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Supervisor Influence on Employee Psychological Safety in U.S. Federal Government Organizations: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

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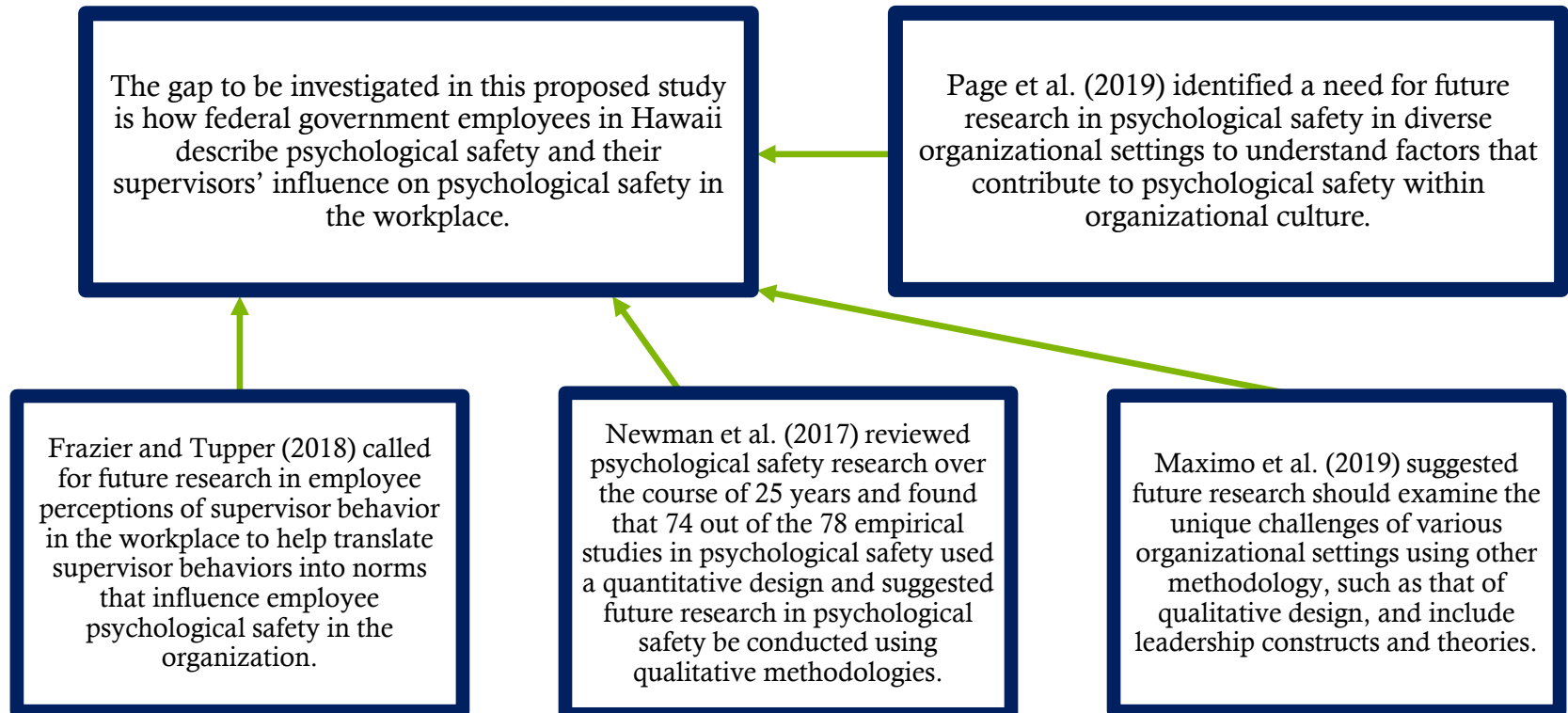Grand Canyon University
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Background & the Gap

The gap to be investigated in this proposed study is how federal government employees in Hawaii describe psychological safety and their supervisors' influence on psychological safety in the workplace.

Page et al. (2019) identified a need for future research in psychological safety in diverse organizational settings to understand factors that contribute to psychological safety within organizational culture.

Frazier and Tupper (2018) called for future research in employee perceptions of supervisor behavior in the workplace to help translate supervisor behaviors into norms that influence employee psychological safety in the organization.

Newman et al. (2017) reviewed psychological safety research over the course of 25 years and found that 74 out of the 78 empirical studies in psychological safety used a quantitative design and suggested future research in psychological safety be conducted using qualitative methodologies.

Maximo et al. (2019) suggested future research should examine the unique challenges of various organizational settings using other methodology, such as that of qualitative design, and include leadership constructs and theories.

Problem Statement

It is not known how federal government employees describe psychological safety and their supervisors' influence on psychological safety in the workplace.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to explore how federal government employees of Hawaii describe psychological safety and their supervisors' influence on psychological safety in the workplace.

Theoretical Framework

Transformational Leadership Theory:

Transformational leaders compel their followers through motivation (Burns, 1978). Through transformational leadership, leaders strive to enhance the spirit of commitment and teamwork (Al-edenat, 2018), suggesting that transformational leaders look beyond self, and through influence and motivation, transform the norms within an organization (Winarto, 2018).

Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) Theory:

PSC is a framework for explaining the relationships between job expectations, supervisor influence, resources, worker well-being, and workers' psychological health. The application of PSC is reflected in organization policy, practice, and leader commitment, that is conducive to a stress-free and uninhibited work environment (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). Furthermore, Dollard and Bakker (2010) assert that PSC is important in an organization as the precursor to better working conditions and to indirectly boosting employees' engagement, job performance and productivity.

Research Questions

- **RQ1**: How do federal government employees describe psychological safety in their workplace?

- **RQ2**: How do federal government employees describe their supervisors' influence on psychological safety in their workplace?
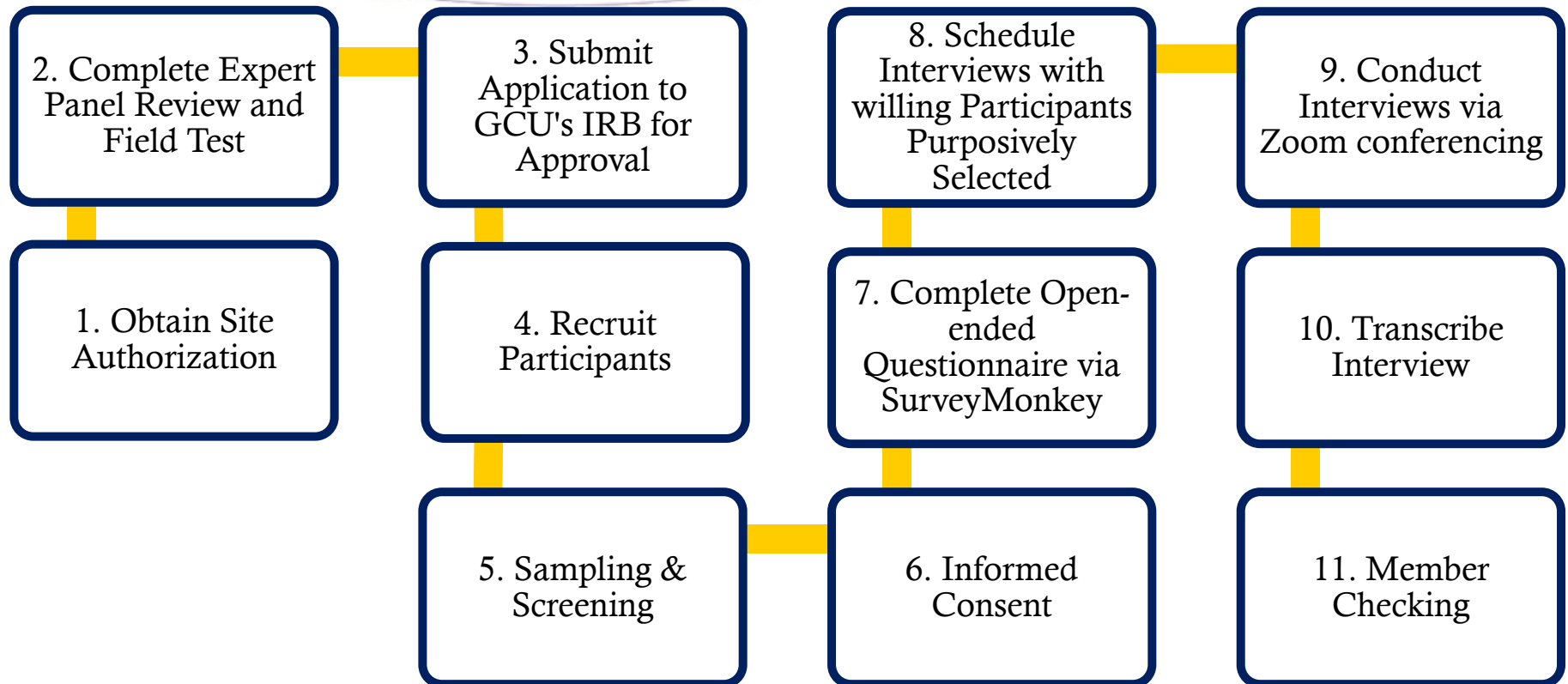
Population of Interest and Sample

- Target population is employees in federal government organizations in Hawaii.

- The unit of analysis is individual federal government employees in Hawaii.

- Sample size: The study will target an estimated 12,053 employees in federal government organizations from the Federal Employees of the U.S. Government LinkedIn Group to achieve a total of 40 federal government employees for a researcher-developed open-ended questionnaire, of which, the researcher will pool about 15 federal government employee respondents (accounting for attrition) with the highest years of working experience for a researcher-developed one-on-one interview.
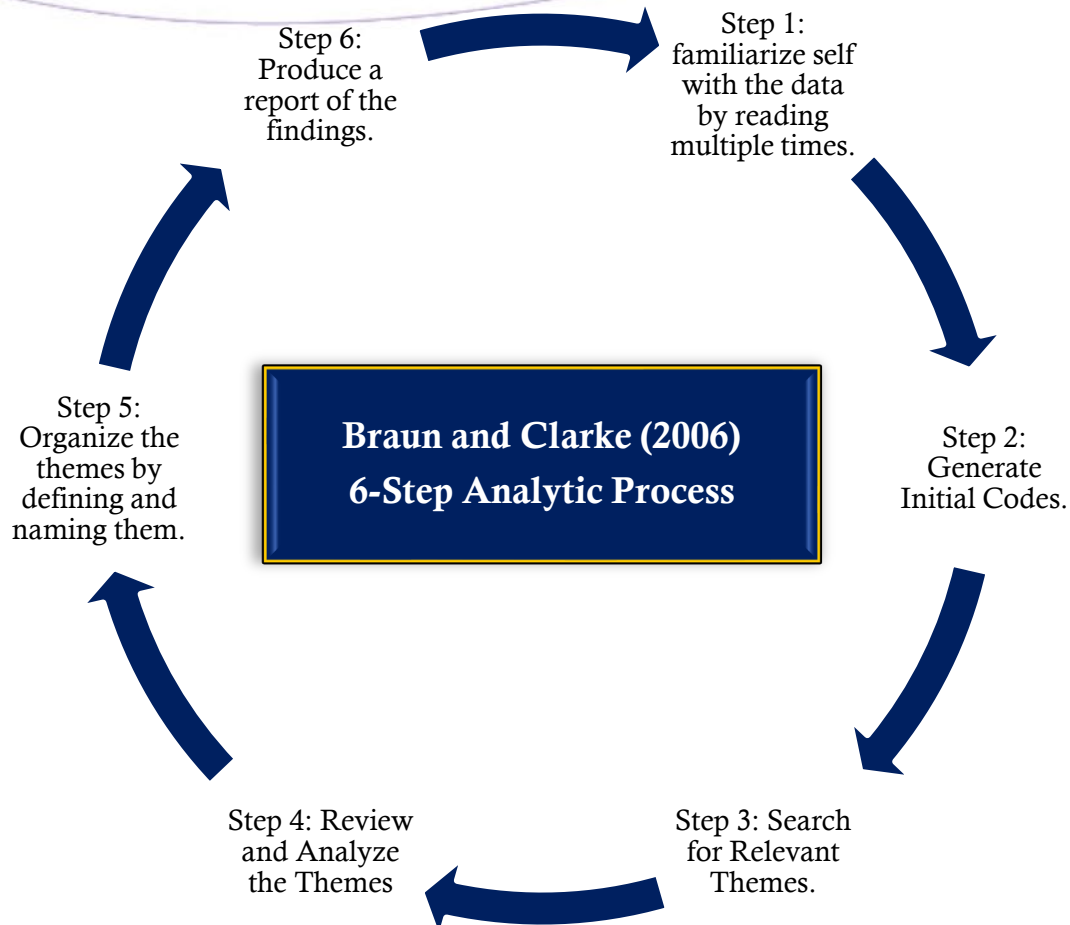
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Sources of Data

Open-Ended Questionnaire

Semi-Structured One-on-one Interviews

Data Collection Procedures

2. Complete Expert Panel Review and Field Test

3. Submit Application to GCU's IRB for Approval

8. Schedule Interviews with willing Participants Purposively Selected

9. Conduct Interviews via Zoom conferencing

1. Obtain Site Authorization

4. Recruit Participants

7. Complete Open-ended Questionnaire via SurveyMonkey

10. Transcribe Interview

5. Sampling & Screening

6. Informed Consent

11. Member Checking

Data Analysis Procedures

Step 6: Produce a report of the findings.

Step 1: familiarize self with the data by reading multiple times.

Braun and Clarke (2006) 6-Step Analytic Process

Step 5: Organize the themes by defining and naming them.

Step 2: Generate Initial Codes.

Step 4: Review and Analyze the Themes

Step 3: Search for Relevant Themes.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths

- Integrative multi-theoretical approach

- Adds new knowledge to existing literature of psychological safety, especially in Federal Government organizations

- Qualitative research could provide a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon than a quantitative study

Weaknesses

- Transferability and applicability

- Self-reported data collection method

- Limited target population

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Questions

Thank you!