transportation employees, which included conductors and engineers and five interviews with managerial employees. Interviews included: (a) observations, (b) documentation, (c) artifacts, and (d) archival records that depicted the culture and work environment of the Class I railroads where the research was conducted.

Themes in this chapter are presented in order based on the associated reoccurring subthemes and most significant themes. The organizational culture and work environment were the primary themes, which was driven by the employee's motivation in

the workplace. The second theme took into account the relationships between agreement and nonagreement employees that impact productivity, motivation, and organizational sentiment in the work environment. Last, the final theme from this research described the employee morale as a result of the culture of the industry. The themes and categories are summarized in Table 2 at the end of this section. Employee testimonies, suggestions, and documented observations of the work environment as a result of experiencing and inquiring about the people and culture ultimately influenced the outcomes of the primary themes identified in this chapter.

This study explored the employee perspective through storytelling, interviews, and assimilation into the railroad industry to understand the emotions and motivations that drive performance. Observations and interviews in the participant's natural setting facilitated open-ended dialogue and uninterrupted engagements to observe natural behaviors in the workplace. The intent was to understand the employee perspective based on interviews if performance-based incentives for achieving organizational objectives is a possibility. The employees' stories and quotes were used to illustrate the context in which the participants live and work naturally in their work environment.

Table 2*Overview of Findings*

Themes	Categories
1	Industry Culture and Work Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship between management and unionized employees • Employee characteristics and behavioral traits • Conversation style and jargon • Motivation and work behaviors • Common purpose and shared values • Work environment and culture from the unionized employee perspective • Work environment and culture from the managerial perspective
2	Employee Perspective on Effective Performance Incentives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union employee incentive preference for performance • Employee responses to performance based on incentives • Managerial response on incentivizing employees for their performance • Managerial response on incentivizing employees for their performance • Balancing culture, motivating employees, and achieving expectations • Managerial perspective on incentivization
3	Distrust of the organization to follow through on performance incentives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisiting Vroom's expectancy theory • Valence • Instrumentality • Expectancy

Theme 1: Industry Culture and Work Environment

The problem statement in Chapter 1 identified a gap in research for performance-based incentives for unionized railroad employees to increase productivity relative to performance objectives of the organization. Despite other transportation industries that provide incentives to their employees to reduce operational costs and increase productivity (Lilja, 2018), it is unknown if the same incentivization would be applicable and welcomed by union employees in the railroad industry. The perspective, interactions, and natural behavior of agreement and nonagreement employees facilitated the research

to determine the possibility of performance-based incentives where personal performance is aligned with the goals of the organization.

A review of the employee perspectives, experiences, ideologies, and historical context in their daily work environment provided a narrative description on whether performance-based incentives are possible in a Class I railroad. Employee quotes and documented experiences are highlighted to illustrate the culture, work environment, and daily interactions that drive behavior and engagement in the railroad industry.

Review of Railroad Operating Performance

As previously mentioned, there is little competitive advantage among the Class I railroads with the exception of geographical proximity. Efficiency, cost reduction, and asset utilization drive the operating ratio, and the industry regulates these associated costs with respect to transportation volume through storing locomotives, fuel efficiency plans, employee furloughs, and scheduled planned infrastructure maintenance to name a few. The operating ratio is the measure of profitability, efficiency, and performance of the railroad (Simpson, 2020) and is the barometer used to compare other Class I railroads.

Relationships Between Management and Unionized Employees

During the fieldwork aspect of this study, it was imperative to observe the relationships of agreement and nonagreement employees to understand the communication processes, the challenges of the work environment, and the job functions of all employees that contribute to the entire operation that drive performance metrics. Furthermore, it was essential to observe the work behavior of unionized railroad employees in relation to the core job characteristics outlined in Hackman and Oldham's

(1975) job characteristics theory (JCT) to understand the task significance and task identity of a job-related task.

Task significance and task were identified as the most crucial core job characteristics that a unionized railroad employee could exhibit. Task significance offers a substantial indicator of how an employee views their work in relation to the overall scheme of the railroad operation. Ferreira et al. (2017) suggested employees with high levels of task significance are more engaged with their work and its overall impact on the organization. Task identity, according to Hackman and Oldman (1975), is an indicator of how an employee finds their job meaningful in the work process. As discussed in Chapter 1 and noted in Figure 1, the outcomes of the JCT based on the core job characteristics of task identity and task significance are work motivation, growth satisfaction, job satisfaction, and work effectiveness. From the beginning of a unionized employee's work day to the end, it was necessary to observe what drives employee motivation and effectiveness throughout their workday.

The findings presented were derived from approximately 20 hours of observation in railyards, terminals, and casual conversation among a variety of employees. These findings were captured before and after the interviews were conducted to understand the natural environment and instinctive interactions of employees among coworkers and management. During observations, handwritten notes were taken on these interactions and documented from radio transmissions, in a company vehicle near employees switching in a yard, through several job briefings between unionized employees and management, and in a yardmaster's office without the presence of other employees.

The findings can be summarized by Conversation Style and Jargon between all railroad employees, the Motivation and Work Behaviors in railroad employees in their natural work environment, and Common Purpose and Shared Values that are evident in their daily interactions while in their respective work environment (see Table 3).

Table 3

Summary of Findings: Employee Characteristics and Behavioral Traits

Subtheme	Name and descriptions
1	Conversation Style and Jargon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storytelling, humor, and situational awareness • Railroad lingo • Defensiveness of each other; looking out for other union employees
2	Motivation and Work Behaviors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solidarity • Money and retirement over lifestyle • Untrusting of management
3	Common Purpose and Shared Values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared company values • “Union mentality” • “What’s wrong with the company” • Continued employment • Thoughts on management • Autonomy

Conversation Style and Jargon

The railroad subculture provided a unique way of communicating among unionized railroad employees, which included: (a) storytelling, (b) humor, and (c) situational awareness in the field. It appeared the purpose of storytelling between unionized employees was to provide a historical context of when they encountered a situation that benefitted their peers or negatively affected them, usually at the expense of the company or management. Humor seemed to bring out solidarity and companionship

that solidified trust among employees, while also providing situational awareness of current work environment.

Unionized railroad employees used storytelling to generate humor and reinforce their common purpose, which was to perform the job safely and efficiently and to remind each other of specific situations they could encounter throughout each tour of duty. Throughout the field observations, especially through radio communications between yard employees, communication through humor and storytelling not only appeared to pass the time through the monotony of switching and yard operations, but also reinforced the unionized culture. An example of storytelling, humor, and situational awareness was captured in this radio transmission between an engineer, conductor, and brakeman while working a local yard assignment:

Conductor: That'll do, that'll do. That will do! Damn, Robbie, if I say "that will do" it doesn't mean keep going back another 100 feet, how am I supposed to get that pin! It's not like I can run to get that pin, these managers will slap my hand and get themselves another failure. You know collecting failures is how they get themselves brownie points.

Brakeman: Robbie, are you trying to slow down production or just trying to get fired! (Laughing over the radio) Remember that one time Bill got fired for shoving back too fast and once Alex got that pin that cut of cars coupled into the track causing those cars to derail? Keep it slow and steady and if you can't hear let us know, you don't want to be like Bill do you?

Conductor: Isn't Bill working for a Class III now making like \$22 an hour now? It would suck to make 60 thousand less a year.

Brakeman: No, he's a day trader now from what I hear. His Facebook page says "Entrepreneur" under employment on his Facebook page. But you better watch out, Robbie, you know these managers will come after you!

Engineer: Well damn, I can't hear a thing because this crap engine is so damn loud! Maybe if the company maintained its engines or bought new ones with the billions of dollars they bring in every year we wouldn't have this issue! I'm pretty sure Bill is doing just fine collecting job insurance while day trading, or whatever he says he does for money on the side.

Conductor: Yeah, well you'll be there right beside Bill pretty soon trading penny stocks as long as you keep it up, brother. Just stop me if you can't hear me, you're a hell of an engineer and I don't want to see the company take you out like they did Bill.

Brakeman: I mean, it wouldn't be a bad thing if they took out Bill (laughing over the radio).

Engineer: Ok, ok, let's go guys. Let me know when to take them ahead.

The humor and storytelling used in these daily operations were common throughout the workday in their natural environment under the presumption management and their peers could be listening over the radio. These interactions were common and not limited to unionized employees conversing among each other, but also with management. These interactions bring all employees together and form the culture in the railroad environment. Their stories brought out situational awareness and provided historical context of workplace implications if an infraction were to occur. These same stories, humor, and situational awareness dialogues were present through peer-to-peer job

briefings, briefings from management, and casual conversations with other unionized crafts in the field.

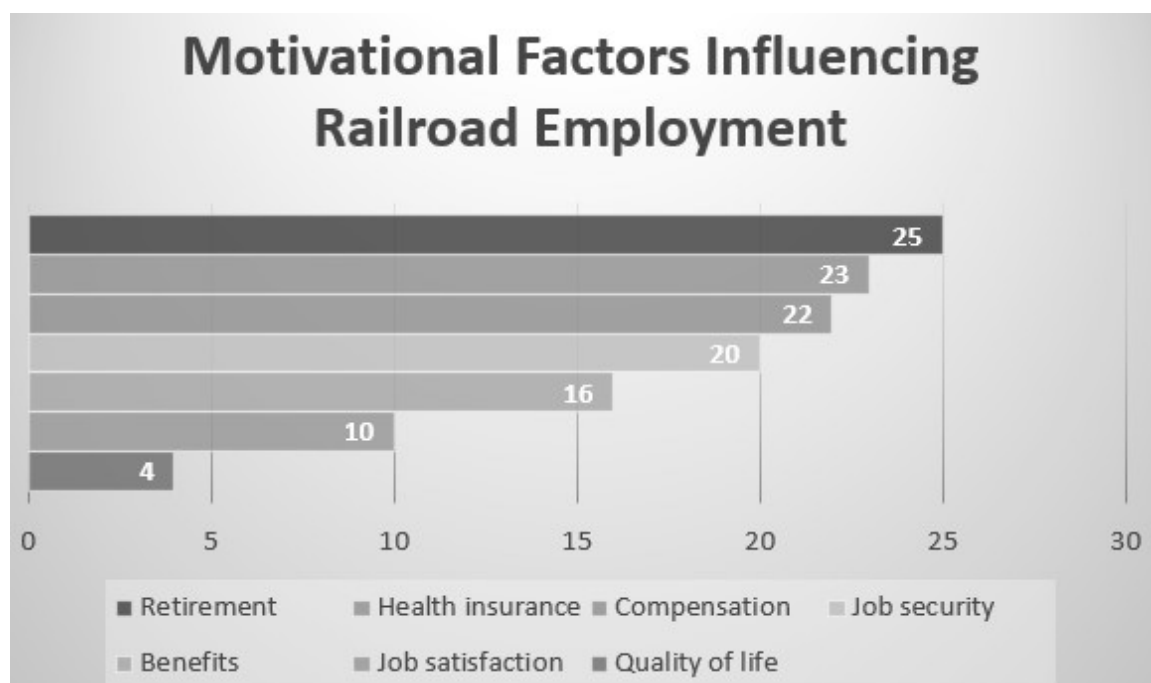
Motivation and Work Behaviors

Throughout field observations and interviews, a common theme emerged of the factors that motivate unionized employees to work for the railroad, which includes solidarity, a competitive railroad compensation package, and the collective conception that management cannot be trusted which will be further discussed in Theme 3: Mistrust of the Organization to Follow Through on Performance-Based Incentives.

To briefly summarize unionized employee motivation and incentive to be a railroad employee, Figure 7 captures the responses from specific follow-up questions of the 25 conductors and engineers who were interviewed that contribute to their motivation as a railroad employee. These data were collected through interviews, transcribed, and coded to identify key words that influence their employment with their respective railroad.

Figure 7

Motivational Factors Influencing Railroad Employment for Unionized Employees



Note. This figure was constructed by transcribing interviews and identifying key words that influenced union employee employment with their respective railroad.

The general theme and overall response from conductors and engineers interviewed indicated their employment with the railroad was not for the lifestyle, but rather for compensation, incentives, and continued job security through union participation. Several responses from the interviews indicated a poor work environment and culture between management and the union professionals which reinforced union employees are highly compensated. Chris provided his input on continued employment with his respective railroad:

Managers cycle in and out all the time. Rules and operating practices change all the time. At first I was a go-getter, then after management burned me after I

helped them out and didn't pay it back, I realized that the company and management only care about the bottom dollar and not the worker. My purpose now is to work safely, go home, and eventually retire knowing I'll get great benefits and a great retirement.

Gary echoed Chris' statement:

There's not a lot of company men here. Our union is strong in representation which protects us workers from the carrier and their mistreatment. Almost all of us are in it for the long haul which is the retirement package.

Karl shared Chris's and Gary's perspective, but elaborated on the motivation of railroad employees, the work environment, and the lifestyle:

As odd as it sounds, some of us did want to work for the railroad while growing up, whether because we were railfans, growing up in a railroad family, or just overall intrigued of how the railroad works. As a conductor and engineer, I can tell you that we get compensated very well and the company will tell you that at interviews. What they don't tell you at the job interviews is the relationship between management and the guys on the ground. The newer guys see how the environment works after a few years and they eventually adopt the same mentality as the old heads that you're in it for yourself. Work safe, stay on everyone's good side, go home, and try and make it to retirement.

The general consensus through interviews with both newer and seasoned employees was their motivation resided in continued employment through solidarity and protection from the union in the case of furloughs, investigations, rules infractions, and continued employment. The ultimate motivating factor was their current compensation

package, benefits, and ultimately railroad retirement. Despite some employees signaling their appreciation of the railroad industry and its operations, the motivational factors were almost all extrinsic through compensation.

Common Purpose and Shared Values

Regardless of agreement or nonagreement employment status, all employees had a strong incentive to work safely and efficiently for continued employment. From a management perspective, operational performance, asset utilization, and obtaining operational metrics were paramount to their employment objectives with their respective railroad. Safety was the solidifying factor from both an agreement and nonagreement perspective that allowed management to obtain operational performance metrics while forging that necessary relationship with unionized employees. Nathan, a midlevel manager with 16 years of experience, repeated this phrase multiple times in safety briefings and during his interview: “Lead with safety and the operation will follow.”

Safety was apparent among the union ranks through job briefings, peer communications, and while working in the field. Conductors and engineers, through their affiliation with their respective unions, looked out for each other’s safety, continued employment, and reinforced solidarity in their union subculture in the railroad. Through observations, data collection, and assimilation into their culture, common discussion topics among employees were safety, “what’s wrong with the company,” their thoughts on management, and working autonomously. For example, a conversation documented between Cody and Alex with their manager (Demarius) illustrated a frequent clash of expectations during a job briefing. Their job briefing took place in a crew room without other employees around with their manager. It was later determined by talking with their

manager both employees were called on their rest with an on-duty time of 22:40 hours and could be upset by the fact they were probably woken up by the crew caller after spending 10 hours on undisturbed rest after their previous tour of duty:

Cody: Garbage power, AGAIN! When can the company give us good power to haul all of this freight. I don't think we'll have enough horsepower. Are there any other engines available?

Demarius: We have nothing else. We can only work with what's available to us.

Cody: Ok, if we stall after leaving the terminal, what's your backup plan.

Demarius: You have enough horsepower. You're a qualified engineer, are you telling me that you're not going to attempt to make the hill out of town or just admit defeat already? I know you're a good engineer, I'm not sure why you're questioning me on a backup plan when your paperwork states you have enough horsepower.

Cody: It's like this, the company wants us to work safely, and I'm telling you I know this power, and it could result in something unsafe. Let's say we come apart while pulling the hill. We all know the company will want a download on my engine and will try to come after me for it.

Kent: (Interrupts Cody) Cody, we're taking the safe route by informing our manager of the safety implications that we can potentially see. [It was assumed that this statement was made to have a witness in case a potential incident were to occur or to relieve the crew of any responsibility after leaving the terminal.]

Kent: Speaking of safety, do you have any paperwork for this HAZMAT car? I don't have any in my paperwork.

Demarius: Listen, you have enough horsepower! I expect you guys to be on your power in 20 minutes. Kent, I'll get you that paperwork in a couple of minutes. I'm tired of you guys finding reasons not to operate trains or delaying trains. I get that you might be tired, but this is the railroad, everyone is always tired. [While in Demarius's office, he continues to voice his displeasure.] This is what I deal with on a nightly basis. Constant arguing, nothing is ever good enough for these guys. And it's always the company's fault. Did you see how they're trying to push off any responsibility if their train fails down the road? Daily, man. I deal with this daily.

Other employees shared their sentiment on how the company and management micromanage them, which indicated the cultural rift in their respective company. While talking with some employees out in the field, Michael, an out-of-town conductor building his train to take back to his home terminal, was asked for his thoughts on management and how it affects his motivation to perform in the field:

I've been working this local for 10 years, I know each industry en route. I have management telling me how these industries should be serviced. Ninety-five percent of field managers have little to no experience on the ground. If management left us alone, this would get done faster. But they chime in with how it should look on paper to be performed correctly. We're making a 5-hour job a

10-hour day if I follow their guidance. I just want to get home, but now I have to listen to someone who has never performed this job.

Charlie is an engineer nearing retirement and shared Michael's perspective:

I've listened to the company, managers, and even my own coworkers on how to railroad for years. It took me nearly half of my railroad career to realize that I know more than they do, but I just need to keep my thoughts to myself. I have a laundry list of what's wrong with this company and management and the majority of the time the union has our backs. But at the end of the day, I just want to work, do it safely, and go home. In a few years, this company will be an afterthought. If there's one thing I can praise the company on it's their focus on safety. Everyone cares about safety and I can thank those before me about their emphasis on working safely, otherwise I wouldn't be here about to retire next year.

Work Environment and Culture from the Unionized Employee Perspective

Using ethnographic principles to analyze the culture of the environment, social processes, and behaviors of this specific group of people (Wolcott, 2008), it was imperative to determine the knowledge and perception of operational metrics in relation to their performance and impact they have on operations. Several interviews, interview questions, interactions, and artifacts were collected to determine if nonagreement employees understood their operational impact based on their work processes and their input into the scheme of the organization's operating performance.

Throughout these observations there was an almost nonexistent understanding and callous disregard of the employee's operational input with their work behaviors in terms of how their work efforts collectively influence the operational input of the organization.

Regardless of demographics, work experience, or industry knowledge, the interviews revealed a work environment and culture from the unionized employee perspective that placed more attention on the culture of the union rather than the organizational culture. It was observed that the culture of the railroad industry from the unionized employee perspective was more of a brotherhood and collective of their own interests rather than the interest of the company as a whole, specifically, its own subculture in the industry.

The most vocal employees vividly exemplified the current work environment through historical anecdotes and current sentiments on behalf of the unionized population. Gary, most outspoken critic of his organization, provided his opinion on the current work environment and mutual collaboration with management to achieve organizational objectives:

I've worked for three different railroads in my career both as a manager and as a unionized employee, and the only thing that has changed is how the company will do anything to save money. The only thing I ever heard of as a manager was the operating ratio. Ask any veteran railroader, it's all about the operating ratio. We used the same beat-up engines that fail in some capacity in every single tour of duty. Each trip, it's something with the engine. The company is good at putting a Band-Aid on a serious fault. This is the culture of this railroad. Have you ever heard of a toxic work culture? That's this railroad. Safety is the company's favorite word, but they don't practice what they preach.

Gary was the first participant to use the term "company man," which was used on a couple of occasions throughout observations and interviews with other employees. Gary expressed his displeasure about mutual collaboration with management on achieving

organizational goals: “I’ll be the first to tell you that I’m not a company man, that’s why I gave up on management. Even as a manager I was promised many things and it never panned out.”

All unionized employees interviewed were given the same structured question on whether the culture of the organization would support performance-based incentives, relative to the performance of the organization. Train velocity and safety were key inputs from unionized employees described in Chapter 3 that influenced operational performance. Unionized railroad employees impacted train velocity and car dwell by: (a) being available for work, (b) working safely and efficiently, and (c) having job briefings with their peers to discuss the work needing to be done. Unionized employees impact safety, which is a key metric and industry focal point due to the safety sensitivity of the industry and this culture. Safety is paramount to ensure injuries to employees and the general public are mitigated through public awareness, in compliance with prescribed rules and regulations, and monitored through managerial efficiency testing, which is mandated by the Federal Railroad Administration (Mendoza, 2017).

When asked if they would support performance-based incentives based on their inputs (e.g., safety, availability for work, working efficiently), a variety of answers were provided by the participants that encapsulated their views. Amy, a railroad veteran of 15 years and participant of this study, stated:

This particular railroad or this environment in general would not support performance-based incentives no matter how much money, time-off, or trinkets they give away. This company doesn’t like to give anything away for free,

especially if the company is already paying you to perform a job you agreed to perform contractually.

Bryan, one of the local chairman, was most critical of the railroad culture and support of performance-based incentives for unionized trainmen:

This culture is toxic and disastrous. Even if managers or the company were to award these incentives, under what description or criteria would these be established? Management has their favorites, me and the older heads aren't their favorite. I guess you can say I'm part of the culture problem, but the culture problem started a long time ago with how management and the company treated their workers. There's a history of mistreatment.

The overall response from unionized participants regarding the current work environment and organizational culture was mainly negative, which can be attributed to the stories told from a historical context of previous senior management and executive leadership. Chris, another unionized employee with over 20 years of experience as a conductor, summarized employee morale about organizational culture and relationship with management.:

When I first started, I took a lot of pride in my job, and I got along with management. I figured as long as I worked hard then management wouldn't mess with me. Then the company shifted toward a strict rule compliance and discipline policy where any small infraction resulted in time off work or lost wages. I worked efficiently and if I bent the rules to get things done faster to help the company then that's what I did. Then management started popping me for the slightest infractions. Then I started losing money. That's when I stopped trusting

management and the company. Now I come to work, do my job as rule compliant as possible, and go home. No extra favors unless I have time remaining on my hours of service. No amount of money can entice me to help the company. When I get called for service for a specific job, I'll take my time to make sure it's done safely, but I'm not cutting any more corners or going above and beyond to help the company.

Work Environment and Culture from the Manager's Perspective

During the fieldwork of this study, all locations had available access to personal protective equipment (PPE) for employees, organizational slogans that emphasized safety were displayed in crew rooms, and signs on the outside of the buildings emphasizing safety (see Figures 8 and 9). Organizational circulars littered the bulletin board that outlined significant safety incidents such as last fatality, last reportable injury, last run-through switch, and so on. Of the locations observed during this research, each location preached, practiced, and emphasized safety through the use of equipment, visuals, safety briefings before work, and verbal discussion among employees.

Figure 8

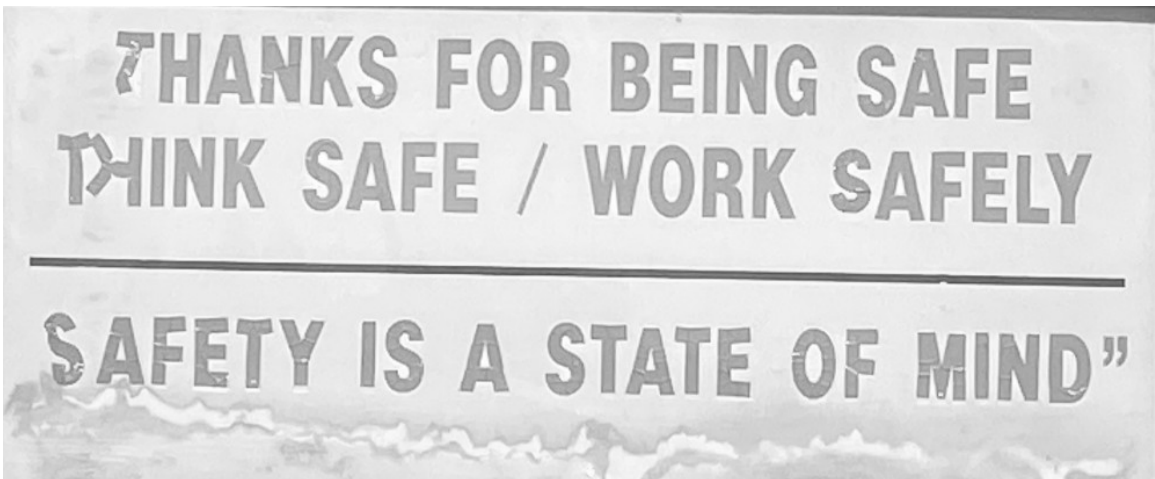
Figurative Railroad Signal Displaying Green Emphasizing the Prioritization of Safety



Note. Photo taken in 2020 outside of a Class I railroad terminal.

Figure 9

“Safety is a State of Mind”



Note. This slogan was captured in 2020 and located in several highly visible areas to remind employees of the safety sensitive environment in which they work.

During this research several managers were asked to discuss their current work environment and culture, and whether performance-based incentives would influence unionized employee motivation to work in conjunction to achieve operational performance metrics. At a Class I railroad terminal in Chicago, two railroad managers offered their opinion on whether they would be supportive of performance-based incentives for unionized employees relative to achieving operational objectives.

Nathan, a midlevel manager with 16 years of railroad experience as a conductor and manager, emphasized how “in theory, it makes sense to incentivize in order to motivate to achieve metrics,” but also explained why incentivization would never work:

I’ve worked for two different Class I railroads and one short line. If you look at the relationship history of unionized railroaders versus railroad management, you have to understand that conductors and engineers are skeptical of management. As managers and supervisors, we preach safety all day and actively participate in safety by ensuring that our employees work safety, mainly through efficiency testing. I’ve been on both sides of the fence as a conductor and now as a manager responsible for hundreds of employees. If you ask any conductor or engineer, they will tell you that management has a quota for efficiency test failures, and when I was on the ground and I look at it from their perspective, it would appear that management hunts for failures.

Nick, a subordinate manager under Nathan, added:

I’ve been at this terminal for almost 3 years, it took nearly a year to earn a sliver of trust from the guys on the ground. The railroad culture can be stressful and chaotic with lots of moving parts. I have safety briefings with all our employees

on a daily basis and we have signs everywhere to remind employees of working safely. The fact of the matter is union employees stick together, it's a brotherhood to an extent. Without asking any random conductor or engineer if they would consider incentives or performance pay if it's tied into a company metric, they would laugh at me. There's a level of distrust that the union folks have with management and quite honestly, I don't blame them. There are some unethical managers that care about their next promotion rather than the actual health and welfare of their fellow employees.

Nathan concluded by stating:

As much as I believe in the carrot and stick idea to drive metrics, you can't get an entire union on board with incentives to perform. Their bond is too strong. As a union employee, I was once on the bandwagon of distrusting management. The work environment is dictated by unionized employees. As managers, the only thing we can do to positively impact morale, the culture, and performance is live and breathe the safety aspect of our operations because that's one thing management and the union employees mutually agree on.

Many of the interviewed Class I managers perceived union employees did not care about performance incentives relative to organizational objectives. Bryan, a senior manager with over 20 years of experience as a conductor and engineer, explained the union mentality in his geographic location and how monetary incentives tied to unionized performance was not a conceivable option:

At most terminals you have brand new managers that don't know how to railroad because they're still learning operations. New managers treat the words coming

from executives and general managers as gospel. If a general manager says that the company is failing in safety, these young managers will go out and efficiency test until they're blue in the face. The reason behind that is because most new managers are operationally deficient, all they know is how to efficiency test. These new managers target newer conductors because they're also learning how to railroad, that's the way they can get their efficiency test failures up and get recognized by their senior management. In turn, this creates distrust with the newer conductors on the ground with management. Now what you have is an older workforce that already distrusts management and a new workforce slowly starting to learn to distrust management. At the end, most conductors and engineers won't be on board with an incentive program that rewards performance because they already distrust management and now the carrier.

Summary of Theme 1: Industry Culture and Work Environment

The theme's most significant outcome was the constant culture clash between management and unionized employees. The challenges faced in this environment were a result of expectations, challenging relationships, and competing personal motives that were dictated by the operating environment in the railroad. Although comradery and relationships were strong among the unionized employees, their lifestyle and environmental demands served as an unmotivating force given their lack of a work/home balance stability.

Railroad managers encountered the same hurdles when pressed to motivate employees in an environment where constant personality clashes were present with an overwhelming distrust between the agreement and nonagreement employees. The

communication and dedication to safety was the common bond that allowed the two sides to facilitate amicable relations while facilitating railroad operations. Railroad managers operated through a different lens where they used the available work force to obtain organizational objectives while establishing and maintaining relationships. From a conductor and engineer's perspective, railroad managers may be perceived as demanding due to the variety of functions unionized professionals are qualified of performing, especially when called to work a variety of tasks that typically leads to the creation of stories.

The work stories created and shared between unionized employees to drive humor, break up the monotony of a long day, and potentially serve as a warning of what a manager's tendencies and expectations are when called for duty. In the end, the common motivational factors were working safely, performing their job as requested from management, going home, and providing for their families.

Theme 2: Employee Perspective on Effective Performance Incentives

Two primary research questions sought to explore the employee's intrigue and receptiveness of an incentive system relative to their performance with respect to the company's operational performance. As described in Theme 1, Table 3 provided context to the union mentality and distrust of the organization in the unionized subculture. Much of the data for this study were collected by asking interviewees if an incentivization package was offered, which incentives for performance would be most preferred and realistic given their current collective bargaining agreement and their relationship with the organization. The interviews were triangulated with other forms of data collection and analysis to include observations, interviews, and coded data through NVivo.

Union Employee Preference in Incentives for Performance

Field observations and assimilation to the culture were crucial to understand the context of unionized employee's motivation to perform. Table 4 provided background context as to what fuels employees to perform at their job to include continued employment, pension, and a railroad retirement, which were further discussed and elaborated by union employees in the field. Throughout field observations, radio communication among employees, and interviews conducted with unionized employees, there was an overwhelming conclusion: Unionized employees are very well compensated as long as they remain available for work.

When asked directly what incentives would entice employees to perform and directly achieve organizational metrics or objectives, their responses closely aligned with time off work, paid time off work, and opportunities to perform special projects. Few responses referenced additional monetary compensation. Chris, a railroad veteran of over 20 years who previously provided context on the relationship between unionized employees and management and the organization, provided his perspective on what additional incentives could increase employee motivation to achieve organizational objectives:

Listen, we make a lot of money, and a lot of the newer employees make the same if not more than a manager's base salary. I assure you that these guys on the ground wouldn't work any harder for a little extra money because we already make enough. If the company really wanted to provide a perk for us to work harder, then provide a compensation day. I can't tell you how many times I tried to take a personal day or single vacation day only to be told by administration that

the day I wanted was already over allotment. We already don't see our families enough, having a paid day off or a day off approved would motivate the guys to get the job done as long as we knew it was a guarantee.

Aaron, a conductor with 5 years of railroad service, followed up with Chris's sentiment:

Our compensation package is really good as long as we remain marked up. We chose this profession for the money, not the lifestyle. Why complicate our compensation package with additional money tied into our performance when we don't know if the company will follow through with their end of the bargain in addition to not knowing how we would have to submit a claim for that compensation agreement by the company. Make things easy and have management agree to a personal leave day or a vacation day, it's easy to claim, and it's less complicated.

Alex, a conductor and engineer with close to 10 years of experience, provided a different perspective on compensation tied to performance:

I can't speak on behalf of those who have more railroad experience than I do, but if some employees knew which objectives needed to be achieved and if there was a clear-cut process of how we would get rewarded, I can see some guys get on board with the idea. Why not offer the performance incentives to the company as a whole and make it the decision of the employee to decide if they want to participate?

Immediate Response by Employees to Types of Incentives Based on Performance

Of the 25 unionized employees selected for this research, each provided a distinct and immediate initial reaction about forms of preferred incentivization. This subsection

provides an overview of these conductors' and engineers' immediate reaction when proposing the idea of incentivizing employees relative to organizational performance measures, which is detailed in Table 4.

Table 4

Immediate Response by Employees to Types of Incentives Based on Performance

Interviewee	Response
Chris	"I already make enough money as it is . . . approved time off goes a long way when we're already on the road for 60 hours a week."
Aaron	"Give us extra time off work, time that's approved. It doesn't have to be paid all the time, we make a great living as it is."
Alex	"Give the employees the option to participate in performance incentives. Most of us are stockholders, anyway."
Matthew	"We all want to be paid more or at least have more options that benefit our lifestyle and home life."
Gary	"I get paid more as an engineer than any manager at my terminal. The company doesn't care about me so I'm not going out of my way for them."
Jenny	"We all get paid extremely good, over six figures a year to do a job that requires a high school diploma. I don't want to complicate it."
Bryan	"I'm paid to do a job regardless of the company's objectives. I don't want to be compensated like a manager."
Brendan	"Quite frankly, I think we're underpaid for this type of environment. I can get on board with additional pay such as working in poor environments, or having additional time off work."
Charlie	"I would never support a compensation package that benefits the company. If I wanted more money I would call the manager on duty and ask if he needed someone to work so I can get paid overtime."
Karl	"The majority of us work on the extra board which means we don't know when we're getting called for work which also means it impacts our family life. Pay the extra board more. Also, the performance metrics need to be clearly identified so we know what we're working towards and how it helps the company."
Clint	"I get paid enough as it is, I'm good. You want to hook us up in some way, give us extra time off that's paid. Do me a favor and I'll do you a favor."
Danny	"We get paid better than other major railroads, I don't want to ruin a good thing we got going. If I could suggest one way to give out performance monies, I would suggest extra time off work so I can see my family more often instead of calling them from Salt Lake every other 3 days."

Interviewee	Response
Ed	“I’m all about increasing the value of the stock I own with the company so if you really want to motivate these guys to work harder then give them other opportunities such as job trainers or peer evaluators. It’ll help with the safety aspect of our operations as well.”
Joshua	“We already get good benefits and pay. Also the company has a history of not fulfilling their obligation, so no change at all.”
James	“I don’t think any of this needs to be discussed without our union representation present.”
Kavin	“If you want to give out performance rewards, focus on paid time off instead of money. We make good money as it is.”
Franklin	“Does it really matter? The railroad will change in 5 years where everything will be operated with computers and no actual conductors or engineers.”
Justin	“Extra time off work, paid or unpaid, as long as it’s excused.”
Tyler	“I would think that the company would want to reinvest in it’s workers, so why not provide opportunity for those employees to do special projects or allow them opportunities that align with the company’s objectives?”
Sean	“I will always take more money. You tell me what the company wants and if the company will pay me to do that, I’ll do it.”
Donnie	“I want nothing to change. This has been a good career for me in terms of money and benefits.”
Matt	“Extra time off work.”
Terrence	“I think we get paid pretty good for 40 hours of week, and as long as the company is harping about overtime, I’ll take whatever extra incentives I can get.”
Jimmy	“We already make enough money as it is. As long as the company doesn’t complicate things and keeps it easy, as long as the union is ok with it then I’m ok with it.”
Jerry	“This will obviously have to have the support of the union, which I doubt will even be looked at.”

Employee Responses to Performance Based Incentives

There was overwhelming support for additional time off as an incentive as indicated in Table 4. Referencing Herzberg’s (1959 two-dimensional model, some hygiene factors that affect people’s attitudes about their work include supervision, peer relationships, and salary (Gawel, 1997). Based on the interviews conducted, understanding the relationship between employees, the company, management, and their current pay structure, unionized employees strongly favored additional time off as opposed to a monetary-based incentive.

A question asked to employees was whether they felt adequately compensated to perform work in an industry where odd work schedules, irregular sleep schedules, and performing work in all environmental elements were constantly present. Based on field work and understanding the culture of the industry, several follow-up responses were received from employees who indicated additional time off as an incentive would be most beneficial as an incentive. Aaron, one of the most outspoken and active participants of this research, stated:

This industry isn't for everyone, but the money, retirement, and benefits have raised the standard of living for my family. But, there's times when I'm out of town in a hotel waiting for the next train back home that I have no idea when I'm getting called for, and running the risk of missing appointments, birthdays, or planned days off. I'm at the mercy of the railroad and it definitely affects my home life. I would consider working towards incentives such as additional time off work as long as the company held their end of the bargain.

Karl echoed Aaron's sentiments from the perspective of being on the extra board:

When you're on the extra board, you're essentially playing a game of chess with the company. You can be first out, ask the manager on duty when I can expect to be called, he'll give you a timeframe so I can actually go out and get something done like grocery shop or play with my children, and more times than not I'm either getting called to work immediately after hanging up on the phone with the manager on duty or I'm sitting around for another 8 hours. This affects my home life and my rest cycles. I understand that as an extra board railroad employee I'm utilized at the company's convenience, but this does create a safety concern with

adequate rest to perform my job safely. A great incentive I would support would be extra time off work as long as I meet the company's goals with my performance.

James, although not a union representative, incorporated the union aspect of performance-based incentives:

With respect to our contract, any monetary compensation for our performance must be written in our contract. Although I'm opposed to any managerial incentives tied into our performance, I think the easiest and most encouraging way to increase our workforce to perform to a more efficient standard would be to allow management to approve paid time off if employees have additional vacation days or personal days to burn rather than complying to local policies and the quotas that so many men and women can be off at once on a specific day.

Jerry, one of the most fervent union supporters nearing retirement, provided some historical context to his response:

I'm about 2 months from retirement and at this point I don't care. I will say that of all the railroads I've worked for, the company constantly changes their policies and guidelines, most of which are clear as mud. A lot of good employees have been burned by the company, some of which were fired. You'll notice with a lot of the old heads, some of the responses you're getting are directed at the lack of trust with this company and how our union has fought for our benefits due to mistreatment by managers and the company. One thing you can't take away is what's guaranteed in our contract, which is paid time off. If a manager came up to me and said, "Jerry, I really need you to get this train out in the next 2 hours

because the terminal is about to become congested. If you can safely move this train out in 2 hours so I can avoid this congestion, I'll go over allotment on any day for a single day vacation or personal day off. Will you do this for me?" You better believe I'm going to get that train out safely and in under 2 hours because now I want Christmas Day off work.

Managerial Response on Incentivizing Employees for Their Performance

The five managers selected for this research had varied backgrounds, some of which come from the union ranks and each having their own metrics they are trying to obtain. All managers indicated struggles motivating a unionized workforce while simultaneously appeasing to the demands of senior management and achieving corporate metrics. All of the managers interviewed indicated safety, asset utilization, and timely train performance were the key drivers that shaped their performance. The managers interviewed came from three different Class I railroads, so performance metrics and standards of operational efficiency varied; however, they all specifically indicated it takes creativity to manage a unionized railroad workforce in a culture beset with mistrust and competing ulterior motives from both the unionized employee and salaried manager.

Balancing Culture, Motivating Employees, and Achieving Expectations

The managers indicated several competing factors shaped how they approach operations, which ultimately started with assessing the individual personality of each unionized employee. Most managers described the tactics and motivational techniques used to illustrate the importance of the work to be performed through job briefings, while they kept in mind the operational factors that shaped their overall operations.

Each manager stressed the competing environment between unionized employees and managerial objectives that are tied to performance with the main struggle focused on how to provide that additional motivational incentive to achieve a task at hand. Two interview questions presented to each manager focused on offering incentives tied to performance relative organizational objectives and how the manager could or could not incorporate incentives into their operations. Data was collected from Class I managers in confidence in their offices away from unionized employees. The offices typically overlooked a railyard or in close proximity to unionized railroad employees.

Bryan, one of the most seasoned railroad managers with railroad experience exceeding 20 years as a conductor and engineer, provided his insight on his struggles of a competing unionized culture while getting the most out of his employees:

As a senior manager, I have eight subordinate managers underneath me, four of which are brand new with no railroading experience on the ground. Operationally I have to continue to train them, but when it comes to efficiency testing, they were taught that at the schoolhouse and are quite proficient at it. I have to both mentor my junior managers while ensuring my metrics for the terminal are achieved. It's common knowledge in the railroad industry that safety supersedes any other aspect of railroad operations. When my superintendent or general superintendent tell me that my safety metrics are lagging behind other terminals, my junior managers ramp up their efficiency testing and fail our employees on the smallest of things. This crushes our employee morale, which in turn slows down our operations because our union employees feel they're watched like a hawk and they don't want to be reprimanded again for something so small or arguably petty.

Now I have a unionized workforce on the ground that's slowing productivity because my management team takes exceptions on them for something that can be argued as not an efficiency test failure.

Bryan then elaborated on the culture challenge on his metrics:

It's a constant balancing act. The guys on the ground know that I don't have the authority to overturn an efficiency test failure, but they know that I can mentor my junior managers on what constitutes an efficiency test failure. My challenge is how do I motivate our conductors and engineers to perform work in a fashion where we achieve our objectives, but at the same time encourage safety. I want my managers to take efficiency test failures if they're legitimate because it improves our safety, and unfortunately it is a metric that's inherent in our objectives as a division, but there's other ways to improve safety metrics that are more obvious such as no run-through switches, derailments, or injuries. Just because our general superintendent says our safety metrics are lacking doesn't mean go out and blitz our employees, it can also mean having meaningful conversations on how to operate safely.

Bryan then concluded on whether there is a way to incentivize employees for their performance despite the clash between the culture of the organization and achieving performance metrics: "The fact of the matter is that our employees on the ground are compensated very well and the only time they lose money is when they're held out of service for attendance or safety-related issues." Bryan then proceeded to show a copy of the agreement that stipulated the compensation in their respective union's collective

bargaining agreement. While standing and looking outside the window of his office that overlooked his yard where two remote control yard jobs were working, Bryan said,

This employee right here with the belt pack on is a phenomenal employee, great attendance, no safety issues. All he wants is me to spread out his vacation days to single day vacations so that he can have every other weekend as a 3-day weekend. I can easily approve that and I know that his morale and motivation will shoot through the roof. My problem is that how to backfill that vacancy when I have an extra board that typically calls in sick or uses their Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) on Friday through Monday. If I give him that day off, I run the risk of not being able to fill his vacancy. If I approve it for him, then I set the precedent that every employee should be guaranteed the same treatment. There's logically no way I can make our employees on the ground happy while at the same time achieving my metrics that my bonus depends on.

Other managers did not have the same mentality as Bryan when it came to balancing culture and achieving metrics. Jacob, a midlevel manager with 8 years of managerial railroad experience, shared a vastly different perspective on how to balance the unionized culture while motivating his employees and achieving his metrics:

This is what I tell all of my employees whether they're union or management: "You chose this profession, the profession didn't choose you." All of our employees know the expectations: work efficiently, work safety, communicate any unsafe acts, and be available to work. I don't offer additional incentives to our employees because their collective bargaining agreement or their contract stipulates the concept of work to be performed. If an employee fails to work

efficiently, safely, or has poor attendance that affects my operations, then I'll correct that employee through discipline outlined by our company's policies.

Jacob concluded with his thoughts on offering incentives to unionized employees:

Offering incentives to unionized employees to perform a job they're under contract to perform is purposeless. I'm not going to reward an employee for doing a job they're paid to perform. Management on the other hand has bonuses tied into their overall compensation. Our system is designed for management to be creative to achieve our operational metrics through safety, on-time performance, and ensuring our customers are taken care of. Rewarding unionized employees to perform a job under contract doesn't make sense.

Nathan was asked whether incentives would increase motivation and performance out of his unionized employees. Nathan has worked both as a conductor and now a manager and provided a unique perspective on how to incentivize employees for their work in relation to achieving operational metrics: "To me it's all about building relationships." While outside of a grain loading facility, Nathan discussed the importance of relationship building and building trust:

Do you see that grain plant over there? We load and unload hoppers on a daily basis. Their production drives our terminal's metrics which are meticulously analyzed at the corporate level. I understand that people need time off for their families, medical issues, you name it. I build rapport with my people to actually care about their problems. The conductor on that train you see over there (points to a train near the grain facility), I know he's a single dad. When he comes up to me asking me for a day off, I give it to him. When I call him on his off day asking

if he can work, 9 times out of 10 he says yes. To me it's about building relationships. Keep people safe, keep people happy, and the operations will follow. My incentive to my workforce is to treat people the way I would want to be treated.

Not all railroad managers have conductor or engineer experience. Kale, a railroad manager with less than 3 years of service, was asked on his thoughts on whether incentives would work to drive performance and operational metrics:

Our employees are paid pretty good, I doubt extra money to achieve safety standards, operating metrics, or performing a slowdown would encourage people to work a certain way. They work the monotonous routine of getting up for work, taking a train to a different location, staying in a hotel, and waiting for their phone to ring to bring a train back home. Their lifestyle is horrible. I'm not opposed to giving an extra day off if I had the authority to do so. I can't imagine facetimeing from a hotel watching my kids grow up while I wait for the next train, then getting called out on my rest, and being extremely tired because I had just stayed up all day in order to see my kids. I think a great motivational tool would be to offer a paid day off for those employees that exceed expectations, whether it's through their attitude, performance, or safety initiatives.

Summary of Theme 2: Perspective on Effective Employee Performance Incentives

Unionized Employee Perspective

The majority of unionized employees felt additional time off work—paid or unpaid—would be the greatest incentive. Through interviews, field observations, and

documentation provided by management, it was evident additional monetary compensation was not the primary concern.

Conductors and engineers, primarily those who work off the extra board, endure an unpredictable lifestyle and are subject to the necessity of their respective railroad. Maintaining a lifestyle that provides them the opportunity to be with their family or attend to significant engagements (e.g., medical, social) does not adequately fulfill their need. As evidenced in Tables 3 and 4, in addition to the coding provided through NVivo, a suitable work-life balance was most sought in terms of how additional incentives can increase their work performance and motivation, particularly when it comes to incentivizing based on performance relative to the objectives of the organization.

Managerial Perspective on Incentivization

The management perspective on incentivization yielded various responses, which can be attributed to the current culture of the work environment and the demands from their senior leadership in terms of operational performance and expectations. Most managers did not know how to incorporate incentives to increase performance out of their unionized workforce. They never considered alternatives to incentives to increase productivity, or succumbed to the current organizational culture as it currently exists in their terminals. The managers had a firm grasp on their current culture in their respective terminals and some were willing to entertain the idea of incentivizing, particularly through approving additional days off because it was an option at their disposal. However, managers were uncertain on how to incorporate additional monetary compensation with respect to union buy-in and acknowledging the fact they are already compensated to perform their job in their contract.

Theme 3: Distrust of the Organization to Follow Through on Performance-Based Incentives

This section features feedback provided by unionized railroad employees from both a historical and current context. The data and information provided a descriptive context of the relationships between management and unionized railroad employees that can be perceived as a potential barrier for performance-based incentives.

Revisiting Vroom's Expectancy Theory

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, Vroom's (as cited in Carnes & Knotts, 2018) expectancy theory asserts despite different organizational goals and objectives, employees can be motivated through rewards and alignment of performance. The three variables in Vroom's expectancy theory are valence, instrumentality, and expectancy. These variables were visited with data and information obtained from interviews and fieldwork related to each variable and employees' mistrust of the organization to follow through on performance-based incentives.

Valence

Vroom (as cited in van Eerde & Thierry, 1996) defined valence as the importance, attractiveness, desirability, or anticipated satisfaction with outcomes. With respect to valence, the question becomes how important and desirable is performance-based incentives to unionized employees? Several participants were explicit in their lack of motivation to exceed expectations despite the potential of extrinsic rewards to include: (a) extra time off work, (b) additional monetary compensation, and (c) opportunities to pursue other career objectives in the organization. Brendan, a conductor with 15 years of

railroad service, provided his opinion by explaining both pros and cons of employee buy-in to performance-based compensation as it relates to employee motivation:

Listen, you have railroaders that have been doing the job for decades, their mentality won't change because all of them at one point or another has either been furloughed, fired, been targeted by management, has had terrible representation by their union, or their own union brothers and sisters has attempted to tarnish their reputation. It's these railroaders that know the best thing to do is do their job, stay out of trouble, and go home. Our motivation every day is to go home safe and still gainfully employed. Almost all of us understands that the company, the union, our coworkers, and management will turn their backs on anyone if they don't fall in line. I can reduce my exposure to that nonsense by not participating in anything deemed to help the company above my abilities.

Brendan continued his thoughts by analyzing the younger railroad generation's perspective:

Pay for performance might work with the younger generation of conductors because they're young and don't know any better. If the company were serious about implementing pay for performance, the company needs to explicitly state which objectives need to be met. Is it safety? Is it attendance? We are paid to move freight safely. If there was buy-in, the company needs to be specific on what performance measurements the railroaders will be working for.

Gary, one of the most outspoken and harshest critics of his respective Class I railroad and the idea of performance-based incentives, unknowingly described the perceived lack of valence as it relates to incentivization:

Most of us aren't motivated to work for additional money for several reasons, starting with we don't trust the company to fulfill their end of the bargain.

Another reason is we are union, if we wanted to be paid like management then we'd be management. I think the biggest factor why many of us don't like the idea of pay for performance is the fact that we are already compensated pretty good as it is, involving performance pay at the discretion of the company is nonsense because of the lack of trust that already exists from us union guys.

Clint, a younger employee who was recently promoted to engineer, added his perspective on how performance-based incentives could work in the railroad industry.

I think pay for performance could work, but it needs to be individualized. What I mean is that the company or management creates the criteria, whether it's efficiency test failures, attendance, number of cars switched out in a shift, whatever it is they come up with. The individual employee needs to meet those specific criteria whether it's no efficiency test failures, perfect attendance, you know what I mean? If you are depending on your coworkers for their fair share towards the company as a whole, it will never work. If it's tailored to the individual then I would support it. Some individuals would be motivated if the individual employee worked to achieve those results on his end. Now here's why it won't work. What if I'm furloughed tomorrow and I lose everything I worked for the performance pay? Do you see what I'm getting at? Employees need to buy-in a program like this, but not everyone has faith the company will fulfill their end of the bargain.

Instrumentality

Instrumentality is the subjective probability the promised rewards will actually be given when performance objectives are achieved (Lee, 2019). Although valence and instrumentality are similar, instrumentality focuses on the employee's perception the organization will fulfill their promise on providing the performance.

A resounding theme emerged that unionized employees generally distrust their respective organization. The concept of a lack of instrumentality in reference to performance-based incentives was descriptively annotated in interviews and field observations. Kelly, a switchman with over 15 years of experience who declined a request for a formal interview, provided a thorough answer to my question if he would favor performance-based compensation relative to achieving operational objectives. Kelly told his conductor and engineer to stop all movement, tie down their equipment, and head inside for their break at the request of management. Kelly took the time to provide his feedback:

So, I've seen Nathan [the manager on duty] drive around all day. I personally thought he was efficiency testing so I was making sure to do everything by the book. I didn't know he was driving you around. I'm not sure what type of performance pay or whatever you call it would be beneficial to me. I switch cars in the yard all day. Here's why I think your pay for performance won't work. Let's say I get a bonus for switching 250 cars a day for the entire month I'm working. I really have to be moving to get that number, and I can do it, I've been doing this job a long time. Let's say I accidentally break one of our operating rules because I'm trying to get that 250-car quota and I fail an efficiency test or I cause

a derailment. Do you think management would support me because I was trying to get a quota for additional pay to help with their metrics? Absolutely not.

Because I was trying to get a quota, I created an unsafe work incident, and now I face a discipline policy that's designed to fire people.

Danny shared a similar attitude, but referenced common occurrences that already affect unionized employees. Danny provided proof from his handheld electronic device that showed a claim he submitted for compensation as a mileage expense while called to a different on-duty location:

When we report to a different on-duty location, we submit mileage claims; it's something like 50 cents a mile. As you can see, I submitted my mileage claim while working out at a different on-duty location, which equals about \$32. If you look even more closely, I have 13 pending mileage claims. If you look even closer, they all require approval and acknowledgement from the manager on duty. It can be any manager just to say that this is a valid claim. These 13 pending requests are as old as 3 months. If the company can't do something as simple as approving a mileage claim, how certain am I that they would fulfill a performance pay initiative?

Jerry, an engineer who is set to retire in 2 months, succinctly elaborated on the problems with performance-based incentives with unionized employees:

I'll be as politically correct as I can. Most of us on the ground have been screwed over by the company at some point. I can think of 1 time the company gave me something for doing a good thing, it was a Christmas ornament back in 2012. I still have it because it was the only time in my 30 some odd years with this

company that they did something nice for me. I keep it with me at all times to remind the younger guys that all of us are nothing but an “Hours of Service” number. You know what I mean? How much work can I get out of this guy in 12 hours?

Jerry motioned to follow him into the crew room and proceeded to reach inside his bag and pulled out a small box with a Christmas ornament inside and shared, “I think the company actually liked me in 2012,” Jerry said pointing to the stenciling on the Christmas ornament that says “2012.” Jerry’s Christmas ornament and comment generated hysterical laughter and banter from his coworkers. Jerry explains the purpose of his Christmas ornament by stating, “My point is that the company won’t go above and beyond for us, why should I do that for them?”

Expectancy

Expectancy is the probability an action or effort will lead to a desired outcome (van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). Fulfilling the expectancy aspect of Vroom’s expectancy theory include having resources available to achieve the objective, the knowledge, skills, and abilities to achieve the task, and support from management to accomplish the task (Lloyd & Mertends, 2018). As discussed in Chapter 2, expectancy can be fulfilled if managers are cognizant of their employees’ abilities of producing a realistic outcome. The individual performing the task must have enough expectancy that if enough effort is expended, it will lead to the desired performance (Acikgoz & Sumer, 2018). A lack of expectancy can become a motivational concern for managers (i.e., does the individual performing the task have enough motivation to fulfill the expectancy?). Assuming these employees have the qualifying competencies to perform the task given their rigorous

railroad training and certification, will performance-based incentives change employee behavior and encourage motivation to achieve operational objectives?

Table 5 depicts the responses from employees who argued for or against the expectancy requirements. Although not directly postulated as a question throughout interviews, these responses were captured, coded, and transcribed to describe the expectancy element of Vroom's expectancy theory. Attitudes, expectations, culture, work environment, and work-life balance were the criteria used to describe the motivation aspect required to describe the expectancy.

Table 5*Employee Responses Indicating Motivation Level Relative to Expectancy*

Interviewee	Response
Chris	"I don't trust this company. I've been screwed by them many times, especially when it comes to alleged rules infractions."
Aaron	"If management was more consistent with how they treated their employees it would certainly help with the environment."
Matthew	"If the effort I put in helps the company, it's extra motivation for me to be an even better employee."
Gary	"The only thing that has changed with the railroad industry is what the company will do to save a buck. Firings, furloughs, lack of equipment, that's how they save money."
Jenny	"There's not many company men in this organization. A lot of guys and gals here hate management. In retaliation we'll try and screw the company over if we feel wronged."
Bryan	"The company is very good at putting a Band-Aid on a serious fault. Patch it up until it's no longer usable, anything to save money."
Brendan	"Have you ever heard of a toxic culture? That's the railroad."
Charlie	"I just want a stable income and career. This whole company has changed in my 20 years with the company. Managers come and go. Executives come and go. New rules get implemented. People get fired for breaking rules. It's a vicious cycle."
Ed	"You can't trust your coworkers, management, or the company. That's why I think the culture wouldn't support incentives with this company."
Kavin	"The culture of this organization, it's fair to say there's an 'us versus them' mentality. It is a morale killer and it doesn't motivate us."
Franklin	"Does it really matter? The railroad will change in 5 years where everything will be operated with computers and no actual conductors or engineers."
Justin	"This culture is toxic and disastrous enough. Even if managers or the company were to award these incentives, under what discretion or criteria would be established?"
Tyler	"I can't count how many times senior management has tried to put the blame on union employees for an incident that happened."
Donnie	"I want nothing to change. This has been a good career for me in terms of money and benefits."
Matt	"furloughs, investigations, firings, you name it. The union folks here are a brotherhood, the union is very strong here."
Jimmy	"Most of the employees here either hate the company or don't trust the company. We're here to do a job and go home. When I think of culture, a good culture, I think of headquarters where the suits are that pat each other on the back."
Jerry	"The company doesn't care about you, why should we care about the company?"

The responses in Table 5 indicate a strong lack of expectancy in unionized employee attitudes, behaviors, and motivation because of the perceived outcome. Several keywords included: (a) toxic, (b) culture, (c) furloughs, (d) investigations, (e) union, and (f) company. These strong codes were repeated throughout interviews, casual workplace conversation, and other sources of data collection that indicates a predetermined cognitive disposition of the work environment and their respective company's culture. A lack of perceived autonomy is evident in Table 5 as many employees indicated a lack of faith in the company. Because their ability to influence the outcome was beyond their control, the expectancy was also low, which ultimately affected employee motivation. Employee motivation was perceived to be low based on the responses focused on toxic culture, lack of trust, lack of motivation, and low morale.

Summary of Theme 3: Organizational Distrust on Performance-Based Incentive

Follow Through

Unionized railroad employees offered detailed input on why they did not trust the organization to follow through with performance-based incentives.. Vroom's expectancy theory was used as the framework for identifying patterns and trends in responses specifically focused on valence, instrumentality, and expectancy. Valence, instrumentality, and expectancy were broken down by components in Vroom's expectancy theory model to identify major themes in each variable of the model. The amount of insightful input and predetermined thoughts on their respective organization from unionized employees indicated a culture of distrust from every facet of their work environment to include fellow employees and outside employees affiliated with their respective organization.

Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation explains why individuals behave in certain ways, which determines their level of effort, motivation, and performance that ultimately influences the outcome of a desired end state. Throughout many interviews and observations, it was noted how employees have been allegedly wronged by their respective organization in the past, which is why there is a lack of trust. Therefore, the level of effort and motivation were just enough to complete the job in a safe and efficient manner rather than exceeding expectations.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study were organized around three distinct themes identified in this chapter. The most significant observation that resonated throughout the study was the organizational culture set the precedent of the responses from both a historical and present-day perspective. The conversation style, motivation and work behaviors, and shared values identified in Table 3 set the cultural tone in the railroad environment that set the precedence of the major findings, which are further explained in Chapter 5.

Unionized Railroad Culture Will Not Support Performance-Based Incentives

The participants' railroad service ranged from a few years to over 30 years and approaching retirement. With the small exception of the newer railroad employees who considered performance-based incentives relative to organizational performance objectives, there was an overwhelming disregard for the opportunity to consider performance-based incentives. Although amicable relationships were present between the unionized workforce and management, historical and current storytelling, behavioral patterns reflecting animosity and distrust, and union comradery superseded any

opportunity that presented itself to forge a relationship between the organization and the unionized workforce that consisted of incentives for achieving organizational metrics.

Through fieldwork, triangulation of interviews and observations, and analyzing documents, it was revealed safety and unionized comradery was at the forefront of the organizational culture. The use of storytelling and communication in the field reminded unionized employees of past and present risks of unsafe behaviors and what could warrant managerial intervention. Discussions of unsafe actions that could result in a rule infraction or a potentially more hazardous incident such as a derailment or injury while performing work in the field were constant safety discussion topic amongst employees.

Assimilation into the unionized railroad culture revealed a work environment where management did not go above and beyond. From a manager's perspective, the animosity was acknowledged and expected. Several managers indicated malingering, intentional delays in productivity, and an overbearing attempt on what constitutes safety as major inhibitors in the railroad culture. Despite some managers who made earnest attempts at establishing a profound and amicable culture focused on teamwork, mentorship, and a decent work-life balance, most of the managers acknowledged the dichotomous culture that existed between agreement and nonagreement employees. The divide in this relationship narrowed the opportunity to understand the likelihood of performance-based incentives in this industry.

Unionized Employees Entertained the Idea of Extrinsic Rewards While Managers Were Uncertain on How to Reward Employees

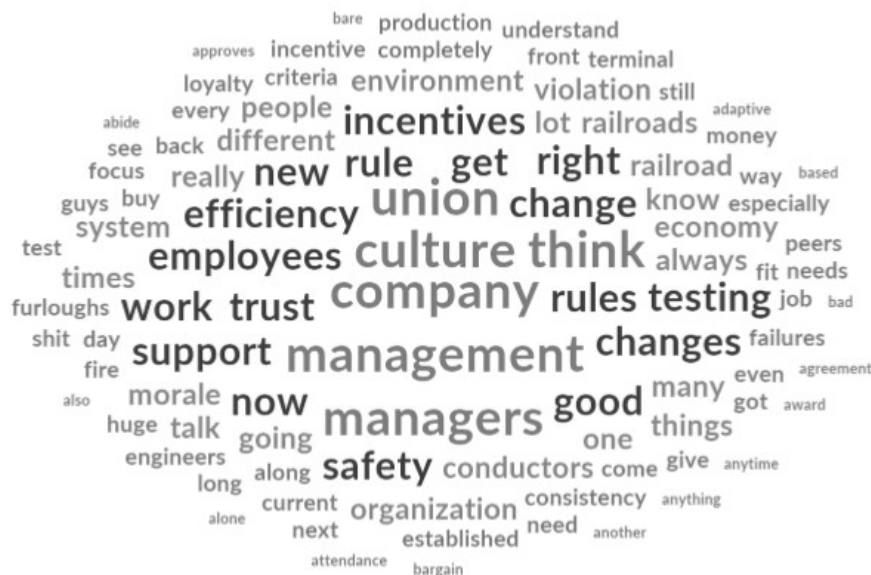
Unionized employees provided thorough feedback on how to incentivize achievement of organizational objectives with the majority of employees citing additional

time off from work as a motivational tool to increase workplace safety and productivity. Nearly all of the participants stated additional monetary incentives were not a motivational driver due to their fair compensation. Employees felt additional time off work, whether paid or unpaid, and additional opportunities for career advancement would best serve as motivation. Other employees felt union involvement and approval would be required for the organization to offer monetary incentives and how it would affect their respective collective bargaining agreement.

Senior- and mid-level managers who were interviewed struggled with how to reward employees with additional time off from work or to assist with employee career advancement. Executive management and union buy-in to performance-based incentives were the most prevalent hindrances mentioned. Most of the managers interviewed stated the current railroad culture with demanding metric attainability and lack of a work-life balance for railroad employees would still create disruption and animosity that would negate the likelihood for performance-based incentives. The chaotic dynamic of the railroad industry presented several roadblocks for performance-based incentives in the railroad industry, most notably the culture and current work. Figure 10 is a word cloud developed through NVivo depicting the word count associated with the culture in the railroad environment. The word cloud analysis takes into account agreement and nonagreement perspectives of the current organizational culture that exists and the key word count used during these interviews.

Figure 10

Word Cloud Analysis of Employee Perspective on the Current Work Culture



Note. Wordcloud developed in NVivo from the unionized employee perspective on their work culture.

Several words and themes relevant in Figure 10 include: (a) union, (b) managers, (c) testing, (d) safety, (e) morale, (f) trust, and (g) loyalty. All words and themes are behavioral attitudes and conceptions—identified through interviews and fieldwork—that would affect workplace motivation and not support performance-based incentives.

There is a Lack of Trust from Unionized Employees That Their Respective Organization Would Fulfill a Performance-Based Incentive Program

The third major finding was discovered upon completion of the thematic analysis process of the interviews conducted. Utilizing the data collected and categorized in NVivo, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method was conducted and the

following six phases of the process were addressed: (a) familiarization with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report. The thematic analysis was used based on participant responses pertaining to the codes generated throughout interviews, conversations, and observations (Nowell et al., 2017).

Throughout interviews and observations, six subthemes were identified that emerged pertaining to unionized employees' level of trust with their respective organization to fulfill a performance-based incentive program. The six subthemes are identified in Table 6. Table 6 provides detail of the six major subthemes, the frequency of those subthemes documented with the 25 participants, and a significant example of the subtheme. The frequency of the subthemes was compiled based on reoccurring references to the identified subtheme through interviews and observations as it relates to unionized employees trusting their organization to fulfill an incentivization program through performance. Table 7 provides a summarization of themes and general findings.

Table 6*Subthemes of Employee Sentiment Towards Company Incentives*

Subthemes	Frequency	Examples
Attitude toward company (negative)	50	<p>“There is no loyalty on the railroad. The company doesn’t care about the union guys. Hell, I’ve seen some managers walked off the property for no apparent reason.”</p> <p>“No one trusts the company.”</p> <p>“Those of have been here a long time now how to manipulate the system.”</p>
Attitude toward company (positive)	47	<p>“If the effort I put in helps the company, it’s extra motivation for me to be an even better employee.”</p> <p>“I don’t know about performance money, but I do know the company already pays me really good as it is, regardless of others attitudes around here.”</p>
Company will fulfill incentive program	19	<p>“During job briefings we are told of the expectations of the job we need to do. If managers know the expectations and if we know the expectation, it won’t be difficult to reward us for the work agreed upon.”</p> <p>“Sometimes payroll messes up, but if the company is upfront about what metrics we need to achieve, especially at an individual level, I think it would be a good idea and some might be on board.”</p>
Company will not fulfill incentive program	30	<p>“Can’t trust management. That’s why there’s not many company men in this organization.”</p> <p>“Management has their favorite employees so an incentive program would not be fair.”</p>
In favor of performance incentives	7	<p>“I would favor an incentive program under circumstances I can control such as working safely or having good attendance. I can’t rely on others.”</p> <p>“I would support if it because it could improve morale or motivations. Some of us on the ground here could use some extra morale boosts.”</p>
Not in favor of performance incentives	18	<p>“I’m sure management and executives will find a way to put as many loopholes as possible into a performance or incentive plan.”</p> <p>“I would never support a compensation package that supports the company.”</p>

Table 7*Themes and General Findings*

	Theme	General Finding
1	Culture: Understanding the culture in the industry and their respective organization.	The culture of the railroad industry from a historical and present-day context doesn't support performance-based incentives due to relationships between management/organization and unionized employees.
2	Methods to Incentivize: Employees offer their opinions on the most favorable incentives for achieving performance-based objectives.	Employees preferred extra days off work rather than extra monetary compensation for achieving organizational objectives.
3	Organizational Trust: Management and unionized employees describe their relationships to make performance-based incentives legitimate and meaningful.	Unionized employees overwhelming detail their lack of trust with the organization to fulfill their agreement to make performance-based incentives fair and impartial as a result of the work environment.

Summary

Exploring the possibility of performance-based incentives to increase job satisfaction, performance, and motivation in a historically unionized industry requires significant buy-in from the employees who perform the job. Despite the shared values between agreement and nonagreement employees, there were competing interests from several parties that influenced the possibility of performance-based incentives in the Class I railroad industry. This study followed the lives of railroad employees in their daily work environment through assimilation into their respective work culture to understand the relationships and motivations that drive employee performance.

In Chapter 5, the study findings and research questions are fused with conclusions drawn on the emergent themes and how they align with the guidance research questions.

The alignment of the findings to the problem statement are applicable to business

administration and human resource problems that an organization may encounter. The implications of this study for management professionals, recommendations for future and alternative studies, and a closing commentary are provided in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The railroad agreement and nonagreement employee perspective of exploring the possibility of performance-based incentivization was conducted at Class I railroads by researching the following questions:

1. What are unionized railroad employees' perceptions of an incentive system based on their performance and availability?
2. How do employees perceive a compensation package with performance-based incentives tied to operational performance based on their efforts?
3. What other employee benefits or incentives can influence employee performance aside from monetary incentives?

Using these exploratory questions as a guide through fieldwork, assimilation into the culture of the workforce, and conducting interviews, the study achieved its purpose, which was to have a better understanding of performance-based incentives in the railroad industry from the employee's perspective. Having a better understanding of the employee perspective on performance-based incentives relative to achieving organizational objectives contributes to business administrators and human resource managers from similar unionized industries to increase motivation, job satisfaction, and productivity of a workforce. Understanding the motivational viewpoint of the employee performing the work contributes to a perspective that could be heedlessly disregarded by management because of their lack of experience in the unionized employee's position. Understanding the organizational culture and motivation from the perspective of the unionized employee that performs the work for the organization can generate alternative forms of incentivization on how to improve performance and the organizational culture.

Significant findings of the study revealed the culture of the railroad industry fuels a dichotomous relationship between agreement and nonagreement employees, which will not support performance-based incentives. Employees favored extra days off as an incentive over monetary performance incentives due to the unfavorable working environment of the railroad industry. Unionized employees did not trust their respective organization to follow through with performance-based incentives as a means of achieving organizational objectives.

The findings and conclusions were applied with the problem statement to include explanations of any inconsistencies or lack of available data from the research. Implications for business administration and suggestions for modified research objectives are provided along with closing comments pertaining to the research.

Discussion of Findings, Proposals, and Conclusion

A summary of the major findings are discussed along with two primary recommendations as a result of the findings. A summary of the major themes, key findings, and recommendations are provided. A synopsis of the findings and research are discussed in the conclusion and the possibility of performance-based incentives for unionized employees is discussed.

Major Finding 1: The Culture of the Unionized Railroad Environment Historically and Currently Will Not Support Performance-Based Incentives

The purpose of this study was to assimilate into the culture of unionized railroad employees to understand their work behaviors, motivation, and purpose behind their work performance. As discussed in Chapter 2, the collection of raw data was imperative to understand if aligning organizational objectives with employee performance incentives

would change the work behavior that benefited both the unionized employee and the organization. Understanding the current motivation and work behavior of unionized employees relative to their personal work experiences facilitated further engagement outside of the predetermined research questions as initially presented in Chapter 1.

Table 3 summarized the critical aspects of unionized employee behavior to include: (a) daily interactions, (b) motivation and work behaviors, and (c) shared values among unionized employees. Although agreement and nonagreement employees shared the same values about workplace safety and working for the benefit of the organization for continued employment, there was a stark difference in motivational behaviors between agreement and nonagreement employees. Figure 8 detailed the motivational factors contributing to continued railroad employment with their respective organization with railroad retirement, health insurance, and current compensation levels being the largest drivers.

The unionized employee perspective was reverberated through casual conversation, observations, and interviews that revealed no interest in aligning additional performance-based incentives with organizational objectives. Chapter 2 introduced JCT by Hackman and Oldham (1975), where outcomes of a particular work event are influenced by job satisfaction and job characteristics (Acquah, 2017). With the end state being high work motivation, high job satisfaction, and high work effectiveness, employees must first experience meaningfulness of work, responsibility of outcomes, and responses and knowledge of work activities (Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

As described by employees and annotated in Table 3, the use of storytelling, situational awareness, and defensiveness of their fellow employees, as a result of the

existing cultural norms, limited the potential for high work motivation and high job satisfaction. The culture was created long before this research, where a division existed between agreement and nonagreement employees and was being absorbed by newer railroad employees as the norm of the railroad culture. Culture change cannot be created with an organizational mandate, it must be lived, practiced, and shared among all participating members to instill trust and conviction for culture change to occur (Walker & Soule, 2017). Gradual and meaningful change in the culture of an organization is imperative for employee buy-in and to create a shared identity (Watkins, 2019). Rapid change through performance-based incentives in an industry already beset with mistrust must be gradually implemented through a collection of amicable behaviors to instill trust.

Proposition 1: Incremental Culture Change Must Occur Before Any Notion of Performance-Based Incentives is Discussed

As reported in Chapter 2, railroad operating performance is strictly tied to safety initiatives, asset utilization, and customer service and expectations. Conductors and engineers have a direct impact on railroad performance through safe working behaviors and delivering customer goods through on-time performance, as long as the goods are available for delivery. As explained in Chapter 4 and depicted in Figure 7, the primary motivation for continued railroad employment of unionized employees was railroad retirement, health insurance, and their current compensation. Exceeding work performance expectations in a culture plagued with distrust between management and the unionized workforce, cultural change must occur incrementally to change the cultural norm as opposed to rapidly instituting a performance-based incentive program to align

with organizational objectives. In summary, incremental buy-in is required over a period of time to change the norm in the culture as opposed to sudden mandates.

In Chapter 2, Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory was discussed to outline factors that can influence motivation in the workplace, which are motivators and hygiene factors. Figure 7 outlined the motivating factors for unionized employment in the railroad industry. Hygiene factors, echoed by Gawel (1997), include: (a) supervision, (b) peer relationships, (c) salary, (d) company policy, and (e) working conditions. Two hygiene factors in particular, supervision and working conditions, were most prevalent for this study and its impact on organizational culture change.

Working conditions in the railroad industry are safety sensitive and unforgiving where employees work a variety of shifts, in inclement weather, and provides a lifestyle or an irregular work-life balance. The instability of a sufficient work-life balance has the potential for employees to not attend family events, holidays, could miss out on medical appointments or scheduled off days. An unstable and insufficient work-life balance has the potential to impact the culture of the organization and industry at large.

Supervision and management was another hygiene factor that impacted the railroad culture. Management, as mandated by the FRA, must conduct efficiency testing. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, the perception of efficiency testing created friction between agreement and nonagreement employees, which strained the current culture in the industry. As told in Chapter 4 through interviews and observations, this friction between agreement and nonagreement employees constantly existed where perceptions of efficiency testing led to unharmonious relationships between the two sides.

Incremental culture change can exist where management and unionized employees collectively work together on two shared values: safety and ensuring customer expectations. The referenced hygiene factors, working conditions and supervision, impact organizational culture change where two sides can forge a shared identity through safety and customer service. Rewarding employees for safe working behaviors through an additional day off or ensuring employees make their scheduled off day can positively impact working conditions and their work-life balance. According to Walker and Soule (2017), organizational cultures should always be developing and evolving rather than making dramatic shifts. Small gestures of appreciation, discussion of safety before and after an efficiency test, and understanding the stressors involved in an unstable work-life balance as the opportunity to incrementally change the culture of the railroad organization.

Major Finding 2: Unionized Employees Entertained the Idea of Extrinsic Rewards While Managers Were Uncertain on How to Reward Employees

As indicated in Table 5, several unionized employee responses were provided on the most effective way to incentivize performance. An overwhelming number of employees supported additional time off work (paid or unpaid) rather than monetary incentives. Fieldwork, observations, and interviews with unionized employees supported this notion. Many employees stated they were compensated enough for the work they perform; however, their work-life balance lacked in comparison to the lifestyle they must endure to continue their railroad employment to support their family.

Conversely, railroad managers are handcuffed by operational demands and their respective senior management, whereby allowing additional employees to take time off

work has the potential to affect their metrics. For example, if there is a set quota on the number of employees who can be on vacation or have planned time off on one specific day, and a manager exceeds the quota, the potential unfilled trains or yard vacancies can impact a manager's operational metrics. Management faces the daunting task of aligning a cultural change with the demands of operational performance at their respective location.

Major Finding 3: There is a Lack of Trust from Unionized Employees That Their Respective Organization Would Fulfill a Performance-Based Incentive Program

Vroom's (as cited in van Eerde & Thierry, 1996) expectancy theory was revisited with the focus on expectancy (i.e., the probability an action or effort will lead to a desired outcome). Table 6 depicts the responses from several employees who argued for or against the expectancy requirements under Vroom's expectancy theory. Many unionized employees indicated current issues with their level of expectancy based on their current relationships with several departments or managers in their respective organization that indicates a lack of motivation to consider performance-based incentives. The interviews and responses from Theme 3 in Chapter 4 indicated several animosities with the current level of response for the simplest of requests. These employee requests include answers to pay discrepancies, additional compensation to out of terminal work locations, job insurance claims, and being correctly paid for their work performed.

A significant takeaway from Table 6 was the amount of animosity and negativity toward their respective organization by unionized employees. Figure 11, a word cloud developed through NVivo, depicts the word count associated with unionized employee interviews and their perspective on their respective organization and management.

Figure 11

Word Cloud Analysis of Non-Agreement Employee Perspective on Management



Note. Wordcloud developed in NVivo from the unionized employee perspectives on management.

The common acrimony unionized employees have with management is management or the organization wants to terminate their employment through furloughs, efficiency test failures, or rule violations. Keywords to support acrimony such as: (a) failures, (b) violations, (c) testing, (d) rules, and (e) trust are highlighted in Figure 10. These keywords support Major Finding 3 that the level of expectancy with any performance-based incentive starts with creating trust in the organization at the local level.

Proposition 2. Communicate the Current Safety and Customer Service Expectations to Create a Culture of Mutual Understanding to Achieve Organizational Objectives

In Chapter 2, Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory was introduced that discussed allowing employees to improve both task efficiency and satisfaction through ownership of their job with the expected outcome of recognition, pride, and advancement (Paul et al., 1969). Safety and customer satisfaction (delivery of goods on time or through work reporting) are essential aspects of the unionized railroad professional. Management and the organization at the lowest level must communicate safety and customer satisfaction expectations, and must consider employee empathy in their operations (i.e., why the individual unionized employee matters). Through communication of employee expectations, management can educate employees on why management has to efficiency test, why employees get furloughed, and why some departments lag in response to employee claims. Empathy in the workplace can increase individual and team performance (Gallo, 2019), and when employees understand the purpose behind the organization's overall operations, buy-in to incentivization through employee performance is attainable as opposed to a divisive work culture.

Conclusion: Performance-Based Incentives Will Not Work in the Railroad Industry

There are challenges in the railroad industry that limit the possibility of performance-based incentives with Class I unionized railroad employees. The exploratory research questions posited in Chapter 1 served as open-ended engagement icebreakers to potential interviews in an effort to gauge the interest of performance-based incentives. These research questions evolved into a genuine dialogue of organizational cultures issues that revealed the dichotomous relationship between agreement and nonagreement railroad employees.

The motivation and work behaviors exhibited through observations and interviews revealed a lack of urgency to achieve organizational objectives as long as the work was performed safely and to standard. The lack of urgency to achieve organizational objectives is the norm when there are two divisive factions of the organization and management, and the unionized employees. Of the Class I railroads observed, the union mentality and association were strong with a bond nearly inseparable with common values, objectives, and lifestyles in the union subculture. The union subculture drives their own motivation and morale through the use of storytelling, recent experiences, and projections of the future state of their respective organization.

Conversely, management does nothing to subvert these deficiencies to motivation and morale because of their lack of association with the union subculture. The lack of information sharing with unionized employees (i.e., how their work impacts the entire state of the network or health of their respective organization), fuels the “us versus them” mentality. Safety messages are constantly discussed between agreement and nonagreement employees, but the direct impact of the work of unionized professionals was not discussed, therefore it could be perceived their work is meaningless as long as it is performed safely and to standard.

Knowledge sharing not only recognizes individual ideas, but also it promotes building trust (Jacobson, 2020), which was a major finding revealed throughout this research and lacking in this industry. To eradicate the historical cultural norms in the railroad industry, trust and relationship building are paramount to show appreciation for the work being done in the organization, understand empathy for agreement and nonagreement employees, and show values in each other’s work and its impact on the

overall operation. Once these factors are achieved, the notion of performance-based incentives can be revisited.

Application of Findings and Conclusions to the Problem Statement

The problem statement addressed in Chapter 1 identified a current gap in research and literature that reference the railroad industry's attempt at paying for performance, relative to achieving organizational objectives by unionized railroad employees. The manufacturing and trucking industries have performance incentives tied to operational performance for unionized employees; therefore, exploring the possibility of another transportation unionized industry such as the railroad industry was entertained to ascertain the likelihood of unionized employee perception of this concept.

The findings of Chapter 4 revealed a lack of interest for performance-based incentives relative to achieving organizational objectives from a unionized employee perspective. Despite other transportation industries having some sort of performance-based initiative to increase productivity or performance, the findings from this research revealed no such interest in the railroad industry.

The railroad industry has accepted the dichotomous relationship between management and unionized employees. Both are separate entities working for the same company. Both sides have also accepted agreement employee compensation is strictly contractual with the work they perform tied to their respective collective bargaining agreement. The railroad industry accepts the fact the union will represent its due paying members; union representation will be present if a unionized employee is investigated for alleged unsafe working habits, and railroad managers are strictly held to performance metrics as a result of their operational tact.

Ethnography was chosen as the research design to experience the culture, behaviors, and beliefs of the unionized employee perspective to understand the motivations of their work habits (i.e., what influences their behavior and if extrinsic incentives can increase performance). An outsider would assume both agreement and nonagreement employees were in lockstep with the same mutual purpose for their respective organization. In this research, assimilation into the culture was required to describe the life as it was lived and experienced from a unionized employee perspective. Based on these experiences through this research, the following research questions were revisited:

1. What are unionized railroad employees' perceptions of an incentive system based on their performance and availability?
2. How do employees perceive a compensation package with performance-based incentives tied to operational performance based on their efforts?
3. What other employee benefits or incentives can influence employee performance aside from monetary incentives?

Culture

The relationship polarity between agreement and nonagreement employees was accepted in the railroad industry with safety at the forefront as a mutual objective. The observations of work behaviors, forthright in antagonistic attitudes in the workplace, and individualistic attitude with respect to their own respective regard indicates performance-based incentives were insignificant. Performance-based incentives would be possible if tied to individual performance; however, significant buy-in from both the organization and employee would be needed. Still, the culture runs deep and has been accepted for

decades with employees of over 30 years of experience telling stories that still live today in the observed work environment.

Work-Life Balance

Throughout this research it has been documented several times that transportation unionized employees are well-compensated for the work they perform. Several employees have stated they work for the railroad because of the money and benefits, not the lifestyle. The lifestyle is arduous, requires acute attention to detail, and requires time spent away from their home. Of the employees interviewed, most stated having additional time off—paid or unpaid—would be the preferred method of incentivization, so employees can spend more time at home. Of the three Class I railroads visited, two Class I organizations gave their extra board employees guaranteed days off. The other Class I organization had no guaranteed days off. Conductors and engineers overwhelmingly supported additional days off to compensate for the unorthodox work schedule.

Antagonists

There were two antagonists who would prevent any possibility of performance-based incentives: (a) the organization and (b) the union. Historically, through the artifacts and encountered documents, there has never been monetary compensation for performance awarded to unionized employees for achieving organizational objectives. Labor has always been at the forefront due to the safety sensitive work environment of the railroad. The organization will compensate employees for working safely and efficiently per a collective bargaining agreement constructed by union representation. Conversely, when reopener dates arrive, parties can initiate new rounds of bargaining with unions that focus on healthcare benefits, higher wages, and working conditions.

Several interviewed employees strongly indicated their union representation would never approve a measure to include performance-based incentives related to achieving organizational objectives.

Managerial Vision

Despite not having the authority to monetarily reward employees for achieving organizational objectives, managers did indicate they have the capacity to reward employees for their performance through approving specific days off. Managers also indicated it would require additional work to create specific measures to warrant additional time off such as no efficiency test exceptions, a great attendance record, reporting the work performed at a customer's facility, or participating in safety summits. Two managers also stated they would need union buy-in for employees to participate in a program outside the scope of work as designed in their collective bargaining agreement. One of those managers rephrased it as a "safety competition". Regardless, managerial vision and excitement to entertain the idea of performance-based incentives at the local level was unenthusiastic and not entertained.

Implications for Business Administration

In this study, the employee perception of performance-based incentives was shared, and two propositions were suggested to highlight an optimistic and realistic outlook. Managers can apply the findings from this research to their respective industry or understand how a divisive culture can holistically impact the overall objective of the organization.

The purpose of this research was to ascertain the interest of performance-based incentives relative to achieving organizational objectives. This research quickly evolved

into an organizational culture issue that negated any possibility of performance-based incentives unless changes were made as indicated by the two proposals. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, supervision, peer relationships, working conditions, and company policy influence hygiene factors (Gawel, 1997) relative to Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory. Incremental organizational culture change is required to establish buy-in rather than implement drastic change overnight. Effective managers and leaders should understand their employees and what influences their work behaviors. Leadership is a social interaction in which the leader has significant influence on the behavior of their followers, which impacts their performance (Maamari & Majdalani, 2016). Leaders lead from the front. Understanding employees' thought processes and work behaviors can generate empathy, which can influence the organizational culture outlook.

Employee buy-in requires employees take ownership of the work they perform. Employees in a railroad industry have ownership on how safe and efficient they can work as long as they are provided the tools and resources to be successful. Communication and collaboration between agreement and nonagreement employees is required to create an autonomous work environment that allows employees to own the work they perform, which can lead to higher levels of workplace satisfaction and overall performance.

Business administration professionals supervise business operations and direct their energy to specific performance activities in order to achieve a measurable goal or objective. Decisions must be made that affect the livelihood of the employees that business professionals manage. The end state of business administration professionals is generating output. Unionized employees, specifically in the railroad industry, are a unique workforce where safety supersedes production. There are controllable work

performance incentives that management can offer and there are controllable work behaviors that unionized employees can control, such as working safely and efficiently. In this study it was revealed that there was more emphasize placed on safety and culture over additional incentives for employee performance.

Recommendations for Action

Leaders and managers who oversee operations in highly complex and challenging environments must understand the culture in which they operate. Throughout observations and interviews in this research, it was apparent all employees inherently want to do a great job for the organization; however, the subcultures in their organization have manifested into a divisive relationship where the nonagreement subculture and agreement subculture have different viewpoints of how the organization currently operates.

In Chapter 4, unionized railroad employees told stories of how their peers, themselves, or someone they knew were negatively impacted by the organization or management. Although storytelling did pass the time, encourage comradery, and solidified an existing bond between unionized employees, this storytelling was almost always observed in the presence of management. Empathy was briefly discussed in Proposition 2 in Chapter 5 in which managers need to communicate the *why* with employees. Empathy in the workplace can increase individual and team performance (Gallo, 2019), and when employees are communicated the why of an incident or the why of how an operation needs to be executed, then the use of storytelling can have a positive impact on the overall organization rather than using storytelling as a negative reminder. Communication of performance expectations, developing harmonious relationships

between the two sides, and constant friction due to the lack of interaction and understanding were evident throughout this research. To entertain the idea of performance-based incentives, immediate and incremental change to organizational communication, relationship building, and creating empathy is required.

Management, although reluctant at entertaining the idea of performance-based incentives, did show interest at the employees' reaction to awarding additional time off for their performance. Regardless of whether a workforce is affiliated to a union or salary-based, people enjoy additional time off. Awarding additional time off for their performance can ultimately create a more harmonious culture and become an enjoyable work environment. Managers from all industries should understand employees like to be rewarded for performing their job if it exceeds expectations; awarding additional time off work if available to the manager's discretion should be used to foster an enjoyable work culture and environment.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study can be expanded to understand the antagonist's response to performance-based incentives (i.e., the organization and the union's response). The word "antagonist" was used because the organization and union ultimately negotiate terms of a collective bargaining agreement and to institute performance-based incentives would not come to fruition without the organization and union's involvement.

This study can be replicated in its entirety with Class II, Class III, or contract railroads in place of Class I railroads. Class II and Class III railroads are much smaller in terms of operating revenue and serve a smaller customer base or small towns. It is unclear if smaller railroads that employ a smaller number of employees have a different

organizational culture and work environment, so it is unknown of the frequency of interaction between management and the unionized workforce.

Future studies of similar topics pertaining to the railroad industry from a qualitative analysis need to include different railroad managers from other departments such as engineering, mechanical, and signal. Although engineering, mechanical, and signal managers have their own respective employees to manage, it would be worthwhile to understand the similar burdens that inconvenience their operation and performance metrics, albeit from a significantly different perspective.

The population and sample size of railroad managers were inadequate. After interviewing, observing, and documenting the manager's relationships and their respective work environments, the sample was not large enough to document other lived experiences a railroad manager endures on a regular basis. Perhaps if the population or sample size was larger, there may be a performance-based incentive program in place that was overlooked. The population and sample size of unionized employees were appropriate because of the frequency they engage with their coworkers, which can be observed and documented without conducting additional interviews. Throughout this research, management rarely worked with other managers at the same location which limited the opportunity to gather a larger sample size of managers.

This study focused primarily on the agreement and nonagreement railroad employee's perspective on performance-based incentives and disregarded other railroad departments that have knowledge of performance-based incentives such as human resource or marketing professionals with prior railroad operations experience. Input from

these professionals can alter future studies of similar problem statements that can generate different results.

Closing

Several theoretical frameworks exist that pertain to employee motivation in the workplace including (a) Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, (b) Hackman and Oldham's (1975) JCT, and (c) Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory. These theoretical frameworks focused on the experienced meaningfulness of the work an employee performs and what motivates them to perform that work. JCT revealed the greater the feedback it can create an experienced meaningfulness in work leads to high work motivation and job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Vroom's expectancy theory determined employees can be motivated through rewards aligned with performance and achieving organizational goals (Carnes & Knotts, 2018). Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory explains employees are compelled by intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that influence behaviors in the workplace.

Railroad managers and unionized employees fall into these theoretical frameworks, but after analysis and conclusion of this research the rationale of how employees fall in these frameworks vary by motive as a result of organizational distrust and past lived experiences in their respective work environment. This dichotomous relationship has existed for decades and is accepted in the railroad culture and work environment. Entertaining the prospect of performance-based incentives requires a constant incremental change to the organizational culture to build trust and establish clear lines of communication in regard to safety, performance expectations, and relationship building. Once these criteria are met and engrained in the culture over a significant period

of time—where trust is established and the work environment is not hostile—can extrinsic rewards be considered for performance incentives.

This ethnographic study shared the experiences from three Class I railroads, the culture and work environment they encounter every day, and the motivational factors that influence their behaviors in the workplace. Employees are compelled by intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can either increase or decrease work satisfaction, which ultimately impacts the organizational culture (Alshmemri et al., 2017). When employees are not motivated to exceed performance standards or expectations, the organizational culture can be expected to be substandard as evidenced through this research.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Questions

Interview questions presented to unionized railroad employees:

1. Describe your railroad experience when you were first hired leading up to today? What has changed with the current working environment and the expectations from the organization?
2. Do you think the performance expectations from the railroad and your local managers are reasonable? If no, explain why?
3. How often does management communicate performance expectations?
4. Do you believe you are adequately compensated to perform the work you do in the railroad industry given the fact you work odd shifts, have irregular sleep schedules, and perform work in all the elements at any given time?
5. Would you support performance-based compensation that's relative to the organizational objectives such as increased safety performance, great attendance record, and adhering to customer reporting of work performed at their facility?
6. Would performance-based compensation increase your performance in the workplace?
7. How would you incorporate performance-based compensation into your overall compensation package?
8. Would you favor performance-based compensation for unionized employees relative to achieving operational objectives?

Interview questions presented to railroad managers:

1. How often do you communicate performance objectives with unionized railroad employees and what do you communicate to them?
2. How would you describe the overall work environment to include relationships with your superiors, peers, and subordinates?
3. Are unionized employees aware of the organizational metrics that railroad managers are measured for performance?
4. Do you think that implementing performance-based incentives for unionized employees increase performance metrics such as safety, attendance, and customer reporting?
5. What positive and negative aspects of incorporating performance-based incentives for unionized employees do you foresee?
6. Is organizational buy-in for performance-based incentives attainable with the leaders of your organization, union officials, and unionized railroad employees? If not, what initial hurdles do you see?
7. Would you favor performance-based incentives for unionized employees relative to achieving operational objectives?

APPENDIX B: Invitation to Participate in a Study

Railroad conductors, engineers, yardmasters, and immediate supervisors, you are invited to participate in a doctoral study analyzing the perception of performance-based incentives relative to achieving operational objectives of the organization. Unionized railroad employees with at least 1 year of service and immediate supervisors with at least 3 years of service are invited to participate. Your participation is completely voluntary. No compensation or reimbursement will be provided. This form is called an Informed Consent Form that details the purpose of this study, outlines how your confidentiality and rights will be protected during the doctoral study, and completing the agreement will indicate your approval to participate in this study. As a participant of this study, you may keep or print a copy of the consent form for your records.

The researcher, Ian N. Bain, a doctoral student at City University of Seattle, will be conducting this doctoral study. The data collected will examine railroad employee perceptions of performance-based compensation for achieving organizational objectives.

There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research study and there are no associated costs to the participant. The information you provide will help me understand employee perceptions of performance-based compensation in the railroad industry. The information you provide may not directly benefit you, however, the information collected from your participation could provide future benefits or compensation practices for employees in the railroad and other unionized industries. My sole objective is to collect data that will help me understand railroad employees' perception of performance-based incentives relative to organizational metrics and objectives.

Your participation is completely voluntary. No one will be able to identify you as a respondent and no one in the organization will be able to identify you, your craft, or your affiliation. No one will know if you participated in this study or not. Your responses to the questions I ask will in no way influence your current or future employment with your organization. If time is a factor, continued participation in this study may take place over telephone while off duty and while not interruption your undisturbed rest per FRA Hours of Service requirements. I can be reached at XXXXX@cityuniversity.edu.

Sincerely,

Ian Bain

APPENDIX C: IRB Approval Letter**Institutional Review Board****Certificate of Approval****IRB ID# Bain_Williamson032120**

Principal Investigator (if faculty research):

Student Researcher: Ian Bain

Faculty Advisor: Laura Williamson

Department: School of Management. Dr Business Administration.

Title: Would performance -based compensation encourage higher productivity for unionized employees.

Approved on: March 21, 2020

- Full Board Review
- Expedited Review (US)

- Delegated Review (Can)
- Exempt (US)

CERTIFICATION

City University of Seattle has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The Faculty Advisor Laura Williamson and the student researcher Ian Bain have the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original Ethical Review Protocol submitted for ethics review.

This *Certificate of Approval* is valid provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process, or documents. Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures are required to be reported to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board in advance of its implementation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Guthrie". The script is cursive and fluid.

Brian Guthrie Ph D, RSW, RCSW
Chair, IRB City University of Seattle