

2020

## Retail Business Leaders' Strategies to Increase Employee Engagement and Workforce Productivity

Sada Hye Jaman  
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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Sada Hye Jaman

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

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Productivity

by

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MS, University of Maryland, UMUC, 2010

BS, New York City College of Technology, CUNY, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2020

## Abstract

Retail leaders face increased performance challenges due to disengaged employees. Disengaged employees cost United States' organizations \$77 billion to \$96 billion in lost revenue annually. Grounded in the transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies retail leaders use to improve employee engagement and increase workforce productivity. Data were gathered from semistructured, face-to-face interviews using open-ended questions with 4 retail business leaders in the eastern region of the United States who effectively used strategies to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through inductive coding of phrases and repeated words. The three themes that emerged were professional development, collaboration, and work life balance to improve workforce productivity. A key recommendation includes engaging employees with the tenets of transformational leadership, which could improve workforce productivity and financial stability. The implications for positive social change include the potential for retail leaders to implement transformational leadership strategies to engage employees, which could improve workforce productivity and financial stability, thereby improving the quality of life for the employees, economic independence, and wellbeing in the local community.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this research project to God almighty. Without the blessing of God Almighty I wouldn't have achieved the milestone. I would like to thank my family members who have supported me in various capacities and encouraged me to complete my doctoral journey. Special gratitude to all the staffs, mentors, librarians, advisors, and faculty members. I have to thank Dr. Dina Samora, Dr. Kevin Davies, Dr. Kim Critchlow, and my peers who have been a constant support to make my doctoral study pristine.

## Acknowledgments

To Dr. Dina Samora and Dr. Kevin Davies, thank you for your constant support and guidance. You have been a blessing to work with. To my University Research Review (URR), thank you for your productive feedback, which helped me to finalize my research study. To my academic advisors and all my peers, thank you for your support in scrutinizing my scholarly writing. I appreciate everyone's support and pray for your wellbeing.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iv
Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem .....	1
Problem Statement .....	3
Purpose Statement.....	3
Nature of the Study .....	4
Research Question .....	5
Interview Questions .....	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Operational Definitions.....	6
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	7
Assumptions.....	7
Limitations .....	7
Delimitations.....	8
Significance of the Study .....	8
Contribution to Business Practice.....	9
Implications for Social Change.....	9
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	9
Literature Review Search and Organization.....	10
Literature Review Organization.....	12
Critical analysis and synthesis of transformational leadership theory .....	13



Transformational leaders at work .....	21
Criticism of transformational leadership .....	27
Contrasting theory.....	30
Comparison theory: Expectancy theory.....	35
Retail Industry.....	37
Employee Engagement .....	44
Section 2: The Project.....	60
Purpose Statement.....	60
Role of the Researcher .....	60
Participants.....	61
Research Method and Design .....	63
Research Method .....	63
Research Design.....	64
Population and Sampling .....	65
Ethical Research.....	67
Data Collection Instruments .....	69
Data Collection Technique .....	70
Data Organization Technique .....	73
Reliability and Validity.....	79
Reliability.....	79
Validity .....	81
Transition and Summary.....	83

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change .....	85
Introduction.....	85
Presentation of the Findings.....	86
Theme 1: Professional Development .....	88
Theme 2: Collaboration .....	96
Theme 3: Work Life Balance.....	104
Applications to Professional Practice .....	112
Implications for Social Change.....	113
Recommendation for Action.....	115
Recommendation for Further Research .....	117
Reflections .....	118
Summary and Study Conclusions .....	119
References.....	120
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	161
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter for Study Participants.....	163
Appendix C: Request to Schedule an Interview .....	165
Appendix D: Human Subjects Research Certification.....	166

## List of Tables

Table 1 .....	12
Literature Review Sources .....	12
Table 2 .....	87
Emergent Themes .....	87
Table 3 .....	96
Theme 1: Professional Development .....	96
Table 4 .....	104
Theme 2: Collaboration .....	104
Table 5 .....	112
Theme 3: Work Life balance .....	112

## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The retail industry is rapidly growing. Nakate (2017) asserted that the retail sector is the second largest industry in the United States. Despite the rapid growth of the retail industries, retail leaders face challenges to meet customers' expectations because of constant shifts in customer's behavior, economic forces (Yeng & Yazdanifard, 2015), employee engagement (Rao, 2017; Shmailan, 2015), employee retention (Olubiyi, Smiley, Luckel, & Melaragno, 2019) and technological advancement (Kativhu, Mwale, & Francis, 2018). Goldman Sachs' training program *10,000 Small Businesses* recognizes the importance of effective management practices for business growth and offer an educational program for business leaders to grow as robust leaders in creating economic prosperity and business success (Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses, 2018). Nevertheless, employee retention is an endless concern for leaders because they fail to satisfy their employees in the workplace, and replacing employees costs as high as \$10,000 per hour of employees (Olubiyi et al., 2019). According to Rao (2017), leaders could lower the risk of employee retention when they enhance the level of employee engagement in the workplace. Highly engaged employees increase the organization's profitability by twice the annual net income (Rao, 2017); however, only 21% of employees are globally engaged (Saks, 2017).

### **Background of the Problem**

Leaders are in authority to improve employee engagement, productivity, and the organization (Yaakobi & Weisberg, 2018). Researchers warned that disengaged

employees could affect workforce productivity and sustainability of retail businesses (Consiglio, Bourgoigne, Di Tecco, & Schaufeli, 2016) because disengaged employees cost the United States industries upwards of \$345 billion of its GDP (Zelles, 2015). Retail leaders' inability to engage employees might erode profits, expansion opportunities, or produce other adverse business-related outcomes (Luo, Fan, & Zhang, 2015). When employees are engaged in the workplace, customer retention increases and product return decreases, which results in the profitability of the organization (Ahsan & Rahman, 2016). Though retail leaders could apply effective leadership skills to develop strategies in improving the level of employee engagement and employee performance (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015), researchers emphasized the lack of retail leaders' management skills to foster a collaborative working environment (Jarvis & Williams, 2017). The transformational leadership style has proven to be effective in engaging employees in the retail industry for increased productivity (Yeng & Yazdanifard, 2015).

In this multiple case study, I explored strategies some retail leaders used to engage employees and increase productivity. Using semistructured interviews and exploring companies' official documentation, I collected information regarding retail leaders' approaches to enhance employee engagement and workforce productivity. The results from this research study might contribute to increasing employee engagement and workforce productivity and promoting a positive social change by ensuring leaders' ability to achieve financial gain and contribute to the economic development of communities and society's wellbeing. To promote positive social change, economic

prosperity is important to the wellbeing of the community. Business owners, retail leaders, and business consultants might use the findings of this study to learn how retail leaders could use effective strategies to improve employee engagement and increase workforce productivity.

### **Problem Statement**

Disengaged employees often have low self-esteem and unsatisfactory performance, which can negatively impact organizational productivity (Alessandri, Bourgojne, Schaufeli, Caprara, & Consiglio, 2014; Anitha, 2014; Consiglio et al., 2016). Results of Gallup research for 2015 and 2016 indicated that employee engagement has reached levels as low as 15% worldwide (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016; Gallup, 2017). The general business problem was that leaders of retail businesses experience a loss in organizational productivity due to disengaged employees with low self-esteem and low performance. The specific business problem was some leaders of retail businesses lack strategies to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies leaders of retail businesses use to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity. The target population comprised of four leaders from two retail organizations in eastern region of the United States who have implemented successful strategies to engage sales associates. The implications for positive social change include the potential for leaders of retail businesses to achieve financial stability by promoting an organizational culture of

high performance and productivity among sales associates. Improving workforce productivity could help to ensure leaders' ability to achieve financial gain that might contribute to the economic development of communities and the wellbeing of society.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used the qualitative method for this study. Researchers use the qualitative method to explore human behavior in natural settings to explore a phenomenon in-depth (Subramony & Pugh, 2015; Yilmaz, 2013). Using the qualitative research method, the researcher explores complex textual descriptions of how people experience a phenomenon by analyzing content and seeking evidence (Subramony & Pugh, 2015). The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because I planned to explore leaders' experiences of a business phenomenon. Researchers use the quantitative method to examine phenomena or hypotheses using numerical data and statistical testing (Yilmaz, 2013). The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because I did not examine relationships among variables or use statistical testing to examine human behavior. Researchers use the mixed method to combine both quantitative and qualitative techniques to address research objectives (Gibson, 2017). The mixed method was inappropriate for this study because I did not test a hypothesis or used statistical testing.

I used multiple case study design. Yin (2017) identified a case study as the exploration of an individual, groups, or events that reveals matters pertinent to general issues. A multiple case study design was appropriate for this study because I could provide a robust result that aligns with the research questions. Researchers use the

phenomenological design to study human behavior and lived experiences to demonstrate a cohesive vision from the participants' standpoint (Moustakas, 1994; Nazir, 2016). The phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study because I did not seek to describe the participants' lived experiences. Ethnography is a research approach in which the researcher explores the participant's social behavior and cultural collaboration (Meyer, Crane, & Lee, 2016; Yin, 2017). The ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study because I was exploring neither social behaviors nor cultural collaboration. Researchers use narrative design to report the life stories of individuals (Byrne, 2016; Gergen, Josselson, & Freeman, 2015), which was not the intent of my study. The narrative design was not appropriate for this study because I was not reporting the stories of individuals.

### **Research Question**

The research question for this qualitative study is: What strategies do leaders of retail businesses use to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies have you used to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity?
2. How did sales associates respond to the different strategies you used to increase productivity?
3. Which strategies were most effective and why?
4. What leadership skills did you use to increase employee engagement?



5. What are your key measures and indicators of employee engagement and workforce productivity?
6. What other information would you like to add regarding strategies to increase employee engagement?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Bass (1985) introduced the transformational leadership theory to describe the relationship among employee leadership and motivation, trust, creativity, and professional development in the organization. Bass developed the transformational leadership theory, which researchers use in studies to relate to the effectiveness of leadership in engaging employees (Dussault & Frenette, 2015). Burns (1978) established transformational leadership theory in his descriptive research on political leaders, and later transformational leadership theory was used in organizational psychology. Bass provided a conceptual framework for exploring the impacts of effective leadership in engaging sales associates by influencing them to remain motivated, trustworthy, and creative. Leaders of retail businesses might increase workforce productivity using transformational leadership by adjusting their approach to leadership to match key drivers of workforce engagement.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Job Satisfaction:* Employees communicate job satisfaction by demonstrating engagement and loyalty in the workplace (Lee, Yang, & Li, 2017; Vorina, Simonič, & Vlasova, 2017).

*Professional development:* Professional development is continuous learning to maintain professional skills and abilities to help employees and leaders to improve their knowledge and expertise (Keevy & Perumal, 2014).

*Workforce engagement:* Workforce engagement and employee engagement have the same meaning. Workforce engagement is the organizational process to ensure workforce loyalty by embracing the mission and goal of the organization (Amerine et al., 2017).

*Workforce productivity:* Workforce productivity is the transformation of inputs into outcomes to enhance the workforce productivity to achieve organizational bottom line (Michaelis, Wagner, & Schweizer, 2015).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are beliefs that researchers do not gather from reliable sources (Schendel & Tolmie, 2016). In this study, I have included three assumptions. The first assumption was that I would select the participants that meet the criteria eligibility. The second assumption was that the research participants would respond to me honestly and disclose the best of their knowledge. The third assumption was that participants' responses would relate to workforce engagement and workforce productivity.

#### **Limitations**

Limitations are the weaknesses of the research study in which researchers find obstacles due to various constraints (Holloway & Galvin, 2017). This qualitative study

was limited to a sample of four business leaders from two retail industries in eastern region of the United States. The study was limited to the business leaders of retail industries, such as retail store managers and supervisors.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the boundaries that limit the scope of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In this study, my focus was on two retail businesses located in the eastern region of the United States. The participants were from populations of two similar retail industries, including shift managers, store supervisors, and store managers with at least 2 years of managerial experience. The study of 2 similar retail industries from eastern New York might not embody the diverse population of retail businesses in the United States. The research involved a limited population, which might narrow the findings of the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was of value to the leaders of retail businesses who sought to increase employee productivity and organizational performance by establishing relationships with key stakeholders. Leaders of retail businesses may use the study to develop strategies to engage sales associates and explore how leaders of retail businesses with transformational leadership characteristics can improve employee productivity. Leaders of retail businesses can use this study as a reference tool when implementing the strategies to engage sales associates.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The study could be important for leaders in retail businesses to understand the strategies to increase workforce productivity. Leaders with transformational leadership characteristics and behaviors might influence their sales associates to change the culture of the organization by creating sustainable and efficient organizations. The leaders of retail businesses could be able to advance their leadership practice in developing strategies to increase employee engagement, which could help the sales associates to improve self-esteem and performance (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015). Engaged sales associates might increase productivity resulting in financial gain.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve knowledge for the leaders of retail businesses in changing the culture of the organization. Leaders of retail businesses could understand the business practice of what influences workforce productivity. An increase in workforce productivity might create a positive social change by aiding retail organizations to improve financial gain and financial stability (Viitala, Tanskanen, & Sääntti, 2015).

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The review of academic literature is a critical component for analyzing scholarly research, particularly when summarizing and synthesizing research topics (Baker, 2016; Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015). In the following literature review, I explored the use of transformational leadership theory as the conceptual framework in the retail industry.

The additional analysis included a synthesis of the contrasting theory transactional leadership, comparison theory, and the employee engagement implications to explore strategies retail business leaders use to engage employees and increase workforce productivity. When leaders demonstrate the characteristics of transformational leadership, workforce productivity improves (Putri, Hasan, Darma, & Yusof, 2017).

Transformational leaders raise the countries' economies by improving workforce productivity (Matin, Razavi, & Emamgholizadeh, 2014; Sayadi, 2016). Pradhan and Pradhan (2015) noted that retail business leader's engagement strategies should help improve the quality of employees' performances, which Viitala et al. (2015) believed would help create positive social change by improving the financial stability and transforming the society. The knowledge might influence retail leaders to bring a positive social change in the retail industry. The financial stability of an organization might result in sustainability and job creation, which could benefit the community at large.

### **Literature Review Search and Organization**

The primary purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies leaders of retail organizations use to engage with sales associates in increasing workforce productivity. Luo et al. (2015) stated retail business leaders' inability to engage employees might erode profits, expansion opportunities, and produce other unfavorable business-related results. The findings of this study might provide strategies to engage employees from business leaders' perspectives from multiple companies leading to increase workforce productivity and competitiveness. The source of inquiry

includes information published in various journals and seminal scholarly books. I used the Walden University Library as the primary source to explore multiple databases. The databases where I obtained the information are (a) ABI/INFORM Complete, (b) Academic Search Complete, (c) Business Source Complete, and (d) ProQuest Central. Furthermore, I used Google scholars to collect information relating to my study inquiry. Google Scholar is a web-based search engine suitable to search for scholarly resources. Occasionally, I accessed Government websites to gather information. The search strategy for the information included using keywords in the above databases. Moreover, I applied filters specific to each database during my search to retrieve relevant information. The filters included specific words, time frames, publication types, and industries. During my search, I gave priority to articles published after 2015 to ensure the information is current and relevant to today's business context. The keywords used to search the database are *retail business strategies, employee engagement, employee wellbeing, expectancy theory, leadership behavior, leadership strategies, motivation, organizational success, organizational turnover, retail industries, sales associates' attributes, transformational leadership, transactional leadership theory, transformational leadership theory, productivity, and workforce productivity*. I used the Ulrich's Periodical Directory to verify the scholastically peer-reviewed journal articles to ensure scholarly voice. The literature review included 253 references, out of which 95% are peer-reviewed, and 89% of these references are within the past 5 years of publication, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1

*Literature Review Sources*

Source	Number of references	Percentage
Peer Reviewed	241	95%
Nonpeer-Reviewed	12	5%
< =5-years from 2020 graduation date	226	89%
> =5-years from 2020 graduation date	27	11%
Total	253	100%

**Literature Review Organization**

I used a chronological structure to organize the literature review. I started the literature review with a brief introduction, including search strategies. Then I listed identified themes relevant to the study phenomenon in various topics. The topics I discussed in this literature review were transformational leadership implications, contrasting theory, comparison theory, retail industry challenges, engaged employees' benefits, and effective strategies to improve employee engagement. Throughout the literature review, I compared different points of view and relationships between previous research and findings with this study. I conducted a comprehensive, critical analysis, and synthesis of the literature related to the conceptual framework and the research topic.

Transformational leadership theory was the first topic provided, which included an in-depth scholarly analysis of studies from authors who researched transformational leadership. Furthermore, I examined alternative and opposing theories. After discussing each theory and its relevance to this topic, I provided an analysis of existing literature pertaining to the retail industry, challenges in the retail industry, factors influencing employee engagement, and employee engagement strategies. The following sections included a critical analysis of the literature reviews based on transformational leadership theory.

### **Critical analysis and synthesis of transformational leadership theory**

The conceptual framework chosen for this study was the transformational leadership theory. Burns (1978) established the term *transformational leadership*, which leaders may use to elevate followers' quality of performance. However, Bass introduced the transformational leadership theory in 1985, which outlined how leaders could use their leadership abilities to motivate others, build trust, promote creativity, engage employees, increase productivity, reduce turnover, and enhance professional development for the betterment of the followers (Bass, 1985, 1990). Using 228 employees with multifactor leadership questionnaire (MQL), Bass (1990) unfolded the relation between leaders and followers, which included followers' performance and leaders' approach for the wellbeing of the organizations. In concert with Bass (1990), Moriano, Molero, Topa, and Lévy Mangin (2014) tested 186 employees in Spain and claimed that the transformational leaders' behavior influenced followers to produce extra



effort by sharing an organizational vision and promoting opportunities for employees to grow in the workplace. Therefore, exploring Bass's (1990) transformational leadership theory could help the leaders to improve the development and efficiency of employees in the organization.

Leaders may learn to use transformational leadership tenets to enhance their skills in fostering the quality of employee performance, particularly when they understand the various dimensions or characteristics of a transformational leader. Bass (1990) identified the concepts of transformational leadership theory to assist leaders in understanding its effectiveness, which comprises four dimensions: (a) idealize influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) individualized consideration, and (d) intellectual stimulation. Bass further added that these four dimensions helped leaders communicate their vision, achieve organizational goals, engage followers, display confidence, address followers' needs, and involve followers in the decision-making process. Seemingly, Breevaart et al. (2014) posited that these characteristics empower leaders to stimulate thought, gain trust, buy-in, and provide mentorship to followers in the workplace. Moreover, Getachew and Zhou (2018) confirmed that a leader's competence to improve employees' performance coincides with Bass's reference to the tenets of transformational leaders. Business leader's use of these four tenets might help facilitate strategies to improve employee engagement, increase workforce productivity, enhance employee performance, and change the organizational culture to foster organizational sustainability.

**Idealized influence.** The concept of idealized influence originates from Bass (1990), and he defined the term as role model tactics, which leaders could use to create a sense of purpose for employees that may create organizational commitment. In another study by Khan, Nawaz, and Khan (2016), the authors defined idealized influence as a sense of purpose, which is inspirational and embodies the charismatic attributes of a role model, as noted by Bass's research. To better understand how the use of idealized influence is critical to an organization, Shaw, McBride, Casemore, and Martin Ginis (2018) investigated 12 employees in Canada to examine whether their behavior aligned with transformational leadership. The authors essentially showed that idealized influence enabled leaders to deliver corporate missions allowing employees to understand the expectations and thrive to achieve organizational commitment. Consequently, participants in the study shared how leaders acted as role models, and because leaders cared about their wellbeing, employees were inspired to follow their leaders and remain committed to the organizational objectives. In concert with Shaw et al., Quintana, Park, and Cabrera (2015) learned that leaders using idealized influence sought to encourage work commitment by inspiring employees to work with extra effort. Conducting a series of statistical analyses in hotels located in Canary Island, Quintana et al. further posited that leaders with idealized influence encouraged employees to perform beyond expectations by demonstrating a positive role model. Involving 144 teachers, Andinasari, Sujanto, and Mukhtar (2017) conducted a quantitative study in schools of higher learning and learned that principals with high expectations enhanced the commitments of teachers,

which influenced the teachers to demonstrate their best performance and act responsibly. Hence, the significance of idealized influence within the tenets of transformational leadership indicated that leaders who demonstrated attributes of a positive role model tend to enhance employees' dedication and commitment to the workplace.

Leaders using idealized influence could also promote employees' self-efficacy and self-esteem. Afsar and Masood (2018) examined 322 nurses from public sector hospitals, and the findings revealed that employees were creative when leaders promote self-efficacy by adapting idealized influence tenet. Similarly, Matzler, Bauer, and Mooradian (2015) surveyed 411 managers in Austrian companies and posited that leaders perceived the transformational leadership theory as the predictors of self-esteem. Matzler et al. defined self-esteem as an individual's self-assessment in identifying the competencies. Nevertheless, a leader's behavior could be part of what can influence the effectiveness of transformational leaders. Leaders might consider other tenets of transformational leadership to learn more about the leaders' and followers' association. Therefore, Bass's (1990) transformational leadership theory was an appropriate conceptual framework to explore the strategies that leaders could learn the relationships between the employers and employees, and the development of employees.

**Inspirational motivation.** Leaders with inspirational motivation could seek ways to create a positive work environment. Inspirational motivation results in self-confidence among employees (Bass, 1990). In the 2017 study, Nguyen, Mia, Winata, and Chong believed that inspirational motivation incrementally exerts effort through collaboration,

which enabled followers to go beyond the call of duty. Other authors argued that a safe environment is crucial for employees to improve performance. Researchers Barling, Loughlin, and Kelloway (2002) found that leaders used inspirational motivation to encourage employees to work beyond their needs by assuring a safety climate in the workplace. Barling et al. concluded a significant relationship exists between transformational leadership and occupational safety because leaders with transformational tenets could focus on climate safety and reduce occupational injuries. While evaluating the variables related to a worker's safety, Schulte et al. (2015) learned about the legislation implemented in the organization to sustain employee safety, such as Occupational Safety and Health Act, Toxic Substances Control Act, and the Mine Safety and Health Act. Hence, leaders assuring a safe environment in the workplace could assure employees to feel positive about their work environment. Nonetheless, leaders should also focus on factors that help their followers to fit in the workplace.

**Individualized consideration.** Leaders using the concept of individualized consideration could help employees bring out their potential. Individualized consideration is one of the tenets of transformational leadership theory, which means leaders are addressing the specific needs of each employee (Bass, 1990). Other researchers have further defined individualized consideration as a leader's ability to help employees grow professionally by understanding their employees' concerns and treating everyone in accordance with their uniqueness (Getachew & Zhou, 2018; Sayadi, 2016). Leaders who

focus on the individuals' needs of employees may find that the results of an approach vary.

By empowering employees, leaders could accomplish organizational goals (Maurya & Sharma, 2017). When employees find that their organizational goals are achievable, they are more likely to work hard for the organization (Nohe & Hertel, 2017). For example, Cote (2017) evaluated leadership styles and concluded that when transformational leaders empowered their followers by focusing on their needs, they eliminated the intrinsic and extrinsic incentives required by transactional leaders. Moreover, Nohe and Hertel (2017) surveyed 761 employees to expand on the idea of transformational leadership and found that transformational leaders help employees to achieve organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) by making connections between employees' roles and organizational goals. The authors found that OCB enhanced the organizational environment to achieve extra-role behavior that leads to improved employee performance that, in turn, positively impacted the organization (Nohe & Hertel, 2017). Hence, leaders should use the attributes of transformational leadership to empower employees to achieve organizational goals.

When leaders use the tenets of transformational leadership, employees are more likely to be satisfied. For example, Choi, Goh, Adam, and Tan (2016) found that leaders who used individualized consideration were more likely to empower subordinates by promoting job satisfaction. Similarly, Banks, McCauley, Gardner, and Guler (2016) compared authentic leadership and transformational leadership and found that

transformational leaders encouraged workforce cohesion, provided inspiration, and addressed followers' needs, which resulted in job satisfaction for employees.

Furthermore, Sayadi (2016) argued that transformational leadership was a more effective leadership style in increasing job satisfaction when he surveyed 431 teachers in Iran and found teachers were more satisfied with their job when they obtain guidance from their leaders who possessed the tenets of transformational leadership. Though the results revealed evidence to support the use of transformational leadership tenets to promote job satisfaction, Sayadi further recommended future studies that include a larger sample. Hence, using transformational leadership is an effective way to promote job satisfaction for employees.

To be effective, leaders with individualized consideration influenced employees to grow professionally (Getachew & Zhou, 2018). Nguyen et al. (2017) emphasized that with individual consideration, leaders help subordinates reach their full potential by listening to employees actively, addressing their individual needs, communicating promptly, following up, and providing feedback when necessary. Furthermore, Khan et al. (2016) posited that transformational leaders show individualized consideration towards employees through professional development to improve their desired work behavior for favorable results. To be an effective leader, a leader should influence employees to reach their full potential.

**Intellectual stimulation.** The final dimension of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation that varies in the literature. Intellectual stimulation is leaders'

ability to increase awareness (Nguyen et al., 2017), engender creativity (Bass, 1990; Khan et al., 2016), challenge followers to test assumptions (Moriano et al., 2014), and to encourage followers to become innovative (Besieux, Baillien, Verbeke, & Euwema, 2018). In a similar study, Choi et al. (2016) noted transformational leaders use intellectual stimulation to build trust with employees, promote creativity and innovation, and foster critical thinking. Jena, Pradhan, and Panigrahy (2018) reported that intellectual stimulation was an important managerial practice in India within the retail industry as they account for more than 10 % of the country's global domestic product. Studying teachers in the Netherlands, Breevaart and Bakker (2018) found that the school principal had considerable influence on teachers' work engagement when leaders approached with intellectual stimulation. The authors further added that the school principal demonstrated intellectual stimulation by listening to the teachers' problems and guiding teachers to attend workshops for professional development (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). The levels of empowerment granted to employees using intellectual stimulation may help employees to grow professionally, enhance creativity, and come up with innovative solutions to organizational issues.

Researchers have found that transformational leadership is effective because it may inspire employees, provide incentives, and motivate employees to maximize work performance. As evident with much of the findings in the literature, leaders' ability to exhibit transformational leadership traits influenced employees to achieve more than beyond. The tenets of transformational leadership facilitate business leaders to improve

the quality of employee performance, which might lead employees to remain active in the workplace. Business leaders use these tenets might provide numerous opportunities to improve the quality of employee performance that may lead to organizational success.

### **Transformational leaders at work**

There are numerous responsibilities placed on leaders in the workplace. Foremost, leaders are responsible for improving the profitability and sustainability of the organizations (Yaakobi & Weisberg, 2018). Transformational leaders may have the ability to improve the quality of employees' performance (Frieder, Wang, & Oh, 2018), employee engagement (Consiglio et al., 2016), organizational justice (Deschamps, Rinfret, Lagacé, & Privé, 2016), job demand (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018), communication (Albrecht, Breidahl, & Marty, 2018), organizational change (Martin, 2016), and teamwork (Raziq, Borini, Malik, Ahmad, & Shabaz, 2018). Furthermore, Anitha (2014) suggested that a transformational leader's most important role in promoting the growth of employees within the organizations may result in financial stability and organizational sustainability. Although these organizational outcomes highlight the transformational leadership tenets, the recipients of these outcomes are the employees and those they serve. In the following sections, I discussed how a transformational leader's influenced may go beyond their employees' potential in the workplace. These additional areas of influence included organizational justice, job demand, improved communication, employee turnover, organizational change, and teamwork.



**Organizational justice.** Treating employees fairly has its rewards, yet balancing justice in the workplace may challenge leaders' skills. Lack of justice in the workplace may discourage employees from working effectively. Deschamps et al. (2016) revealed a positive correlation between transformational leadership traits and autonomous motivation driven by organizational justice. In a quantitative study consisting of 420 managers in Quebec's public healthcare industry, they found that employees' motivation increased when transformational leaders applied procedural and interactional justice in the workplace. Deschamps et al. defined the term interactional justice as the fair treatment and the flow of information that employees receive from their leaders. The authors further defined procedural justice as the fairness of the process that demonstrated laws for the employees to obey in the workplace. Strom, Sears, and Kelly (2014) confirmed the argument of Deschamps et al. (2016) in a survey of 348 anonymous individuals from across the United States and found that leaders with transformational leadership traits could address the challenges related to organizational justice in the workplace by monitoring employees' progress and then by sharing organizational policies for fair sharing of rewards. Hence, the findings may provide insights into how leaders' fairness promoted organizational justice to avoid dysfunctional workplace behavior.

**Job demand.** Employees may not know that a leader has to meet the demands of the workforce or the marketplace. Job demand is an employee's ability to meet the physical and cognitive aspects of the work. Breevaart and Bakker (2018) explored the

leadership roles that included helping employees meet cognitive demands and workload in an academic institution. The authors found that transformational leaders intellectually challenged employees to overcome work challenges and requirements. While, other authors (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017) felt transformational leaders' effect on job demand was affected by different factors than what Breevaart and Bakker (2018) suggested such as decreasing employees' stress when they face task conflict, which helps transformational leaders to manage conflict and improve work environments. Breevaart and Bakker recommended the need for further research, particularly in different industries, to fully understand the correlation between transformational leadership style and job demand. Nevertheless, the benefits of transformational leaders' influence members of an organization are wellbeing. Moreover, leaders should focus on other factors such as communication, which may facilitate employees to improve their performance.

**Improved communication.** Transformational leaders could enhance employee commitment in the workplace, particularly when they communicate with employees. Toufaily (2018) suggested that when leaders communicate the organizational mission, employees are more likely to remain committed. Using 1,578 employees from different organizations, Albrecht et al. (2018) revealed that transformational leaders increased communication frequency by implementing six organizational practices such as senior leadership, strategic alignment, organizational adaptivity, clarity of organizational goals, and organizational autonomy. Leaders encouraged employees to participate in the

meetings and in the decision-making process to stay informed about the organizational practices, which helped employees to gain a keen sense of commitment in the workplace. Jeong, Hsiao, Song, Kim, and Bae (2016) surveyed teachers in South Korea and revealed leaders with transformational leadership traits engaged employees in the workplace by helping the teachers to become independent in the decision-making process. Though Toufaili (2018) posited transformational leaders strengthen their influence through communication, not many employees want to achieve the leadership position because they believe they do not possess leadership skills. Other scholars recommended that leaders who communicate effectively need to adopt transformational leadership behaviors (Berson, Halevy, Shamir, & Erez, 2015). Hence, the findings revealed the significant role of the transformational leaders in the workplace when it comes to applying effective communication strategy. Nonetheless, leaders who embrace the style of transformational leadership may discover how their leadership style may reduce employee turnover.

**Employee turnover.** When leaders do not treat employees pleasantly, employees may leave the organization. Eberly, Bluhm, Guarana, Avolio, and Hannah (2017) surveyed 564 U.S soldiers and argued that employees intended to leave the organization because of their leaders' unpleasant behavior. The authors' findings revealed that transformational leaders reduced employees' turnover intentions through job embeddedness. Eberly et al. defined job embeddedness as to how employees perceive their jobs and personal values to stay with the organization. Seemingly, Mekraz, Gundala, and Jack (2016) conducted a quantitative study and surveyed 135 store managers of

Fortune 1000 retailers in the midwestern part of the United States and learned that both the transformational and transactional leadership approach is effective in retail organizations to improve employee turnover. However, researchers suggested exploring transformational leadership in other extreme contexts, such as organizational change, as suggested by Eberly et al. (2017).

**Organizational change.** Transformational leaders may act proactively during organizational change. Martin (2016) used the multifactor leadership questionnaire on academic librarians of the four years institution to examine the transformational leadership traits. Martin found that transformational leaders were extremely helpful during organizational change because these types of leaders help employees adapt to changes by using appropriate change management strategies during organizational change periods. Specifically, the author revealed that followers' perception of leaders' style was more crucial than the leaders' perception of their leadership style. Seemingly, Caniëls, Semejin, and Renders (2018) surveyed 259 employees in the technology industry in Netherlands and concluded that leaders with proactive personalities tend to prepare employees ahead of time, which helped them adapt to change to fit the organization. Furthermore, the authors noted that the transformational leadership approach, when balanced, enabled leaders to effect change even when they cannot predict when the change would occur (Caniëls et al., 2018). Though Aarons, Ehrhart, Farahnak, and Hurlburt (2015) learned that transformational leaders might not always influence employees to be proactive; their findings revealed that transformational leaders are more

likely to engage employees with a growth mindset by applying strategic planning in producing the type of adaptive workforce necessary to face daily challenges.

Nonetheless, leaders may encourage employees to work in team settings to promote creativity and collaboration.

**Teamwork.** Teamwork in the workplace could enhance employees' creativity. Transformational leaders identify and address team needs, as well as build confidence towards meeting organizational and team goals (Raziq et al., 2018). For example, Bai, Lin, and Li (2016) used multilevel structural equation modeling and found that transformational leaders promoted students' creativity in team dynamics by reducing task conflict and increasing willingness to share knowledge among members in the team. Likewise, Sun and Wang (2016) stated that it is important for leaders to motivate their employees to work in the team context, especially when attempting to achieve an organization's goals. Sun and Wang further added that leaders used the inspirational motivation attribute of transformational leadership to improve employees' morale values and collaboration when working in a team. Previous researchers stressed the importance of tenets and believed that transformational leaders could improve the quality of employee performance and the level of engagement through team settings (Lee, Cheng, Yeung, & Lai, 2011). Hence, the transformational leadership theory could assist leaders in applying strategies in improving the employees' creativity in team settings, which may contribute to business success. However, leaders who use transformational leadership attributes do not come without criticism.

### **Criticism of transformational leadership**

Some authors have criticized the value of transformational leadership capabilities. Leaders' effort may vary in facilitating a positive environment for employees. Despite the argument of previous authors, Caniels et al. (2018) examined employee's mindset and their proactive personalities towards work engagement and suggested transformational leadership style may or may not work to stimulate engagement or workforce productivity. Similarly, after examining the relationship between engagement and transformational leaders, Besieux et al. (2018) concluded that engagement is neither directly or indirectly related to transformational leadership. Additionally, Li, Furst-Holloway, Gales, Masterson, and Blume (2017) investigated how each dimension of transformational leadership directly or indirectly influences followers' behavior. The authors found that parts of transformational leadership dimensions were counterproductive, and only the intellectual stimulation dimension aspect produced favorable results. Furthermore, Breevaart and Bakker (2018) posited that a transformational leadership style might not necessarily work in every situation and diverse industries. Moreover, Alatawi (2017) argued that managers with one of the attributes of transformational leadership are not legitimate transformational leaders. Alatawi suggested that further research on the transformational leadership theory is critical to justify conceptual clarity. As shown, not everyone believes in the tenets of transformational leadership. Yet, their beliefs have not stopped the advancement of this theory. Although the previous authors' viewpoint merits

attention, there may be other contributing factors that influence the effectiveness of transformational leadership.

A leader should consider all areas when seeking to keep or engage employees. Transformational leaders who often focus on engagement could fail to address the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees, which could significantly affect organizational sustainability. In a related study, Mozammel and Haan (2016) conducted a quantitative study to survey 64 managers and 64 employees from the banking sectors in Bangladesh and concluded that the transformational leadership style was not always effective in engaging employees in the workforce. Due to the poor asset quality of the banking sectors in Bangladesh, the transformational leadership theory was not effective in promoting employee engagement. Similarly, Salem and Kattara (2015) surveyed the Egyptian hospitality industry and found the transformational leadership style was ineffective when employees had high interactions with guests. The culture of punishing employees is also a factor that shapes organizational success. Strom et al. (2014) discovered in their study that when outcomes were undesirable, transformational leaders punished employees. Hence, the use of a transformational leadership style is crucial to promote employee engagement, but in some instances, the effectiveness of transformational leadership is questionable (Mozammel & Haan, 2016; Salem & Kattara, 2015). In hindsight, transformational leaders may have to display behaviors that produce negative results to achieve a positive outcome. A leader's willingness to act out these behaviors may model that of other leadership styles, but the results are transformable.

Transformational leadership may not be effective in promoting a positive organizational culture in their quest to develop followers. Using 369 employees from Jordanian banks with structural equation modeling, Suifan, Abdallah, and Al Janini (2018) took a different approach to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' creativity. Their findings revealed that transformational leaders enhanced employee creativity by demonstrating support and recognition of their hard work and creativity. However, Suifan et al. suggested future research on transformational leadership with respect to culture. Moreover, in some instances, leaders used transformational leadership skills for their self-interest instead of their followers' interest (Northouse, 2016). However, Doucet, Fredette, Simard, and Tremblay (2015) surveyed 227 account managers in the finance industry in Canada and learned that transformational leadership was just as effective as transactional leadership. According to Li and Yuan (2017), the scope of transformational leadership is broad and transformational leaders continue to face challenges to develop followers. Li and Yuan further concluded that leaders should consider other leadership strategies to make quick decisions for the wellbeing of the organization. Therefore, leaders should not only endorse transformational leadership and reject alternative leadership styles, but also find ways to use effective leadership strategies to enhance employee performance in the retail sectors.



### **Contrasting theory**

Leadership attributes may not always enable employees to perform at an optimal level for organizational success. According to Bass (1990), transactional leadership is an alternative to transformational leadership, enabling leaders to provide something of value in exchange for performance. Bass defined transactional leadership theory as an exchange of relationships, whereas each party meets their respective interest or obtains mutual benefit. Afsar, Badir, Saeed, Sears, and Hafeez (2017) collected data from a cross-industry sample of 557 employees and 64 leaders representing knowledge-intensive organizations to examine entrepreneurial behaviors of transformational and transactional leaders. Afsar et al. found that transactional leaders did not challenge the status quo within organizations and lacked the intrinsic motivation with employees to foster creativity.

The fundamental tenets of transactional leadership center around leaders using their authority to provide material value such as pay increase or a bonus for work performed (Sayadi, 2016; Tung, 2016). The transactional leadership style could help business leaders to engage employees to improve organizational performances by providing financial benefits such as commissions and bonuses. Li, Castaño, and Li (2018) found that transformational and transactional leaders enhanced employee engagement in the workplace; transformational leaders have a greater contribution as opposed to transactional leaders by fostering psychological capital for employees. Li et al. defined psychological capital as a psychological construct for the development of employees,

which included hope, self-efficacy, optimism, and resiliency. Moreover, Strom et al. (2014) cautioned that some elements of transactional leadership style could trigger uncertainty towards the workplace. For example, leaders who used the transactional leadership theory failed to clarify employee responsibilities and expectations. Similar to Strom et al.'s argument, Tung (2016) examined 50 electronic companies in China and revealed a transactional leadership approach negatively impacted employees' motivation due to a lack of employee empowerment. Often, leaders find difficulties in maintaining mutual exchange, and they learned that leaning toward a one-sided favorable situation could affect employees' motivation (Afsar et al., 2017; Sayadi, 2016). Hence, leaders who apply transactional leadership may not be as advantageous as transformational leadership theory; however, the tenets could be used to reward behavioral and productivity compliance.

**Contingent reward.** The contingent reward may or may not have a positive effect on organizational commitment. Transactional leaders provide contingent rewards to gain mutual benefits (Bass, 1990). Khan et al. (2016) described contingent rewards as a leader's way of showing positive support or gratitude towards employees for their excellent work in the form of merit increases, bonuses, and promotions. Using 248 employees from 10 different organizations in Pakistan, Raziq et al. (2018) examined the relationship between leadership style and project cost and mentioned contingent rewards could help leaders to improve individual productivity and performance. Raziq et al. concluded that the contingent rewards were not as effective as a motivational aspect in

minimizing project-related costs. While Xenikou (2017) used the questionnaire to examine the impact of contingent rewards and found that transactional leaders who used contingent rewards helped the employees to understand the goal of the organization as opposed to transformational leaders. Contingent rewards are contingent on expected achievements (Bass, 1990). Nevertheless, when transactional leaders punished employees for undesirable work, employees' enthusiasm dropped (Raziq et al., 2018). Rewarding employees who meet expectations is a leadership strategy that attaches a real cost to productivity. It also creates an opportunity for leaders to formulate relationships with employees.

Leaders may use a contingent reward to enhance employee engagement. Breevaart et al. (2014) used multilevel regression to examine the daily work engagement of 61 naval cadets in Military University College and found when leaders clearly defined directions and provided contingent rewards, employees' level of engagement increased. Consequently, the authors noted that transactional leaders focus on contingent rewards, whereas transformational leaders use motivation to enhance performance. Retail leaders who rely on contingent rewards may improve employee engagement; however, Breevaart et al. argued contingent rewards lack inspirational appeal, and therefore, management-by-exception could be a suitable alternative to retail leaders. Leaders also need to be mindful of integrating other effective strategies to make their retail business successful.

**Management-by-exception.** Management-by-exception is one of the transactional leadership tenets. Breevaart et al. (2014) described *management-by-*

*exception* as a passive part of transactional leadership to confront followers when they make mistakes and help them avoid mistakes. Consequently, leaders who practice management-by-exception actively or passively monitor or correct the actions of their followers to a satisfactory end (Campbell, 2018; Khan et al., 2016). Breevaart et al. disputed previous claims and stated management-by-exception has no effect on followers' engagement. In concert with Breevaart et al. assertion, Willis, Clarke, and O'Connor (2017) examined existing literature to explore the effects of management-by-exception approach on work engagement in an environment where hazards and accidents are highly prone to happen. Willis et al. found that some aspect of management-by-exception practice was ineffective in highly hazardous environments. In the retail sectors, leaders could not take chances of applying ineffective strategies because leaders would face concern over producing undesirable outcomes (Al-Emadi, Schwabenland, & Qi, 2015). Mistakes would be made in business and many relationships, yet leaders who selectively choose how to address those mistakes could create a pattern of unpredictable leadership behaviors, which may produce unpredictable results. In any event, the relationship between leaders and employees should be consistent.

**Laissez-faire.** Leaders may adopt a passive management style to promote effective leadership strategies. Laissez-faire is a passive management style in which limited exchanges exist between leaders and followers (Hoque, 2016). Bass (1990) described the laissez-faire leaders abdicate responsibility, meaning leaders avoid making decisions. Park, Kim, Yoon, and Joo (2017) surveyed 285 employees from 8 companies

in South Korea and found that empowering employees significantly required managers engaging and maintaining exchanges in the form of dialogues and support. Managers who exchanged dialogues with employees provided people freedom power to enhance the performance of their duties (Jena et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the *laissez-faire* leadership approach may not be suitable to empower the employee, as managers do not make decisions and are less engaged with employees (Mekraz et al., 2016). Though many authors (Baškarada, Watson, & Cromarty, 2017) favored transactional leadership style, Mekraz et al. (2016) suggested researching further on the retail store environments and transformational leadership approach because leaders may find transformational leadership approach beneficial for their workplace.

Leaders may play an important role in improving the performance of their organizations. In the retail industry, interactions between colleagues and customers are inevitable, though employees may struggle with producing positive results from those interactions; the outcomes are still the leader's responsibility (Mekraz et al., 2016). Retail leaders struggle to figure out the effective leadership theory that is critical to organizational success; therefore, Afsar and Masood's (2018) study suggested to adopt transformational leadership for enhancement of the performance. Although organizational goals, values, and objectives are important for retail business leaders (Keevy & Perumal, 2014), they should not neglect the challenges of trying to understand what engages their employees to perform well in the workplace. The expectation in the

workplace would vary with both leaders and their followers upon choosing the transformational or transactional leadership style.

### **Comparison theory: Expectancy theory**

In comparison to transformational leadership theory, leaders may find expectancy theory effective in creating a dynamic organizational culture to enhance the quality of employee performance. Lloyd and Mertens (2018) noted that work motivation is important but challenging for the organization. Hence, a need for determining what cultural factors in the workplace impacts workers' performance. Parijat and Bagga's (2014) examination of expectancy theory revealed three relationship variables: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Within these measurements, they calculated individual effort, performance, organizational rewards, and work outcomes, as well as personal goals to determine the cognitive process that affects motivation (Parijat & Bagga, 2014). The authors found that leaders using expectancy theory does not indicate which rewards may motivate employees, but the tenets of expectancy theory could enable extrinsic or intrinsic inspirations to achieve personal and organizational goals. In concert with Parijat and Bagga's viewpoint, Lloyd and Mertens concluded that productivity increased in the workplace when employees were interdependent, which led to social pressure. In the retail industry, the social context may vary based on the type of stores an individual visits and work, which may impact employee turnover and organizational citizenship (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). However, the authors further suggested researching the expectancy theory in relation to employee turnover and organizational citizenship.

Hence, leaders may need to apply expectancy theory to facilitate effective leadership traits in enhancing the success of the retail business.

Leaders may need to focus on factors that motivate employees, and Soyoung and Sungchan (2017) used the expectancy theory to investigate the relationship between organizational performance and employee motivation in public organizations and found that age was a significant factor in performance and motivation. Similar to results found in Salem and Kattara's (2015) study of transformational leadership that job satisfaction is not always the result of leadership. In contrast, the use of expectancy theory on restaurant employees, Harris, Murphy, DiPietro, and Line (2017) indicated that leadership practices influenced motivational levels. Harris et al. further concluded that rewarding for accomplishments increased motivation in the workplace. Additionally, previous research by Yen (2015) revealed that the Perception of Organizational Politics (POPs) led to improved employees' performance. Surveying four companies in the manufacturing and service industry, Yen used the expectancy theory and revealed managers using the POPs motivated the employees to improve performance, which led to financial gain for the organizations. Though financial gain is the result of motivation, Yen further warned managers about organizational politics and how it could threaten the organization's bottom line. Hence, retail leaders need to be careful about the factors that promote employee motivation to promote financial gain for organizations.

Using the expectancy theory, leaders can also influence positive change in employees. Barba-Sánchez, and Atienza-sahuquillo (2017) took a different approach and

aimed to explain if an individual's motivation and ability influence their willingness to start a business based on expectancy theory. By investigating a Spanish self-employed worker in the manufacturing industry, the results revealed that all three components of expectancy theory enhance entrepreneurial motivation to start a business. Moreover, using 129 students from two high schools in the northeastern United States with self-report questionnaires, Galla, Amemiya, and Wang (2018) applied expectancy theory to explore self-control in academic institutions and concluded that employees who enjoy their work are more likely to have greater self-control. As explained by Parijat and Bagga (2014), motivation drives human efforts and achievements. Hence, the use of expectancy theory may not be adequate for retail leaders to bring out the employees' potential for the success of their business, but there is aspect of the theory that may motivate individuals on other capacities. Lindblom, Kajalo, and Mitronen (2016) and Nakate (2017) both noted that in a retail industry, the right leadership trait is necessary to engage employees to remain highly competitive in the marketplace. Retail leaders may also need to determine what approach works best for the business needs.

### **Retail Industry**

The retail industry is large and growing. The retail industry comprises of the interactions between stakeholders to produce products and services to meet consumers' demand (Gunawan, Fiarni, & Lawalata, 2015; Zamba, Mahlangu, Giyane, & Rebanowako, 2018). Moreover, the objective of a retail business is the timely delivery of goods at an affordable price (Nakate, 2017). Though, the retail industry is the second



largest industry in the United States (Nakate, 2017), retail leaders face challenges to meet customers' expectation because of constant shifts in customer behavior, employees' performance, economic forces, and cultural mistakes (Yeng & Yazdanifard, 2015), which may affect organization's bottom line. The results of U.S Census Department report for 2019 indicated sales have decreased by 0.2% (U.S Census Bureau, 2019). Business leaders are in constant need to build competitive advantages, which could facilitate their companies to reach a favorable position in the marketplace (Baltzan & Phillips, 2018).

**Competitive advantage.** Competitive advantage could result from a business process enhancement. Because of the growing trend of retail industry, there has been need for competitive advantage to gain sustainability in the marketplace. Baltzan and Phillips (2018) defined *competitive advantage* as the ability for the organization to use their resources productively to gain dominance in the marketplace. Interestingly, the competitive advantage is significantly related to business process for organization's sustainability. Gunawan et al. (2015) defined business process as a set of activities to produce the desired outcome. Luo et al. (2015) warned retail business leaders' inability to integrate different business process might produce unfavorable business related results. Gunawan et al. stated that leaders need to improve the business process to remain competitive in the marketplace and their findings revealed that by improving the business process facilitated leaders to make a real time decision, which is essential for organization sustainability. In concert with Gunawan et al., researchers Jones, Harrison, and Felps (2018) concluded that leaders gained competitive advantage by practicing

ethical strategy to promote a sustainable organization. Though, leaders may need to continually evaluate and seek competitive advantages; leaders should also focus on factors that are most suited to their business need, such as technology tools. Hence, retail leaders should always find ways to remain competitive in the marketplace.

**Technological tools.** The use of technology could provide a competitive edge to retail leaders to promote employee engagement. Zamba, Mahlangu, Giyane, and Rebanowako (2018) collected data using questionnaires, interviews, and observation to explore the use of business intelligence tools, such as BRM POS system, Adept, Storyline, and March4. The authors discovered that retail leaders were not integrating the necessary business intelligence tools in everyday business practice to engage employees. Jifeng, Ming, and Han (2016) stated that retail leaders should have updated technology tools to enhance the functionality of employees. To support this view, Heymann (2015) surveyed the service industry to examine the effectiveness of cloud based computing and found that the effective use of cloud based computing tool enhanced employee time management and customer satisfaction, which increased the level of employee engagement. However, Heymann warned leaders that in today's competitive work environment, if retail leaders do not use real time employee engagement tools, they may encounter the risk of disengaging employees, thereby, losing productivity and repeat customers. Though the need for technology tool is crucial to promote employee engagement in the retail sectors, leaders should also seek ways to retain employees.

**Employee retention.** Retail leaders could increase the competitive advantages of retaining employees and customers. Baltzan and Phillips (2018) claimed that retail businesses might encounter the risk of failure because of losing valuable employees to competitors while Matthews (2018) stated that 45 percent of US employees intent to look for a job because they are not happy in their current organizations. Many of those challenges are because of business leaders' inability to retain employees and maintain their interest in the job (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018; Xenikou, 2017). Zamba, Mahlangu, Giyane, and Rebanowako (2018) found that many retailers' thirst for sales, hindered their relationships with employees, customers, and suppliers in Zimbabwe's retail sector, which resulted in retention-related problems. To understand this phenomenon, Sahu, Pathardikar, and Kumar (2018) conducted quantitative research to survey middle management employees in India and concluded that transformational leaders used employee branding initiatives to decrease turnover by encouraging employees to feel a sense of identification with the organization. Moreover, Sun and Wang (2016) performed a study on transformational leadership and confirmed that transformational leaders increased employee retention by creating a positive bonding with the employees, which promoted a positive organizational culture. Although employee retention is crucial for the success of the organizations, leaders should seek ways to empower employees for a sustainable organization.

**Empowerment.** Retailers continually face challenges to empower employees. The challenge for retail leaders is to maintain ongoing employee engagement to gain

favorable result (Mekraz et al., 2016). The retail industry accounts for more than 8 percent of India's employment and 10 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP), yet some leaders do not understand how to empower employees (Jena et al., 2018). Employee empowerment increased the level of employee engagement within the organization (Heymann, 2015). Using 310 employees from the retail sectors in India, Jena et al. (2018) assessed the employees' competence, self-determination, and impact of their perceived empowerment. The authors concluded that psychological empowerment such as selling hope, aspiration, and experience are necessary components to empower employees. Although, findings revealed that employee empowerment is one of the important components in the retail industry, the efforts for retail leaders to acquire transformational leadership tenets may increase the workforce productivity, which may result in benefiting the organization. In the retail industry, organizational success relies heavily on employees' productivity (Mekraz et al., 2016).

**Productivity.** Multiple methods exist to measure worker productivity. Meyer (2015) described the term *productivity* as the sustainability of human performance that leads to higher profitability. Oliver (2018) suggested that measuring productivity by subtracting expenses from revenues and then dividing that number by the number of employees, De Meulenaere, Boone, and Buyl (2016) stated the gross added value divided by employees. The authors further added that leaders could get to the same desired outcome by taking the gross value divided by employees. Oliver further argued that this sort of assessment of workforce productivity would provide an analysis of how well

leaders are managing human resources to sustain superior performances over an extended period. Some researchers argued that the workforce productivity is important, and leaders must pay attention to remain competitive (Matin, Razavi, & Emamgholizadeh, 2014; Pouramini & Fayyazi, 2015).

**Leadership.** In the retail industry, the variance of leadership style is the primary reason for fluctuation in employee engagement, which could affect workforce productivity. Several authors have examined factors that influence workforce productivity. Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) surveyed 593 employees from heterogeneous organizations in Israel and found that an active employee is innovative and improve productivity. Similarly, Suhartanto and Brien (2018) found that psychologically engaged employees delivered high work productivity, which subsequently enhanced the overall performance of the retail store. On the contrary, Ghosh (2017) used methods of Lean Six Sigma (LSS) to determine if financial incentives enhance productivity. The author found that the root cause of low productivity was because of the lack of financial incentives offered to employees. While, Amerine et al. (2017) concluded communication, recognition, engagement, and involvement in decision-making could help employees to increase workforce productivity and the overall success of the organizations. Furthermore, Brunow and Nijkamp (2018) suggested leaders be aware of diverse workforces to promote productivity. Culturally diverse workforces need leadership skills capable of keeping employees engaged in increasing the profits, performance, and productivity of the organizations (Brunow & Nijkamp, 2018). Consequently, a leader's

awareness of whether his or her behavior is positively or negatively affecting the workplace may help leaders to understand the leadership effectiveness for favorable results. Regardless of the leadership style, all leaders should continuously seek ways to improve workforce productivity. The leaders' role could avoid organizational failure (Gunawan et al., 2015). Understanding leaders' contributions to workforce productivity is important to sustainable business. Nonetheless leaders should not underestimate the leadership behavior that may influence workforce productivity.

Transformational leadership style remained popular in improving workforce productivity. Michaelis, Wagner, and Schweizer (2015) stated that transformational leaders provide knowledge to help their employees gain a better understanding of their task. The findings revealed knowledge exchange by employees results in workforce productivity. Hence, the authors further concluded that the necessity of employees to share knowledge with the organization could increase productivity (Michaelis et al., 2015). Conversely, Putri et al. (2017) analyzed the influence of transformational leaders in total quality management to improve workforce productivity of 190 individuals in the rubber industry and revealed that transformational leaders who do not motivate or satisfy employees are susceptible to low workforce productivity. When leaders exhibit characteristics of transformational leadership, workforce productivity improves (Kovjanic, Schuh, & Jonas, 2013; Putri et al., 2017). Also, Ding, Li, Zhang, Sheng, and Wang (2017) examined 162 employees of a construction company in China to determine the linkage between transformational leadership and work outcomes. Though the results

indicated that transformational leaders increased employee productivity and reduced project turnover, researchers suggested further research on other leadership styles (Ding et al., 2017). While, some scholars have shown transformational leaders not only improved workforce productivity, but also raised the economic, social, and cultural aspects of their countries (Matin et al., 2014; Sayadi, 2016). Using 250 managers from Imamzadeh Abdullah Industrial Park in Amol, Mazandaran with stratified random sampling questionnaires, Matin et al. found that transformational leaders' behavior affects workforce productivity by treating employees with respect and approaching employees considerately. Their findings suggested the necessity for the transformational leadership tenets that leaders could use to increase productivity, which may enhance overall performance of the retail industries. While not many scholars demonstrated the significant relationship between transformational leadership, workforce productivity and employee engagement in the retail sectors, the findings may appear to demonstrate the positive outcome of the three variables in the workplace.

### **Employee Engagement**

The success in engaging employees could depend on how the leader defines what constitutes engagement. Holland, Cooper, and Sheehan (2017) stated much debate exists behind defining employee engagement. Anitha (2014) defined employee engagement as the levels of commitment, and involvement employees have in an organization. While Besieux et al. (2018) defined employee engagement as the vigor, dedication, and absorption an employee has into their work. According to Vorina et al. (2017), leaders

must ensure employees invest time in understanding the organization's goals and values. Vorina et al. supported the rationale by surveying 594 employees of public and non-public sector in Slovenia using the Gallup questionnaire, which concluded with a suggestion that enthusiastic employees bring favorable results for the organization. Vorina et al. further concluded that leaders have to focus on their needs that make the employees satisfied at work, which resulted in employee engagement. To further understand employee engagement, Anthony-McMann, Ellinger, Astakhova, and Halbesleben (2017) examined 472 information technology professionals working in the community hospitals and concluded that the success of employee engagement in organizations depends on three attitudinal factors: identification, involvement, and loyalty. The three factors highlighted the level of care and commitment, as well as employees' emotional investment towards organizations (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017). Moreover, using a sample of 109 managers in the technology industry, Yaakobi and Weisberg (2018) conducted a quantitative study to evaluate how they kept employees engaged and argued that transformational leaders addressed both organizational and individual needs for positive employee engagement. Each of these approaches by the researchers indicated that the level of engagement varies based on leadership tactics. However, leaders should become aware of other factors to foster employee engagement in the workplace. Nonetheless, Rao (2017) warned leaders that disengaged employees could become liabilities of the organizations.



**Disengaged employees.** Disengaged employees are pricey and could be costly to an organization. According to researchers (Firoozabadi, Uitdewilligen, & Zijlstra, 2018; Keating & Heslin, 2015), disengaged employees act in a perfunctory manner through uninspired efforts that stifle productivity. Furthermore, Shmailan (2015) argued that disengaged employees exhibited poor customer service and lack of commitment within the organization. A 2016 Gallup survey showed employee engagement as low as 15% worldwide (Gallup, 2017). Moreover, Saks (2017) reported that only 21% of employees are globally engaged. After viewing a Gallup survey, Zelles further confirmed disengaged employees cost the United States industries upwards of \$345 billion or two percent of its GDP. Similarly, Rao (2017) reported that disengaged employees cost United States organizations \$77 billion to \$96 billion in lost revenue annually. Researchers have spent years to understand how engaged employees impact workforce productivity and sustainability of retail businesses (Consiglio et al., 2016). Moreover, Ahsan and Rahman (2016) used the analytic hierarchy process based on a multicriteria decision-making approach to interview operation managers in major retail firms located in Australia to understand the effect of employee disengagement. They found that high products return in the retail industry occurred when employees are not engaged in the workplace. Though the above findings revealed that employee disengagement is threatening to the organizations, Roof (2015) suggested further research on employee engagement to understand the benefits it may bring to the organization.

**Benefits.** Several scholars have commented on the effectiveness of employee engagement at the level of organizational performance. Engaged employees demonstrated positive results by driving innovation (Kim & Gatling, 2018), meeting deadlines (Reina, Rogers, Peterson, Byron, & Hom, 2018), and cooperating with colleagues (Consiglio et al., 2016; Gauche, de Beer, & Brink, 2017). Moreover, engaged employees tend to participate in the decision-making process (Amerine et al., 2017) and show loyalty that increases customer retention (Ababneh & Macky, 2015; Heymann, 2015) and stimulates growth and profitability of the organizations (Anitha, 2014; Salimath & Kavitha, 2015).

Engaged employees demonstrate organizational commitment that could produce favorable results for the organization. To further understand the employee engagement effectiveness, Zelles (2015) conducted a quantitative study using questionnaires to examine information technology firms and revealed that higher employee engagement positively influences profitability by demonstrating commitment. In a related study, Salimath and Kavitha (2015) revealed the positive relationship between employee engagement and commitment, which led to organizational profitability. Similarly, Cesário and Chambel (2017) conducted a quantitative survey of the Portuguese workforce and argued that engaged employees do not leave the organizations because they are highly committed to the organization. Furthermore, Salimath and Kavitha revealed the factors to increase employee engagement and commitment by providing transportation accommodations and increasing wages for employees. Using 451 employees from retail stores in Indonesia, Suhartanto and Brien (2018) concluded that

engaged employees enjoyed working and defended the brand image for their organization. However, the authors suggested for further research that include data from other cities and other types of employees. Though the outcome of scholarly work suggested the benefits for employee engagement for the organizations' bottom line, Maurya and Sharma (2017) suggested that the use of appropriate leadership skills may increase employee engagement in the workplace. Hence, leaders should concentrate on their functions in developing strategies for employee engagement. The following sections included effective strategies that leaders may use to enhance employee engagement.

***Motivation.*** Leaders may find motivation is significantly related to employee engagement. Matthews (2018) stated the need for effective engagement strategy for a productive organization because in a recent UK research, 35 percent of employees reported that their employers do not motivate them to work hard for their organization. To understand this phenomenon, Carleton, Barling, and Trivisonno (2018) used 183 employees from organizations in North America and found that transformational leaders were successful in creating a positive work environment, fostering employee engagement, and motivating their employees through trait mindfulness. The authors defined trait mindfulness as the leader's ability to be open minded, responsive, and lenient. Seemingly, Kouni, Koutsoukos, and Panta (2018) used transformational leadership tenets to conduct a mixed method study, which involved 171 teachers, and the result revealed when school principals exhibited transformational leadership tenets, they were effective in motivating teachers to engage in the workplace. Supporting this view,

Frieder, Wang, and Oh (2018) conducted a quantitative study of 1525 sales employees in Korea and found that transformational leaders motivated employees to view their work meaningfully, which encouraged employees to meet the organizational goal. The results also revealed that transformational leaders benefit the organization by increasing employee motivation. While, Bailey and Cardin (2018) used survey to examine the effectiveness of transformational leadership style in the healthcare industry and learned that in certain instances, transformational leaders were able to increase motivation of registered nurses by fostering self-awareness, which positively impacted patients' health and resulted in an increase in the level of engagement. Furthermore, Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, and Derks (2016) surveyed 57 leaders from different organizations to understand the transformational leaders' role in increasing employee engagement through motivation and concluded that transformational leaders were successful in developing self-leadership attributes among employees. Breevaart et al. referred to self-leadership as the self influence process that employees felt motivated to increase performance. Although these findings supported previous research, scholars studying this phenomenon believed that leaders need to be equipped with transformational leadership skills to enhance engagement (Keevy & Perumal, 2014).

***Job satisfaction.*** Job satisfaction is an essential component for employees to remain active in the workplace. Several researchers have explored the effect of job satisfaction and employees' role within an organization. Job satisfaction is the fulfillment of a rewarding performance, which provides security to those engaged in the workplace

(Consiglio et al., 2016; Guest, 2017; Hakanen, Peeters, & Schaufeli, 2018). While Prabowo, Noermijati, and Irawanto (2018) surveyed 78 employees of Hotel Kartika Graha Malang in Indonesia and discovered that transformational leaders have no positive influence on employee performance but promoted job satisfaction. Moreover, Bošković (2017) surveyed 250 employees and found satisfied employees work harder when their income could cover the necessary living expenses. To further explore job satisfaction, Wu, Rafiq and Chin (2017) surveyed 424 employees from the media sector in Pakistan and concluded that work and life related wellbeing influenced job satisfaction, and a worker's intention to stay engaged in the workplace. Additionally, Lindblom et al. (2016) tested 208 frontline employees in the retail industry and confirmed that charismatic leaders, as an aspect of transformational leadership, promoted job satisfaction by helping them to understand the jobs and guide them with challenging goals. Though the findings revealed the significance of job satisfaction in the workplace, employees may need the availability of job resources.

***Job resources.*** Job resources may be one of the predictors of employee engagement. Some authors warned leaders that an absence of job resources such as micromanagement, personal stress, academic credentials, and fatigue increased burnout and decreased job satisfaction among employees (Debus, König, Kleinmann, & Werner, 2015). To understand the relationship between employee engagement and job resources, Breevaart and Bakker (2018) used school teachers in Netherlands to broaden their view of employee engagement and found that predictors of engagement consisted of the

availability of job resources. Moreover, Patel, Moake, and Oh (2017) surveyed 386 employees from South Korean manufacturing, hospitals, and pharmaceutical companies to understand how job resources such as academic credentials influenced employee engagement. The authors' findings showed that educated employees tend to remain engaged in the workplace when the environment is competitive. On the contrary, Shuck, Adelson, and Reio (2017) surveyed 283 employees from diverse organizations and concluded that an allocation of strategic resources improved the quality of performance; however, results did not indicate the level of engagement. While Breevaart and Bakker (2018) further added that the level of engagement increased when transformational leaders intellectually challenged the teachers. Hence, the need for job resources is crucial for engaging employees and decreasing burnout.

***Avoid employee burnout.*** Not all employees may experience satisfaction, and Hakanen et al. (2018) warned dissatisfied employees could also lead to complacency or burnout. Burnout is the psychological exhaustion of work related strains and stresses (Gauche et al., 2017). In a (2016) study, Auh, Menguc, and Spyropoulou found that employees experienced burnout when leaders monitored and micromanaged them closely. Hildenbrand, Sacramento, and Binnewies (2018) took a different approach by testing 148 employees from a German manufacturing company and revealed that transformational leaders addressed employees' basic psychological needs that enabled them to decrease burnout and thrive in the workplace. Hence, the findings revealed that decreasing burnout promoted job satisfaction, which appeared to be more prevalent in the

workplace for sustainability of employee engagement. However, employees' wellbeing is crucial to create a healthy competitive environment for organization.

**Wellbeing.** Leaders need a thorough understanding of employee wellbeing to foster employee engagement. *Wellbeing* is the ability for employees to balance work and life to obtain a sense of purpose, pleasure, and comfort to meet the demands of the workplace (Schulte et al., 2015; Van Wingerden, Bakker, & Derks, 2017; Viitala et al., 2015). In the literature, authors suggested when it comes to employee wellbeing, leaders should focus on several factors such as work habits (Hakanen et al., 2018), stress (Debus et al., 2015), cynicism (Viitala et al., 2015), and job satisfaction (Sebastiano, Belvedere, Grando, & Giangreco, 2017). Some leaders do not make employee wellbeing a priority, which may create inefficient employees. For example, Mozammel and Haan (2016) learned that leaders in banking sectors did not implement strategies to enhance employee wellbeing, which resulted in poor performance of employees. While evaluating the variables related to a worker's health, Schulte et al. (2015) showed in their study that objective wellbeing consisted of survival needs, and when those needs were absent, employee's wellbeing was at risk. To understand employee wellbeing, Meyer (2015) examined the relationship between a positive business environment and employee wellbeing by exploring leaders' strategies to transform their organizations. Meyer referred "*doing well*" as the entrepreneurial success for the organization. The author further discovered factors to improve the family life of employees such as safe environment, honesty, trustworthiness, support, transparency, and commitment. In a

(2017) study in Slovenia, Zizek, Mulej, and Milfelner used structural equation modeling and revealed that the level of employee engagement increased when leaders met employees' needs by providing workshops on healthy life style such as exercise, nutrition, music listening, relaxation, body massage, and meditation. Nevertheless, leaders may need to determine the type of leadership to enhance employee wellbeing for the development of employee engagement.

Transformational leadership style could influence an employee's wellbeing at work. Scholars concluded transformational leaders focused on the wellbeing of the employees in their organizations to stimulate behaviors that motivate employees to remain engaged (Henker et al., 2015; Suifan et al., 2018). Supporting this view, Arnold (2017) reviewed empirical research and noted that transformational leaders decreased employees' sickness by helping employees to gain a positive state of mind and health, which increased the level of engagement. Seemingly, Li and Yuan (2017) surveyed 556 employees from the technology industry in China and concluded that transformational leaders increased employee's psychological capital, which included employee's life, emotion, motivation, cognition, and behavior. Li and Yuan further added that an employee's psychological capital resulted in improved employee engagement. Another interesting relationship between employees' needs and wellbeing is that findings have revealed that employees who find support from the leaders are more likely to stay active in the workplace.



**Leadership Support.** Leaders who are supportive of an employee may increase employee engagement. A leader's supportive act could draw employees' actions that demonstrate their potential (Norman, Gardner, & Pierce, 2015). Supporting this view, Yadav (2016) surveyed teachers in India and revealed that the level of engagement increased when leaders supported employees by creating learning opportunities for new skills and involving them in higher decision-making. Similarly, Cantor, Morrow, and Blackhurst (2015) used stakeholder theory, commitment theory, and organizational support theory and demonstrated support by communicating clearly with employees, encouraging employees to attend trainings, and holding regular meetings. In other words, a leader's authority with supportive actions helped employees to complete their task and increase the level of engagement in the workplace (Blumberga & Austruma, 2015). Furthermore, using 383 managerial level employees from small scale organizations, Anitha (2014) concluded that leaders supported employees by encouraging employees to connect with one another in the workplace. Though the studies revealed how the researchers have sought to understand the brevity of how to keep employees engaged in the workplace, leaders may approach employees to work in a team to foster engagement.

**Teamwork.** Teamwork in the workplace may help employees to stay engaged. Bai et al. (2016) emphasized on the teamwork in the academic settings, which helped the students to be creative and engaged in deeper conversations. Bass (1985) noted transformational leaders enhanced team process by sharing their visions of the organizations. Seemingly, Raziq et al. (2018) surveyed employees from multiple

organizations in Pakistan and concluded that transformational leaders helped employees to stay engaged in the team settings by addressing team needs and clarifying the team goals. Leaders may encourage employees to work in a team, which may facilitate employees to exchange ideas and remain highly concentrated while working in a project. Leaders may find that when attempting to get individuals to work as a team, some attributes of transformational leadership may be the best approach to create a collaborative environment to foster employee engagement.

***Collaboration.*** Leaders could create a collaborative environment for employees to increase level of engagement. According to Baltzan and Phillips (2018), when employees work in a silo, they do not know much about the overall performance of the organization, which may result in fragmentation and poor work engagement. While Gerards, de Grip, and Baudewijns (2018) believed that leaders could increase engagement when employees have access to information and organizational knowledge. To support this view, Nguyen et al. (2017) surveyed 710 managers in Vietnam and confirmed that transformational leaders reduced the levels of individual isolations and created opportunities to practice collaboration in the workplace by inviting employees in the decision-making process. When employees are part of the decision-making process, they are more likely to stay connected with organization. Nevertheless, Nguyen et al. labeled transformational leaders as charismatic leaders who addressed the individual needs of subordinates for their growth and development.

***Professional development.*** Leader's ability may help employees to grow professionally. The retail industry is growing, and leaders are constantly looking for skilled employees capable of producing volumes of products and services (Ahsan & Rahman, 2016). According to Wong Fui and Rashad (2015), lack of skilled employees is one of the challenges to the retail sector. Transformational leaders encouraged their followers to grow professionally (Bass, 1990). To support this view, Sayadi (2016) posited that leaders act as coaches to elevate the needs of employees' competency level. Similarly, Keevy and Perumal (2014) learned that the leaders helped employees to grow by providing continuous learning environment to maintain professional skills. Moreover, Caniëls, Semeijn, and Renders (2018) surveyed 259 employees from a high tech organization in the Netherlands and concluded that transformational leaders needed to coach and challenge their employees to improve employee engagement. Seemingly, Besieux et al. (2018) also stressed on coaching employees to increase the level of engagement. The findings from above authors revealed that professional development of employees is crucial to promote employee engagement. However, Martins Abelha, César da Costa Carneiro, and Cavazotte (2018) conducted a quantitative research method and used electronic questionnaires of 166 individuals from different organizations and learned that there is no direct link between transformational leadership and the idea of professional training. To understand the relationship between employee engagement and professional development, Bui, Zeng, and Higgs (2017) conducted a similar study in China and found that the level of engagement increased when transformational leaders

promoted growth opportunities by encouraging them to acquire further job skills. Nevertheless, leaders should also participate in professional development programs to coach their employees effectively (Afsar & Masood, 2018). Additionally, leaders may also approach for employee engagement by evaluating their task closely with the purpose of appraisal and positive feedback.

***Feedback and appraisal.*** The level of engagement may increase, when leaders appraise their employees and provide positive feedback. Zelles (2015) confirmed that the level of employee engagement increases, when leaders provide feedback to employees. In a related study, using 5313 employees from retail banking industry with survey questionnaire, Besieux et al. (2018) revealed that transformational leaders stimulated the plethora of engagement antecedents by providing essential feedback to employees to help them reach their potential. Moreover, Huertas-Valdivia, Llorens-Montes, and Ruiz-Moreno (2018) claimed that leaders enhanced engagement by providing appraisal to their employees in a timely matter. Additionally, Bailey and Cardin (2018) claimed that traits of transformational leadership approach were effective in continuous assessment and evaluation of nurses to maintain work engagement in the healthcare industry. While Khan et al. (2016) confirmed that a leader's ability to provide feedback and appraisal to followers increased the level of engagement in the workplace, Besieux et al. recommended for further research on employee engagement to draw upon theoretical frameworks that go beyond retail banking industry. Nevertheless, the findings revealed the importance of transformational leadership style to improve employee engagement.

Hence, the transformational leadership theory may assist retail leaders in learning and executing strategies to improve the level of employee engagement and workforce productivity for a sustainable retail organization.

### **Transition**

An engaged workforce was essential to the productivity of businesses in the retail industry. Section 1 included the problem statement, purpose statement, and the justification for choosing a multiple case study design within the nature of the study. I introduced the research question and the map from which to answer that question using the interview questions, conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, operational definitions. Further, it included the review of the professional and academic literature, which described the concepts behind transformational leadership theory for retail business leaders to engage sales associates to increase workforce productivity in the retail industry. Moreover, section 1 included an analysis of the literature in which I addressed how researchers have used the transformational leadership approach to improve employee engagement and workforce productivity in the retail sectors.

In section 2, I included a restatement of a purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method, research design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, and study validity. In section 3, I included the presentation of findings, the implications for social change, and the recommendations for the leaders in

the retail businesses. I also included recommendations for further research and the conclusions for this doctoral study.

## Section 2: The Project

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies leaders of retail businesses used to engage employees and increase workforce productivity. The target population comprised leaders from two retail organizations in eastern region of the United States who have implemented successful strategies to engage sales associates. The implications for positive social change included the potential for leaders of retail businesses to achieve financial stability by promoting an organizational culture of high performance and productivity among employees. Improving workforce productivity could help to ensure leaders' ability to achieve financial gain that may contribute to the economic development of communities and wellbeing of society.

### **Role of the Researcher**

A researcher's goal is to construct, process, and provide in-depth analysis of findings using interview protocols to understand retail leaders' tactics to engage employees and increase workforce productivity (Yin, 2017). I do not have prior experience working in the retail industry, nor do I have preexisting relationships with any participants of the chosen retail businesses, which helped to mitigate potential biases that could influence the results of this study. Mitigating biases could help the researchers to demonstrate credibility and convince the readers (Baker, 2016). My additional roles consisted of adherence to protecting participant's privacy and wellbeing. The Belmont report includes three ethical principles that underscore the treatment of participants:

respect, beneficence, and justice (Bromley, Mikesell, Jones, & Khodyakov, 2015; Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979). I ensured to conduct ethical research by protecting participants' privacy and wellbeing.

I mitigated biases by using the bracketing technique to accurately interpret the participants' responses and acknowledge any of my insight, as suggested by researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2015; Yin, 2017). I asked the interview questions (see Appendix A) in an unbiased way and pay close attention to the responses of the participants by following an interview structure to help with the comfort levels of participants. By using an interview protocol, researchers could collect participants' responses to gain a richer understanding of the participants' experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). My unbiased technique may have helped the participants respond honestly and provided additional insights based on their experiences to discover their effective strategies to increase employee engagement and workforce productivity.

### **Participants**

Research participants might agree to participate in a research study if they were provided with a certificate to confirm confidentiality (Beskow, Check, & Ammarell, 2014). I used purposeful sampling to decide who would be the participants for my research study. Using a purposive sample could allow the researchers to select participants based on the needs of the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). The availability of skilled employees poses significant challenges for leaders in the retail industry (Wong Fui & Rashad, 2015). Therefore, I selected four participants for this study who meet the



criteria that included (a) a minimum of 18 years or older, (b) 2 years of leadership experience in the retail industry located in eastern region of the United States, (c) supervised at least three employees in the retail industry, and (d) knowledge of successful strategies used to engage sales associates to increase workforce productivity.

Interviewing is one method that researchers use as a data collection instruments for participants to share in-depth knowledge and strategies (Dikko, 2016); therefore, I used this method to allow interviewees to share their experiences using open-ended questions.

I obtained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon approval from the IRB, I used the internet, visited retail organizations, and made phone calls to search for potential participants. Email and hand-delivered packages included (a) an explanation of the intent of my study, (b) letter of cooperation, (c) and invitation to participate, and (d) the informed consent form with the approval number 10-30-19-0589658 from the Walden IRB. The informed consent form is an important element of ethical research as it includes the purpose of the study, confidentiality of research individuals, potential risks and benefits, and withdrawal rights (Ioannidis, 2013). If participants agree to participate, I asked them to sign the consent form confirming their participation; I contacted the participants individually and arranged for an interview. Participants signing the informed consent form demonstrated their willingness to participate and understanding of confidentiality as it pertained to their participation in the study. During the interview, I informed the participants that they have the right to stop

the interview at any time. I collected interview data until data saturation is met. Data saturation was met when no new information emerges (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

In this study, I used the qualitative research method to explore strategies leaders of retail businesses used to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity. A qualitative research method was appropriate for this study because my goal was to explore leaders of retail businesses are doing in engaging the sales associates and increasing workforce productivity. In a qualitative research method, researchers explored the participants' experience in detail by examining the collected data from the interview responses (Yin, 2017). A qualitative research method was effective in collecting data about participants' actions, strategies, and manners in relation to the phenomenon (Griffith, 2013; Yin, 2017). As a researcher, I could demonstrate the rationales using such data types to explain what strategies leaders of retail businesses use to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity.

In a quantitative research method, researchers examine empirical evidence to test a hypothesis (Fugard & Potts, 2015). The quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study because I was not examining empirical evidence to test a hypothesis (Fugard & Potts, 2015). Researchers used mixed methods to combine both qualitative and quantitative methods (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013). The mixed

methods approach was not appropriate for this study, as I did not use quantitative components.

### **Research Design**

I used a multiple case study design for the study. Multiple design options exist under the qualitative method (Yin, 2017). Qualitative researchers choose a design to understand the phenomenon in natural settings (Yin, 2017), and that allowed the researchers to explore the need for the retail of business leaders' strategies in increasing employee engagement and workforce productivity. Vohra (2014) emphasized that the researchers used a multiple case study design to strengthen the results and increased the robustness of the results. A multiple case study design was appropriate for this study because I could align with research questions and provide a detailed understanding of the business process. I collected the data based on the interview methods. Researchers use interview methods in which interviewees could share their experiences in detail that are related to the phenomenon and results in meaningful responses (Allen, 2015).

Researchers use phenomenological design to describe the common meaning for the individuals' behavior to demonstrate a common concept standpoint (Moustakas, 1994; Nazir, 2016). The phenomenological design describes participants' lived experiences (Yin, 2017), so this design was not appropriate for this study because my goal was to explore the strategies business leaders use to engage employees and increase productivity. Ethnography was a research design in which the researcher explores the shared patterns of the participant's social behavior and cultural collaboration (Meyer et

al., 2016; Yin, 2017). An ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study because I was not exploring an entire culture of people and their perspectives based on that culture. The multiple case study design was the best approach in collecting and synthesizing the data comparing to the other designs.

Data saturation is one of the important aspects of the research process because researchers could achieve data saturation when no new data emerge, and information begins to repeat (Fusch & Ness, 2015). As a researcher, I was seeking to obtain data saturation by observing the collected data and looking for redundant answers. I also sought to obtain the member checking process by sharing the data synthesis with the research individuals so that I could update additional responses, if any. I continued the members checking process until I found no new responses added by the research individuals. I looked for the common themes based on the responses and assemble them in a grid, in which I listed the interviewees vertically and themes horizontally.

### **Population and Sampling**

In this qualitative multiple case study, the population sample included a purposeful sampling of four retail leaders in the eastern region of the United States who have used successful strategies to engage employees and increase workforce productivity. Researchers use a purposive sample because they could select participants according to the needs of the study, and their knowledge and experience help with obtaining a rich understanding of the phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). Researchers in the multiple case study ensure reliable findings in cultivating comprehensive themes that show more

depth than those obtained in the single case design (Yin, 2017). Using a multiple case study gave me a better understanding of the strategies that leaders used to engage employees and increase workforce productivity.

A researcher's main goal was to ensure the sample size was enough to be able to manage and aggregate rich data that served the purpose of the research study (Fugard & Potts, 2015). I ensured the sample size was large enough that I could obtain data saturation to enhance the reliability of the study. I gathered enough interview questions to obtain data saturation. Researchers achieved data saturation when there was little or no change in the aggregated data (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Fugard and Potts (2015) recommended that researchers consider the type of study, time, and ethical concerns when determining sample size for research. In qualitative studies, there are no set rules to determine the number of participants; however, by selecting the appropriate number improves reliability and validity of a study (Khan, 2014; Yin, 2017). Researching on an entire population is expensive; thus researchers select several participants based on the nature of the study (Khan, 2014). In the selection process of the participants, the selection criteria to choose the participants would require experience and knowledge in the field (Yin, 2017). The participants in my study had to meet the eligibility criteria which included (a) a minimum of 18 years or older, (b) 2 years of leadership experience in the retail industry located in the eastern region of the United States, (c) supervised at least three employees in the retail industry, and (d) knowledge of successful strategies used to engage sales associates to increase workforce

productivity. By selecting appropriate participants, I expected the participants to provide valuable and diverse perspectives. I selected four participants from two retail organizations to gather participants' perspectives on the strategies to engage employees and increase workforce productivity.

I preferred to meet the participants in their chosen location, except I requested a quieter place to avoid distractions and noise when needed. During the meetings with the participants, I dedicated at least 45 to 60 minutes for the entire interview method to gather rich data. Researchers achieve data saturation when there is little or no change in the aggregated data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Besides, I also used the interview data and the company's documents to obtain data saturation. Researchers have concluded that selected participants could share important insights relevant to the research topic (Palinkas et al., 2015; Yin, 2017). Using the methodological triangulation methods and member checking process, I enhanced the reliability of my research findings. The experience and skills of the participants who hold leadership positions in the retail industry would help address the research question.

### **Ethical Research**

After obtaining approval from the IRB, I contacted the participants to ensure that they meet the necessary criteria to participate in my study. While selecting the participants, I emailed the selected participants the informed consent form, which outlined the assurance of confidentiality and provided details about the intent of the study. While recruiting research individuals, informed consent is the base of ethical

research (Ioannidis, 2013). If participants agreed to participate in my study, they were requested to sign the consent form, which advised me of their deliberate intention to participate in the study. Research participants may agree to participate in a research study if they are provided with a certificate to confirm confidentiality (Beskow et al., 2014). I clearly mentioned about the confidentiality of the participants in the informed consent certificate, which included transparent information about the informed consent process. In the informed consent form, I also addressed the withdrawal rules. Participation in this study was voluntary; therefore, participants could withdraw from this study at any time during the data collection process or at any time during the research period with verbal or written notice. There were no incentives offered to participate in this study.

Participants' protection was one of the crucial aspects of the doctoral study and, that was why I aimed to protect participants' information throughout the research period. I adhered to the IRB approval process and list provisions in the consent form for the ethical protection of participants. Researchers include the assurance of confidentiality in the informed consent form so that individual participants understand the provisions of confidentiality (Wolf et al., 2015). Confidentiality is important in any research study (Wolf et al., 2015). To protect participants' identities, I used pseudo-codes B1P1, B1P2, B2P1, and B2P2 to identify participants. I communicated with participants that I stored their responses, informed consent form, and interview notes on a password-protected flash drive that was kept in my personal cabinet locker. After 5 years, I will destroy their responses, consent forms, and interview notes as part of the ethical protection of the

research process. Data is required to remain protected and secured for a minimum of 5 years before destruction (Walden University, 2016).

### **Data Collection Instruments**

I was the primary instrument for the data collection process. Amankwaa (2016) noted that a researcher is a primary instrument because they are involved in the data collection and data analysis process. I conducted a semistructured interview to collect data in determining the strategies that business leaders use to engage the workforce and increase productivity. The interview protocol is located in Appendix A. I used resources as described by Yin (2017) to include interviews and review of companies' documentation, to collect data in determining the strategies business leaders use to engage the workforce and increase productivity.

Researchers can review major protocol questions to help with inquiry structure (Yin, 2017). There were six open-ended interview questions that I asked the participants to inquire about their experience in the field of the retail industry located in Appendix A. I gathered the interview questions based around the central research question. I asked leaders to share additional documents related to the company, which demonstrated their best strategies for increasing employee engagement and workforce productivity.

I ensured validity and reliability to establish the credibility of my research study by mitigating bias and ensuring trustworthiness in the data analysis. Validity is the integrity that the researchers can apply to ensure the findings of the data (Noble & Smith, 2015). Reliability is the consistency of the research analysis in which researchers use the



research method repeatedly to check the credibility of the findings (Noble & Smith, 2015; Yin, 2017). Member checking enhances the reliability of the research by confirming the data accuracy with the participants (Allen, 2015; Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Hence, I provided an opportunity for the participants to check my data interpretation, which ensured data saturation and the credibility of the results. Using the member checking process, I asked the interviewees to review the data and summary to ensure the reliability and validity of my interpretation of the information provided by the participants. To ensure qualitative data validation, member checking was essential before final data analysis.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Throughout the data collection process, my goal was to ensure the credibility and reliability of the data. Yin (2017) recommended using the data collection tools such as interviews and review of companies' documents to ensure data saturation. The primary source of data included structured, semistructured, and unstructured interviews (Yin, 2017), and I conducted semistructured interviews. After I obtained the IRB approval, I scheduled a 45 to 60 minutes face-to-face semistructured interview with each participant that followed the interview protocol in Appendix A. I also ensured that location was suitable for both the participants and the interviewer and that the meeting place was quiet enough to avoid the distractions and noise. According to O'Keeffe, Buytaert, Mijic, Brozovic, and Sinha (2015), semistructured interview was more effective in collecting the information at a reasonable cost. I used an audio recording device to capture verbatim

responses from participants and ensured the semistructured interviews follow the guidelines incorporated in the interview protocol to ensure alignment with the central research question. I provided them the hard copies of the informed consent form if in case the participants need further clarification. I also informed participants of all associated risks that might influence the outcome of this study. Yin (2017) recommended that researchers review their protocols before going into the field. So I reviewed the protocols before I initiated the interview to avoid any impromptu issues and interruptions. Moreover, other authors suggested that researchers should ask to follow up questions for further clarifications (Alby & Fatigante, 2014). Hence, I prepared myself to ask follow up questions to seek further clarification, which could lead to the primary source of data.

I did not conduct a pilot study; however, I reviewed companies' documentation for triangulation to increase credibility, validity, and trustworthiness. I used methodological triangulation, which included interviews and review of companies' documentation to enhance the reliability of the results from this research study. Methodological triangulation is the standard approach to inquire further detailed information about the organizations from multiple sources (Joslin & Müller, 2016; Okoe & Boateng, 2016). Conducting the semistructured interview in-person and reviewing companies' documentations would allow me to verify the data and substantiate the information provided by the participants. Reviewing the documentation provided me with an opportunity to gain an understanding of the business leaders' effective leadership attributes in guiding their employees to increase engagement and productivity. I also

explored the company's website to learn about the company's history and leadership strategies. If applicable, I also observed the participants' behavior, mannerism, and attitude, which might reveal how charismatic they were in influencing their employees to remain engaged and productive.

Treloar, Stone, McMillan, and Flakus (2015) argued that the interview is one of the appropriate methods to gain a rich interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. An advantage of the semistructured interview process is that researchers and participants can have open discussions about the subject matter to gain a better understanding (Yin, 2017). Similarly, other authors believed that interviews and observation strategies are great tools because they enable researchers to listen to and observe participants while they share their experiences (Treloar et al., 2015; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Using interviews as a source of data collection enables the researchers to carefully prepare questions that directly target the research problem to help the participants offer additional insight and in-depth information related to the topic (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2017).

One of the disadvantages of the semistructured interview method is that new researchers may have biases that may lead to misinterpretation of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to Yin (2017), researchers must avoid biases to enhance the credibility of the doctoral study. To exclude bias, Baškarada (2014) warned against asking leading questions. Consequently, I adhered to my interview protocol listed in

Appendix A and ensured that I created an atmosphere where participants could have freedom of thoughts and feel free in responding to my interview questions.

I also sought to obtain the member checking process by sharing the cleaned data with the participants so that the participants can double check discrepancies and add new information. I could ensure the accuracy of the interpretation and credibility of the findings by conducting the member checking process, as suggested by Allen (2015) and Roche, Vaterlaus, and Young (2015). Researchers referred to member checking member validation that includes a presentation of the interpretations (Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). As suggested by the researchers, I conducted the member checking in two stages (Varpio et al., 2017). First, I asked the participants to review the data analysis transcripts to check discrepancies, and secondly, I asked the participants to add new data information relevant to the study. I concluded the member checking process if participants did not add any new information that was relevant to the central research question.

### **Data Organization Technique**

I recorded the interviews using the digital voice recorder and ensured that I had gained participants' consent. Later, I transcribed the voice recording interviews using NVivo. As part of the research process, I stored the transcribed interviews in my password-protected flash drive and ensured that I stored the flash drive in a reliable place. In addition, I saved the following in a secured place: audio recordings and interview notes. I used the NVivo software to code the stored data so that I was able to explore the

emerging themes. Once I gathered the common themes, I stored them using an Excel Application. Organizing the themes using Excel application was an easier process for me because I was able to assemble them in a grid, in which I listed the interviewees vertically and themes horizontally. Throughout the research process, I aimed to protect the participants' information by assigning the participant with codes to maintain confidentiality. I removed research participants' personal information to ensure confidentiality. Instead of labeling participants by their names, I assigned a letter and number so that I could keep the participants' information confidential. One of the ways to ensure confidentiality was by replacing participants' personal information by coding. Coding would be helpful to maintain the researchers' information confidentially, and coded data can be categorized, which would result in themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Yin (2017) argued that researchers should not include research participants' information to maintain confidentiality. Confidentiality includes storage of research data in a secure place, anonymization of data, and destruction of data after completing the data analysis (Wolf et al., 2015). Further, Yin (2017) suggested that researchers should replace research participants' information with codes. I assigned a code to each participant to protect their personal information by labeling them as B1P1, B1P2, B2P1, and B2P2. I locked the participants' information and data in a secure cabinet. Participants received a reminder via email about the scheduled interview appointment. I informed the participants that their responses were saved for 5 years in my password-protected flash

drive to ensure confidentiality for participants' protection. After 5 years, I will destroy the raw data and notes.

### **Data Analysis**

Analyzing the data can help researchers to explore the meanings of the data (Van Den Berg & Struwig, 2017). The data analysis includes collection, examination, categorization, tabularization, and testing (Yin, 2017). Yin mentioned in case study research that findings are likely to be more convincing and accurate when researchers triangulate the data from multiple sources. Researchers used the triangulation to provide detailed information about additional sources of the organizations (Joslin & Müller, 2016; Okoe & Boateng, 2016). I used methodological triangulation for the data analysis because methodological triangulation included multiple methods to examine the phenomenon. In methodological triangulation, researchers control the methods by observing the phenomenon and applying ethical research (Firmin, Bonfils, Luther, Minor, & Salyers, 2017; Joslin & Müller, 2016; Kotus & Rzeszewski, 2015). Using the methodological triangulation process, I was able to apply multiple types of methods that included the data gathered from the interview and review of companies' documents. The appropriate data analysis process for this study was methodological triangulation because methodological triangulation includes multiple methods to examine the phenomenon (Firmin et al., 2017; Joslin & Müller, 2016). Researchers also use the methodological triangulation to enhance the reliability and validity of the data analysis (Firmin et al., 2017).

Using the qualitative approach, researchers can focus on the research topic and modify the research to generate rigorous and structured research analysis (Barnham, 2015). There are several ways to analyze a qualitative study. I used Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR), as suggested by Van Den Berg and Struwig (2017) to follow a step-by-step process in collecting, coding, analyzing, and saturating the research data. During the data analysis, I (a) collected the data, (b) formulated theme (c) obtained data saturation (d) analyzed the data, and (e) used the comparison method to understand the successful retail organizations' leadership strategies to increase employee engagement and workforce productivity.

**Collection.** I used the interview questions located in Appendix A to seek responses from the participants. After the completion of the interview protocol, I transcribed the data. Researchers can transform the data into transcripts by analyzing the data (Yin, 2017). As part of the transcribing process, I did not hire anyone; instead, I used the NVivo software to transcribe the data. NVivo software is the data analysis software that allows the researchers to analyze data gathered from interviews (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). As a researcher, I reiterated the process to seek correct transcription so that I could translate the data accurately to ensure reliability. Besides the collection of the participants' responses, I collected the data from the review of the companies' documents, such as a website to gain further understanding about the company, leadership role, leadership strategies, and other key measures.

**Coding.** After the transcription process, I determined the themes using qualitative analytic tools. Firmin et al. (2017) mentioned that researchers use qualitative analytic tools to generate an in-depth analysis of data. NVivo software is an application that researchers can use for qualitative studies to collect, analyze, and code data (Humble, 2015). NVivo software is appropriate for this study because I could clean and organize the data with the emerging themes and code, and analyze the data by counting and sorting. I looked for the common themes based on the responses and assemble them in a grid using Excel application, in which I listed the interviewees vertically and themes horizontally. I assigned a code to the participant by labeling them as B1P1, B1P2...B2P2 to replace research participants' information, as suggested by Yin (2017).

**Analysis.** I analyzed and reviewed the data that emerge from multiple methods. As suggested by Paulus, Woods, Atkins, and Macklin (2017), I used the NVivo application to analyze the interview data, company documents, and observations for the determination of the themes. My goal was to seek data accuracy by reviewing and cleaning the data that emerged from the interview and the review of the companies' documents. While analyzing the data, I sought to (a) identify relevant themes, (b) assign code, and (c) connect themes to the phenomenon. I reviewed the data to determine the effectiveness of how retail business leaders' strategies to increase employee engagement and productivity against the conceptual framework transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985). The transformational leadership theory provided a lens for understanding the findings that may assist the leaders in retail organizations to rely on the strategies to



increase employee engagement and workforce productivity. I reviewed companies' documentation to understand business leaders' strategies utilizing transformational leadership theory to improve employee engagement and increase workforce productivity. Researchers validated the results by constantly presenting new codes and themes to establish data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In my report, I included the new ideas that evolved from the data analysis. Moreover, I compared and contrasted the themes from data analysis with the recent findings in the literature to make the study current. While comparing and contrasting, I utilized a thematic approach. The thematic approach enables a researcher to compare and contrast the study findings and draw a conclusion on findings validity (Teruel, Navarro, González, López-Jaquero, & Montero, 2016). I developed the themes and looked for variation within published work in the literature under the umbrella of transformational leadership theory, which was the conceptual framework for this study. I reviewed the data to determine the effectiveness of how retail business leaders' strategies to increase employee engagement and productivity against the conceptual framework transformational leadership theory. The transformational leadership theory provided a lens for understanding the findings that might assist the leaders in retail organizations to rely on the strategies to increase employee engagement and workforce productivity. The results might provide useful information to improve the lack of leadership strategies in the retail organization.

## **Reliability and Validity**

Researchers should ensure the quality of the study by ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings. Noble and Smith (2015) suggested the researchers can ensure the validity and reliability of the findings by establishing integrity with research using the test and measures. For this qualitative study, I used methodological triangulation and member checking to ensure reliability and validity, as suggested by Yin (2017).

Researchers increase the reliability and validity of the study by storing, organizing, and tracking various sources of evidence using databases (Yin, 2017). I also used a database application such as Excel to store and organize the data sources that demonstrate evidence to ensure the consistency of the study. I ensured reliability and validity in qualitative research by following the four benchmarks that include dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability, as suggested by Yilmaz (2013).

### **Reliability**

Researchers referred reliability to the trustworthiness of the data collection process, where researchers apply analytical procedures that accurately reflect findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Yilmaz (2013) concluded that researchers should ensure reliability and validity in qualitative research by following the benchmark that includes dependability. In qualitative research, researchers also referred reliability to dependability (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I ensured the reliability of the data collection by following the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Some authors concluded that researchers could achieve dependability by examining the data from multiple sources, conducting member

checking, and documenting the changes (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Using the semistructured interview method, I collected and reviewed the responses from the participants and companies' documents. After conducting each interview, I saved the audio recording in a password-protected flash drive and generated the transcription to ensure the accuracy of the participants' experiences. Finally, I ensured that my research process was transparent for future scholars. Therefore, I used the NVivo software and the database to enhance dependability since they both provide assurance of unbiased and consistent processes, as revealed by Yazan (2015). Using the NVivo software, I analyzed the interview data and the company's documents to enhance dependability. Conducting the member checking process, I confirmed the data accuracy with the participants, as suggested by the researchers (Birt et al., 2016).

Verifying the interpreted data can assure me the accuracy of the evidence. I also documented the changes to preserve dependability. Every time I made any changes to the existing data, I resaved the file with the proper name convention. To ensure dependability, I could easily go back to the previously saved versions to review the changes. Methodological triangulation is another method to examine data from multiple sources in enhancing dependability and assuring reliability (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015). I could obtain data saturation through triangulation, as suggested by Fusch and Ness (2015). I ensured that I gather enough data to obtain data saturation. As part of the triangulation, I collected and reviewed the data from the interview and the companies' documentation.

**Validity**

Researchers described validity as the integrity of the research method that includes credibility, confirmability, and transferability through which researchers conduct research that accurately reflects the findings (Noble & Smith, 2015; Yilmaz, 2013). Yin (2017) noted that, in a qualitative study, validity is crucial for the credibility of the research study because it refers to the accuracy of the findings. Researchers should mitigate bias to enhance the validity of the research results (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Noble & Smith, 2015).

**Credibility.** In a qualitative study, validity is the credibility of the research findings (Yin, 2017). Researchers can conduct triangulation and member checking to enhance credibility and mitigate bias (Yilmaz, 2013). I incorporated triangulation by obtaining data from multiple sources such as collecting data from interviews and review of company's documents. I also explored their companies' websites to gain a better understanding of organizational success. Member checking during the triangulation process enables researchers to check for data accuracy and mitigate bias (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Yin, 2017). I conducted the member checking process to confirm the data accuracy with the participants with an intention to mitigate biases and validate the results. The member checking process enhanced the credibility of my research study, as suggested by (Brooks & Normore, 2015).

**Transferability.** According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), researchers can achieve transferability when findings are transferable to future studies. Purposive

sampling of four participants from two different retail organizations in the eastern region of the United States helps align with transferability. I prepared a thick description, as suggested by Yilmaz (2013), to show reflections on my study that includes research methods, participants, and analysis. Future scholars could understand my study comprehensively by reviewing the thick descriptions, which they can transfer the findings to their future studies.

**Confirmability.** I used the NVivo software to obtain the confirmability. Yazan (2015) mentioned that researchers use NVivo to ensure confirmability by providing audit trails and rationale for the interpretation of data analysis. Using the NVivo software, I formulated themes to perform an in-depth analysis of the data, as suggested by researchers (Humble, 2015). Using the audit trails, I systematically reported the results by justifying my interpretations, as suggested by Yazan (2015). I compared the result with the information gathered in the literature. Confirmability is also referred to as the credibility and accuracy of the data that researchers can obtain through triangulation and member checking (Patton, 2015). Therefore, I also used the triangulation and member checking process that I have mentioned above.

**Data Saturation.** Fusch and Ness (2015) warned against making assumptions when seeking to reach data saturation. As suggested by Senden et al. (2015), I continuously sought for emerging themes while analyzing interviewee responses and relevant companies' documents until I reach data saturation. My goal was to avoid data redundancy. I could prevent data redundancy by obtaining data saturation as

recommended by (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The data saturation process included an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the participants and the review of companies' documents that show retail business leaders' successful strategies to increase employee engagement and workforce productivity. I conducted the member checking process to ensure the credibility of participants' responses. Researchers can conduct the member checking process to ensure the credibility and validity of the findings (Allen, 2015; Roche et al., 2015). Interviewees get the opportunity to produce prolonged descriptions, which could make the data rich and valuable (Alby & Fatigante, 2014). Hence, I continued the members checking process until I found no new responses added by the participants. Once the research participants confirmed the accuracy of the interpretation and that they did not want to add any new data, then I concluded the member checking process.

### **Transition and Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study design was to explore the strategies retail leaders use to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity. I used semistructured interviews to collect data and explore the strategies and experiences of the business leaders. I used purposeful sampling to select business leaders from two retail organizations in eastern region of the United States.

In Section 2, I presented the detailed description of the research methodology, purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, data collection and analysis, and the credibility of reliability and validity of the data. In section

3, I included (a) the presentation of findings, (b) application to professional practice, (c) implications for social change, (d) recommendations for action, and (e) recommendations for further research, and (f) conclusion.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

Retail industry leaders face challenges in improving their employees' work performance (Yeng & Yazdanifard, 2015). Researchers found a direct correlation between employee engagement and work performance (Consiglio et al., 2016). The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies retail leaders used to improve employee engagement to increase workforce productivity.

The target population comprised of four leaders from two retail organizations in eastern region of the United States who have implemented successful strategies to engage sales associates. The data source included semistructured interviews and company documents. The data interpretation using NVivo 12 software resulted in three themes: (a) professional development, (b) collaboration, and (c) work life balance. I compared the identified themes with recently published studies in the literature to strengthen the findings.

The findings revealed that retail leaders used different strategies to improve employee engagement and increase workforce productivity. Participants shared strategies that were like the strategies transformational leaders used, as mentioned in the literature review. Section 3 consists of the presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, implications of social change, recommendations for action and further research, reflections, and conclusions.



### **Presentation of the Findings**

The research question of this study was *What leadership strategies do business leaders use to improve employee engagement and workforce productivity?* For this study, I conducted semistructured interviews with open-ended questions (see Appendix A) and interviewed four supervisors from two retail organizations. During the interviews, I collected data to learn about the strategies the participants used to improve employee engagement and workforce productivity. To protect interviewees' identities, I used pseudo-codes B1P1, B1P2, B2P1, and B2P2. Before the interview, participants signed the informed consent form, and the interview took 45 to 60 minutes. After I completed the interviews, I used NVivo to transcribe the data and shared a summary of the participants' responses. I completed member checking by providing a copy of the summary of the interview transcription to ensure the accuracy of the data interpretation. No new information emerged after interviewing third supervisors from the second retail organizations, which ensured data saturation. In other words, I reached data saturation from the third to the fourth interviewees. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated data saturation occurs when no new responses emerge. I used a methodological triangulation process that included the data gathered from the interviews, notes, and documentation such as training programs, training calendar, training agenda, training survey data, customer satisfaction survey data, monthly meetings' agenda, safety awareness flyer, website data, and staff handbook.

After I completed the member checking, I used NVivo 12 for coding and developing themes. I assigned codes to data that participants repeated several times, related to the phenomenon, and found in the literature review. Coding is relevant in qualitative data analysis, which can facilitate researchers to sort and organize data into categories for a robust meaning (Peesker, Ryals, Rich, & Boehnke, 2019). After identifying themes from data, I provided a code to each theme, which facilitated a broader analytical context. Using a thematic analysis, I grouped the codes into categories and developed three major themes: (a) professional development, (b) collaboration, and (c) work life balance. Identifying the theme is helpful to categorize the research findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Table 2 shows the themes that emerged from the data collection:

Table 2

*Emergent Themes*

Themes	<i>N</i>	Incidence
Professional Development	53	38 %
Collaboration	37	26 %
Work life balance	48	35 %

*Notes.* *N*= Frequency of occurrence; Incidence= Percentage of occurrence.

The findings indicated that the retail business leaders helped their employees to grow professionally, created a collaborative work environment, and promoted work life balance to improve employee engagement and workforce productivity (see Table 2).

The participants recommended interesting strategies about employee engagement based on participants' experience and expertise in the management position. During the data analysis, I included examination, categorization, tabularization, and testing. Data

analysis resulted in three themes: (a) professional development, (b) collaboration, and (c) work life balance. The first theme that emerged demonstrated the need for the employees to grow professionally in order to stay fit with the organizational needs. The second theme discovered highlighted the ways leaders create a collaborative environment to promote employee engagement. The third theme that emerged showed the ways leaders engage employees as an effective business practice to foster employees' work life balance.

### **Theme 1: Professional Development**

During data analysis, I assigned codes to participants' responses. The coding process included a thematic approach. I assigned codes to phrases and sentences, constituting the concepts relating to training and mentoring, which I categorized under the professional development theme. While professional development is not new to the organization, the ability to be able to facilitate employees' growth successfully was essential for the organizations to learn. According to Chidi and Victor (2017), professional development practice consists of training, counseling, and mentoring. Professional development is a careful distribution of knowledge to the employees to grow them as a competent worker (Luthuli, Nyawo, & Mashau, 2019). Chidi and Victor revealed that lack of training opportunities for secondary school staff members in Nigeria, resulted in poor knowledge in performing their jobs efficiently, for which employees were not committed to their workplace. Kuijpers, Kooij, and van Woerkom (2020) revealed that managers helped employees to identify their strengths, weaknesses,

and interests through a series of workshops, which resulted in increased employee engagement and productivity and decreased absenteeism. All four leaders viewed the professional development strategy as an effective business practice to increase employees' capabilities in improving the productivity of the organization. Participants further stressed the need for a continuous learning environment to polish employees' competency level that included soft skills, management style, safety, information technology, and customer service skills to increase workforce productivity.

**Training.** Participants mentioned that training is mandatory for their employees. Training is a method for employees to upgrade the knowledge and skills to remain fit in the workplace (Chidi & Victor, 2017). B1P1 and B1P2 added that they designed a systematic training so that employees could quickly grasp the purpose and were able to apply their learning in the workplace. For example, employees working in the merchandising department go through the training in reading the product labels, shelves adjustment, printing labels, and stocking merchandise. A well-structured training plan enabled employees to improve their performance, which resulted in increased productivity (Taufek & Mustafa, 2018). B1P2 added, "Since employees are crucial for the company's success, we need to provide an ongoing learning environment for employees so that they remain emotionally connected to work". B1P2 further added that improvements in the employees' professionalism were noticeable after the completion of training programs. For example, after completion of training programs, employees were

proactive in completing daily tasks, were capable of dealing with customers' issues in a better manner, and treated their coworkers with increased respect.

B1P1 and B1P2 shared the company's documents, such as a yearly training program, agenda, and a pie chart of the outlined topics. Some of the topics I discovered from the pie chart were customer service, soft skills, money metrics, safety, time management, information system application, cultural diversity, and growth and opportunity. While reviewing the training program documents, I found that managers grouped the training topics in modules. Each module included the agenda, assignment, and contextual materials. For example, in the money metrics module, managers wanted employees to assess the new opportunity based on Porter's five forces model and helped employees to understand their potential customers, market segment, and the competitive advantage. The robust knowledge gained from the well-structured training program could empower employees to become proactive and eager to invest their capabilities to their fullest.

B2P1 and B2P2 said that the training also helped new hires to understand the use of technological tools and the procedural steps in completing the planograms. While hiring new employees, B2P1 and B2P2 explained to their employees about the mandatory training and the importance of learning new professional skills. B2P2 added that the training resulted in employees doing the task without the supervisor's involvement. Employees further demonstrated a willingness to inquire about the new products, inventory restocking process, reporting function, and the completion date for each task.

B2P1 and B2P2 added that employees completed a short survey after completing the training session, which helped them to assess their learning goals. Participants shared pre- and post-survey data in a graph that demonstrated employees' responses in handling the business processes. The graphs showed employees' improved management and soft skills. The survey results also indicated improvement in employees' work efficiency after attending the training. For example, employees from B2 organization indicated in their survey that their job inspired them and that they feel energetic and enthusiastic after acquiring professional training. The theme showed that for employees to show greater commitment in the workplace for higher quality performance, there must be systematic professional development program.

**Mentoring.** When leaders act as coaches, they could elevate employees' competency level. Besieux et al. (2108) stated that mentoring employees could increase the level of competence and engagement. Mentoring is the sharing of one's experience to guide the employees to achieve professional growth (Chidi & Victor, 2017). Participants promoted professional development through mentoring programs.

Mentoring is crucial in inspiring employees to grow professionally by following their mentors. Leaders should mentor employees by empowering them to understand their capabilities. Gannon's (2020) study revealed that leaders encouraged employees to realize the importance of developing their careers. As mentors, participants shared their experiences with their employees to motivate them. For example, participants shared stories regarding their journey as an entry-level employee and becoming managers. B1P1

and B1P2 played the role of an employee and showed how they would handle a demanding customer by staying calm and building a rapport. Such a reflective approach helped employees to stay involved and take the initiative in the workplace.

B2P1 and B2P2 showed that they actively listened to their employees, which motivated employees to pay close attention to completing their jobs. “Even if it’s a small issue, I took the time to listen and provide a solution, which demonstrated my role as a supporting colleague,” added by B2P2. Participants mentored employees through verbal communication, which created a strong bonding between employees and managers with increased mutual respect. For example, B1P2 added, “I think you have to leave early to pick up your kid from school, don’t worry, you can leave now, I can take care of the next customer.” “You have done a quiet of lot of work today, thank you so much for moving the line so fast, keep up the good work” added by B1P1. Such a verbal mechanism inspired employees to be proactive and dynamic. This finding is in agreement with Shaw et al. (2018), who revealed that leaders mentored employees through conversation and verbal appreciation.

Participants sought to strengthen employees’ skills so they could better handle any complex situation. B2P1 and B2P2 coached employees to understand their potential. For example, B2P1 and B2P2 helped employees to navigate the company’s technological database tools to assist them in learning about the products and customers’ buying behavior. In support of the findings of participants, Nahar (2018) reported that leaders in the organization mentored employees to gain important knowledge about the organization

by using information system platforms. Such business practice empowered employees to understand the performance of the organization through enhanced data, which could assist employees in taking action accordingly.

Because of the managers' greater responsibilities, they guided their employees to grow by mentoring, which could strengthen their employees' ability to adapt responsibility. Participants strongly believed that their mentoring approach helped employees to perform their tasks responsibly. Hence, they coached employees to grow and acquire professional skills through training and mentoring, which would result in an increase in employees' self-esteem and the level of engagement. Through mentoring, leaders aided employees to reflect on their performance and increase understanding of their roles and responsibilities to improve the performance.

**The correlation to the literature.** Previous researchers supported professional development strategy as the fundamental practice to enhance employee engagement. The findings from the interview responses revealed that participants understand the importance of employees' growth and their correlation to employee engagement. Participants expressed that they achieved business success by emphasizing the professional growth of their employees. Leaders must create learning opportunities for employees to enhance employee engagement, as suggested by Yadav (2016). Luthuli et al. (2019) posited that learning opportunity boosts employees' energy levels, and such employees are more likely to perform duties responsibly. Likewise, Wijayanti's (2019) study of 60 employees in Indonesia, resulted in discovering that employees' performance



level improved when they have access to professional development opportunities. Seemingly, Besieux et al. (2018) also stressed on coaching employees to increase the level of engagement. Engaged employees committed themselves to work beyond by using brainpower, energy, and time efficaciously (Jnaneswar, 2020). Learning opportunities for employees improved the employees' performance and productivity (Luthuli et al., 2019).

**The correlation to the conceptual framework.** Using professional development strategies such as training and mentoring opportunities aligns with the transformational leadership theory, which is the conceptual framework for this study. Participants' responses referred to the intellectual stimulation attributes outlined for transformational leadership theory. Retail leaders used phrases related to intellectual stimulation, such as coach, mentor, train, workshop, guide, skills, competence, adaptability, experiences, learn, grow, action, expertise, and knowledge. Breevaart and Bakker (2018) posited that leaders with intellectual stimulation influenced employees work engagement by guiding employees to attend workshops for professional development. The intellectual stimulation attributes of leaders engage employees through professional development opportunities. The levels of empowerment granted to employees using intellectual stimulation motivated employees to grow professionally. Transformational leaders create a motivational climate for employees by recognizing employees' competence (Turnnidge & Cote, 2018). A study by Lock, Rainsbury, Clancy, Rosenau, and Ferreira (2018) suggested that leaders should assess the impact of their guidance on employees through

intentional design resources using transformational leadership capability. Researchers have found that transformational leadership is effective because it may inspire employees, provide incentives, and motivate employees to maximize work performance. Likewise, Yang, Chen, Zhao, and Hua (2020) revealed that transformational leaders improved employees' task performance by clarifying job responsibilities through mentoring, which resulted in meaningful contributions. This finding is in agreement with Frieder, Wang, and Oh (2018), who revealed that transformational leaders helped employees to view their work meaningfully, which encouraged employees to contribute meaningfully. The findings of this study aligned with the purpose of the study and support the conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory. Leaders using the transformational leadership tenets could assist employees in understanding the flows and logistics of the business operations to better analyze the competition in the market place. Leaders should use a professional development strategy to support employees to understand the nature of tasks, customer relationships, and market needs, which could further guide them to handle their duties responsibly. The research study deepens the knowledge of the research by presenting key themes providing a significant role in responding to the overarching research question. In support of the findings of participants, leaders who trained and mentored employees were more proactive and committed to the organizations. Facilitating learning and growth opportunities are important tactics used by transformational leaders to enhance employee engagement.

Table 3

*Theme 1: Professional Development*

Sub Theme	<i>N</i>	Incidence
Training	30	57 %
Mentoring	23	43 %

*Notes.* *N*= Frequency of occurrence; Incidence= Percentage of occurrence.

The findings indicated that the retail business leaders helped their employees to grow professionally by creating a continuous learning environment through training and mentoring practice (see Table 3).

**Theme 2: Collaboration**

B1P1, B1P2, B2B1, and B2P2 aimed to create a collaborative environment for employees to increase the level of engagement. Collaboration is the second theme that emerged from the responses gathered during the interviews. All participants often used the phrases *decision-making, ethical culture, code of conduct, safe environment, silo, fragmentation, and teamwork* to communicate expectations and foster cohesion between employees, which I grouped under collaboration theme. Decision-making (Oluwatayo, Opoko, & Ezema, 2017), ethical culture (Hodges, 2017), and teamwork (Kossaify, Hleihel, & Lahoud, 2017) are factors that influence the output from collaboration. Collaboration is the teamwork in the workplace to achieve a common goal (Othman, Wahi, Ya'acob, & Kofli, 2017). Effective collaboration depends on ethical culture (Colaco & Loi, 2019), availability of resources (Sahni, 2019), and teamwork (Kossaify, Hleihel, & Lahoud, 2017). Collaboration is a critical factor for leaders to promote engagement. Researchers noted that leaders could increase the level of engagement when employees work in a collaborative environment, which allows them to have access to

organizational information (Gerards et al., 2018). The subthemes that emerged from the theme *Collaboration* are decision-making, ethics, and teamwork.

**Decision-Making.** Participants noted that working in silo created poor performance. When employees work in a silo, they do not gain much knowledge around the surroundings, which could impact their engagement leading to poor performance (King et al., 2016). According to Tian and Zhai (2019), engagement at work enhances knowledge distribution resulting in improved productivity. B2P1 and B2P2 invited employees to be part of a decision-making process to deter organizational silos and build a collaborative working environment. B2P1 and B2P2 noted that employees' participation in a decision-making process enabled them to identify problems, understand implications, and generate innovative solutions. B2P1 stated that "when we invited employees to be part of departmental meetings, employees showed enthusiasm". According to Chen, Treviño, and Humphrey (2020), leaders should allow employees to share their voice to promote ethical practice in the workplace. B2P2 added, "Employees should have open space to share their voice, otherwise they won't be committed to the organization. And we have to ensure that their voice matters". Such enthusiasm results in the sense of belonging to the team, and in return, employees take ownership of their work and engage in improving productivity. Nguyen et al. (2017) suggested that business leaders assisted employees in understanding the scope of decision-making and its implications. B2P1 stated that collaboration in the workplace enabled employees to share thoughtful suggestions during the decision-making process, which they found beneficial

for the company. Participants stated that they shared the strategic goal and performance of the organization through a whole staff meeting, which resulted in collaborative efforts and enabled employees to think a cohesive way. B1P2 stated, “when employees understand the vision of the organization, they come up with innovative ideas related to the product design and process enhancement.” Sharing of the company’s vision could foster collegiality and social interaction in the workplace (Gerards et al., 2018). Anitha (2014) labeled social interaction as a collaborative environment. The findings also revealed the importance of employees’ attachment with the companies by showing that the managers cared about their employees’ decision, which increased the employees’ self-esteem and collaborative thinking and resulted in an increase in their engagement. B1P1, B1P2, B2P1, and B2P2 noted that when employees were part of the decision-making process, they stayed connected to the organization and contributed meaningfully. Participants stated that the decision-making process enabled participants to view the business through the lens of the company’s leaders. Knowing important information from the meetings was beneficial as they were able to understand the expectations. The findings supported by Amerine et al. (2017), who reported that employees attending meetings as part of the decision-making process are likely to know the organization better leading to increase employee engagement. Similarly, Oluwatayo, et al. (2017) revealed that managers inviting employees during the decision-making process increased employees’ engagement and commitment. Oluwatayo et al. concluded that employees

participating in the decision-making process developed a resilient working relationship with the managers and colleagues.

**Ethics.** Ethical practice in the workplace is essential for business sustainability. Ethics in the workplace are the rituals of business tactics that constitute ethical behavior (Colaco & Loi, 2019). B1P1 and B2P1 suggested that promoting ethical practices can foster a collaborative environment in the workplace. B1P1 added that the implementation of ethical practices motivated employees, which lead to improving the level of engagement in the workplace. Participants ensured that the employees are aware of the code of conduct to protect employees' wellbeing and the reputation of the companies. For example, companies will not hire any minor who is under 18 years old. B2P1 also stated, "When it comes to hiring and promoting employees, we make fair decisions regardless of the gender. If my employees find that I am impartial, I would stand out as a role model to them". Recognizing gender equality illustrated an ethical culture in the workplace (Cavero-Rubio, Collazo-Mazón, & Amorós-Martínez, 2019). Furthermore, all participants noted that a collaborative workplace involves educating employees about the companies' policies relating to ethics, workplace violence, and workplace safety. B1P2 said, "it is mandatory for employees to complete the online training on workplace violence every year. Educating employees and acquiring knowledge allow employees to avoid any unethical practice". Such business practices promoted collaboration by assuring employees to be aware of the threats and preventive measures. Therefore, employees valued the organizational goals and abided by the companies' rules. The

findings from the participants indicated a strong sense of collaboration nurturing employees to work with passion. This finding is in agreement with Hodges (2017), who reported that leaders go over the companies' policies in the department meetings, which resulted in an increased awareness of the companies' regulations for employees to work with ethics and attention. Following the business policies promoted organizational success and sustainability (Gordian & Evers, 2017). Likewise, Colaco and Loi (2019) in research, concluded that the identification of business ethics required clarity of work responsibilities and transparency of safe working conditions. Furthermore, Schulte et al. (2015) enforced workplace safety through collaboration by educating employees about the Occupational Safety and Health Act and Toxic Substances Control Act ensure workers' safety, which relies on workplace collaboration. Thus, leaders assuring a safe environment in the workplace by applying the legislation can assure employees to feel positive about their work environment. Leaders who possess the attribute of transformational leadership theory encouraged employees to work in an assuring a safety climate in the workplace (Barling et al., 2002). Hence, the collaboration in the workplace involved cohesion, a safe working climate, and an ethical infrastructure to enhance employee engagement.

**Teamwork.** Participants stressed that teamwork in the workplace could enhance employees' creativity and collaboration. Teamwork enables a group of people to work in collaboration with the intention to achieve a common goal (Kossaify et al., 2017). B1P1 and B2P1 stated that reducing conflict and sharing knowledge was an essential function

of an organization to promote collaboration. Participants further mentioned that they promoted job rotation and team flexibility by incorporating team building, which led team members to share their expertise and increase knowledge sharing. B1P1 identified the needs of teamwork and helped the team members to create goals to promote collaboration among team members. Supervisors allowed employees to work in a group in tasks relating to inventory management, sales, customer issues, and complaints. Teamwork helped the employees to engage in gaining and sharing knowledge, which led to complete the tasks productively. B1P1 also added, “team members will not be engaged if they don’t have an effective communication plan, so I have to make sure that regular meetings are taking place among members to stay on top of the progress.” The clear communication between the team members avoids confusion and help leaders to enforce expectation (Dirks, 2019). To promote a collaborative setting, B2P1 stated, “we ensure that employees understand the goal of the organization when working in a team context, which helps them to carry out their job responsibilities with dedication”. Sun and Wang (2016) contended the importance of employees working in the team context to achieve an organizational goal.

**The correlation to the literature.** Previous researchers supported collaborative practice as a fundamental strategy to increase the level of employee engagement. Working condition has a significant impact on employee engagement (Malinowska & Tokarz, 2020). O’Connor and Crowley-Henry (2019) emphasized the value of implementing ethical practice as part of the collaborative working environment.



Employees want the organizational support to create a sense of responsibility and obligation, which guide them to gain passion in completing their job and achieve the organizational goal (Aryupong, Chalermjirapas, & Theingi, 2019). Through open communication, leaders created a collaborative environment where employees engaged through an exchange of dialogues (Llorente-Alonso & Topa, 2019). In a collaborative setting, employees seemed to open themselves in connecting to work and bring their complete selves to perform with passion.

**The correlation of conceptual framework.** Using a collaboration strategy, such as decision-making, ethics, and teamwork opportunities, aligns with the transformational leadership theory, which is the conceptual framework for this study. Participants' responses referred to the inspirational motivation and idealized influence attributes outlined for transformational leadership theory. Retail leaders used phrases related to inspirational motivation and idealized attributes, such as collaboration, positive environment, compliance, participation, input, insight, encouragement, commitment, teamwork, role model, integrity, administration, ideas, contribution, meaningful, and trust. Peesker et al. (2019) revealed that leaders with the tenets of transformational leadership improved the leadership of sales employees by incorporating collaboration in the workplace. Establishing high expectation and giving more control to employees increase employees' passion and the level of ownership. The transformational leadership style supports employee engagement through the decision-making involvement (Khumalo, 2019). Khumalo's study revealed that transformational leaders increased the

level of commitment for the employees by seeking feedback and involving them in other departmental activities. Similarly, Carleton, Barling, and Trivisonno's (2018) study revealed that transformational leaders enhanced employee engagement by creating a positive work environment. Likewise, Raziq et al. (2018) posited that transformational leaders promoted cohesion in the workplace by promoting teamwork and addressing team needs. Effective teamwork appeared to create cohesion among members, which enabled employees to help each other out and created a sense of belonging to the organization. Furthermore, Eisenberg, Post, and DiTomaso's (2019) study revealed that transformational leaders promoted collaboration through team communication, which results in improved team performance and effectiveness. Employees' connectedness to the organization motivated them to perform better, resulting in financial gain. Sun and Wang (2016) claimed that transformational leaders promote teamwork to improve employees' morale values when working in team collaboration. The findings of this study aligned with the purpose of the study and support the conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory. The tenets of transformational leadership theory could assist leaders to apply collaboration to improve employees' engagement, which might contribute to improved ethical behavior, employee creativity, commitment, and productivity. Collaboration relates to inspirational motivation and idealized influence, which are the tenets of transformational leadership theory. Besides the collaborative environment, participants discussed maintaining a healthy work life balance to improve employee engagement.

Table 4

*Theme 2: Collaboration*

Sub Theme	<i>N</i>	Incidence
Decision-Making	9	24 %
Ethics	12	32 %
Teamwork	16	43 %

*Notes.* *N*= Frequency of occurrence; Incidence= Percentage of occurrence.

The findings indicated that the retail business leaders aimed to create a collaborative working environment through decision-making process, ethical practice, and effective teamwork (see Table 4).

**Theme 3: Work Life Balance**

The establishment of work life balance enables employees to stay engaged in the workplace. Participants stated a thorough understanding of factors affecting work life balance to foster employee engagement. Work life balance refers to employees' ability to balance work and life to obtain a sense of purpose, pleasure, and comfort to meet the demands of the workplace (Schulte et al., 2015). Scholars suggested leaders focus on employees' work habits (Hakanen et al., 2018), work-related stress (Debus et al., 2015), and job satisfaction (Sebastiano et al., 2017). Leaders should promote a healthy work environment for employees by providing workshops and promoting healthy habits such as exercise, nutrition, music listening, relaxation, and meditation (Zizek et al., 2017). The sub themes under work life balance are *burnout and stress*, recognition, and *employees' wellbeing*.

**Burnout and Stress.** When employees feel stress in the workplace, they are more likely to experience burnout (Hakanen et al., 2018). Burnout is an exhaustion that

employees experience at work (Otto, Hoefsmit, van Ruysseveldt, & van Dam, 2019). B1P1 and B1P2 added that they do not monitor their employees because close monitoring resulted in employee burnout. When leaders micromanage employees closely, employees experienced burnout (Auh et al., 2016). Instead, B1P1 and B1P2 approached employees in a friendly manner and inquired about employees' wellbeing. For example, when employees call in sick, B1P1 inquired about their health condition and showed supportive action. B2P1 also invited employees for lunch out to promote social interaction. B2P1 added, "it is very important to promote social interaction because this gives them a chance to talk and relax. They also discuss important aspects of work, for example, the deadline to complete the tasks, or discussing a product on sale". While B1P1 added, "I intentionally take a lunch break with my employees, and have a casual talk. In doing so, I noticed that my employees shared their tension." Harjanti and Todani (2019) posited that leaders fostered social capital by increasing trust among employees and reducing insecurity, which led employees to remain engaged and decrease burnout. Harjanti and Todani defined social capital as the values and potential, achieved through social interactions with other employees. Likewise, Kuriakose, Wilson, and MR (2019) concluded in their study that leaders care for the employees' wellbeing by inviting them for a group lunch to foster social interaction, which improves collegiality and engagement.

The companies' documents from participants revealed that participants incorporated a healthy work life balance for the employees. A review of the company's

documents revealed that employees are eligible to take annual sick leave. B1P1, B1P2, and B2P1 added that they promoted healthy habits for their employees by encouraging them to take short breaks in the workplace and supported employees to use their annual leave for vacation. B2P1 added, “working for long hours can be stressful, so I have to make sure that my employees are taking a break and not exceeding more than 8 hours shift”. According to Hsu et al. (2019), long working hours resulted in work life imbalance and job dissatisfaction for employees. B1P1, B1P2, and B2P1 stated such business practices helped their employees to mitigate stress and show commitment. Participants found an increase in employee engagement after implementing work life balance strategy. The finding is an agreement with Otto et al. (2019), who reported that the availability of resources helped employees to avoid burnout. Lack of resources in the workplace impacted the motivation of employees to remain energetic in completing the task (Sahni, 2019).

**Recognition.** The level of engagement may increase when leaders recognize employees’ efforts and competent performance in the workplace. Zelles (2015) found that the level of employee engagement increased when leaders appreciated employees’ work. B1P1 and B1P2 claimed that when they provided verbal appreciation to their employees for their efforts, the employees remained enthusiastic in the workplace. All participants added that they noticed a sense of job satisfaction and enthusiasm in their employees’ behavior when supervisors recognized and appreciated their employees. B2P1 and B2P2 shared that they even celebrated employees’ efforts by awarding them for their

outstanding performance in the workplace. For example, B2P1 stated that “when employees received an award like *Employee of the Month*, they become very energetic and excited in performing their regular task and work more than they are asked for.” B2P1 further added, “It’s quite competitive to achieve the award because they have to fulfill the criteria such as being punctual at work, take customers’ efficiently, complete the task in an effective manner, and so on.” This mechanism of recognizing the employees enhanced the employees’ motivation as added by B1P1, which aligned with Lin and Kellough’s (2019) study. B2P1 added that the award takes place twice a year, which inspired the employees to prove themselves and remained engaged in the workplace. While B2P2 said, “Employees have some expectation in return for their hard work. Sometimes, they communicate with me about promotions or salary increases. As a manager, my responsibility is to take care of my employees, rather than thinking about the profit only”. The finding is in agreement with Huertas-Valdivia et al. (2018), who revealed in their study that recognizing employees in a timely manner enhanced employee engagement. The participants focused on developing optimistic attitudes that resulted in the physical and mental fitness of their employees.

When managers praise employees for their skilled performance, employees gain a sense of accomplishment as added by B1P1. Interestingly, B1P1 and B2P1 claimed that positive compliments to their employees are an important aspect of practice in the workplace. For example, B1P1 stated, “every time I walk by the employees, I simply talk about the positive aspect of their work. I use phrases like *good job, really thank you for*

*your stunning contribution this afternoon. Customers seem happy when you serve them”.*

B1P2 and B2P2 even confirmed that they praised their employees in person and in the presence of other employees, which motivated them to play an active role in the company. Seemingly, Khan et al. (2016) confirmed that a leader’s ability to praise their employees increased the level of engagement in the workplace. Furthermore, Yang et al. (2020) confirmed that leaders with transformational leadership tenets motivated employees through their proactive personality.

**Employees’ Wellbeing.** Employees’ wellbeing is one of the important factors of work life balance that included the workplace safety, quality, and job satisfaction (Chohan, Butt, & Chohan, 2019). B1P1 and B1P2 claimed that sometimes they did not make employees’ wellbeing a priority, which might create stress and dissatisfaction for the employees. As suggested by Wu et al. (2017), B1P1 and B2P2 stated that, when leaders cared about the wellbeing of their employees, the level of engagement and retention increased. B1P1, B1P2, and B2P1 expressed concern that often they found it challenging to pay close attention to employees’ needs. Despite the negligence, participants made an effort to inquire about the needs of the employees. B1P1 believed that their supportive actions would help employees to complete their tasks routinely and increase the level of engagement, as highlighted by Blumberga and Austruma (2015). For example, B1P1 offered schedule flexibility for employees, which created a positive state of mind and increased employee engagement. B1P1 also guided their employees in understanding and completing the task. For example, B1P1 added, “I loved helping my

employees with day to day tasks such as completing the data entry to prepare inventory and sales report.” B1P1 also added, “I also reminded employees about their upcoming tasks so that employees did not feel overwhelmed. Sometimes, employees forget to check the temperature of the refrigerator, for which the food could get stale”. Thus, B1P1 gave them a friendly reminder, which motivated the employees to stay on top of their tasks. Such actions helped the employees to feel that their efforts are not in vain, and their managers cared about their hard work. The need for the managers to pay close attention to the employees’ schedule flexibility is significantly important in achieving task completion (Nathan, Prajogo, & Cooper, 2017).

B2P1 and B2P2 also mentioned how they provided extra attention to disabled employees’ needs, which can motivate them to work hard. If the disabled employee felt tired, B2P1 and B2P2 offered spare break time to rest. B2P2 stated, “We have to ensure that employees get thoughtful attention, so they exhibit extra efforts at work”. Hughes, Lusk, and Strause (2016) examined employees with disabilities and found employers promoted employee wellbeing by supporting them to take a break, coping up with stress, using electrical gadgets to track their tasks, and providing the flexibility of the schedule. “We even have office parties, where we invite all employees regardless of their position in the organization,” added by B2P1. Such recreational activities helped the employees to have a positive state of mind, which improved collegiality and motivation”. Researchers investigated 400 employees from 35 firms in Pakistan and found that fostering of cultural



programs and recreational activities enhanced employees' wellbeing (Chohan, Butt, & Chohan, 2019).

**Correlation to the literature.** The findings demonstrated the opportunity for work life balance as an effective strategy to engage employees. The interview responses revealed that participants understand the importance of employee wellbeing, and it's correlation to employee engagement. If the employees get attention from their employers, they will enjoy their work and perform better, which will result in passion and engagement. Retail leaders must understand the needs of their employees to increase the level of passion in completing their task. Breevaart and Bakker (2018) emphasized the need for the availability of resources to engage employees. Likewise, Patel et al. (2017) posited that the availability of resources influenced employees to work with passion. Employees provided with the availability of resources resulted in efficient employees (McCluney, Bryant, King, & Ali, 2017). The theme showed that employees gained a strong sense of work life balance, which enabled employees to invest their physical effort and tie emotional attachment into their job functionality. Through implementation of work life balance strategy, the employees were highly satisfied with their responsibilities, which showed eagerness in task completion. Promoting work life balance in the workplace is an effective way to enhance the quality of employees' life and the level of engagement.

**Correlation to the conceptual framework.** Using work life balance strategy such as addressing burnout, recognition, and wellbeing opportunities aligns with the

transformational leadership theory, which is the conceptual framework for this study.

Participants' responses referred to the individualized consideration attributes outlined for transformational leadership theory. Retail leaders used phrases related to inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, such as stress, long hours, lunch break, health, annual, sick, social interaction, burnout, flexibility, collegiality, attention, recreational, support, and praise. Getachew and Zhou (2018) posited that leaders with individualized consideration attributes helped employees to grow professionally by understanding the needs of their employees and treating them with uniqueness.

Hildenbrand et al. (2018) noted that leaders with inspirational motivation addressed employees' basic needs that enabled employees to decrease burnout and work hard for their organization. The finding is in agreement with Jain, Duggal, and Ansari (2019), who reported that transformational leaders stimulated the plethora of engagement antecedents by enhancing employee wellbeing and showing trust to their employees in reaching their potential even in difficult situations. Likewise, Kouni et al. (2018) revealed that leaders used transformational leadership tenets to enhance the level of job satisfaction, which resulted in motivating employees to engage in the workplace. Gerards et al. (2018) found that transformational leaders promoted employees' wellbeing through social interaction, which resulted in employee engagement. The findings supported Arnold's (2017) statement that transformational leaders increased the level of engagement by helping employees to gain a positive state of mind and health, which led to a decrease in employees' sickness. Leaders using the tenets of transformational leadership theory could

enhance the employees' sense of control over their work life balance in the workplace. The findings revealed the importance of transformational leadership style that leaders may adapt to improve employee engagement.

Table 5

*Theme 3: Work Life balance*

Sub Theme	<i>N</i>	Incidence
Avoid burnout	16	33 %
Recognition	19	40 %
Employees' wellbeing	13	27 %

*Notes.* *N*= Frequency of occurrence; Incidence= Percentage of occurrence. The findings indicated that the retail business leaders promoted work life balance by avoiding burnout, recognizing employees' effort, and enhancing wellbeing of the employees (see Table 5).

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The application of this study to professional practice included providing retail leaders with strategies to increase employee engagement and improve workforce productivity. Retail leaders need to understand the important factors that contribute to disengaged employees and strategies to decrease their impact on workforce productivity. Employee disengagement is a concern for the retail organization because of the decrease in productivity (U.S Census Bureau, 2019). An engaged employee would benefit the retail organizations in improving customer service (Tomasella & Ali, 2019), increasing employee and customer retention (Luo et al., 2015), and enhancing productivity (Ahsan & Rahman, 2016).

According to Hansbrough and Schyns (2018), the appeal of transformational leadership theory enabled leaders to influence their employees to gain a sense of dedication, commitment, and intelligence. Based on the transformational leadership theory, the results of this research study indicated that leaders with transformational leadership attribute and using effective business practices improved employee engagement and workforce productivity. From the viewpoint of successful retail leaders, implementing effective strategies to engage employees proved to improve the level of performance and workforce productivity. Transformational leadership strategies could help retail leaders to understand how to engage employees.

Exploring effective strategies may help retail leaders to understand the phenomenon that affects employee engagement in the retail organization. Retail leaders may better understand effective strategies needed to engage employees from this research study. Retail leaders may use this research as a guide to improve their business practice. The results from this study could contribute to an understanding of these effective business practices in-depth, in which retail leaders, business consultants, and business owners may seek to improve the level of employee engagement and workforce productivity.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include the potential of retail leaders to identify effective business practice that improves employee engagement and workforce productivity. Business leaders need to understand the business practices that influence

workforce productivity and affect the local community and the country's economy (Jia et al., 2019). If the business leaders contribute to the increase of employee engagement, financial gain may increase, which may result in job stability. Leaders in retail organizations increased profitability by improving employee engagement (Luo et al., 2015).

Success in the business would include improved workforce productivity, profitability, and economic prosperity. Businesses' sustainability and profitability are key influence on economic growth (Tomasella & Ali, 2019). Business leaders would use effective strategies, which might increase the level of employee engagement, competency level, and workforce productivity. An engaged employee becomes competent and is more likely to increase customer retention, and decrease product return, which may result in increased productivity of the organization (Ahsan & Rahman, 2016). Engaged employees have secured jobs, which could boost the country's economy (Sahni, 2019; Taufek & Mustafa, 2018).

The employees' job stability may affect social change by generating revenue for the government, which the government could invest in social activities. To promote a positive social change, Fowler, Coffey, and Dixon-Fowler (2019) suggested that business leaders implemented social activities to enhance positive social change for the wellbeing of the local community members. Business leaders and employees pay tax, which would increase the development of the local community and the country's economy. The government leaders could invest in public schools to educate students on global warming

with more resources. The findings from this study could help the retail leaders to work on social projects like global warming and create awareness in the local community. The implications for social change include exploring effective strategies that might increase the level of employee engagement to enhance workforce productivity, local community and the economy.

### **Recommendation for Action**

Based on the findings from this study, I recommend business leaders explore their business practices to improve employee engagement. Business leaders should evaluate their business practices and seek for improvement (Baltzan & Phillips, 2018). I recommend that business leaders, consultants, and entrepreneurs pay close attention to the results of this study to understand the importance of engaging employees with the tenets of transformational leadership styles. If business leaders determine that their organization has no effective business practices stimulated to engage employees, business leaders may want to consider using some of the effective strategies suggested in this study. I identified three recommendations for business leaders to use effective strategies (a) professional development, (b) collaboration, and (c) work life balance. The three recommendations are favorable to the current retail businesses who are struggling to engage their employees and increase workforce productivity. The findings of this study indicated that effective strategies motivate retail leaders to improve business practices and promote financial stability.

All participants indicated that the professional development of employees is crucial for employees to gain skills and remain engaged in the workplace. I recommend professional development to increase the skills and knowledge to understand the organizational goal and apply their best practices. Second, I recommend that retail leaders should incorporate a collaborative workplace for employees to exchange ideas and skills in achieving common goals. Lastly, retail leaders must recognize employees' efforts and dedication to promoting employee engagement. Retail leaders should not neglect the wellbeing of their employees; hence leaders should care for the employees' work life balance to increase the level of engagement.

I recommend using the transformational leadership theory as a leadership style to improve business practice. Leaders equipped with transformational leadership tenets improved workforce productivity, which raised the economic, social, and cultural aspects of their countries (Sayadi, 2016). Researchers further suggested the necessity for the transformational leadership tenets that leaders can use to increase productivity, which may enhance the overall performance of the retail industries (Matin et al., 2014). As described by researchers, transformational leaders enhanced employee engagement by promoting professional development (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018), collaboration (Peesker et al., 2019), and work life balance (Jain, Duggal, & Ansari, 2019). The findings of this study indicated that retail leaders adopting the tenets of transformational leadership are principal factors for engaging employees and increasing workforce productivity. Furthermore, I recommend business leaders, entrepreneurs, and consultants to promote

the findings of this research through business conferences and professional development seminars to encourage improvement in business practice.

The findings of this study are important for business leaders to improve productivity. Distribution of these findings will benefit the retail leaders to improve their business strategies in engaging employees. Therefore, I will publish my study in the ProQuest database for researchers, business leaders, consultants, and students. Dissemination of research findings is ways to improve business policies (Rose & Flynn, 2018). To publicize the findings of this research, I will provide a summary of the findings and recommendations to all participants. I will also present my findings by attending and presenting at business conferences. Furthermore, I will seek out business journals or associations to publish a journal article to reach the larger community of business leaders.

### **Recommendation for Further Research**

This study comprised of four retail leaders in the eastern region of the United States. I have several recommendations for further research. The primary limitations of this study resulted from the focus on retail organizations, geographical location, and sample size. Future researchers should conduct multiple case study that includes various retail organizations to assess the research findings across the retail sector. Retail organizations might not represent the entire retail sector to explore the strategies required for retail leaders to increase employee engagement and workforce productivity. Exploring other retail sectors might be helpful for future researchers to explore further in-depth and improve the reliability and validity of the result. The location for the research



study is the eastern region of the United States, which might be limited. I recommend exploring the strategies retail leaders use in other cities and states to confirm whether the emergent themes are comprehensive and universal. Lastly, I recommend including larger sample size, which might expand the research and achieve a robust result.

### **Reflections**

The doctoral study was an overwhelming yet rewarding experience for me. The literature review and participant selection process were an intricate part of this study. Though I obtained IRB approval within a month, I thought the selection of interviewees would be challenging. I wanted to ensure that the participants meet the criteria. During the interview, I was worried to inquire about the strategies participants used and whether they would be willing to share effortlessly. The participants provided valuable information that helped me to understand the sensitivity of how each participant handled the phenomenon. Having an open discussion with the interviewees was interesting as I discovered the complexities of business operations and strategies to enhance employee engagement.

In spite of the challenges, I was able to discover interesting information about business operations and the need for effective strategies to enhance employee engagement. During my doctoral journey, I experienced joy, intellect, and real-world experience. The findings from my study gave me several effective strategies that business owners, consultants, and researchers can use and make a difference in the retail organizations by contributing a positive social change. The results of this study inspired

me to explore further the retail business landscape that may benefit the broader community.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

The employees' poor performance harms the profitability and sustainability of the business. Some retail leaders lack strategies to improve employee engagement and increase workforce productivity. The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to use transformational leadership theory as the lens to explore strategies some retail leaders used to increase employee engagement and workforce productivity. Using the semistructured interview technique, I asked six-open ended questions to four retail leaders in the eastern region of the United States, and gathered data that addressed the research question of this study: What strategies do leaders of retail businesses use to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity?

The emerging three themes that are in need of adapting included: (a) professional development, (b) collaboration, and (c) work life balance. Retail leaders used effective strategies to improve employee engagement and workforce productivity. All four participants confirmed using professional development, collaboration, and work life balance as effective strategies to improve employee engagement. Using transformational leadership as the lens in analyzing the multiple case study involving the retail organization filled a gap in the literature. Owners and managers of retail organizations could use these themes to improve the level of employee engagement and workforce productivity.

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### Appendix A: Interview Protocol

- I will contact the participants, introduce myself and recap the informed consent form.
- I will check if the participants have any questions before they sign the informed consent form.
- I will schedule a date and place for interview.
- On the day of interview, I will greet them, recap the informed consent form, and remind them that the interview will be recorded.
- I will record the interview, transcribe the recording, and share the interpretation with the participants to confirm the accuracy.
- I will also request companies' documentation for methodological triangulation.

#### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies have you used to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity?
2. How did sales associates respond to the different strategies you used to increase productivity?
3. Which strategies were most effective and why?
4. What leadership skills did you use to increase employee engagement?
5. What are your key measures and indicators of employee engagement and workforce productivity?

6. What other information would you like to add regarding strategies to increase employee engagement?

## Appendix B: Recruitment Letter for Study Participants

[Date]

Re: A Research Study That May Interest You

Dear [Name]:

My name is Sada H. Jaman and I am currently a student at Walden University pursuing a doctoral degree in business administration (DBA). I am conducting research on what strategies do leaders of retail businesses use to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity entitled: "Business Leaders' Strategies to Increase Employee Engagement and Workforce Productivity." I am interested in conducting a study to explore what leadership strategies may increase employee engagement and workforce productivity.

I am seeking to interview managers' or supervisors of a retail organization/business who fit the following criteria:

- Be a manager/supervisor who has used leadership strategies to improve Employee Engagement,
- Be in a leadership position at a retail organization/business for at least 2 years,
- Manager/supervisor must have at least 3 to 5 subordinates,
- Manager/supervisor is currently employed in a retail organization/business,
- Manager/supervisor must be able to share key measures.

Managers/supervisors who fit the criteria for this study could share their insights and understanding to this research study. My research study will include a face-to-face

interview with the participants. At the end of this study, I will share results and findings with the participant, and Walden University.

If you have met the above criteria and is interested in participating in this research study, please contact me. Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants can withdrawal from this study at any time during the course of study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sada Jaman

Walden University DBA Student

## Appendix C: Request to Schedule an Interview

[Date]

Re: Request to Schedule an Interview

Dear [Name]:

The purpose of this letter is to schedule an interview with you. Because you have expressed your interest to participate in my studies, I would like to schedule an appointment for the interview. I will record the interview using a digital recorder and later, share with you the transcribed data. As per Walden University, you can withdraw at any point of time from this study. Interviews can be conducted in your place of organization/business. The interview will take 45-60 minutes. Will you be able to meet on any one of the following days/times in the week of \_\_\_\_\_ in your office?

Thursday - Anytime from \_\_\_\_\_ pm

Friday - Anytime from \_\_\_\_\_ pm

Once you confirm your availability, please contact me at to schedule the interview and confirm the date, time, and location.

Thank you.

Sada Jaman

Walden University DBA Student



## Appendix D: Human Subjects Research Certification

