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Strategies Small Business Leaders Use to Improve Employee Engagement

Jennifer A. Boyd
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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Jennifer A. Boyd

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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by

Jennifer A. Boyd

MBA, Strayer University, 2008

BS, Upper Iowa University, 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2020

Abstract

When employees are disengaged, owners of small businesses face decreased employee productivity, which affects profitability. Owners of small businesses may reduce the profits lost annually by implementing strategies to improve employee engagement.

Grounded in the social exchange theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that 3 small business owners in Virginia used to improve employee engagement. The participants selected successfully implemented strategies to improve employee engagement. Data were collected using semistructured interviews via Zoom audio, employee handbooks, and documents obtained from the small businesses' websites. The 3 themes that emerged from the thematic analysis were relationships, leadership behavior, and communication. A key recommendation for owners of small businesses is to conduct employee orientation training with all new employees on operational procedures that support employee-customer relationships and engagement. The implication for positive social change includes a potential culture of volunteerism and corporate citizenship. An engaged employee could improve social issues such as tutoring programs, community reinvestment projects, or job opportunities.

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Dedication

I dedicate my works to my Heavenly Father, who opened the door to make this possible; for this, I have God. I pray for God's favor in this study and to direct my future works, and that the results of this study will be helpful to others along life's pathway. I dedicate my works to the memory of the two people God blessed me with at the age of nine who adopted me and became my parents, the late Mr. John P. Boyd and the late Mrs. Sadie M. Jordan Boyd. Because they taught me what it means to have a relationship with God and walk with him, trust him, and continue to pray, they got me to this point in life.

Acknowledgments

Thank you, God, for loving me. I also dedicated this research study to my brothers. This sister-in-law had loved and supported me over the years and provided emotional and physical support and believed in my abilities even when I became discouraged. This journey would not be possible without the love and support of my dearest friends near and far. I want to thank you, everyone, for your kindness and resolute support. My unwavering gratitude is dedicated to all of you.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Employee engagement has a significant influence on an organization's productivity and can also influence employees' willingness to cooperate during change. In the 1980s and 1990s, managers became interested in ways to engage employees because employee engagement could lead to improved job performance and increased productivity (Crossley, Cooper, & Wernsing, 2013; Purcell, 2014). Small business leaders in the 21st century also look for ways to improve employee engagement and increase performance (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). Small business leaders strive to develop strategies to increase productivity, profitability, job performance, and customer services by enhancing employee engagement during organizational change (Guerci, Radaelli, Siletti, Cirella, & Shani, 2015).

Some small business leaders may view the employee as their most significant asset for an organization to meet their goals to implement employee engagement strategies. Also, leaders in small business organizations often struggle to create methods to measure employee engagement, and the effect engaged employees have on the organization's success (Abu-Shamaa, Al-Rabayah, & Khasawneh, 2015). Effective problem-solving is crucial for promoting a culture of engaged employees within an organization (Swarnalatha & Prasanna, 2013). I addressed a gap in research by concentrating on strategies small business leaders use to improve employee engagement and how engaged employees influence the organization's success.

Background of the Problem

Disengaged employees result in a decrease in production and do not align with the organization's goals. Fisher, Strider, and Kelso (2016) mentioned that disengaged

employees in the United States cost organization leaders \$450 to \$550 billion because of the lack of productivity from disengaged employees. Pater and Lewis (2012) shared the results from a survey indicating an increase of disengagement among low-level employees resulted from a lack of trust in managers within the organization. However, an engaged employee contributes to increased retention, productivity, and profitability in small business organizations. Hough, Green, and Plumlee (2015) declared that engaged employees contribute to increased retention enabling the organization to retain valued employees. Osborne and Hammoud (2017) stated that human resource managers in organizations realize that employee engagement is necessary for maintaining high-performing employees, which leads to increased productivity and profitability. Disengaged employees hinder growth, requiring small business leaders to incorporate strategies to engage employees.

Managers of small business organizations strive to improve employee engagement by identifying strategies to bridge the gaps between engaged and disengaged employees in the organization. Joo and Lee (2017) specified that employees with a positive attitude toward the organization engage themselves emotionally and cognitively in the workplace. Guerci et al. (2015) declared that a significant gap exists in the literature regarding the desired and actual employee engagement within organizations. Gallup (as cited in Jindal, Shaikh, & Shashank, 2017) identified that disengaged employees are less productive, less loyal, dissatisfied, and often unsure about the expectations of their work. Small business leaders implement strategies to increase employee engagement to bridge the gap between engaged and disengaged employees.

Problem Statement

Some small business leaders must address issues of disengaged employees to prevent a negative effect on profits (Lynch, Price, & Hofmeyr, 2018). Disengaged employees within small business organizations cost the United States more than 6 million dollars annually (Essien & McCarthy, 2019). The general business problem was that high employee disengagement results in increased costs and reduced profitability. The specific business problem was that some small business leaders lack strategies to improve employee engagement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business leaders used to improve employee engagement. The population consisted of three managers from small business organizations in the northern United States who had improved profits through increased employee engagement. The contributions to social change may include decreased unemployment through increased hiring in local communities. Additionally, with increased profits, small business leaders may contribute more financial support for local and community-based service organizations and initiatives.

Nature of the Study

Researchers use the qualitative method to describe participants' viewpoints and experiences. Borrego, Foster, and Froyd (2014) indicated that a researcher might gain a deeper understanding of phenomena by using data gathered from a variety of resources through the qualitative method. Stake (2013) posited that researchers use the quantitative methodology to examine the relationship between variables; a quantitative method was

not suitable for exploring perceptions in the current study. I did not test theories or determine the relationship between variables. In a mixed-method study, a researcher examines relationships between variables and conducts face-to-face interviews, which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Wardale, Cameron, & Li, 2015). I rejected the mixed-methods approach because no examination of quantitative relationships or testing of hypotheses was necessary for this study.

I reviewed several qualitative research designs, such as phenomenological, case study, and ethnography, and selected a multiple case study design. A phenomenological design consists of documenting the lived experiences of a phenomenon from the perspective of participants. Researchers use a multiple case study design to conduct face-to-face in-depth interviews regarding a social phenomenon (Yin, 2017). Researchers use an ethnographic design when studying a cultural group over an extended period (Yin, 2017). Yin (2017) suggested that ethnography includes observing characteristics of culture by direct observation and interaction with participants. I rejected ethnography because the purpose of this study was not to seek data on cultures through direct observation. I rejected the phenomenological design because this study did not address the experiences of employees. After a careful review of phenomenological, case study, and ethnographic designs, I selected a multiple case study to gain a thorough understanding of successful strategies small business leaders used for improving employee engagement.

Research Question

What strategies do small business leaders use to improve employee engagement?

Interview Questions

1. What are the specific strategies you use to engage employees?
2. How do you define employee engagement?
3. Which of your engagement strategies produce the best results?
4. How did you implement strategies to improve employee engagement?
5. How has implementing employee engagement strategies created success in the organization?
6. How do you communicate engagement strategies throughout the organization?
7. How do you measure employee engagement?
8. How do you use data from evaluations to improve employee engagement strategies?
9. How do you build trust with your employees?
10. What other information concerning employee engagement strategies can you share with me to help me understand how to sustain highly engaged employees?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the social exchange theory (SET) by Homans (1959). Saks (2006) extended SET by revealing that employee engagement occurs when a two-way relationship exists between the managers and the employees. Saks (as cited in Kamau & Sma, 2016) developed three constructs for engaging employees: trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment. Agarwal, Datta, Blake-Beard, and Bhargava (2012) declared that the fundamental tenets of SET are vigor, dedication, and absorption. Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, and Hall (2017) extended SET by suggesting

that employees perceive themselves to be a good fit, and employees repay the organization through an excessive degree of engagement. SET was appropriate for the current study to explore how managers build trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment to engage employees in an organization.

Operational Definitions

Disengaged employee: An employee who shows withdrawal and disconnection in the duties they are expected to perform (Yanchus, Carameli, Ramsel, & Osatuke, 2020).

Horizontal trust: The trust employees have in coworkers (Hasche, Höglund, & Mårtensson, 2020).

Reciprocity: A concept within organizations linking trust between managers and employees (Byron & Landis, 2020).

Social exchange theory: A reciprocal relationship identified through a series of interactions between two parties who are in a state of reciprocating interdependence and obligation (Aktar & Pangil, 2017).

Vertical trust: The trust employees have in their supervisors (Lisbona, Bernabé, & Palací, 2020).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are needed to validate the results of a study. Assumptions are statements researchers consider to be true but can not be confirmed (Yazan, 2015). Assumptions are essential to a researcher's ability to produce ethical research through unprejudiced reporting (Kirkwood & Price, 2013; Pilcher & Cortazzi, 2016). One assumption in the current study was that all participants would provide honest responses

to each interview question. Additional assumptions were that the research method, design, and sampling were appropriate for answering the research question. I also assumed that the participants would provide current documentation. Finally, I assumed that the participants' responses would lead to improved employee engagement strategies and improved productivity for similar small businesses.

Limitations

Limitations are present in all studies and are identified to assess the study results. Limitations are potential weaknesses of the study that are beyond the researcher's control (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013; Henderson, 2014; Yeatman, Trinitapoli, & Hayford, 2013). The first limitation of this study was that the geographical location was limited to Northern Virginia; Washington, DC; and Maryland. The second limitation was that the sample size was limited to three small business leaders who implemented strategies to engage employees. The third limitation was that some small business leaders who participated in this study might have displayed some bias toward engaging employees because of their position as the implementing manager. The fourth limitation was that I did not quantify the relationship between variables or determine the degree to which variables influence the participants and their situation; however, the multiple case study design was expected to provide rich data. The fifth limitation was that Zoom audio interviews are time-consuming and may negatively influence the schedules of the researcher and participants. I informed the participants of the time requirements before they agreed to take part in the study.

Delimitations

Delimitations are present in all studies. Delimitations are the characteristics restricting the scope of the study (Crossman & Kazdin, 2016) and concern the data, participants, and geographic location of the study (Brutus et al., 2013). The first delimitation of this study was that I interviewed only three small business leaders with knowledge of successful engagement strategies in small business organizations. The second delimitation was the geographic location, which was limited to Northern Virginia; Washington, DC; and Maryland. The results of the study may not be applicable for large business organizations.

Significance of the Study

Contribution and Value to Business Practice

Small business leaders may use the findings and conclusions from this study to identify strategies to increase employee engagement, productivity, and profitability. Hultman (2020) shared that engaged employees contributed to a 21% increase in profitability through better customer service, increased productivity, and higher retention of employees in the organization. Radda, Majidadi, and Akanno (2015) identified that gaps in employee engagement cost businesses in the United States about 300 billion dollars annually in productivity. Small business leaders who have a good understanding of employee engagement strategies may increase employee engagement in their organization and improve the organization's profitability.

Implications for Social Change

This study may contribute to a positive social change by small business organizations sustaining employment and reinvesting profits for the well-being of

communities. Attaran, Attaran, and Kirkland (2019) declared that small business leaders increased the workforce by 15% by implementing employee engagement strategies. Chin, Yang, Zhang, Yu, and Cao (2019) stated that engaged employees are the spirit of the community by their strong commitment to the welfare of society. M. Smith and Bititci (2017) shared that in the last decade, the U.S. economy became strong because of engaged employees and a growing earning per share. Small business leaders who implement employee engagement strategies may contribute to an increase in productivity, improved community relations, and a more robust economy.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business leaders used to improve employee engagement. An extensive search of more than 200 scholarly peer-reviewed articles and dissertations yielded appropriate resources pertinent to the topic of SET and employee engagement. The databases used included Google Scholar, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and Emerald Management Journals. I also used government websites and databases.

A review of the literature consists of reading, analyzing, and writing a synthesis on the scholarly studies regarding specific topics, which provides a foundation for a dissertation (Garrard, 2013). I reviewed articles from peer-reviewed journals, books, and reports and reviewed material related to SET, disengaged employees, employee engagement, employee resistance to change, and organizational change. In this review of the literature, I explain the available research and the problems that result from managers who do not implement strategies that engage employees.

I organized this literature review using seven subcategories, including a discussion of the conceptual framework, employee engagement, the importance of employee engagement, successful employee engagement, the organization, and employee engagement, trusting management, and communication. I selected several sources for this study and conducted most of the searches in the Walden University library. I also used Business Source Complete, SAGE Premier, Google Scholar, and EBSCO host. The key search terms included *social exchange theory, disengaged employees, employee engagement, resistance to organizational change, resistance, servant leadership, importance, success, communication, trust, working relationships, middle management, management*, and combinations of these terms. This literature review contains 138 sources; 93 were published between 2016 and 2020, and 45 were published earlier.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework selected for this multiple case study was SET. Homans (as cited in Soieb, Othman, & D'Silva, 2013) developed SET in 1959, and implied that social behavior is a result of the exchange process between two parties. SET involves interaction between two parties producing personal obligation, appreciation, and trust (Rather, 2019). SET relates to an employee's knowledge of incentives that exist, and that their accomplishments would offer the highest value to the organization (Xiong & King, 2019). SET is the exchange of noticeable and unnoticeable activities that reward or benefit at least two parties (Cropanzano et al., 2017). SET is a robust approach that managers use regarding employee engagement. Researchers described engagement as a two-way relationship involving employees and managers within the organization and how employees pay the organizations back by their level of engagement (Neuhofer,

Kittel, & Reindl, 2016; Saks, 2006). SET includes identified factors that small business leaders can use to improve employee engagement.

Scholars defined SET as reciprocity and the tenets of SET as a reciprocal relationship between two parties through a series of interactions. Oparaocha (2016) declared that SET creates feelings of obligation by the employees to reciprocate trust in managers within the organization. The key tenet of SET is relationships that develop between the managers and employees consisting of trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment when both parties abide by the rules of the exchange (Kumau & Sma, 2016). Reciprocity is a value within organizations linking trust between managers and employees. Rana (2015) described SET as a possible framework for organizations, affording managers the chance to foster reciprocal interdependency between managers and employees. Small business leaders used strategies, including reciprocity, to gain the trust of employees.

SET tenets are vigor, dedication, absorptions, trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment used by managers to engage employees. Chooi, Ramayah, and Doris (2018) posited that the three main tenets of SET for employee engagement are a positive state of mind characterized by vigor (employees show a high level of energy), dedication (employees' strong emotional devotion to work), and absorption (total employee engagement at work). Saks (2006) declared that the primary tenets of SET consist of trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment developed from relationships over time between managers and employees, as long as both parties adhere to the rules. Kamau and Sma (2016) shared that the tenets of SET involve reciprocity whereby the managers' and employees' actions support the goals of the organization. Small business leaders may use

the tenets of SET to engage employees and maintain a positive relationship with employees.

Employees benefit the organization through engagement. Rana (2015) declared that employees repay organizations by their level of engagement. Kumar and Pansari (2015) shared that employees who receive a high level of praise and excellent training feel a sense of obligation to display a higher level of engagement. Y. H. Huang et al. (2016) shared that employees often become more engaged in the resources and benefits they receive from the organization. Small business leaders developed strategies to engage employees who showed reciprocity between the managers and employees, which were valuable tenets of SET.

This conceptual framework was Homans's SET (1959). Homans suggested that SET, combined with sociology, social psychology, and anthropology, can describe how employees work together as a result of shared interests in the organization. Saks (2017) noted that an employee's performance influenced their engagement in the work environment. Neuhofer et al. (2016) mentioned that Homans created SET and divided the theory into five categories that aid managers in structuring employees' performance based on benefits and rewards: (a) success proposition, (b) stimulus proposition, (c) value proposition, (d) deprivation-satiation proposition, and (e) emotions proposition.

Success proposition. Success proposition refers to an employee receiving a reward for a job they performed (Homans, 1959). Employees are more likely to perform at a higher level resulting in employee's action or act of engagement, rewarding the results, and repeating the initial action (Govender & Bussin, 2020). Cropanzano et al. (2017) stated that managers who used the success proposition discovered that the less

often the action was rewarded, the less likely the employee would be to repeat the action. Small business leaders who use success proposition increase employee engagement and productivity in the organization.

Stimulus proposition. Stimulus proposition was the second fundamental proposition explored by Homans (1959). Cropanzano et al. (2017) declared that a job performed by the employee had a reward and that the employee may repeat similar tasks because of previous rewards. Stimulus proposition occurs when a manager reinforces stimulus at the degree of similarity between the present stimuli and the rewards the employee received from past performance (Cropanzano et al., 2017). The similarities depend on the task completed, which differentiates each employee's ability to complete an action based on one or a combination of stimuli.

Value proposition. The value proposition was the third fundamental proposition explored by Homans (1959). An employee's value proposition includes a description of different employee policies, benefit programs, and reward programs used by managers to increase employee engagement (Neuhofer et al., 2016). Researchers declared that managers who build their team within the organization by using employee value proposition had a higher chance of engaging employees (Neuhofer et al., 2016; Saks, 2017). Small business leaders who use elements from valued proposition develop employees and sustain engagement in the organization.

Deprivation satiation proposition. The deprivation satiation proposition was the fourth proposition defined by Homans (1959). Cropanzano et al. (2017) described deprivation satiation as a plan that includes rewards and punishments based on values measured as positive and negative. Neuhofer et al. (2016) suggested that the more an

employee receives rewards, the less they value the reward. Mitchell, Cropanzano, and Quisenberry (2012) determined that employees value some rewards, excluding the desire to meet lower needs. Small business leaders who use deprivation satiation proposition may engage employees through rewards and punishment when applicable.

Emotions proposition. Emotions proposition is the fifth proposition developed by Homans (1959). Emotions propositions occur when there are various reward conditions. Homans suggested that emotions proposition indicates that employees' emotional reactions are different regarding awards. Rana (2015) asserted that group relationships improve through feelings of belonging and more productivity by engaged employees. Small business leaders use emotions proposition to give more rewards in multiple areas of sustaining productivity.

SET is a widely accepted theory used to explain employee engagement. Mitchell et al. (2012) stated that SET, viewed as a self-interested motive regarding rewards, punishment, and development of management techniques, provides a way to increase employee engagement and improve productivity. AbuKhalifeh and Som (2013) asserted that SET is used to engage employees in the workplace. Saks (2017) posited that SET is the theoretical foundation for employee engagement that predicts employees' outcomes and the success of an organization. Small business leaders use SET to establish strategies to increase employee engagement through training and reward for high levels of performance that increase productivity.

Alternative Theories

Employee engagement and self-determination theories were considered for the conceptual framework but were not selected. After reviewing these theories, I rejected

them because neither provided data on how to improve employee engagement or how engaging employees in the workplace contributed to increasing employee engagement.

Employee engagement theory. Employee engagement theory refers to employees' psychological states. Montani, Boudrias, and Pigeon (2020) found that employee engagement theory includes the psychological conditions with the following elements: (a) meaningfulness, (b) safety, and (c) availability. However, Kahn (1990) declared that the state of an employee's engagement based on the psychological conditions results in engaged or disengaged employees in the organization. Kahn's theory of employee engagement was found unsuitable for this study because I did not address the psychological state of an employee.

Employee engagement refers to the degree to which an employee shows an emotional connection to their jobs. Kahn (1990) shared that employee engagement occurs when an employee has a psychological condition of employee engagement. However, Levitats and Vigoda-Gadot (2020) stated that engaged employees connect to their job physically, cognitively, and emotionally. Bailey, Madden, Alfes, and Fletcher (2017) also suggested that employee engagement promotes the physical and emotional experience employees display, connecting them to their jobs. The employee engagement theory was rejected because physical, cognitive, and emotional characteristics do not help the manager develop strategies to improve employee engagement.

Self-determination theory. Small business leaders used the self-determination theory (SDT) when studying the self-motivation and self-determination of an employee in the organization. Donald et al. (2020) found that researchers used SDT for studying the self-motivation and self-determination of an employee. Rezvani, Khosravi, and Dong

(2017) declared that SDT refers to a motivational theory that focuses on concerns of employee engagement from an academic and professional viewpoint of the manager. Likewise, Howard, Gagné, Morin, and Van den Broeck (2016) shared that researchers use SDT to determine how motivation affects employee engagement and determines its implications for the organization. I rejected the SDT because this study was not about self-determination or self-motivation strategies small business leaders used to engage employees.

SDT is a motivation theory that addresses various concerns about employee engagement in organizations. J. C. Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens, and Smith (2016) found that researchers used SDT to explain how an employee's level of motivation influences employee engagement and demonstrates the significance of the organization. Wilson, Sitbon, Brereton, Johnson, and Koplick (2016) shared that managers use SDT as a work theory to motivate employees who desire to grow independently in the organization to achieve self-defined goals. SDT was unsuitable for addressing employee engagement because the theory focuses on individual motivation for personal growth.

Employee Engagement

Components of employee engagement in an organization are vigor, absorption, and dedication. Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2016) declared that the three components of employee engagement are positive, fulfilling the state of mind for employees. Likewise, S. K. Singh, Burgess, Heap, and Al Mehrzi (2016) declared that vigor occurs when an engaged employee displays a high level of energy from resilience in the workplace. Mazzetti, Biolcati, Guglielmi, Vallesi, and Schaufeli (2016) shared that an employee's ability to invest energy in their work, the ability to not easily be fatigued, and the

determination to handle problems are components of vigor. De Carvalho Chinelato, Ferreira, and Valentini (2019) stated that dedication happens when the engaged employee is involved in their work by having a positive attitude about their job. W. R. Carter, Nesbit, Badham, Parker, and Sung (2018) shared that dedication applies to employees who have a feeling of enthusiasm and significance and display a sense of pride and inspiration for the role they play in achieving the organization's goals. Bakker (2017) acknowledged that for an engaged employee engrossed in their work, time quickly passes, and the employee experiences difficulties detaching from their work. Small business leaders use vigor, dedication, and absorption as important attributes to encourage a positive change of an employee's state of mind related to their jobs in the organization.

Types of employee engagement. Small business leaders referred to three types of employee engagement related to how employees interact with managers and coworkers in the organization. The three types of employee engagement consisted of trait engagement, state engagement, and behavioral engagement (Alrashidi, Phan, & Ngu, 2016). Imandin, Bisschoff, and Botha (2015) found that trait engagement is an employee's disposition, state engagement is an employee's current feelings, and behavioral engagement is how the employee performs their jobs. However, Alrashidi et al. (2016) noted that trait engagement refers to employees who are more engaged than others in the workplace. Konstantinova, Kazimirova, and Perepelkina (2018) distinguished five characteristics of trait engagement: (a) positive view of personal life and the work environment, (b) proactiveness, (c) autotelic personality (more experienced employees), (d) locus of control, and (e) conscientiousness. Managers who apply the characteristics of trait

engagement in the workplace may contribute to happier and more engaged employees.

State engagement refers to an employee's current feeling about their job in the organization. Bailey et al. (2017) found that state engagement occurs when employees are more engaged in their duties at work, depending on the circumstances from one day to another. Some employees may possess that feeling of being in the zone. Likewise, Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2016) mentioned that the characteristics of state engagement by an employee include (a) empowered, (b) committed, (c) involved, and (d) satisfied with their job. M. Liu, Calvo, Pardo, and Martin (2015) noted that trait and state engagement leads to behavioral engagement. Employees' feelings towards their job directly relate to their state or feeling on the job.

Behavioral engagement refers to an employee who works diligently while performing their tasks in the workplace. M. Liu et al. (2015) stated that the three elements that refer to behavioral engagement include (a) proactive employees and personal initiative, (b) role expansion, and (c) engaged with other employees and managers. Likewise, Deskins (2018) found that behavioral engagement offers employees an opportunity to broaden their use of available resources and display this behavior in a workplace environment. Small business leaders use the attributes of behavioral engagement to match employees with the proper job in the organization for a positive outcome.

Drivers of employee engagement. The drivers of employee engagement used in the workplace represent a stimulus to engaged employees in an organization. Radda et al. (2015) discovered that managers used eight drivers to engage employees proactively. The eight employee engagement drivers include the following: (a) trust and integrity, (b)

employee fits the job, (c) synchronization of individual and organization's performance, (d) career growth opportunities, (e) pride in the organization, (f) team members and coworkers, (g) employee development, and (h) line manager relationship.

Trust and integrity. Popli and Rizvi (2016) stated that managers use this driver to show employees that managers care about them, open up to them, and establish adequate communication channels. Managers show an interest in the employee, ensure the employee matters, and affirm that the values and goals of the organization align with the employee's behavior.

An employee job fit. Cascio (2015) shared that the human resource department in an organization selects the correct fit for the organization that supported their goals. Radda et al. (2015) found that employees are excited, challenged, and allowed to take ownership of the job. Employees may view this as an exciting and challenging opportunity when allowed to take ownership and offer assistance in the decision-making process.

Management of individual and organization's performance. in this driver, employees display appreciation for the organization's goals, understand the effect of high-quality performance, and each employee had a consciousness of how performance enhances the company's overall performance.

Career growth opportunities. in this driver, employees strive to grow in their careers and seek promotion opportunities. Employees seek training opportunities to define their place in their chosen career paths.

Pride about the organization. this driver indicates that an employee's self esteem derived from association with the organization, increasing their level of engagement.

Employees also positively advertise the organization to the customers and potentially draw talented employees from rival organizations.

Coworkers/team members. in this driver, loyal employees increase the engagement of employees in the organization.

Employee development: in this driver, the organization develops programs to help enhance the personal skills of employees.

Line manager relationship. in this driver, managers had a good working relationship with employees, which increases the degree of engagement.

The driver of employee engagement had a direct effect on the positive, confident expectation of the organization by sustaining growth and giving the employees a sense of belonging to the organization (Radda et al., 2015). Small business leaders had a deepened understanding of employee engagement drivers to sustain a highly engaged workforce in the organization.

Importance of Employee Engagement

In the current economy, engaged employees are committed to the organizations' goals described in the five drivers of engagement. Jeanson and Michinov (2020) shared that engaged employees are involved, dedicated, and enthusiastic about their daily work and display a commitment to the organization's goals. Likewise, Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) declared that managers use the five drivers system to engage their employees actively.

1. Managers must be competent, should add value to the task, and motivate employees to make the right decisions and judgment calls, allowing them to do their best work.

2. Goals that are created within the proper context drive everything in the organization. Goals should be set suitably for each employee, using their talents to complete the job.
3. Progression and regression were used for measuring objectives; knowledgeable managers typically accomplished these contextual goals.
4. Resources needed to complete the job are available and provided by managers. Managers do not pay the cost of these resources, but the organization provides sufficient resources to complete the job. Organizations must provide adequate resources to remain innovative and continue to engage employees.
5. Employees perform at their best with sufficient autonomy, which was self-directed behavior; autonomy was a lever that enforces employee engagement to full implementation.

Small business leaders used the five drivers to sustain employee engagement and develop new techniques of autonomy for employees.

Employee engagement barriers. Managers strived to overcome five barriers to develop effective strategies for a highly engaged workforce. Saks (2017) declared that employee engagement barriers help an organization foster an engaged workforce. The five engagement barriers are the following: (a) engagement definition barrier, (b) engagement referent barrier, (c) how to measure engagement measurement barrier, (d) engagement driver barrier, and (e) engagement strategy barrier.

Employee engagement was a significant barrier that managers face. Jena, Bhattacharyya, and Pradhan (2017) stated that employee engagement as heightened

emotional and intellectual connection that an employee had for their job, organization, manager, and coworkers. However, Kahn (1990) shared that employee engagement occurs when an employee expresses oneself physically, cognitively, and emotionally during their job performance. Likewise, Costantini et al. (2017) found that employee engagement occurred when an employee had a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Small business leaders defined employee engagement to develop a highly engaged workforce.

Referent barriers were critical to managers measuring and improving employee engagement. Saks (2017) mentioned six types of engagement (a) job engagement, (b) task engagement, (c) team engagement, (d) business-unit engagement, (e) organization engagement, and (f) learning engagement. However, Shantz, Arevshatian, Alfes, and Bailey (2016) shared that job engagement was the actual job that the employee performs. Whereas Kazimoto (2016) declared that engagement refers to a particular task, activity, project, or assignment managers deem as part of the employee's job. Jindal and Shaikh (2016) posited that team engagement refers to the roles, responsibilities, and duties related to an employee's assignment to a specific group. However, Mozammel and Haan (2016) declared that business-unit engagement defines an employee's membership to a department with their roles, responsibilities, and tasks assigned by the lead manager. Albrecht, Breidahl, and Marty (2018) stated that organization engagement refers to the energy and dedication of the employee's ability to achieve goals set by the organization. Also, Saks (2017) noted that learning engagement involves employees participating in training events, community events, or activities. Small business leaders may refer to the

six tenets of referent employee engagement types to measure and improve employee engagement.

Measurement barrier referred to how managers measured employee engagement in an organization. Gupta and Sharma (2016) stated that managers within the organization used the 12 item Gallup scale to measure the conditions in which employees were engaged. Also, Ukil (2016) declared that managers used the Gallup 12 item scales to measure an employee's outcome, including productivity level, customer service, quality of work, retention of employees, and the organization's profit. Likewise, the most frequent use of the employee engagement 12 item scales developed by Gallups includes the following constructs vigor, dedication, and absorption use to measure employee engagement. Also, Mann and Harter (2016) mentioned that an excellent way to measure employee engagement should start with how the organization defines employee engagement to developed ways to measure engagement. Managers use the measurement barrier to improving employee engagement within an organization by using Gallup 12 item scale.

The engagement barrier referred to how managers determine employee engagement in the organization. Saks (2017) shared that the engagement barriers was the primary barrier manager use to determine driver to engage employees. Likewise, Petrou, Demerouti, and Schaufeli (2018) shared that managers primarily focus on improving employee engagement instead of negative factors removed from the organization. Shuck, Osam, Zigarmi, and Nimon (2017) shared that engagement was consistent with the employee's values, and when the goals of the organization align with the employee's

goals, the employees become more engaged. Managers who used the engagement barrier improve employee engagement.

The strategy barrier refers to the manager's ability to develop engagement strategies at the organization level. Saks (2017) shared that managers are faced with challenges to develop organizational comprehensive engagement strategies that resulted in substantive changes to employee engagement in the organization. Likewise, Sun and Henderson (2017) declared that managers use multiple actions and integrate system-wide approaches to improve engagement at the organization level. However, Saks (2017) stated that three approaches are necessary for engagement strategy barriers. The engagement strategies include the following: (a) integrated into the human resources office policies, (b) managers in the organization should ensure dedicated human resources management practices designed to create high levels of employee commitment and long-term relationships between the employees and the organization; and (c) managers should focus on maximizing collective organizational engagement by using the organization's resources. Managers should integrate engagement policies, processes, and systems to increase employee engagement.

Employee engagement challenges. Small business leaders developed strategies to overcome challenges to engage employees. Jha and Kumar (2016) acknowledged that managers' most significant challenges were engaging employees, which boosts competitiveness in the organization. Likewise, Chooi et al. (2018) found that managers' significant challenges are creating ways to engage employees, were committed, enthusiastic about the job, and went the extra mile for the organization to meet goals and accomplish the mission. However, Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) found that managers who

engaged employees contributed to increased productivity and profitability. Small business leaders created ways to overcome challenges when engaging employees contributed to increasing productivity, profitability, and sustaining the organization's goals.

Managers may use techniques to lessen challenges to engage employees within an organization. Osborne and Hammoud (2107) found that managers who used useful listening techniques showed that fairness, showed respect, and built trust with employees decreased the challenges of employee engagement. Siddiqui and Sahar (2019) revealed that managers who use details and rigorous regulations as a strategy to improve employee engagement lessen challenges. Also, Ahmetoglu, Harding, Akhtar, and Chamorro-Premuzic (2105) declared that a manager who develops successful strategies lessens the challenges of engaging employees by increasing customer satisfaction, profits, and productivity. Small business leaders increased customer satisfaction, profits, and productivity by developing strategies to lessen the challenges of employee engagement.

Small business leaders developed a positive relationship with employees, increased productivity, and profitability for the organization. Siddiqui and Sahar (2019) declared that employee engagement in an organization refers to rigorous regulations that managers use to improve employee engagement, resulting in increased productivity. Godkin (2015) and Sirisetti (2012) indicated that managers could increase employee engagement by creating positive relationships in the workplace. Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) shared that employee engagement affects practices in an organization, such as increased productivity, profitability, and loyalty of employees. However, Ahmetoglu et al. (2015) revealed that managers who increased customer satisfaction, profits, and

employee productivity successfully developed and implemented strategies improving employee engagement. Engaged employees create sustainability, which permits the organization to increase profits.

Managers who show appreciation to employees display strategies that improve employee engagement. Fletcher, Bailey, Alfes, and Madden (2020) found that for the manager to show appreciation required a more detailed understanding of the organization's processes and how to handle engaged employees. Likewise, Kazimoto (2016) stated that the openness of a manager's behavior had been proven as an essential element to engage employees regardless of the skills and knowledge they possess. Men and Stacks (2014) posited that authentic and supportive managers influence employee engagement through increasing their involvement, satisfaction, and interest in the work of the employee. Small business leaders implemented strategies showing appreciation for the work the employee performs may contribute to positive attitudes and behavior of employees.

Three components that characterize employees' daily engagement in the organization are vigor, dedication, and absorption. Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2016) declared that vigor occurs when an employee displays a high level of energy and the ability to invest effort in their work. Bakker and Albrecht (2018) stated that dedication occurs when an employee was deeply involved in their work and displays a positive attitude, enthusiasm, inspiration, and a sense of pride in their job. Carter et al. (2018) suggested that absorption occurs when employees concentrate and are deeply engrossed in their work, whereby time at work passes quickly, and the employees experience

difficulties detaching from their work at the end of the day. Vigor, dedication, and absorption are the basic tenets to employee engagement.

Three types of engaged employees exist within an organization. Anitha (2014) declared that engaged employees, non-engaged employees, and actively disengaged employees exist in the workplace. Seymour and Geldenhuys (2018) stated that engaged employees are employees who strive for excellence consistently in their position within the organization. Page and Pande (2018) posited that non-engaged employees cost organizations billions of dollars yearly, according to Gallup polls showing that 68.5% of employees are nonengaged in the position they hold with organizations. However, Carter and Baghurst (2014) noted that disengaged employees often had an adverse effect that contributes to increased absenteeism, unethical behavior, and often infecting coworkers with their negative attitude. John and Chadha (2018) discovered that 24% of actively disengaged employees are unhappy and unproductive, resulting in 340 million employees actively disengaged around the world. Small business leaders strived to influence employees to decrease the number of nonengaged and disengaged employees within an organization.

Successful Employee Engagement

An employee's engagement was characterized by the contribution, fulfillment, and energy to complete the work assigned to them. Davenport and Watson (2013) suggested that 66% of the employees were highly engaged, committed to the organization, and had no desire to leave their occupations versus 36% of employees who were moderately engaged, and 12% who were disengaged. Hewitt (2013) declared that engaged employees contribute significantly to the completion of the task assigned in the

workplace. Davenport and Watson (2013) revealed that an employee engagement survey conducted by The Towers Perrin HR consultancy firm indicated that highly engaged employees are stable. Hewitt (2013) declared that employee engagement within an organization had four levels, which are the following:

1. Highly engaged employees had a strong alignment with the organization's mission, vision, and objectives of the organization.
2. Moderately engaged employees had a positive attitude about their work and are engaged in the task.
3. Engaged employees display productive behavior.
4. Actively disengaged employees often feel disconnected from their jobs and often unhappy at work.

Engaged employees make positive comments about the organization, intend to retain their employment with the company, and strive to give their best daily. Small business leaders improved employee engagement by creating a survey to obtain data on employee engagement and use the four levels of engagement to increase engagement in the organization.

The Organization and Employee Engagement

Engaged employees are more productive, contributing to the organization's goal for success. Victor and Hoole (2017) noted that engaged employees often expect managers to invest in relationships with employees, increased loyalty, and trust. Li et al. (2019) stated that dedicated, engaged employees contribute to the success of the organization and often had a long tenure. Small business leaders considered employees as

a priority in the organization increased credibility among employees and retained engaged employees dedicated to the overall success of the organization's mission.

Managers who display a positive attitude in the workplace contribute to employee engagement. Supanti, Butcher, and Fredline (2015) suggested that managers who emotionally connect with employees often display key critical characteristics of employee engagement. Likewise, researchers indicated that the positive attitude of a manager who gives recognition to employees through awards contribute to the engagement of employees (Chandani, Mehta, Mall, & Khokhar, 2016; Farooq & Farooq, 2014; Tremblay, Vandenberghe, & Doucet, 2013). However, Li et al. (2019) stated that engaged employees who showed a passion for their work in the organizations contribute to their commitment to the organization, contributing to the success in the organization. Small business leaders displayed a positive attitude contributed to engaged employees in the organization, which was a crucial attribute to the success of the organization.

Many factors influence engaged and disengage employees in an organization. Besieux, Baillien, Verbeke, and Euwema (2018) found that for employees to be entirely engaged, employees should focus on the visions and goals of the organization. Likewise, Liyanage and Gamage (2017) found that the Gallup Consulting firm revealed that only 11% of employees worldwide were engaged in their jobs, 62% of employees were disengaged, and 27% actively engaged by focusing on the organization's mission. Small business leaders identified attributes that engaged and disengaged employees develop strategies to sustain engaged employees and implemented new factors to decrease the number of disengaged employees through positive recognition.

Trusting Management

Engaged employees who believed managers might be more productive and contribute to a productive workplace. Kremer, Villamor, and Aguinis (2019) declared that employees' trust in managers' leadership decreased because of a lack of credibility. Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagińska (2019) stated that trust is a vital element of a successful and productive working environment. Researchers suggested that trust was necessary for the organization's environment, as it reinforces and strengthens intraorganizational and interorganizational relationships (Passos, 2019; Villena, Choi, & Revilla, 2019). Engelbrecht, Heine, and Mahembe (2017) found that employees who had trust in managers were fully committed to their work and accepted vulnerabilities based on the positive expectations of the manager. Managers who develop strategies to earn the trust of employees had a more productive workplace.

The trust that an employee had in the organization referred to as internal trust. To increase feedback and advancements, the observation of behavior requires a high degree of internal trust among employees within an organization (Bakiev, 2013). Likewise, Fard and Karimi (2015) found that internal trust was an employee's psychological state showing the intention to accept the vulnerability of necessary actions. Also, Nedkovski, Guerci, De Battisti, and Siletti (2017) shared that internal trust was the extent that an employee was confident in and prepared to act on the actions or decisions of managers or coworkers. Also, Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) posited that internal trust refers to employees' belief in others committing, being honest, and not taking advantage of other employees. Internal trust in an organization contributes to an employee's trust in managers and commitment to the organization.

Vertical and horizontal trust was an essential component of a manager engaging employees. Pennink (2017) noted that horizontal and vertical trust was critical for the success of the organization and employee engagement. Likewise, Hughes, Rigtering, Covin, Bouncken, and Kraus (2018) acknowledged that horizontal trust refers to trust between an employee and their coworkers. However, Voliotis (2017) suggested that horizontal trust in an organization refers to core values of belief in an organization based on the moral standards set by an organization. De Campos, Resende, and Pontes (2019) found that horizontal trust tends in the 21st century to require more interaction, cooperation, and communication between managers and employees. Nedkovski et al. (2017) shared that vertical trust shows that employees are more vulnerable because of the managers' influence over resource allocations. Likewise, Jabłoński and Jabłoński (2020) shared that vertical trust was accepted influence, the absence of monitoring, and the belief that clear motives, mutual learning, and positive outcomes result in a high-level of the performance of engaged employees within the organization. Managers understanding the importance of trust in the organization and showing employees that they are trustworthy may increase the level of employee engagement within the organization.

Employees who trust managers are more engaged and more productive in the workplace. Smollan (2013) shared that managers in an organization take responsibility for developing tasks, which aids in building trust and creating a positive atmosphere in the workplace. Likewise, Su and Swanson (2019) noted that the importance of trust for the engaged employee's well-being was vital for a productive working environment. Also, Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2019) offered that if engaged employees, trust, commitment, and productivity improved in the organization. The trust in the

organization leads to engaged employees becoming vulnerable to the actions of the organization (Bilgin-Aksu, Aksu, & Polat, 2015). Small business leaders earned the trust of employees increases engagement in the organization, which contributes to a positive workplace environment.

Employees who trust in the manager's ability to lead may increase the resources invested in the organization's goals. Hacker, Johnson, Saunders, and Thayer (2019) stated that managers decide to trust and rely on staff to migrate any unforeseen risk because of a lack of trust. Costa, Fulmer, and Anderson (2018) posited that trust shows a positive interaction between managers and employees. Kang and Sung (2017) shared that employee's trust and satisfaction are viewed as the foundations of a quality relationship with the manager and influence the level of engagement employees display. Managers who gain the trust of the employee improve employee engagement and have a positive relationship with employees.

Affected based trust within an organization includes competence, responsibility, reliability, and dependability of managers and employees. According to Bakiev (2013), affect-based trust shows an emotional bond between an employee and coworkers. Bakiev conducted interviews with 194 managers and principal shareholders, and the results indicated that managers who had a high affect-based trust of their coworkers looked for ways to meet the employees' needs and to engage the employee, which increased productivity. Employees choose whom they trusted and respected within the organization.

A minimal level of trust was critical for managers and engaged employees to interact effectively with one another. Cowart, Gilley, Avery, Barber, and Gilley (2014)

discussed the relationship-based theory of trust, indicating that managers' and employees' perceptions of trustworthiness affects their behavior for taking risks. Likewise, Chughtai, Byrne, and Flood (2015) found that trust in management fully mediated the effect of ethical leadership as well as emotional exhaustion on employee engagement. The small business owners displayed a sense of trust among employees enhances relationships with employees in the organization.

Trust from senior management was essential in organizations. Rajhans (2012) mentioned that senior management in the organization could inspire and secure trust in the workplace. Davies and Olmedo-Cifuentes (2016) believed that senior managers and executives could restore trust within an organization by repairing relationships damaged because of a lack of trust. Managers at all levels who act in a way that enhances loyalty and openness could restore trust within the organization. Pate, Morgan-Thomas, and Beaumont (2012) found that to enhance trust, managers should implement new policies to show employees who they are valued team members and a positive influence on the organization's success. Small business owners who focus on trust in a workplace may positively affect relationships with employees.

Researchers also investigated the role of trust in managers as mediators and positive relationships with employees. Lam, Loi, and Leong (2013) examined the relationship between presiding justice and managers' trust and how each affected the additional roles of managers required to perform. The findings indicated that managers' interactional justice significantly affected trust in managers, which enhanced the employee's role performance (Lam et al., 2013). Employees depend on their direct supervisor for the accomplishment of career progression, on the job promotions, and

employees' goals attainability (Lam et al., 2013). Managers should realize the interdependence between employees and managers to increase trust. Chang, O'Neill, and Travaglione (2016) shared that employees' trust in managers is vital. The relationships between managers and employees hinge on trust.

Trusting a manager's ability to lead could decrease because of a lack of credibility. A lack of employee engagement was because of a breakdown of trust in management (Buiter & Harris, 2013; D.S. Wang & Hsieh, 2013). McManus and Mosca (2015) shared that when employees perceived that managers displayed integrity through truthfulness, and treating each employee with dignity and respect, employee engagement increased. Managers who gain the trust of employees gain the trust of each employee and increases the level of employee engagement.

Communication

Effective communication by a manager may improve employee engagement. Jaupi and Llaci (2015) shared that effective communication helps employees understand their influence and roles in the organization. Likewise, Basbous and Malkawi (2017) found that managers who kept employees informed continuously about activities in the organizations, contributed to employees feeling valued and more immersed in their work assignments, which increased the level of engagement. Also, managers had teams more inclined to engage with each other when employees are well informed by a manager who provides a clear set of goals (Han, Bonn, & Cho, 2016; Jeve, Oppenheimer, & Konje, 2015). Managers who use effective communication may retain engaged employees dedicated to meeting the organization's goals.

Managers use communication as a way to influence employees to be engaged and share the goals the organization established. As organizational changes take place, employees fear losing their jobs because of the absence of clear explanations given by managers, which often leads to employees resisting change. Chen (2012) indicated that communication channels and stress levels increase ethical behavior within an organization as it changes. Communication may also reduce costs and possible conflicts (Chen, 2012). However, Cheng, Fu, and de Vreede (2017) mentioned that managers who choose the correct form of communication influence the successful engagement of employees in the organization. Likewise, S. K. Singh et al. (2016) stated that the communication method used by managers to handle explanations and address problems might determine the level of employee engagement. Small business leaders may use communication as the core factor to increase employee engagement and influence employees to adapt to the goals of the organization.

Internal communication occurred between the manager and the employees. Yeomans and FitzPatrick (2017) found that internal communication reflects the manager's ability to build relationships with employees within the organization. Antwi, Opoku, Seth, and Margaret (2016) shared that internal communication allows managers to show the employee the multiple pieces of information about the jobs they perform in the organization. D'Aprix (2009) posited that internal communication was a lubricant used to prevent the organization from self destructing from obstacles created from change. Small business owners use internal communication can build relationships with employees in the organization.

Managers who focus on the use of internal communication may endow the organization with several benefits. Gill (2015) found that internal communication was crucial for the organization's day to day success. Also, internal communication may lead to engaged employees' intellectual and creative assets, producing value in the organization (Fayoyin, 2018). Jacobs, Yu, and Chavez (2016) shared that internal communication was necessary for managers in the organization to keep the employee informed about changes in the organization during a time of crisis. Verghese (2017) stated that managers use internal communication as a strategy to improve the relationship and distribute information at all levels in the organization. Neill and Jiang (2017) noted that internal communication was critical to the relationship between the organization and how the relationships are evaluated, showing the strengths and weaknesses of relationships within the organization. Small business owners used internal communication to develop meaningful relationships with employees increased employee engagement.

Managers use internal communication to increase the trust level between employees and managers in the organization. Nyambeki (2018) affirmed that trust and commitment are results of processes and policies, thereby improving the relationship between managers and employees satisfactorily for both parties, such as open, transparent, and timely communication. Whereas Iddagoda and Opatha (2017) shared that managers develop trust through internal communication, which also involves establishing and maintaining the relationship between chief executive officers, managers at all levels, and employees. Coxen, Van der Vaart, and Stander (2016) shared that managers should ask several questions before measuring trust in the organization through the most

effective means of communication. Chang et al. (2016) found that clear communication increases trust and employees' performance in the organization. Also, Buitter and Harris (2013) mentioned that 50% of employees who are disengaged result from a lack of communication, which was a fundamental element of building trust. Jiang, Gollan, and Brooks (2017) declared that trust was a significant factor that managers in the organization use to measure a successful relationship between managers and employees. Managers can establish a healthy relationship with employees based on trust and internal communication.

Managers used face-to-face communication as the most effective means to relay information to employees. Moon, Miao, Hanks, and Line (2019) declared that face-to-face communication includes information and interaction, sharing that this was the most valuable method for providing credible communication. Managers who use face-to-face communication provide a visual and verbal sign that the employee can understand. Likewise, S. A. Smith, Patmos, and Pitts (2018) found that face-to-face communication was viewed as more reliable than written communication in organizations providing more critical information to the employees. A manager who uses face-to-face communication can see the verbal and non-verbal reactions from employees.

Managers use internal communication to communicate more effectively with employees. Verghese (2017) noted that internal communication provides managers an opportunity to interact with employees informally. Whereas, Chmielecki (2015) sustained that integrated internal communication includes both formal and informal communication that takes place at every level in the organization. Also, Constantin and Baias (2015) stated that a manager uses internal communication to show the connection between

different pieces of information and uses internal communication to give employees information about their jobs. Managers use internal communication to keep employees informed and build relationships in the organization.

A manager uses communication to include the employee in the decision-making process. Godkin (2015) and Sirisetti (2012) indicated that improved employee engagement occurs when positive relationships exist in the workplace, when employees participate in the decision-making process, and when learning opportunities are available to encourage growth. Managers recognize the need to communicate with the employee to explain the procedures and policies of the organization (Siahaan & Gatari, 2020).

Managers who include the employees in decisions may improve employee engagement.

Managers who display the right management skills could enhance employee engagement. Regardless of the size of the organization, managers who displayed limited communication skills were found to be a weakness of the organization (Siahaan & Gatari, 2020). Managers need training to enhance employee engagement. Leary et al. (2013) suggested that managers' communication skills are often unclear and reserved, and that awkward dialogue often frustrated employees. Managers who use good communication skills often alleviate miscommunication among employees.

Strategic communication focuses on all levels of management, introducing new details about the organization. Fletcher et al. (2020) declared that managers understand that active employee engagement means that communication applies to managers at all levels and all employees regarding strategic planning. Breuer, Hüffmeier, Hibben, and Hertel (2020) stated that managers stressed how face-to-face communication contributed

to discussion and debates, which related to engaged employees. Small business leaders increased employee engagement by using strategic communication.

Employees may become disengaged when receiving miscommunication from management. Obrenovic, Jianguo, Khudaykulov, and Khan (2020) indicated that decreased employee engagement was endemic and was causing large and small organizations to incur losses resulting in a significant amount of dissatisfaction. Tran and Pham (2020) indicated that chief executive officers and management teams had created an environment where managers were disengaged, which resulted from managers giving instructions for task completion without guidance. H. Wang, Tong, Takeuchi, and George (2016) shared that some managers find it difficult to pass information to their employees based on the guidance the managers received in the past, which often results in disengagement among employees because employees did not receive clear direction from the managers. Khodakarami and Dirani (2020) mentioned that disengaged employees may work the required hours, yet without any passion for their jobs. However, G. H. Huang, Wellman, Ashford, and Lee (2017) shared that disengaged employees had a high turnover cost, with low productivity and displayed poor morale. Managers may notice that highly disengaged employees are usually unhappy about their jobs and frequently express that at work.

Employee engagement in an organization creates an environment where employees are motivated and care about their jobs. Glavas (2016) shared that employee engagement should be a critical concern for the organization. Likewise, Bakker (2017) shared that employee engagement creates an environment where employees are motivated and connected to their work and care about their jobs. Engaged employees

display motivation and had good job performance, which contributes to achieving the goals of the organization.

Transition

In Section 1, I selected a multiple case study for this qualitative study after reviewing several other research methods and designs. The research question selected for this study aligned with the general and specific business problems. I selected Homans' (1959) SET as the conceptual framework for this research study. I ended Section 1 by discussing the significance of the study and providing a literature review using references with the last 5 years and discussing essential factors of why managers should implement strategies to improve employee engagement. Section 2 of this study contained the role of the researcher, the participants, the research method and design, data collection procedures and analysis, ethical procedures, and reliability and validity. Section 3 provided the study findings, application for professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections, and a conclusion to the study.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 addresses the methodology of this qualitative study. I restate my purpose statement and discuss the role of the researcher. I also describe the research method and design, population and sampling, data collection instrument, data analysis technique, and the reliability and validity of this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business leaders used to improve employee engagement. The population consisted of three managers from small business organizations in the northern United States who had improved profits through increased employee engagement. The contributions to social change may include decreased unemployment through increased hiring in local communities. Additionally, with increased profits, small business leaders may contribute more financial support for local and community-based service organizations and initiatives.

Role of the Researcher

I served as the primary data collection instrument for this study. The role of the researcher begins by reviewing the earlier literature to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic (Yin, 2016). A researcher is involved in the following steps of the research study: (a) defining a research topic; (b) choosing the participants to interview; (c) recording, transcribing, and analyzing data gathered during the interviews; and (d) authenticating the research study concepts and themes (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2015). Peters and Halcomb (2015) indicated that the role of a researcher in a qualitative study is to act as the primary data collection instrument. As the

primary data collection instrument, I collected data from Zoom audio interviews with small business owners and reviewed the organization's documents on procedures used to engage employees and profitability.

I knew small business owners who engaged employees. Yin (2016) suggested that researchers must acquire an understanding of the research topic before conducting research. To mitigate disputes and predetermined conclusions, I had no previous experience with the small business owners who participated in this study. However, through my military service and educational experience, I learned how to implement strategies to engage employees and increase productivity with multiple resources.

Also, the role of the researcher demands ethical communications with each participant. The Belmont Report serves as a guideline for researchers and outlines the distinction between the researchers and participants (Miracle, 2016). Anabo, Elexpuru-Albizuri, and Villardon-Gallego (2019) stated that the Belmont Report identified three major tenets (respect for persons, beneficence, and justice) that all researchers should adhere to. Friesen, Kearns, Redman, and Caplan (2017) indicated that respect for person refers to informed consent, beneficence refers to the principle of doing what is respectable in a way that causes no harm and increases the possible benefits while lessening possible adverse events, and justice requires equal treatment and fairness for all individuals. I adhered to the guidelines in the Belmont Report by confirming that each participant had a clear understanding of the consent form. Participation in the study was strictly on volunteer, no harm came to participants, and each participant received equal treatment during this research study.

As the researcher, I mitigated bias through triangulation and following the interview protocol when collecting, analyzing, and reporting information required to validate this study. Hansen (2018) stressed that researchers often introduce bias based on assumptions or perceived expectations to participants through nonverbal expressions during the interview process. Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2017) suggested that researchers mitigate bias through the collection of data that are appropriate to the research design by using triangulation. Also, reflective journaling is a method used to identify bias for data collections (Fusch et al., 2017). I limited my nonverbal expression and body language during each interview session. Additionally, I used bracketing to decrease bias when collecting, determining, and reporting information collected in this study.

The interview protocol includes the interview questions and provides a guide for the interviews. Zarhin (2018) asserted that it is vital for researchers to create and adhere to the interview protocol with participants to reduce bias during data collection. I adhered to the interview protocol by asking each participant the same questions in the same order while collecting rich data through Zoom audio interviews.

Participants

The participants consisted of managers from three small business owners in Northern Virginia; Washington, DC; and Maryland who implemented strategies to improve employee engagement. In a qualitative multiple case study, a researcher selects participants based on their knowledge and ability to answer the main research question (Coenen, Stamm, Stucki, & Cieza, 2012; Mariotto, Zanni, & De Moraes, 2014; Yin, 2017). Additionally, participants were required to be over the age of 18, currently in a management position, working directly with employees, and located in one of the three

geographical regions. I recruited three small business leaders to provide data on employee engagement strategies for this study.

I gained access to participants by searching for small businesses on the Internet. I contacted the small business owners via telephone and email. I searched the Internet for information on the small businesses located in Northern Virginia; Washington, DC; and Maryland. W. Liu, Sidhu, Beacom, and Valente (2017) stated that a researcher might obtain contact through associations. Three of 10 small business owners I contacted agreed to participate in the study.

Researchers develop strategies to create a working relationship with prospective participants. Trust, respect, and effective communication are essential to establish a good relationship between the researcher and participants (Abma & Stake, 2014; Bodin, Sandström, & Crona, 2017; Siegle et al., 2014). My goal was to establish a relationship with the small business owners who possessed the experience and knowledge of strategies for engaging employees and to obtain their consent to participate in this study. Yin (2017) noted that the researcher should establish rapport with participants by remaining transparent about the study. The small business owners selected to participate in this study agreed to a semistructured interview via Zoom audio. I also collected data from the participants via email and from their organizations' websites.

Research Method and Design

The problem statement, purpose statement, and research question are essential for selecting the research method and design for this study. After careful consideration and review of the available research methods and designs, I selected the qualitative research method and multiple case study design to collect data to explain, evaluate, and report.

Research Method

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are the three research methods available for conducting a research study (Stake, 2013; Williams & Schaefer, 2013; Yin, 2017). Researchers use a qualitative method to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of participants by gathering and interpreting data (Yin, 2017). Also, researchers use the qualitative method to obtain data from participants about personal experiences by communicating freely and expressing feelings about the phenomenon (Bengtsson, 2016). Researchers also use the qualitative method for identifying themes derived from the data collected from the participants (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). Yin (2017) shared that a qualitative study has four elements: (a) the desire to attain an in-depth understanding of participants in a particular setting; (b) the capability to cultivate a thorough, detailed depiction of the phenomenon under exploration; (c) the ability to discover and address indefinable phenomena such as thinking, beliefs, and reasoning; and (d) the desire to build up an investigative phenomenon. I used a qualitative approach to identify strategies that small business owners used to increase productivity by improving employee engagement.

A quantitative method was not suitable for this study. McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) mentioned that in a quantitative study, researchers collect data through surveys to test hypotheses. Goertzen (2017) shared that in a quantitative study, the researcher generalizes the findings to a larger population through an objective process. Borrego et al. (2014) noted that data collected through surveys administered to a sample or an entire population allows a researcher to generalize or make inferences. A quantitative approach

was not suitable for this research study because I did not gather data through the use of surveys or test a hypothesis.

Mixed-methods studies include the collection or analysis of qualitative and quantitative data in a single study. Researchers who conduct a mixed-methods study have an in-depth understanding of qualitative and quantitative methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Problems often occur during the data analysis and the interpretation process of a quantitative and mixed-methods study (Parker, 2014). Complications could occur when the theories and methods are neither distinct nor significant (Yin, 2017). Parker (2014) declared that mixed-methods studies include computing large samples, test credibility, transferability, and accurateness of the research. Because the current study did not involve examining relationships between variables, a mixed-methods approach was not suitable.

Research Design

The research design I selected was a critical element of the study. Qualitative methodology has several designs, such as case study, phenomenology, historical, narrative, and ethnography (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2017). A case study is an exploration of a single or collective case to capture the complexity of the objective (Ridder, 2017). Choosing the right research design maximizes the opportunity for gathering relevant data to answer the research question (D. Wallace, Cesar, & Hedberg, 2018). Researchers use a multiple case study to enhance the exploration of human actions based on participants' experiences, knowledge, and perceptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2017). A researcher uses a multiple case study to explore, understand, verify, and explain the experiences and beliefs of the

participants through interview questions (Yin, 2017). Given the significance of understanding the importance of small business owners' ability to implement strategies to engage employees, I determined that a multiple case study was a suitable design.

The case study design is appropriate when single or multiple cases are connected to interview questions. A case study is a suitable design to obtain a detailed understanding of practices in a real-world setting (Newman, Schwarz, Cooper, & Sendjaya, 2017). The multiple case study design was appropriate to learn what strategies small business owners used to improve employee engagement.

I considered various designs to explore the strategies small business owners used to increase employee engagement. Stake (2013) and Yin (2017) asserted that researchers use the phenomenological design when focusing on the lived experiences of participants who share a similar event or circumstance. The phenomenological design was not suitable for this study because exploring participants' lived experiences were not the focus of this study. Buckley (2016) shared that a researcher uses the historical design to examine and describe events from the past to gain a better understanding of the present and to anticipate potential changes that may occur in the future. Because I did not gather data for future events, the historical design was not suitable for this study. Ejimabo (2015) declared that a researcher uses an ethnographic design to describe people from a cultural standpoint and to answer questions about phenomena from an informant's perspective. The ethnographic design was not fitting because I did not explore the demographics of a group based on their culture over an extended period. The narrative design allows a researcher to obtain data from an individual about events from life

experiences (Hays & Wood, 2011). The narrative design was inappropriate for this study because I did not investigate events that occurred from life experiences.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study consisted of small business leaders in Northern Virginia; Washington, DC; and Maryland, who implemented strategies to improve employee engagement. Palinkas et al. (2015) shared that researchers use purposive sampling to identify and collect rich data using limited resources. A researcher uses purposive sampling to select participants with personal experiences of the phenomenon and who can provide data to answer the research questions (Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015). Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016) asserted that purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who possess a vast amount of knowledge on the phenomenon being studied. The participants for the current study consisted of small business owners eager to share knowledge and experiences on strategies used to engage employees to increase productivity and profitability. I used purposeful sampling to identify potential participants to collect rich data. I addressed the research question and provided each participant with the consent form via email.

I interviewed three leaders; each was from a different small business organization in northern Virginia. Fusch and Ness (2015) asserted that a small sample size was sufficient to address the research question while allowing a researcher an opportunity to collect relevant data for the study. A small sample size is necessary in a case study when the conceptual framework is clear and concise (Yin, 2017). Guetterman (2015) posited that a sample size of 5 to 50 is adequate to achieve information immersion in a study. Fusch and Ness (2015) indicated that data saturation is difficult to obtain because of

specific restrictions researchers encounter while conducting a research study. I continued to hold interviews with participants and reviewed all documentation from the organizations until no new information surfaced, which indicated data saturation had been achieved.

Participants selected to take part in this study were interviewed based on the primary research question. Saunders, Kitzinger, and Kitzinger (2015) asserted that settings researchers select to conduct interviews should protect the privacy of the participants. Researchers bear the responsibility to ensure that no one is privy to the location or the responses received by participants (White et al., 2016). Dempsey, Dowling, Larkin, and Murphy (2016) stressed the need to select the proper location for interviews to ensure that each participant is comfortable and that responses to each interview question are accurately recorded. I included in the consent form the locations and scheduled times for interviews to make each participant feel comfortable and secure while maintaining each participant's confidentiality.

Ethical Research

I followed the informed consent process approved by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this study. I provided the informed consent form to each prospective participant via email, and participants returned the form to me via email. Each participant received the informed consent form identifying the following: (a) background of the study, (b) purpose of the study, (c) research responsibilities, (d) risks and benefits associated with participating in this study, (e) information on the researcher, (f) process for ensuring confidentiality, and (g) role of the participant. Robinson (2014) shared that a researcher must obtain permission from all possible participants. In the

informed consent form, I included a statement letting each participant know that they may withdraw from the study at any time by notifying me via email. None of the participants withdrew. The participants received a \$10.00 Amazon gift card for participating in this study, as identified in the informed consent form.

The participants were informed of their role and provided an overview of the study in the consent form. Robinson (2014) stated that a researcher should provide each potential participant an overview of the research study and define their role in the study. Further, Robinson mentioned that the researcher must inform the participant that participation was voluntary only and provide complete confidentiality to interviewees (Robinson, 2014). I requested that prospective participants return via email their informed consent before I started collecting data, and that occurred after I received IRB approval. I scheduled interviews once I received the consent from the participants via email. During this research study, I referred to principles learned from the NIH's Office of Extramural Research training to protect human participants. Walden University's approval number for this study is 04-13-200365594. I did not divulge the names or any identifying data on the participants or organizations that participated in this research study.

I stored data collected for this research study in a password-protected file on my computer external hard drive. I provided each participant with a copy of the consent form, advising them of the risk, benefits, and informing them that this study remains secured with a personal password protected on my computer for 5 years. After 5 years, I destroyed all data by deleting electronic files from the computer.

I provided ethical protection for each participant, provided an overview of the study, and provided the informed consent form for signing. Marshall and Rossman (2014) declared that the researcher could assign a unique code for each participant rather than using their names. I ensured the confidential protection of each participant by assigning a unique code to each participant's responses from the interviews by using codes I1 (Interviewee 1) through I3 (Interviewee 3). I made sure that all participants knew that the data collected were confidential. To protect information collected from participants, I did maintain confidentiality.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument. Yin (2017) proclaimed that a researcher was the primary data collection instrument for a qualitative research study. Stewart (2016) stressed that a researcher was the principal instrument and was responsible for obtaining and evaluating the information. Fusch et al. (2017) posited that researchers operate as the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research studies. Also, researchers act as the primary data collection instrument, understanding that possible sensitivity, as well as communication skills, are vital to contributing positively to the value of the data collected (de Villiers, Hsiao, & Maroun, 2017; Gaikwad, 2017). Yin asserted that six resources exist for case studies, including the following: (a) archival records, (b) direct observation, (c) documentation, (d) interviews, (e) participant observations, or (f) physical artifacts. As the primary data collection instrument, I collected data from open-ended, semistructured interviews, and documentation obtained about the organizations.

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) contains data used to identify the phases to follow before, during, and after completion of all interviews. Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested that an interview protocol during the initial planning phases of the research. Hilton (2017) opined that researchers used interview protocol to help develop a suitable approach to the interview process. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) contains prompts that consisted of actions required before the interviews, during the interviews, and after the interviews. I followed the steps in the interview protocol. I asked each participant the same questions in the same order while collecting rich data during semistructured interviews focused on the primary research question. Brace (2018) emphasized the need for researchers to provide participants an opportunity to ask clarifying questions, as necessary during the interview session. To collect detailed and dependable data, I used the guidance of the interview protocol to explore strategies small business owners used to engage employees in small businesses.

Secondary data included the review of the organizations' documents such as strategic plans, employee handbooks, and website data on the small businesses in this study. Researchers used data obtained from the organization's documents seeking to identify research themes (Kim, Sefcik, & Bradway, 2017). After obtaining documents from the small businesses, I reviewed the documents for strategies small business owners used to improve employee engagement and identified data related to the research question.

I used an expert panel to validate the interview protocol used for this research study. The expert panel was small business owners not involved as participants. Waltz et al. (2015) indicated that an expert panel reviews the research questions and provides a

recommendation to the researcher for improvement. Ziaee Bigdeli et al. (2018) stated that an expert panel would concentrate on the objective of the researcher and validate the research practices for data collection. I used the results from the expert panel to revise the interview questions before submitting the interview protocol to the IRB for approval.

Data Collection Technique

I collected data from open-ended, semistructured interviews; employee handbooks obtained from the participants; and pages from the organizations' websites. Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, and Kangasniemi (2016) indicated that researchers used the qualitative research method to conduct semistructured interviews for gathering rich data on the experiences of a participant in a research study. Interviews consisted of open-ended, in-depth questions to obtain rich data to address the phenomenon of the study. Dikko (2016) asserted that following interview protocol rules and guidelines decrease inconsistencies when conducting semistructured interviews. Once the three small business owners agreed to participate in the research study, I emailed the informed consent to the participants (see Appendix B). The participants returned their consent statements via email; then, I scheduled a date and time to conduct interviews via Zoom audio over the Internet. During the Zoom meetings, I followed the procedures outlined in the interview protocol (see Appendix A) for each participant. I recorded the semistructured interviews via Zoom audio with each participant and obtained documents via email from the participants on strategies used to engage employees.

There were advantages and disadvantages to conducting semistructured interviews. Nusbaum, Douglas, Damus, Paasche-Orlow, and Estrella-Luna (2017) asserted that the advantage of face to face semistructured interviews improves verbal and

nonverbal communication with participants. Sanjari et al. (2015) explained that another advantage was immediate interpretation and, therefore, the ability to elicit clarification of data not understood. Interactions with participants are necessary to explore successful strategies to engage employees. Therefore, I selected a Zoom audio semistructured interview method. Rizzo et al. (2016) shared that in the face-to-face interviews, participants may be reluctant to share information due to nervousness or hesitancy. McIntosh and Morse (2015) asserted that a researcher's time and money might jointly be disadvantages of the interview method. To confront the disadvantages, I structured the interviews to take not more than 45 to 60 minutes to collect information required from participants, conducted the interviews online, and I sent all the participants a \$10.00 Amazon gift card via email for participating in the research study.

Upon completion of the interviews, I transcribed the recordings into Word documents using Temi.com, a transcription website. I synthesized the participant answers for every question to conduct member checking. Researchers used member checking to authenticate the correct clarification of the data and to gain additional knowledge supporting different participant responses (Madill & Sullivan, 2017). Also, Thomas (2017) suggested that member checking improved the research; it gave a chance for participants to clarify and correct the researcher's interpretations before study conclusions. I went over the main points of my summations, then emailed the summary to the participants for member checking. I gave each participant 2 days to validate and make changes to their responses, per the guidance in the consent form. I took the time to contact each participant and discussed any changes to the transcript for clarity, and no changes were recommended.

Data Organization Technique

I used Microsoft Excel to organize the data collected and Windows Explorer to maintain the data in separate electronic folders by naming each folder with the interviewee's unique identifier. Manning (2017) asserted the importance of storing data collected from participants accurately, increasing reliability for the future. I created a log in Excel to list the employee handbooks and pages from the organizations' websites in chronological order. Nusem, Wrigley, and Matthews (2017) described how a reflective journal with semistructured interviews enhances a researcher's ability to document participants' conduct and demeanor during the interviews. I maintained a reflective journal using OneNote to store researcher notes. In Excel, I categorized and labeled all data by type of information; participant code identifiers (I1, I2, I3); data obtained; and collection location. Example of the file name, participant001.xlsx. I stored all raw data securely for 5 years. After 5 years from the completion date of this study, I will destroy all hard copy documents and electronic documents by shredding.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the collected data by using thematic analysis as the primary technique analyzing interviews and archival documents such as strategic plans, employee handbooks, and website data on the small business organizations. Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) shared that thematic analysis was the foundation for data analysis for a qualitative research study and used by researchers for recognizing, evaluating, organizing, and describing themes identified in a data set. Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas (2013) posited that researchers used thematic analysis to process and analyze data into data sets. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) noted the six steps of thematic analysis had

six steps were (a) become familiar with the data, (b) generate initial codes, (c) search for themes, (d) review themes, (e) define themes, and (f) write a report. Below are the six steps I used for the data analysis process.

The first step in the process consisted of becoming familiar with data. Chapman, Hadfield, and Chapman (2015) declared that a researcher immerses themselves in the raw data by reading and rereading interviews, cross-references, and taking notes from the data collected. First, I engaged myself by transcribing my notes of the interactions with participants, reading the companies' reports, and web pages, re-reading transcripts, and listening to the recordings. I gained a comprehensive understanding by taking notes of the data collected during the interview and noted initial codes.

In the second step, I used the research question, conceptual framework, transcripts, and the companies' documents to identify initial codes. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) asserted that a researcher develops and initiates codes while working through transcripts of data collected. Nowell et al. (2017) proposed some themes align with like meaning, thus can be divided into principles and subthemes. Pokorny et al. (2018) declared that researchers used NVivo software to assist with coding and labeling a large amount of data. I used NVivo 12 computer software to organize the data collected from the interview questions, employee handbook, and data retrieved from the organization websites. The coding process started with a per codebook. I created initial codes from the research question and the conceptual framework. I then looked for repetitive terms and meanings in the data using NVivo 12 software.

In the third step, I searched for themes. Researchers stated that themes were patterns that captured essential data about the research question (Anney, 2014; Maguire

& Delahunt, 2017). Nowell et al. (2017) suggested that themes came from combining components or fragments from experiences, which a researcher may view as meaningless when viewed alone. Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, and Terry (2019) noted that a researcher organizes codes into broader themes as they relate to the specific research question. I maintained a detailed reflective journal to record my steps while searching for themes. I grouped codes into categories using tables. The process of coding the data came from a per code developed from themes from the literature. I grouped categories into initial themes.

In the fourth step, I reviewed themes based on the research question. Nowell et al. (2017) stated that some themes were not used because of a lack of data to support the theme. Researchers often reduced data into manageable sets of essential themes (Nowell et al., 2017). Braun et al. (2019) stated that a researcher conducts a final reread of data collected to determine the validity of themes from data sets. I reviewed the initial themes to answer the research question. I combined themes to create primary and sub-themes.

In the fifth step, I defined and named themes for this research study. Nowell et al. (2017) declared that a researcher determines data collected from participants for each theme. Researchers conducted and wrote a detailed analysis detecting the story that each theme tells (Nowell et al., 2017). Braun et al. (2019) stated that a researcher possessed the ability to define what was unique and specific about each theme. I conducted a final analysis outlining what each theme means relating to the research question and conceptual framework. I determined how each theme fits into the study.

Producing reports was the last step in the thematic process. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) conveyed that creating a final report occurs after a researcher completes all

themes and conducts a final analysis. Nowell et al. (2017) declared that the final researcher report should offer a brief, clear, reasonable, nonrepetitive, and noteworthy account about all data within and across the themes. Braun et al. (2019) suggested that the researcher should provide a convincing story about data collected based on the analysis. I wrote a detailed analysis of the findings. I compared current research to my findings.

I gathered the employee handbooks from participants via email and data from the organizations' websites as secondary data sources. Hayashi, Abib, and Hoppen (2019) acknowledged that a researcher obtains data from the organization that corroborated with data collected from other sources. Secondary data include documentation about the implementation and tracking of employee engagement strategies. I gained access to the organizations' documents used by the owners to engage employees, from the small business owners and the organizations' websites. The secondary data corroborated the data collected during the interviews in interpreting the phenomenon.

I used methodological triangulation to seek clarification of data collected. Methodological triangulation included synthesizing several sources of data (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). Marshall and Rossman (2014) noted that researchers used triangulation to enrich evidence of the research study, establish credibility, and the increasing significance of a qualitative study. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that the researcher mitigated biases by using triangulation. I used methodological triangulation to verify data from interviews with the secondary data aligned to the research question.

I used the data from NVivo 12 to focus on key themes, and I linked the themes to the precoded themes of the theoretical literature within the conceptual framework and

broad topic literature for this study. Castleberry (2014) and Yin (2016) declared that researchers used NVivo to identify themes by finding frequently used words that exist among various data. A researcher uses data analysis strategies that include grouping codes to the conceptual framework (Yin, 2016). De Massis and Kotlar (2014) shared that researchers who conduct a qualitative study used coding techniques to analyze interviews to synthesize data with the research question. I correlated the key themes identified during the data analysis process related to the conceptual framework and newly published studies.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity were necessary constructs to ensure trustworthiness for a qualitative research study. Trustworthiness in a qualitative research study consisted of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Connelly (2016) declared that trustworthiness or vigor indicates trust in data, interpretation, and how the researcher used the data to validate the research study. I addressed trustworthiness by interpreting data collected accurately to validate this research study.

Reliability

For dependability, I used member checking and an interview protocol. Harper and Cole (2012) declared that member checking was a process used by researchers to improve the accuracy of the interpretations of the interview transcripts. Anney (2014) stated that researchers established dependability when researchers in the future used the results of the finding without bias. Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) shared that a researcher used member checking to allow participants to engage, add to the interviews, and interpret data after the completion of the semistructured interviews.

Cypress (2017) suggested that researchers used member checking to enhance rigor in a qualitative study, indicated that credibility was essential in the accuracy of the phenomena. Yin (2016) noted that researchers follow the interview protocol by confirming that the data collected addresses the research question. Haahr, Norlyk, and Hall (2013) shared that a researcher should develop and abide by the interview protocol with the participant to limit biases in the data collection phase in the research study. Castillo-Montoya (2016) declared that interview protocols aid a researcher by increasing the quality of data collected by aligning the interview questions to the research question, and the researchers asked each question in the same sequential order. I used member checking and an interview protocol to ensure dependability in this research study.

Validity

For qualitative research, a researcher must address validity determined by credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation of a research study. Bengtsson (2016) declared that credibility was a process that a researcher used to establish how data analysis procedures carried out and to ensure that relevant data not excluded. Member checking and methodological triangulation were the strategies I used for credibility. Connelly (2016) suggested that researchers establish credibility through transparency and integrity of the findings of the study conducted. Anney (2014) noted that researchers used triangulation to reduce their bias and to cross-examine the truthfulness of the participant's responses. Researchers shared that methodological triangulation used data collected through notes during interviews, observing participants, and additional documentation that enhanced validity showing multiple viewpoints from responses to the same research question (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Joslin & Müller, 2016). I

conducted member checking and methodological triangulation to ensure the credibility of this study.

I provided a detailed description of the study results that permitted potential transferability. Anney (2014) noted that a researcher collects thick descriptive data to ensure transferability. Case studies with a small number of participants might not be generalizable with similar organizations or populations (Bengtsson, 2016; Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017; Sarma, 2015). Elo et al. (2014) described transferability as a researcher's ability to use data from a replicated study from another setting. Other small business leaders may find this study useful by applying it in a different location to determine if the results are transferable.

To address confirmability, I used methodological triangulation. According to Sarma (2015), researchers acquire confirmability through triangulation. Anney (2014) declared that multiple researchers used triangulation to explore the same questions, to show different responses to the same question, and increased consistency of the finding. Foran et al. (2014) stated that methodological triangulation consisted of synthesizing multiple sources of data. Fusch and Ness (2015) posited that researchers used triangulation to ensure the data was rich and in-depth. I used multiple sources of data (methodological triangulation) to answer the research question to address confirmability.

I ensured data saturation by collecting data until I discovered no new information. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that researchers reach data saturation once data repeats or when the researcher obtains no new information, and once further, coding was no longer required. Also, Fusch and Ness emphasized that the number of interviews does not ensure data saturation, but rather the depth of the research conducted. As the researcher, I

gathered data from participants until the information became repetitive, and no new ideas discovered. To achieve data saturation, a researcher interviews until datasets became redundant (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Fusch et al. (2017) asserted that researchers use semistructured interviews to gather data from several participants by asking each participant the same questions in the same order to reach data saturation. I achieved data saturation by interviewing three small business leaders until no new information emerged, and no new codes or themes appeared after data analysis.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included details of this research study. This section included the purpose of the study, the researcher's role, justification of the research method and design, participant population and sampling, ethical research, specifics on data collection, data analysis process, and reliability and validity for this research study. In Section 3, I provided the findings for this study, application for professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections, and a conclusion to the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

This section includes the representation of the findings from data gathered during Skype and Zoom interviews with small business leaders who manage three or more employees and successfully implemented strategies that improved employee engagement. This section consists of the presentation of findings, application to professional practices, implications for social change, and recommendations for action. I conclude this section with suggestions for further research, reflections from my experience during this study, and a conclusion.

Presentation of Findings

The intent of this qualitative multiple case study was to answer the main research question: What strategies do small business owners use to improve employee engagement? To answer this research question, I conducted semistructured interviews via Zoom because of COVID-19. The interview questions were open ended, allowing the participants to expound on how they implemented strategies to improve employee engagement. I followed the interview protocol by asking for consent first from each participant. I then asked each participant the same question in the same order during each interview. The sample for this study was three small business owners. I assigned the participants codes to maintain their confidentiality (I1, I2, and I3). The coded data consisted of keywords and common terms from the interview transcripts and secondary data obtained from the small business owners.

I recorded the interviews, took notes on how long the business has existed and the number of employees currently on staff, and conducted member checking after the

interviews with each participant to validate their responses. After the interviews, I reviewed my notes and transcribed the responses from each participant. I provided each participant with a summary of my interpretation of their responses. McGannon, Smith, Kendellen, and Gonsalves (2019) shared that researchers use member checking to confirm the responses of the participants. I used member checking to ensure that the participants' responses were documented accurately.

I identified three themes from the data collected from the three small business owners. The themes were relationships, leadership behavior, and communication. Rossolatos (2019) declared that NVivo 12 is used by researchers to identify codes and themes from data collected from participants. I used NVivo 12 to search for codes, identify themes, review themes, and produce a report.

Theme 1: Relationships

The first theme that emerged from data analysis was relationships. The literature review and SET framework supported this theme. This finding indicated that relationships evolve between small business owners and employees as a result of trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment. Saks (2006) shared that two-way relationships include small business owners and employees in an organization. I2 said, "My employee handbook stresses the importance of a positive relationship between small business owners, employees, and service agencies." Small business owners create positive relationships building the foundation for a successful business.

The participants also indicated that relationships between small business owners and employees are critical for improving employee engagement. T. Wang, Long, Zhang, and He (2019) shared that relationships between a small business leader and the

employees create a stronger relationship with a feeling of reciprocity, gratitude, and trust, which are characteristics of SET. Relationships between the small business owners and employees promote formal or information connections between the employee and small business owner (Yu, Mai, Tsai, & Dai, 2018). The current study participants discussed several types of relationships needed to be successful in a small business. I1 said, “In the employee handbook, I stress the importance of a positive relationship between employees and service agencies.” I1 also said, “I meet the new employees [and] establish a relationship with them on day one.” I2 indicated that she likes to establish a relationship with employees, hoping they feel comfortable and connected to the business. I3 said, “I have weekly meetings [with] my team creating a positive relationship between staff and doctors within the dental practice.”

I reviewed the I1 employee handbook that stressed the importance of a positive relationship between the contracting company, employees, and service agencies. I reviewed the websites for I2 and I3. I observed how they develop a relationship among the employees for the continuing success of the small businesses. I1, I2, and I3 provided data on the importance of small business owners developing a positive relationship with employees.

Theme 2: Leadership Behavior

The second theme that emerged from data analysis was leadership behavior. The leadership behavior theme included how small business owners hire the right candidate for a position. The literature review and SET conceptual framework support this theme. The literature revealed the drivers of employee engagement include selecting the right individual for positions and establishing goals for the employee’s job performance.

Hiring right. Nikolova, Schaufeli, and Notelaers (2019) shared that when small business owners select a candidate for a position, they ensure candidates possess the skills and job resources, can follow directives, and will have a positive effect on the business. I1 said, “when I am looking for a new employee, I review the resume for experience the individual has.” I1 also said, “I conduct phone interviews, and then I do a face-to-face interview.” However, I2 said, “I select women normally that [are] more mature because of their discipline.” Also, I3 said, “in my dental spa, I look for people with good people skills, since they assist with patient care.” Small business owners who select the right employee for a position within their business create a positive relationship with the employees.

Job performance. W. R. Carter et al. (2018) shared that an employee’s job performance shows their experience and self-confidence regarding the skill they possess to complete a task. Employees who display excellent job performance proactively pursue goals and perform at a higher level. I1 said, “I measure job performance by how employees meet goals.” Furthermore, I3 said, “I measure job performance by how they service the clients.” However, I2 said, “I view good performance by how the employees show they understand the goals.” For an employee to have excellent job performance, small business leaders must provide each employee with the goals of the organization.

Theme 3: Communication

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis was communication. The literature review and SET conceptual framework support this theme. Effective communication between the small business owners and the employees positively affected the employees’ commitment and kept the employees engaged. I1 said, “I think my onsite

presence and presence, you know being consistent in meeting with my employees and following through with them.” However, I2 said,

I try to communicate the way they want to communicate. My young staff would prefer that I text them if that is what they prefer, it bothered me at first. And I was like, oh, this is so ridiculous. But you know, what? If I texted them, they responded. If I tried to call them, they would not pick up the phone.

I3 said,

I do it probably in three ways. Like I said, having meetings where everyone hears the same thing at the same time. I put it in writing. I will send an email, and I am constantly sending out group text.

Small business owners use communication as a strategy to improve employee engagement. Y. Singh (2019) shared that small business owners use communication as a way to urge employee engagement while sustaining goal achievement in the business. Small business owners should often communicate with employees to build confidence among leaders and employees (Yue, Men, & Ferguson, 2019). Small business owners use communication to maintain engaged employees.

S. A. Smith et al. (2018) shared that small business leaders use face-to-face communication as a primary means of providing critical information to employees. Small business owners use face-to-face communication allowing visual indications to relay information to employees essential for meeting the business goals. I1 said, “I like face-to-face communication to get to know the employees and watch body language.” I2 said, “I use face-to-face communication to explain the business to the new employees and how I expect them to treat our customers.” I3 stated, “I use face-to-face interviews to see the

verbal and nonverbal reactions of future employees.” Small business owners use face-to-face communication as a method to communicate with employees effectively.

During the interviews, each participant indicated the importance of face-to-face communication. I1 said, “I use face-to-face interviews to see how comfortable the new employee is talking to me as the owner.” I1 said, “my HR person does all onboarding face-to-face with all new employees.” I2 said, “I do all onboarding processing one-on-one with my new employees.” Also, I3 stated, “I meet all new employees on day one.” Each of the participants shared that all new employees receive a briefing outlining the business goals and reviewing their duties and responsibilities as a new employee. Small business owners use face-to-face communication to keep employees informed, conduct interviews, and onboard new employees.

The themes derived from the data analysis were relationships, leadership behavior, and communication. Saks (2006) shared that developing a positive relationship between leaders and employees overtime develops a relationship of trust and mutual commitment. A relationship between a small business leader and the employees creates a stronger relationship with a feeling of reciprocity, gratitude, and trust, which are characteristics of SET.

Triangulation of Data

In addition to conducting semistructured interviews via Zoom audio, I reviewed company documents that included an employee handbook, annual income, and services provided by the small business owners located in northern Virginia. Alami, Gagnon, and Fortin (2019) shared that methodological triangulation consists of synthesizing various sources of data. I collected data from interviews, employee handbooks, and the websites

of small businesses. I gained in-depth knowledge of the strategies used through methodological triangulation to synthesize data collected from small businesses. Also, I obtained documents from the business owners on procedures and services that contributed to employee engagement and the organization's productivity. Ghazi, Petersen, Reddy, and Nekkanti (2018) posited that a researcher uses methodological triangulation to reduce duplicating and misinterpreting data and increase the reliability of study findings. I coded data from the interviews and documents to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Relevance to Conceptual Framework

I used the tenets of SET, including reciprocity between business leaders and employees, to explore strategies small business owners used to improve employee engagement. Buil, Martínez, and Matute (2019) posited that employees experience a series of interactions with the small business owners, resulting in the employee's increased level of productivity and achieving the business goals from engagement. Reciprocity within small businesses involves trust between leaders and employees. Nyamekye (2018) shared that SET was a possible framework for small businesses, providing small business owners the opportunity to foster reciprocal interdependency between small business leaders and employees. T. Wang et al. (2019) declared that SET creates a feeling of commitment by employees to reciprocate high levels of trust in small business leaders. Small business leaders who used strategies such as reciprocity gained high levels of trust from the employees.

The current study participants identified essential factors in strategies used to improve employee engagement and increase productivity in the organizations. All of the

participants' responses aligned with Homans's (1959) conclusion that engaged employees use essential factors to describe trust in leaders who reciprocated the relationships with employees. O'Connor and Crowley-Henry (2019) declared that engaged employees achieve the organization's goals and achieve self-satisfaction and a feeling of worth in the reciprocal relationship with the small business owner. Therefore, small business owners need to cultivate an environment to maximize engaged employees' productivity and trust in business leaders.

Small business owners who manage employees may benefit from the results of this study. The findings include strategies that small business owners and other business owners may use to improve employee engagement, increase productivity, increase profitability, and establish reciprocal relationships with employees. The findings derived from the interview responses and documents obtained from the small business owners extended the literature related to strategies to improve employee engagement in small business organizations.

Application to Professional Practice

The objective of this multiple case study was to explore strategies small business owners used to improve employee engagement in northern Virginia; Washington, DC; and Maryland. The interview transcripts and documents provided data on how small business owners improved employee engagement. Based on data analysis, I identified three themes: relationships, leadership behavior, and communication. Overall, small business owners managed and maintained a workplace environment that offered personal growth, flexible work schedules, and competitive benefits for each employee. By implementing strategies to improve employee engagement, small business owners may

reduce the gap in professional practice relating to mitigating the effect of disengaged employees.

The results of this study provide strategies for small business owners to improve employee engagement. Furthermore, findings may enhance business practices by expanding and facilitating the use of employee engagement procedures and training for small business owners and employees. Small business owners need to apply the right strategies to operate effectively and maintain profitability by maintaining an engaged workforce (Yang, Sun, & Zhao, 2019). Disengaged employees in a small business hurt the business's growth and decrease profitability (Bukura & Warue, 2019). Small business leaders may experience low profitability and reduced employee engagement from a lack of knowledge on how to implement strategies to improve employee engagement.

The findings from this study provide small business owners with the information they can use to understand the importance of implementing strategies to improve employee engagement within their business. Also, small business owners may use these results to understand how employee engagement strategies may increase retention, engagement, job performance, and morale. Further, small business owners may use the findings to discover new, viable strategies to improve employee engagement and relationships within the business. Small business owners may use the results to find employee engagement strategies to enhance leaders' support, employee commitment, and loyalty to the organization.

Implications for Social Change

This multiple case study was conducted to explore the strategies small business owners used to improve employee engagement. Daqar and Smoudy (2019) shared that

engaged employees represent 20% to 25% of the workforce that accomplishes tasks as the backbone of the organization. Highly engaged employees in small businesses increased productivity by 78% and increased profitability by 40% compared to other employees (Ferreira, da Costa Ferreira, Cooper, & Oliveira, 2019). The participants in the current study included three small business owners who implemented strategies to improve employee engagement. Findings may be used by small business leaders to enhance performance and production in their businesses and the economy in their communities.

An increase in employee engagement may result in an increase in the continuous service to members of the community. Implications for social change by small business owners implementing strategies to improve employee engagement may contribute to the improved socioeconomic status of employees. The engaged employee consistently working may help increase disposable income for employees to reinvest in nearby communities. The small business owners may use the results from this research study to identify strategies small business owners used to increase productivity to enhance the quality of life for the employees and the nearby communities.

Recommendation for Action

Small business owners should consider if the results of this study align with the current small business guidance to improve employee engagement in the workplace. Based on the findings of this study, I was able to generate four recommendations small business owners may consider when implementing strategies to improve employee engagement, which may lead to increased profitability and productivity. Implementation of the following steps may increase employee engagement in the workplace.

The first recommendation is to convey communication clearly and concisely to all employees. Small business owners can host a monthly meeting with the organization, which will enforce communication with all employees. The second recommendation is team building, which may include employees of different areas of the small business to address the scope of a project. Y. Singh (2019) shared that employee engagement is the fulfillment and excitement an employee experiences when engaged in the workplace. Small business owners can create teams allowing all employees an opportunity to take effective communication increasing employee engagement.

The third recommendation came from small business owners who participated in the research study. I1 said, “The engagement process, once you bring a person on board, you know, making sure that you make sure that onboarding process is as smooth as possibly can.” I1 also said,

You know, you interact with the person, you call them and make sure everything is going okay. I find that all those things help in the process of engagement to make your employees still comfortable start feeling that trust early, make sure that the employee knows the reputation of the company.

However, I2 said,

You’ve got to have consistency if you are going to have multiple units, but when you’re just an individual, small business owner, all you have is, you know. That voice every day, day in and day out, you know, making sure that your employees understanding what engagement looks like, don’t wait too long, or don’t wait at all. I am one of those people. I do not wait at all to tell you if something was not’

handled correctly. I do not just jump on you, but I will say, hey, next time you deal with that, this is what I would like you to do or say.

However, I3 said,

I have had no office manager in place before who did not engage employees. She tried to be the star of everything and cover-up for everybody. She did not get it. Employees' opportunities to show what they were made out of.

Also, I3 said,

You know it was one thing is this is something, a manager is not judged upon what they could do. America was judged upon what they can get others to do, correct. And once I can find someone like that, that makes a difference.

Luu, Rowley, and Vo (2019) shared that small business leaders who create a culture of engaging employees appeared to foster an engaged workforce with an organization through high levels of commitment. This recommendation aligns with implementing employee engagement strategies into the culture and business.

Small business owners at all levels that wish to improve employee engagement should refer to the results of this research study. Office managers for small businesses looking for new methods for recruiting and retaining qualified employees should consider reviewing the results of this research study. Also, future doctoral students researching strategies to improve employee engagement may find that the results of this study helpful. I may use the finding of the study for upcoming training with a variety of organizations interested in developing employee engagement strategies and possibly give a presentation to teach leaders about the importance of employee engagement.

Recommendations for Further Research

I identified evidence that small business owners are using employee engagement strategies to increase success in their organizations. In this qualitative multiple case study, I identified two primary limitations: geographical locations and the sample size limited to three small business owners. The participants came from Northern Virginia, Washington, DC, and Maryland. Also, three small businesses were selected, with owners managing more than three employees. The small business owners managed more than three employees and implemented strategies to improve employee engagement. Therefore, I recommend that future researchers conduct similar multiple case studies at other small businesses, expanding the geographical area. By expanding the research study to other small businesses, a researcher may gain a deeper understanding of how small business owners implement strategies to improve employee engagement. Future researchers conducting similar multiple case studies may contact the participants via telephone to establish a trusting relationship with the participants. Also, future researchers can use the consent form as the invitation and ensure participants that their identity will remain confidential.

A future researcher may use similar multiple case studies or a quantitative study to explore or examine strategies small business owners use to improve employee engagement. I suggest that researchers explore strategies small business owners use to improve employee engagement in different geographical locations and increase the sample size beyond three small business owners. I also recommend to broaden the eligibility criteria for participant selection and explore additional strategies that small business leaders can use to improve employee engagement.

Reflections

The objective of this multiple case study was to explore strategies small business owners used to improve employee engagement. I selected strategies small business owners used to enhance employee engagement, based on my 29 plus years of experience serving in the US Army as a senior human resource manager. I witnessed the effect that disengaged service members had on an organization's mission; therefore, I decided to research strategies managers use to improve employee engagement with an organization. As the researcher of this multiple case study, my role was to lessen bias in data collection, analysis, and state the findings.

The Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) process was overwhelming and frustrating. Still, I learned how to manage my time, and this journey helped me become a more influential person as I traveled through this process. The precise requirements of this program helped me improve my writing skills and enhanced my understanding of strategies managers used to increase employee engagement. Before I started this process, I thought I was disciplined and a good writer. During the completion of this DBA, I learned that by improving my writing skills, I was able to enhance my writing, increasing the flow of information of this research study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business owners used to improve employee engagement. Employee engagement is a vital factor for a small business's success. The use of employee engagement strategies is essential for an organization's productivity and profitability. Commons, Miller, Ramakrishnan, and Giri (2018) shared that only 34% of US employees are engaged in the

workplace, indicating a more substantial portion of US employees not performing to full capacity. Small business leaders should establish and maintain an engaged and proactive workforce. However, some small business owners lack strategies to engage employees in the workplace. O'Connor and Crowley-Henry (2019) stated that engaged employees are energetic and fulfilled related to their job and enhance their professional effectiveness. Many challenges exist for small business owners developing strategies to improve employee engagement, increase productivity, profitability, and sustaining a successful business within the community.

After analyzing and coding the data collected, three themes emerged from the thematic analysis. The themes derived from the data collected consisted of relationships, leadership behavior, and communication. Small business leaders may use the information incorporated in these themes identified in this research study to develop and implement additional strategies to improve employee engagement increasing productivity and profitability within the organization. Additionally, the findings from this research study related to strategies small business owners used to improve employee engagement align with Homans' SET. The three themes link to Homans' principles on the interaction between two parties and how the employees pay the organization back through the levels of engagement shown in the workplace. The results of this multiple case study align with the current and previous literature, which contains conclusions with critical components to the success of small businesses, including strategies to improve employee engagement.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

What you will do	What you will say—script
Identifying Participants for this study	I will make initial contact with participants via email. I will email the interview questions and consent form to the participants. Each participant will be assigned a unique code that includes a letter and number to protect their identity.
Introduction	I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The open-ended interview questions will allow you to expound on how you, as a small business leader, have implemented strategies to improve employee engagement. I would like permission to record our interview session. Once I complete the interview, I will record my thoughts. Afterward, I will transcribe the data collected from the interview and send you an email to verify the accuracy of the data collected.
I am selecting a time and place to conduct interviews.	The location will be a location in the organization closed off from other employees. Each interview will last about 45 to 60 minutes. The privacy of each participant will be respected by me, and interviews may take place over two days.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch for non-verbal queues • Paraphrase as needed 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the specific strategies you use to engage employees? 2. How do you define employee engagement? 3. Which of your engagement strategies produce the best results? 4. How did you implement strategies to improve employee engagement? 5. How has implementing employee engagement strategies created success in the organization? 6. How do you communicate engagement strategies throughout the organization? 7. How do you measure employee engagement? 8. How do you use data from evaluations to improve employee engagement strategies? 9. How do you build trust with your employees? 10. What other information concerning employee engagement strategies can you share with me to help me understand how to sustain highly engaged employees?
Wrap up interview thanking participant	I want to say “thank you” for taking time out of your busy schedule to participate in this interview session. The strategies you have implemented are essential to your small business.

ensure I have collected the responses correctly, I will transcribe each response and synthesize the responses for your review and approval. I will send you an email of your synthesis interview to ensure my interpretations are accurate. This process is called member checking.

Appendix B: Email Invitation

Dear Sir or Ma'am,

My name is Jennifer A. Boyd. I am a doctoral student at Walden University's Doctorate of Business Administration Program. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: **Strategies Small Business Leaders Use to Improve Employee Engagement**. This study is to explore strategies small business leaders use to improve employee engagement.

Please read the attached consent form for details of participation. If you would like to participate in the study, please read the form and return this email with the words, "I consent."

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Jennifer A. Boyd, BS, MBA, Doctoral Candidate, Walden University