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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Bianca O. Maynard

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Strategies to Improve Employee Engagement in Retail Stores

by

Bianca O Maynard

MS, University of Phoenix, 2007

MS, University of the Virgin Islands, 1997

BS, University of the Virgin Islands, 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2020

Abstract

Less than one-third of workers in the United States have engaged in their work since Gallup commenced tracking employee workforce engagement in 2000. Retail store managers who fail to engage employees are at risk of losing organizational profitability. Grounded in Kahn's theory of personal engagement and disengagement, and Sak's theory of social exchange, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies retail store managers used to improve employee engagement. The participants comprised 5 retail managers from a retail organization in Metro Atlanta, who effectively used employee engagement strategies. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and company documents, including policy and procedure manuals, newsletters, financial data, strategic plans, and emails. Yin's 5-step data analysis was used to analyze the data. Four themes emerged: communication, employee training and development, rewards and recognition, and transparency. A key recommendation for retail managers is to understand and execute successful engagement strategies to improve employee efficiency and organizational performance. The implications for positive social change include the potential to provide retail store managers with a deeper understanding of the strategies necessary to increase employee engagement. A deeper understanding of effective strategies may lead employees to participate in social settings by contributing their time and talents to the people in their community and society.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my children Tyrone Jr, and Makim; and my two adorable grand-daughters Tyler and Journey, thank you for always supporting me. No matter what I ever accomplish in this life, nothing will ever be more significant than having my sons and grand-daughters by my side. To my mom Eugenie, and my mother in law Yvonne, although you are no longer with us, I know you are looking down on me with much pride. To my wonderful dad Emanuel, I know you are beaming because you are one of my biggest supporters. In pursuing my doctoral degree, I hope to inspire my family to always shoot for the moon, and if by chance you fall short, you will definitely land on a star!

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First, I would like to thank almighty God for giving me the wisdom and fortitude to persevere and accomplish this goal. I would not have made it to the finish line without you by my side. I would like to thank my family and friends for understanding, motivating, and uplifting me when I faced challenges along the way. Thanks for understanding every time I was unable to attend a function, or go on a vacation; but also, being there for me when I needed to take a break.

Thanks to my employer, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, specifically the Office of Financial Resources leadership, for providing me with financial support and encouragement to pursue this advanced degree. COVID-19 may have forever changed the way we conduct our business, however; our passion and mission to protect America from health, safety and security threats remains steadfast.

Finally, thank you to my chair, Dr. Janet Booker. Thanks for taking the time to guide me through this process. I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Lisa Cave and Dr. Alexandre Lazo for your feedback and commitment to help students improve the quality of their work. This has been an amazing and life changing journey, I have met some incredible people and learned some valuable lessons along the way.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Effectively engaging employees in the workplace translates to high productivity and profitability in organizations. Because of the competitive nature of retail stores, it is imperative that managers continue to encourage highly engaged employees, which leads to higher retention rates, increased performance and productivity (Suhartanto & Brien, 2018). Finding ways to engage employees is a major concern for many business owners (Bailey, 2016). Therefore, managers need to learn and understand the strategies necessary to increase engagement; disengaged employees cost businesses over $300 billion annually (Valentin, Valentin, & Nafukho, 2015). Some of the costs associated with disengaged employees include high turnover rates and the costs associated with hiring and training new employees (Hejjas, Miller, & Scarles, 2018). Decreased productivity costs employers an average of over $3,000 annually per employee in salaries because disengaged employees miss deadlines, are late for work, and use more sick days and annual leave than engaged employees (Nunes, Richmond, Pampel, & Wood, 2018). The purpose of this research was to gain insight into the strategies that retail store managers use to increase employee engagement.

Background of the Problem

Employee engagement continues to be a popular topic for many retail owners in the United States, as they strive to stay competitive. Less than one-third of workers in the United States have engaged in their work since Gallup commenced tracking employee workforce engagement in 2000 (Nelson, 2017). For businesses to continue to stay viable, it is important for their managers to invest in ways to engage their employees. According

to Suhartanto, Dean, Nansuri, and Triyuni (2018), engaged employees improve store performance because they have a positive attitude about work, show enthusiasm and diligence while working, and are committed to finding solutions to solve work-related problems. Engaged employees positively affect businesses, and employees are eager to work hard to accomplish organizational goals (Jiang & Men, 2017). Previous studies focused on employee engagement and customer satisfaction, and businesses have spent over $720 million a year on average to find ways to engage employees, but with minimal results (Nelson, 2017). Managing employees is a daunting endeavor. Additional information is needed about strategies that managers can incorporate to engage their employees. Radic (2017) posited that the work ethic of engaged employees can be attributed to sales, service, quality, safety, profits, and shareholder returns.

Problem Statement

In 2017, employee engagement in the United States experienced a 4-year low and continues to decrease (Saks, 2017). Research published in the *Gallup Management Journal*'s Semiannual Employee Engagement Index and *Right Management* identified only 31% of employees as engaged and 69% as disengaged (Rao, 2017). The general business problem was that some retail store managers fail to establish strategies to improve employee engagement, which results in the loss of business profitability. The specific business problem was that some retail store managers lack strategies to engage employees.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that some retail store managers use to engage employees. The target population was five retail store managers located in Atlanta, Georgia, who have a proven track record of successfully implementing strategies to engage employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential to provide managers with a deeper understanding of the strategies necessary to increase employee engagement, which may also contribute to decreasing employee turnover, and improving the overall success of the organization, which may lead to employees performing positively in social settings by contributing their time and talents to the people in their community and society.

Nature of the Study

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are the three most prominent methods researchers use in their studies. Choosing the qualitative method provides researchers with an opportunity to explore the personal experiences of participants (A.J. Fletcher, 2017). Additionally, researchers use qualitative research to provide an in-depth account of everyday problems, and to obtain information from research participants who experienced a phenomenon (Inman, Campbell, Kirmani, & Price, 2018). Researchers use quantitative research to test hypotheses and provide statistical data to answer research questions about variables, relationships, or groups' differences (Tunarosa & Glynn, 2017). Mixed methods research is suitable when researchers require the infusion of qualitative and quantitative data to fully interpret a phenomenon (Tunarosa & Glynn, 2017). The quantitative method was not suitable for this study because I did not test

hypotheses to examine employee engagement strategies; and the mixed methods approach was not appropriate because quantitative analysis was not necessary.

There are several qualitative designs. I used a single case study design for this research study. I also considered a phenomenological and narrative research design. A phenomenological research design is useful to researchers who need to capture information from participants who can share the meaning of the phenomena (Oliveri & Pravettoni, 2018). Social science and public health researchers use the phenomenological approach to gain insights from participants who share information on what they are experiencing while undergoing treatment for terminal illness (Oliveri & Pravettoni, 2018). The phenomenological approach was not suitable for this study because I did not intend to explore the meaning of employees' experiences, but rather to explore their strategies (Jani & Saiyed, 2017). The narrative design was not appropriate for this study because I did not intend to capture and analyze detailed stories from the participants for my research (Barbour, Doshi, & Hernández, 2016). Researchers use a case study design to seek information from individuals who have expertise on a specific subject matter (Yin, 2018). I used the case study design to gather detailed information from participants about the strategies retail managers may use to improve employee engagement in the workplace.

Research Question

What strategies do some retail managers use to engage employees?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to engage the employees within your organization?

2. How did the employees react to the implemented engagement strategies?
3. What engagement strategies have you found to be the most successful?
4. What engagement strategies have you found to be least successful?
5. Based upon your experiences, how have disengaged employees affected the work environment?
6. What role does leadership play in engaging employees?
7. How do you assess the effectiveness of the strategies for employee engagement?
8. Based upon your experiences, what are some of the benefits of successful employee engagement strategies?
9. What additional information would you like to provide regarding the strategies used to improve employee engagement?

Conceptual Framework

One of the pioneers to address employee engagement and its merits was William Kahn. Kahn (1990) documented the psychological and physical importance of an employee who is cognitively and emotionally present while working. To understand how individual's, rely on themselves at work based on the roles they play, Kahn designed conceived of the conceptual framework known as the theory of personal engagement and disengagement. Kahn posited that an employee's level of commitment depended on whether the employee felt valued, which she or he based on the employee's work climate. Kahn argued that meaningfulness, safety, and availability are psychological conditions linked to employee engagement in the workplace.

Saks (2006) explored Kahn's theory and concluded that, while engagement is related to job and organization engagement, personal engagement and social exchange are both separate theories. Through his theory of social exchange, Saks contended that management's response to employees' positive behaviors should reciprocate the expectation for employees to engage at work. Kahn's theory of personal engagement and disengagement and Saks's (2006) theory on social exchange could both align with this exploration of the strategies that retail store managers used to motivate their employees, and therefore were useful for understanding the findings from my study.

Operational Definitions

Cognitive engagement: Cognitive engagement is when employees cognitively relate to a positive work environment, where they can make meaningful contributions and are provided with the tools necessary to be productive (Joo, Zigarmi, Nimon, & Shuck, 2017; Kahn, 1990).

Disengaged employees: Disengaged employees display unfair work practices in relation to working conditions, workload, fairness, and favoritism. Employees become withdrawn, lose interest in their work, and become less productive (Aslam, Muqadas, Imran, & Rahman, 2018).

Employee engagement: Employee engagement is the ability to connect from an emotional, cognitive, and physical perspective to perform in a working environment (Kahn, 1990), which, in turn, results in job satisfaction, job commitment, and job involvement (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Engagement strategies: Engagement strategies are strategies that business owners use to create employee encounters that lead to long-term connections to enhance employee retention and productivity (Cattermole, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are accounts included in a doctoral study that are important to mention, even though they are outside of the researcher's ability to control (Grant, Kovács, & Spens, 2018). Assumptions in qualitative research relate to the philosophical beliefs of the researcher (Palagolla, 2016; Simon & Goes, 2013). The general assumptions associated with my study included that all the participants provided honest responses to the questions asked. Another assumption was that the population sampled was qualified and provided relevant information necessary to add insight on the topic of strategies managers may use to successfully engage employees. Finally, the documentation and reports provided contained reliable and valid information to support the information the managers provided.

Limitations

Identifying and explaining limitations in research serves two main purposes. First, it is important to identify limitations pertaining to research to explain weaknesses in the study that may impact the results (Greener, 2018). Second, rigor in qualitative research is more difficult to maintain and assess, which provides an opportunity and path for future research (Greener, 2018).

One limitation was that the participants may not have provided enough relevant information from their experiences to successfully implement employee engagement strategies in the workplace due to time restrictions. The second limitation was that the chosen population sample for this qualitative analysis was limited to Atlanta, Georgia. Lastly, the validity of my research is another limitation, because the main source of data collected relied heavily on participants' perceptions, as captured via the interviews. While interviews were not the only source of data, the responses provided by the participants played a critical role in the study's foundation.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries or confines of the study and are controlled by the researcher (Simon & Goes, 2013). The focus and scope of the research problem is another delimitation, where in most cases the responses provided may not be reflective of everyone in other countries or similar organizations (Simon & Goes, 2013). One delimitation associated with my research surrounds the participant demographics. The first delimitation was the target population. The participants were limited to a target population in a specific retail business located in Atlanta, Georgia, which did not allow for a more inclusive participant pool of retail managers from other cities in Georgia. In addition, I chose to limit my participants by acquiring expert opinions and strategies from retail store managers only and excluded managers from other industries.

Significance of the Study

Employee engagement and job satisfaction are important aspects of organizational sustainability. Engaged employees can positively affect business productivity,

performance, and profitability, which may lead to organizational excellence and provide a business with a competitive edge over rival companies (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Improving employee engagement can provide tangible results for businesses as satisfied employees share stories about workplace benefits and view their businesses in a positive light.

Contribution to Business Practice

Managers may find the results of the study useful because business viability depends on the ability to engage and retain employees (Jiang & Men, 2017; Schneider & Blankenship, 2017). Engaged employees contribute to the practice of business leaders effectively addressing business challenges such as productivity, profitability, customer loyalty, and customer satisfaction (Jiang & Men, 2017). Disengaged employees continue to be an expensive proposition for businesses (Batra, 2017; Prathiba, 2016) and continue to be an important issue for business managers (Sievert & Scholz, 2017). Managers who incorporate the strategies from the results of this study may strengthen their retail store business practices. Learning strategies from managers in high-functioning retail stores can help managers to increase performance and profitability, while reducing the number of nonproductive and disengaged employees. Furthermore, managers may improve business practices by adapting work strategies and implementing suggested tools to motivate their employees and create an engaging and productive workforce. Adopting new strategies may increase sales and improve businesses' financial performance and shareholders returns.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study may contribute to social change through the individual development of employees in the workplace, where employees can use their skills, knowledge, and ability to engage members of their community and society. Business leaders may continue to provide avenues for employment for the residents of their communities. New jobs may lead to infrastructural changes to office buildings and new housing developments, which further lead to a better quality of living for individuals.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The foundational knowledge on the research topic in the literature review identifies discrepancies such as gaps in research, conflicts in previous studies, and questions raised in previous research (Bodolica & Spraggon, 2018). The main purpose of the literature review is to facilitate the production of evaluative and beneficial information relative to the research topic (Winchester & Salji, 2016). The purpose of this literature review is to provide a detailed analysis of previous constructs related to employee engagement, including. This in-depth review includes a synthesis of constructs on employee engagement, employee disengagement, work motivation, management strategies, leadership styles, and communication. The purpose of the qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that some retail store managers use to engage employees.

I organized the literature into three sections. In the first section, I provide detailed information on employee engagement conceptual frameworks. In the second section, I discuss Kahn’s (1990) employee engagement theory and Saks’s (2017) theory on social

exchange, where I include the foundation for understanding the implementation of employee engagement strategies in retail department stores. In the final section, I explore an alternative theory of employee engagement.

I used the following keywords to search for materials: *employee engagement, employee disengagement, leadership styles,* and *management strategies.* In the final section, I explored an alternative theory on employee engagement.

I used resources found in databases within the Walden University library, including Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, Emerald Management Journals, ProQuest Central, ABI/INFORM Collection, and Sage Premier, I also used Google Scholar to search articles. In the literature review, I used 157 references to establish rigor and to conduct an in-depth analysis of current literature. Of those references cited, 141 (89%) were peer-reviewed articles, journals, or books. I also used seminal peer-reviewed sources that aligned with my conceptual framework. The peer-reviewed sources included articles published from 2016 to and 2020, which is within 5 years of the anticipated publication date of the study.

Conceptual Framework

For this study, I used two theories of engagement, the theory of engagement and the theory of social exchange. In this section, I discussed the constructs of theorists Kahn and Saks, whose work I used to ground the conceptual framework for my research study. Kahn's research has appeared in scores of scholarly works, cited as one of the initial theorists to explore engagement. More recently, Saks expanded on Kahn's theory by linking engagement with his theory on social exchange. Saks (2006) explained the

association of several outcomes with follower engagement and indicated that when employees are satisfied with their jobs, they are less likely to leave. Engaged employees who go beyond in their work to complete tasks and management whose behavior supports employees lead to high performance levels (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Saks, 2006). Both theorists' work has significant implications that can provide information on strategies that retail managers may use to engage employees.

Kahn's engagement theory. Kahn was one of the forerunners who addressed employee engagement and its advantages to business. To establish his groundbreaking theory on engagement, Kahn (1990) conducted two studies that involved using different organizational contexts and taking on multiple roles, first as a participant and observer, and second as an outside researcher. Kahn felt the need to explore engagement using vastly different settings in order to generalize the findings. Kahn contended that personal engagement is most effective when individuals can see themselves immersed in roles related to the work they do, while personal disengagement is the reverse, where individuals detach themselves from the roles related to the work performed.

In his definition on engagement, Kahn (1990) contended that employees become engaged based on their cognitive, emotional, and physical state of well-being. One interpretation of cognitive engagement is through a work lens, where an employee feels connected to work roles, which leads to increased engagement (Joo et al., 2017; Kahn, 1990). Emotional engagement enhances the way employees think; in return, employees display high energy levels toward task completion (Shuck, Collins, Rocco, & Diaz,

2016). Physical or behavioral engagement refers to an employee's display of willingness and commitment to fulfill difficult assignments (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015; Kahn, 1990). According to Kahn, cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and physical engagement are all interrelated expressions that are dependent on each other and lead to full employee engagement in the workplace. Given the significance of the outcomes, organizational leaders should try to find ways to boost employee engagement in the workplace.

Cognitive engagement. Kahn's (1990) research detailed the psychological and physical importance of an employee being cognitively present while working. Cognitive engagement occurs when employees become aware of their task from a mental perspective. Kahn defined cognitively engaged employees as mentally stimulated, focused, and absorbed in their respective work roles. Employees with high levels of cognitive engagement are reasonably aware of their role and can identify with the mission of the organization (Lam, Loi, Chan, & Liu, 2016). Being engaged cognitively also means that the work employees perform is meaningful, and the employees have access to the proper resources (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). An association exists between cognitive engagement and highly engaged employees who continue to thrive with the appropriate resources.

Engaged employees are psychologically present and invest more vigor in work roles (Kahn, 1990; Kumar & Pensari, 2015; Lam et al., 2016). When employees are in sync with their work roles, they become motivated to achieve positive results. According to Alagaraja and Shuck (2015), cognitively engaged employees display high levels of

efficiency and are willing to go beyond to complete tasks. Emotionally engaged employees display dedication and commitment to work assignments and have high levels of engagement with their work. Yoo (2016) posited that emotional engagement represented an employee's eagerness to bond on a cognitive level and share organizational commitment.

Emotional engagement. Emotional engagement refers to an individual's sense of being or to an individual's values. Kahn's (1990) definition of emotional engagement identified how employees use their critical thinking ability to complete work roles. While Yoo (2016) defined emotional engagement as a knowledgeable and emotional duty to an organization from an employee's perspective, Kassa and Raju (2015) contended that emotional engagement also relates to how well individuals react based on their personal attitudes and feelings. When employees become emotionally connected to their job, they experience feelings such as pride, sense of purpose, and self-importance (Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2015; M. Khan & Lakshmi, 2018). Employees who are emotionally attached to their work roles display high levels of engagement.

Scholars have contended that emotional events and well-being are related to employee engagement. Leaders who understand the importance of employees being emotionally engaged reap the benefits of the employees becoming personally invested in the organization's success (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Emotional engagement refers to an employee's ability to be a critical thinker and problem solver (Hardaker & Fill, 2005; Kahn, 1990; Shuck, Adelson, & Reio, 2017). Whether an organization fails or succeeds is dependent on how well employees identify with the mission and vision of the

organization (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Employees become engaged based on their emotional and personal attachments to an organization.

Physical engagement. Physical engagement is equally important and plays a major role in the way an individual becomes engaged. Kahn (1990) contended that employees cannot accomplish cognitive and emotional engagement without the presence of physical engagement. Physical engagement represents the force or actions that an individual exerts to perform a task (Zacher, Chan, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2015). For individuals to be physically engaged, they also need to be emotionally and cognitively vested in their work roles. Kahn described the personal experience of a scuba-diving instructor at a summer camp, who experienced moments of personal engagement and pride in his job. Kahn explained that, in order to prepare for the diving expedition, the instructor had to exert himself physically by ensuring that the diving apparatus was in excellent condition prior to the dive; cognitively by ensuring the divers were safe, checking the diving apparatus, and spearheading the expedition; and emotionally by displaying vested interest, assuaging the fears of the divers, and replacing the fear with excitement. Physical engagement is the willingness of individuals to immerse themselves cognitively and emotionally in the work they perform (L. Fletcher, 2017).

Physical engagement is the application of drive and determination in an individual's work role (L. Fletcher, 2017). Physical engagement describes not only the work role but also the amount of effort an individual exerts to accomplish the task (Kuok & Taormina, 2017). In addition, Kahn (1990) found that, when individuals experience personal hindrances from the physical environment (lack of focus due to workplace

conditions, system inefficiencies, or ineffective communication), it becomes impossible for the individuals to physically do their job. It is important that leaders understand that cognitive, emotional, and physical employee engagement help to create a successful organization.

Kahn (1990) further noted that three physiological conditions exist attributed to work contexts where individuals experience periods of personal engagement and disengagement: psychological meaningfulness where an individual can identify with feeling useful, worthwhile, and valued; physiological safety where an individual can identify with feeling the need to be in a trustworthy, secure, and nonthreatening environment; and physiological availability where the individual can identify with having physical, emotional, or psychological ability or resources to engage on a personal level. Additionally, Basit (2017) contended that psychological safety promotes employee engagement because individuals believe they gain protection from threats, whereas Kumar and Pansari (2016) found that employee loyalty, commitment, and performance relate to an employee's safety, well-being, and connectedness. The authors collectively confirmed that once employees' psychological needs are met, which includes safety, trust, and loyalty, they are more likely to be engaged.

Psychological meaningfulness. Psychological meaningfulness refers to an employee's desire to feel needed and useful in the workplace. Kahn (1990) posited that psychological meaningfulness refers to a sense of feeling useful, valuable, and meaningful. Saks (2006) built on Kahn's theory and contended that, along with meaningfulness, safety, and availability, other engagement predictors are organizational

support, procedural justice, and availability. Tims, Derks, and Bakker (2016) further explained that individuals are more connected to accomplishing work goals than personal goals. It is critical that leaders design and encourage programs that are meaningful to their employees. Liu and Zhou (2018) found that, when managers implemented high-potential programs, employees had stronger emotional connections to psychological conditions of meaningfulness. Employees pursue meaningfulness to feel respected and appreciated at work.

Psychological meaningfulness and work engagement are attributes of productivity and profitability. Kahn (1990) found that when employees had meaningful roles, they became more creative, acquired new skills, and were more productive at work. Tims et al. (2016) explained that when employees viewed the psychological atmosphere in the workplace, where leadership is supportive, engagement levels increased. Organizations are successful when employees feel a sense of belonging, like the work they perform makes a difference, which leads to the financial stability and overall success of the business (O. T. Arogundade & A.B. Arogundade, 2015). Employees need to find meaningfulness at work to feel accepted and respected.

Managers must find ways to meet their employees' needs to ensure the work performed is meaningful. Kahn (1990) found that creating a working climate where employees are encouraged and valued inspires the employees to work hard and give their best effort. Ugwu and Onyishi (2018) noted that, even though some employees experienced high levels of organizational frustration, a positive relationship existed between psychological meaningfulness and work engagement when employees

maintained a high sense of calling. Chaudhary and Panda (2018) indicated that managers who adapt a certain leadership style generate psychological meaningfulness, which improves inventiveness and work engagement (Barta, 2017; Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Chaudhary & Panda, 2018). Based on leadership styles where leaders understand the importance of creating a psychological meaningful environment for employees, employees in return feel that the job they perform contributes to the organization's overall value.

Psychological safety. Kahn (1990) reported that psychological safety is attributable to employees' individual sense of well-being. Psychological safety increases employee engagement (Kahn, 1990; Page, Boysen, & Arya, 2019). Khan (1990) contended that psychological safety, which supports employee's freedom of opinions is critical, where managers create a transparent environment where employees can voice their views without fear of retaliation. Han, Hao, Yang, and Liu (2016) found that leader transparency influences employee psychological safety, which also promotes creativity and a positive working environment. Business leaders who cultivate a psychologically safe environment encourage employees to develop new skills, willingly contribute by sharing their ideas, and find alternative ways in an effort to solve problems when resources are scarce (Tims et al., 2016; Walters & Diab, 2016). For employees to be psychologically safe, business leaders must facilitate a working environment where employees have the chance to share their ideas and learn new skills.

Promoting safe practices and behaviors to reduce workplace injuries is an important concern for retail business leaders. Nimri, Bdair, and Al Bitar (2015) found

that safe working conditions and psychological safety related directly to employee engagement. Dollard and Bakker (2010) contended that management commitment, management priority, organizational communication, and organizational participation are all aspects of a psychologically safe work environment. Practicing a culture of prevention by ensuring that managers receive training, establish policies and procedures to make sure that psychological health is a priority, and provide employees with resources that will promote their personal development is critical to enhance worker engagement (Huyghebaert, Gillet, Lahiani, Dubois-Fleury, & Fouquereau, 2018). When management takes safety precautions seriously and a business develops a strong safety culture, positive outcomes result, and employees are more likely to engage.

Psychological availability. Psychological availability refers to having the mental capability to perform at work when other conditions exist such as coping with everyday living (Kahn, 1990). In addition, the depletion of physical and emotional energy, personal security, and outside lives was found to be the main diversion that influenced psychological availability (Kahn, 1990). Distractions may limit employees' ability to be fully committed to their work roles, which may lead to decreased work engagement. Liu and Zhou (2018) found that psychological availability and meaningfulness mediate the relationship between high-potential programs and employees' emotional commitment, whereas Danner-Vlaardingerbroek, Kluwer, van Steenbergen, and van der Lippe (2013) found that psychological availability mediated the link between negative and positive work-related moods, such as work-related positive or negative behaviors. Consequently, it is incumbent on management to establish a stress-free working environment for

employees to be fully engaged. Psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability are contributing factors necessary to increase employee engagement.

Saks's Social Exchange Theory

Through a study on the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement, Saks (2006) continued the conversation to measure and interpret the meaning of employee engagement. Through his social exchange theory (SET), Saks contended that management's reaction to employees' positive behaviors should reciprocate the expectation for engagement by employees. Saks (2017) contended that a set of rules govern the SET, where relationships morph over time forming loyal, trusting, and reciprocal commitments. Saks (2017) explained that managers must remove the existing barriers of employee engagement by adapting workable solutions. Harter et al. (2002) identified generalizations throughout companies by referencing correlations between employee behaviors, business productivity, and profitability. Saks (2006) and Harter et al. both made similar distinctions that employee engagement is important to business and referenced the seminal constructs of Kahn.

Saks (2017) understood the importance of employee engagement in an organization and realized that more research was necessary. Drawing from Kahn's (1990) definition on engagement and disengagement, and Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter's (2001) definition of engagement as the negative or positive antitheses of burnout, Saks's SET provided the theoretical groundwork to explain why employees are engaged or disengaged at work. Saks identified employee engagement as it relates to job and

organization engagement. The antecedents included job characteristics, rewards and recognition, perceived organizational support, and distributive and procedural justice as factors that predict employee engagement (Saks, 2006).

Individuals' become vested in their organization through their level of engagement. Saks (2017) found that job characteristics such as psychological meaningfulness, workload, and control settings positively related to job and organization engagement by claiming that, from a SET perspective, employees provided with enhanced and stimulating assignments display high engagement levels. Haddon (2018) noted that organizational leaders who invite employees to take part in workplace activities benefit from happier and more productive employees, which translates to increased engagement and productivity in the workplace. Lv and Xu (2018) found that based on SET, employees will operate differently according to how leaders within organizations and implement initiatives that meet their needs from an emotional perspective. Social exchange theory is applicable to the workplace because employees assess their interactions by considering the benefits, they feel they will receive.

The second antecedent that Saks researched related to rewards and recognition. Saks (2017) found that rewards and recognition had a positive relationship to job engagement and organizational engagement. Kahn (1990) noted that the rewards and recognition received for work performed may vary based on employee perception. Alzyoud (2018) found that, while rewards provide incentives for employees to continue to perform well on the job, recognition is also important as it serves as a form of feedback. Engaged employees may learn to increase their skills at work to be more

productive in a positive workplace setting that provides psychological and financial rewards (Lu, Wang, Lu, Du, & Bakker, 2014). Accordingly, rewards and recognition play a vital role in how well employees respond and engage in the workplace setting.

Kahn (1990) also indicated that individuals' engagement level fluctuates based on how they perceive benefits. Tiwari and Lenka (2016) reported that lack of rewards and recognition can trigger burnout, which is also necessary for engagement. The resource theory of E.B Foa and U. G. Foa (1980) identified employee rewards and recognition as economic and socioemotional outcomes, where economic outcomes adhere to financial needs from a tangible perspective, and socioemotional outcomes adhere to an individual's social and esteem status from a figurative and particularistic perspective. Rewards and recognition are critical and should receive consideration to engage employees effectively in retail organizations.

Perceived organizational and supervisor support is another antecedent used by Saks to explain his SET. One of the core values of any organization is employee engagement. Saks (2017) found that perceived organizational and supervisor support positively related to job and organizational engagement. Saks (2006) further explained through his SET that management and employee relationships are built from mutual obligations, where if the employee feels like managers are transparent about the organization's intentions, they are more likely to become engaged. When employees feel valued and feel that their supervisor cares about overall success and well-being, they are more likely to become engaged (Lăzăroiu, 2015; Saks, 2017). Alternatively, Maslach et

al. (2001) found that lack of supervisor support consistently relates to burnout, which can also be the root cause of employee disengagement (Sievert & Scholz, 2017).

Organizational support may provide significant advantages for employees and organizations.

Distributive and procedural justice relates to the way organizational leaders handle the process regarding disbursing rewards and recognitions (Saks, 2017). Velez and Neves (2017) noted that distributive justice relates to how individuals perceive fairness and outcomes, and Saks (2017) indicated organizational justice relates to how employees feel about their jobs in terms of satisfaction, commitment, and corporate conduct. Because distributive justice relates to how individuals perceive fairness, it is important to understand the strong implications from an organizational perspective, with the distribution of outcomes an essential part of the process (Velez & Neves, 2017). Based on the evidence provided by Saks and by Velex and Neves, distributive justice positively relates to job and organization engagement.

Researchers have shown that employee engagement has positive consequences for organizations. Kahn (1990) reported that engagement provides benefits for individuals, as well as for organizations, whereas Saks (2017) indicated that, when managers implement exchange rules based on his SET, individuals experience relationships where trust, loyalty, and commitment yield positive results for an organization. Saks noted that job and organization engagement relate positively to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior and negatively to intention to quit. Akingbola and van den Berg’s (2019) research yielded similar results with one caveat:

employees of nonprofit organizations are less likely to have the intention to quit because work roles are considered voluntary.

Kaur (2017) explained that the need for more studies on employee engagement is essential to help managers to develop strategies that would lead to continued organizational success. Managers need to understand why and how employees become engaged and disengaged (Tucker, 2017). In the next section, I provide a definition and detailed explanations of employee engagement and disengagement. In addition, I discuss the impact of engaged and disengaged employees on businesses.

Employee Engagement

Defining employee engagement is necessary to understand employee engagement from a research perspective (Jin & McDonald, 2017). Kahn (1990) initially introduced the engagement concept, noting that individuals become immersed in work roles and express themselves using physical, cognitive, and emotional expressions. Kahn observed that periods of engagement and disengagement were present in work environments based on the tasks assigned to individuals. Carasco-Saul, Kim, and Kim (2015) recognized employee engagement as an interchangeable term used with personal engagement, role engagement, work engagement, and job engagement.

To define employee engagement, Shuck, Osam, Zigarmi, and Nimon (2017) posited that the meaning of employee engagement has several connotations with inconclusive results. Karumuri (2016) indicated that employee engagement pertains to the level of employees' emotional and intellectual devotion to a task that will ultimately help an organization to reach its goals. Employee engagement as an active psychological

state that covers work experiences such as on-the-job training, teamwork, and jobs (Shuck, et al., 2017). Other ways to characterize employee engagement include freedom in the workplace, value creation, doing more than just the regular job, making connections for career advancement, and gaining non-work-related experiences (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018). Subsequently, it is critical that managers understand the definition of employee engagement if they are to find solutions to increase engagement in the workplace.

Shuck, Adelson and Reio (2017) created an overview of constructs related to engagement by providing definitions and unique focal points. Other scholars indicated that types of engagement included work engagement, job engagement, organizational engagement, employee engagement, cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement (Shuck, Osam, Zigarmi, & Nimon, 2017). To thrive and remain competitive, business leaders must constantly find ways to engage employees (Tims et al., 2016). It is important to understand the dimensions of each engagement type and how it affects the way that employees engage in the workplace.

Types of Employee Engagement

Several types of engagement relate to employees in the workplace. According to Adkins (2015), an employee can be engaged, not engaged, or actively disengaged. Engaged employees are employees who contribute to an organization's overall success and are fully immersed in their work roles using their skills and abilities (Kahn, 1990; Thompson & Webber, 2016). Nonengaged employees are manager-led employees who only work on the tasks given and add no additional value to the

organization (Harris & He, 2019; Popli & Rizvi, 2015), while actively disengaged employees can stymie an organization's success and growth through negativity and low productivity levels, which results in financial losses (Popli & Rizvi, 2015).

Engaged employees. Engaged employees provide valuable outcomes to businesses. Managers must ensure they fully understand what engagement means. Engaged employees are more productive and provide positive consequences for themselves and their organizations (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Kumar and Pansari (2016) posited that 70% of the managers observed indicated that engaged employees enable a firm to meet its goals and to benefit financially. Shuck, Adelson, and Reio (2017) emphasized that positive employee engagement occurs after meeting an employee's psychological needs. While employee satisfaction is crucial for organizational success, managers need to understand what true engagement entails and work with human resources to develop engagement programs for employees (Mayo, 2016). Because employee engagement is important for business success, leaders must have access to the tools they need to develop strategies to engage employees.

Engaged employees perform better on their job, willingly take on new tasks, and are more productive. In fact, Reijseger, Peeters, Taris, and Schaufeli (2017) noted that actively engaged employees performed at a higher level than disengaged employees and were willing to take extra assignments. Kumar and Pansari (2016) found that engaged employees' express satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, and perform at a higher pace, which contributes to an organization's success. In addition, Popli and Rizvi (2016) explained that leaders can realize a benefit from highly functional employees that results

in increased productivity and profitability and higher levels of employee commitment when executing employee engagement strategies. Accordingly, when engaged employees display high productivity levels, companies are more successful.

To engage employees, managers must effectively communicate with them and provide them with opportunities to feel empowered and supported (Holland, Cooper, & Sheehan, 2017). Human resource managers in organizations play a major role by implementing environmental initiatives to promote employee well-being (Benn, Teo, & Martin, 2015). Allowing employees to find their voice and including them in the decision-making process helps actively engage employees (Rao, 2017). Krishnaveni and Monica (2016) identified five primary drivers that lead to effective employee engagement in the workplace: job characteristics, supervisor support, coworker support, training and development, and perceived fairness and recognition. Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement addressed the physical, emotional, and cognitive support as necessary indicators to engage employees. Employees gravitate toward organizational managers who take the time to implement tools and strategies to engage employees and who pay special attention to employees' needs.

Nonengaged employees. Nonengaged employees are unmotivated employees who are unlikely not supportive of others regarding organizational success (Adkins, 2015). Nonengaged employees do not focus on assisting their organization to achieve objectives and goals because they only focus on their individual assignments. More than half of the employees in an organization are not engaged during specific periods (Popli & Rizvi, 2015), which further explains why organizations have productivity losses. Gupta

and Sharma (2016) found that nonengaged employees contribute to productivity losses because they do not feel connected to an organization.

Nonengaged employees provide minimal effort to an organization, even though they arrive to work on time and focus on their designated roles (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). Nonengaged employees feel like they are constantly passed over for promotions and that management does not value their efforts (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Managers can work on engaging nonengaged employees by providing meaningful work assignments that would make them feel more appreciated (Glavas, 2016; Kahn, 1990). It is important that managers understand why employees are not engaged and provide meaningful work roles so the employees may feel appreciated, valued, and actively engaged.

Actively disengaged employees. Actively disengaged employees negatively affect businesses and present challenges for managers in organizations. Disengaged employees create a major financial burden for organizations (Jin & McDonald, 2017). Disengaged employees also refuse to go the extra mile to get the job done if it is beyond the scope of their job description (Jindal, Shaikh, & Shashank, 2017). According to Popli and Rizvi (2015), disengaged employees are nonproductive and stymie an organization's progress by providing negative input, showing a lack of enthusiasm regarding projects or new tasks, and displaying irresponsible behavior (absenteeism, tardiness, and neglecting deadlines). Disengaged employees can seriously affect an organization financially, (low productivity, decreased profits) and emotionally (disruption and conflict among employees).

Auh, Menguc, Spyropoulou, and Wang (2016) provided useful insight into reasons for high levels of disengagement among service employees. Service employees, by virtue of their position, can either make or break a business through customer service (Auh et al., 2016). Service employees become disengaged because of poor working conditions, lack of supervisor support, and lack of employee CSR programs (Hejjas et al, 2018). Although some employees were still disengaged despite the implementation of corporate social responsibility programs, they took part in the programs because they had a passion for what the program entailed singing or volunteer activities (Hejjas et al., 2018). Because retail store employees are in the service employee category, it is important to understand that disengaged employees can lead to productivity issues and ultimately business failure.

When supervisors find it difficult to be fair minded, employees are likely to pull back and disengage themselves from their work roles (Saks, 2017). According to Plester and Hutchison (2016), research on disengagement is lacking, and researchers consider burnout to be the antithesis of engagement. High turnover rates that lead to constant recruitment and associated costs, poor customer service that leads to lost revenue, and excessive absenteeism and tardiness are factors attributed to disengaged employees (Rastogi, Pati, Krishnan, & Krishnan, 2018). According to Popli and Rizvi (2016), the effects of disengaged employees on businesses need further analysis. Finding strategies to increase employee engagement would significantly reverse the effects of disengaged employees.

Leadership Styles Associated with Employee Engagement

Employees are one of the most instrumental assets of an organization. Employees could control the success or failure of the company (Auh et al., 2016). Organizational leaders who understand the importance of employee engagement have adopted strategies to ensure their employees are engaged. Finding managers who possess the correct leadership style that works with employee engagement can save time and money. According to Othman, Hazmah, Abas, and Zakuan (2017), leadership styles play a vital role in assuming employee behavior. Several theorists found that a significant and positive relationship exists between leadership styles and employee engagement (Drzewiecka & Roczniewska, 2018; Putri, 2018; Saad, Sudin, & Shamsuddin, 2018). It is important to understand what leadership styles have a close association with employee engagement.

There are several leadership styles commonly associated with effective employee engagement: transformational leadership, where leaders inspire their followers; servant leadership, where leaders support inclusion and serve their followers by ensuring their needs come first; and participative leadership, where leaders value their followers' ideas and support innovation and creativity (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). In this subsection, I explain how these three leadership styles align with Kahn's theory on engagement and Saks's theory on social exchange. I will also provide information on authoritative leadership and dysfunctional leadership and identify reasons why this type of leadership style is not suitable for engaging employees.

Transformational leadership. Transformational leaders transform and inspire followers to excel in organizations (Sahu, Pathardikar, & Kumar, 2018). Followers display honesty and engagement and contribute to a reduced employee turnover rate (Sahu et al., 2018). Employees are less likely to leave the organization if they are dedicated to their jobs, which ties back to the antecedent conditions proposed by Kahn (1990), where leadership behavior enhances safety, psychological meaningfulness, and availability. Saks (2006) further explained that employee engagement is an intermediary between apparent supervisor support and an employee's intention to resign. A link exists between transformational leadership and engaged employees, where employees are dedicated, inspired, and transformed by their respective managers.

Studies in retail sales indicate that leadership styles affect the attitudes of managers and their employees. Transformational leaders could directly affect the engagement levels of retail sales employees (Lindblom, Kajalo, & Mitronen, 2016). Transformational leaders must understand the importance of an effective working environment because it has a direct effect on employee motivation and engagement (Pradhan, Panda, & Jena, 2017). Transformational leaders display an ability to psychologically empower retail employees to perform better (Kahn, 1990; Pradhan et al., 2017). Employees must feel psychologically empowered to express their views, discuss new initiatives, and provide input on operations related to their jobs to add value to the organization (Pradhan et al., 2017). Transformational leaders affect retail sales employees in a positive manner, which ultimately leads to productive engaged employees and increased employee performance.

Organizational identification refers to the way employees relate to an organization and whether they feel a sense of belonging (Lindblom et al., 2016). Transformational leaders create an atmosphere of positivity and provide constructive suggestions to employees, which enables them to harbor positive feelings and feel a sense of belonging to the organization, which further increases their identification with the organization (Lindblom et al., 2016; Mazzei & Quaratino, 2017; Popli & Rizvi, 2016). Transformational leaders further motivate employees, making them feel that the work they perform is important, valuable, and related to a grand purpose (Pradhan et al., 2017). Transformational leaders play a vital role in managing, engaging, and empowering employees by creating an environmental culture of positivity and connectedness to an organization.

Servant leadership. Another leadership style that closely aligns with employee engagement is servant leadership. Researchers have indicated that servant leaders display the best leadership style to motivate, develop, and engage employees (Peachey, Burton, Wells, & Chung, 2018). Servant leaders create a culture of inclusion, where everyone serves as a leader in an organization (Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2016). Servant leaders also build a trusting environment, where employees are treated honestly and work toward building a strong team (Peachey et al., 2018). Servant leaders also provide direction and stimulating assignments for their employees, keeping them actively engaged and productive (Yang, Ming, Ma, & Huo, 2017). The main principles of servant leadership align with the key components of employee engagement (developing people, building trust, and accomplishing assignments) experienced in most organizations.

Kahn (1990) contended that when employees experience higher levels of meaningfulness at work, they are under the supervision of leaders who take care of their needs. Through their stewardship behavior, servant leaders provide psychological safety and meaningfulness (Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2016). Because servant leaders put their followers first, their leadership style stimulates followers (Haar, Brougham, Roche, & Barney, 2017), and Saks (2006) noted employee reciprocate the behavior by exuding higher energy levels directly related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. When managers assume a servant-leader-like approach toward their employees, they benefit from employees who are more engaged and productive because they feel like the managers will take care of their needs.

While servant leadership is prevalent in retail organizations, top management can do more to ensure leaders increase their promotion of employee well-being (Conzelmann, 2017). Briggs, Deretti, and Kato (2018) explained that one of the dimensions of service orientation relates to service leadership, where managers are servant leaders who lead by providing service to retail employees. The servant leadership approach occurs when managers create a service-oriented environment; demonstrate the willingness to give of themselves by implementing training programs designed to motivate, advance, and engage employees; and establish policies and procedures surrounding giving and receiving good customer service (Briggs et al., 2018). It is important for retail organizations to foster and encourage managers who have a servant leadership mind-set.

Participative leadership. The leadership style that works well with employee engagement is participative leadership. Similar to transformational leadership and servant

leadership, participative leadership wins support and loyalty from employees, which is essential for task completion (Salman, Khan, & Javaid, 2016). Participative leadership describes leaders who work well with members of their team (Lythreatis, Mostafa, & Wang, 2019). Participative leadership takes place when managers involve their employees by asking for input and suggestions before making final decisions (Chan, 2019). Managers who display a participative leadership style work well with employees by promoting work engagement, which leads to effective employee performance.

Previous constructs explained that the participative leadership style helps to promote employee commitment levels and job satisfaction. Participative leadership style managers produce satisfied employees and create high performance levels in the workplace (Islam, Tariq, & Usman, 2018). Organizations whose leaders embrace their employees, allowing them to participate in the decision-making process, create a cultural climate of flexibility and change (Albrecht, Breidahl, & Marty, 2018). Additionally, when leaders meet employees' goals and expectations, the results yield a positive working environment and job satisfaction (Mariappanadar, 2018). In retail organizations when employees are satisfied, customer relationships improve (Briggs et al., 2018). Because participative-style managers encourage employee participation and ensure job satisfaction, employees are highly productive and engaged.

Authoritative leadership promotes a culture of compliance where leaders set the vision and organizational communication with stated goals, purpose, and direction, without any input from employees (Jiang & Luo, 2018). Authoritative leaders present a dominant and powerful force and do not mesh well with employees, especially

millennials (Akanji, Mordi, Ajonbadi, & Mojeed-Sanni, 2018). Authoritative leaders will more than likely face resistance from their employees; therefore, this leadership style is not recommended for employee engagement.

Dysfunctional leadership has a negative effect on employees and employee productivity (Alemu, 2016; Shuck, Rose, & Bergman, 2015). Although some managers are unaware of their abusive and coercive behavior (Shuck et al., 2015), other managers' abusive supervision and leadership lead to employee silence from feelings of emotional exhaustion (Xu, Loi, & Lam, 2015). How leaders manage and lead is important for organizational success. Weeding out dysfunctional leaders to change leadership teams' mind-set may save organizations millions of dollars in legal fees (Lazan, 2016). Weeding out dysfunctional leaders may also lead to more engaged employees and a more productive and efficient workforce.

Management Strategies

Engaged employees provide a strategic advantage for businesses by increasing productivity and profitability, which is an asset to an organization. Engaging employees is beneficial to an organization's success, although managers may face barriers implementing the changes necessary to engage and motivate staff. Bell and Barkhuizen (2011) explained the importance of understanding the types of barriers to provide business leaders with useful information on ways to avoid these pitfalls. Neill and Jiang (2017) posited that limiting external communication creates functional silos, while Tucker (2017) suggested being open and honest with employees promotes integrity and

transparency. Managers who are aware of these barriers may be in an optimal position to implement seamless changes in their efforts to engage employees.

Managers should understand what strategies work to engage employees. In the theory on social exchange, Saks (2006) argued that management must provide resources for employees to thrive for the employees to be actively engaged. Leadership and organizational communication with stated goals, purpose, and direction develops motivated and engaged employees (Jiang & Luo, 2018; Ruck, Welch, & Menara, 2017). Finding successful strategies that managers use to engage employees is important for optimal business success (Matthews, 2018). Managers must first adapt workable strategies to fully engage their employees.

Communication. One strategy that managers can use is communication. Strong leadership, where managers place emphasis on learning ways to communicate results to highly engaged employees (Saad et al., 2018). Conducting meetings creates a structured setting for employee engagement, because meetings allow managers to use the time set aside for the meeting to communicate with staff on important job-related issues (Allen, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Sands, 2016; Bergman, Dellve, & Skagert, 2016). Different modes of formal communications include monthly branch meetings, job-related meetings, and team meetings. Setting meetings systematically is critical to increasing employee engagement and organizational performance expectations and to providing clarity regarding work duties (Tan, 2018). Managers conduct meetings as a form of communication where employees have an opportunity to use their interpersonal skills to collaborate and focus on work activities which increases employee engagement.

Another form of communication is the use of social media. For example, the use of social media is increasing, and most company leaders do not fully understand the value of allowing their employees to use social media during working hours (Smith, Stumberger, Guild, & Dugan, 2017). Using social media to engage employees is another trend leader's use to improve communication (Smith et al., 2017). When employees read stories about their organization on social media, they develop a sense of pride about the organization (Rissanen & Luoma-Aho, 2016). Understanding the communication methods leaders use to engage employees can help managers to make decisions that support an organizational climate that encourages employees to use social media to promote their place of employment.

E-mail communications is the most common way to communicate in the workplace. Estévez-Mujica and Quintane (2018) found that e-mail communications may be a great way to determine if employees are on the verge of job burnout and disengagement. Owen, Curran, Bantum, and Hanneman (2016) explained that e-mail communications tie to connectivity with staff more than blogs, discussion boards, and chatrooms. Managers use emails daily to effectively communicate with employees that telework from remote locations (Ter Hoeven, van Zoonen, & Fonner, 2016). Additionally, short email blasts can be used by managers to send congratulatory messages to employees who have done exceptional work (Jiang & Men, 2017).

Transparency. Transparency is another strategy that management may use to engage employees. Jiang and Men (2017) found that transparency represents the groundwork for developing employee engagement. When organizational leaders openly

and honestly share information on events within the company, and request employee participation and input, employees are more likely to feel engaged (Jiang & Men, 2017). Allowing employees to find their voice and including them in the decision-making process helps to engage employees (Rao, 2017). Holland et al. (2017) contended that without transparency, employees will lack direction and demonstrative commitment. Management must constantly provide information pertaining to the company's vision and goals to keep employees engaged (Holland et al., 2017; M. Khan & Lakshmi, 2018). When managers work collaboratively with employees, remain transparent about the company's goals, and create a culture of inclusion, employees are more engaged.

The way employees interact can affect how an organization is able to implement changes. Selivanoff (2018) explained that, when employees are not involved in the change management processes, they become disengaged and resistant, which creates costly delays. Employees may be less resistant to change if they are positively engaged, receive constant communication, and understand the entire process (Rieley, 2016). Appelbaum, Karelis, Le Henaff, and McLaughlin (2017) found that, while some employees show a high level of resistance when there is a merger or acquisition about to take place, other employees show resistance to change when there is less transparency or when the employees feel they have tasks that are not meaningful (Brett, Uhl-Bien, Huang, & Carsten, 2016; Petrou, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2016). Managers and leaders of organizations should ensure they are able to immediately address employee concerns when resistance occurs to avoid disengagement and disruptions in the workplace.

Training and development. Organizational leaders who invest in training managers to learn strategies that will engage and empower employees will benefit from a healthy working environment and fully engaged employees (Prathiba, 2016). Presbitero (2017) found that, when human resources management builds programs where managers focus on key areas such as training and development, there was a significant rise in employee engagement. Gupta (2015) encouraged managers to create an environment where an employee can learn new skills with opportunities to reach their full potential. Scholars recommend training and development as a mechanism for retail business management teams to learn strategies on how to engage employees.

When businesses managers collaborate with human resources and provide training and educational courses for their employees, the employees in return feel like the company is invested in their ability to advance, which further enhances employee engagement (Gupta, 2015; Tracey et al., 2015). For example, Starbucks offers employees several training and development incentives. Kumar and Pansari (2016) explained that Starbucks provides upward mobility programs and a variety of training initiatives for new and existing staff. For new staff, the company provides on-the-job training; has a formal academic program at Starbucks University; and created the Starbucks College Achievement Plan, where they provide total tuition reimbursement for employees who would like to pursue a 4-year degree (Starbucks Education, 2019). Employee development and advancement needs can be addressed through continuous training, which may contribute to improving job satisfaction (McManus & Mosca, 2015).

Knowledge sharing. Managers who take the time to communicate with employees provide effective knowledge sharing within organizations (Luu, 2016). Organizational leaders may find ways to engage employees through knowledge sharing and embracing diversity (Ford, Myrddin, & Jones, 2015; Harris, 2017). Scholars posit that knowledge sharing in conjunction with innovation foster creativity and participation among employees (AlShamsi & Ajmal, 2018; Islam & Tariq, 2018). When managers interact and engage employees through knowledge sharing, workers display proactive work behaviors and are more creative (Mura, Lettieri, Radaelli, & Spiller, 2016). Knowledge sharing leads to an effective and engaged workforce.

According to Razmerita, Kirchner, and Nielsen (2016), knowledge sharing is a critical part of social collaboration in organizations. Donating and sharing knowledge is the cornerstone of a successful organization (Firoozi & Hatami, 2017; Razmerita et al., 2016). From an individual perspective, knowledge is transferred and received where employees exchange ideas and information, know-how, experiences, and skills (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016; Mura et al., 2016; Razmerita et al., 2016). Knowledge sharing can be either explicit or tacit (Han, 2018). Explicit knowledge is tangible, where information on rules, polices, procedures, and electronic information is provided or shared with employees, whereas tacit knowledge is not readily assessible because it is stored in an individual's mind and shared only when an individual displays an intention to share (Firoozi & Hatami, 2017; Han, 2018).

Knowledge sharing depends heavily on the organizational climate. Llopis and Foss (2016) noted that creating an environment for knowledge sharing is difficult and

requires a long-term approach. Han (2018) explained that when leaders create a climate where knowledge sharing is supported and encouraged the organization flourishes because employees are more engaged. Management support is the key to creating knowledge-sharing environments (Hussein, Singh, Farouk, & Sohal, 2016). Because knowledge sharing is vital to organizational success, it is important that management create an environment where employees continue to be engaged so that they feel comfortable sharing information with each other for the continued growth of the company.

Rewards and recognition. Organizations whose leaders continue to find ways to engage employees continue to be successful and productive (Nelissen, Forrier, & Verbruggen, 2017). Companies whose leaders invest in rewards and recognition programs are rewarded with highly engaged and productive employees (Dysvik, Kuvaas, & Buch, 2016; Ghose & Mohanty, 2016; Verčič & Vokić, 2017). For example, some companies provide movie tickets, gift cards, employee-of-the-month banners or stars, and restaurant coupons. Providing employees with incentives that are financial and nonfinancial in retail organizations leads to positive employee performance and engagement (Rai, Ghosh, Chauhan, & Singh, 2018). Rewards are influential for the professional advancement of employees, whereas recognition serves as a part of meaningful work, and both rewards and recognition lead to engagement (Rai et al., 2018).

Offering intrinsic rewards such as monetary incentives (bonuses, cash awards, salary increases, and retention pay) is one way of letting employees know that the work

they perform has value (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). However, intrinsic rewards are not enough to keep employees motivated and engaged. Kazimoto (2016) studied employee engagement and organizational performance in retail enterprises and found that rewards and incentives comprised only 50% of contingencies for employee engagement. Availability of resources, recognition for performance, ideas and suggestions, importance to individual needs, and image of the company comprised the remaining contingencies for employee engagement (Kazimoto, 2016). It is equally important for managers to focus on extrinsic rewards to engage employees effectively.

Alternative Theory: Vroom's Expectancy Theory

Expectancy theory, developed by Vroom in 1964, linked motivated individuals' behaviors with three factors: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Vroom (1964) contended that expectancy has ties to employees' belief that they will be rewarded based on their level of effort. According to Bandow and Self (2016), supporters of the expectancy theory believe that employee expectancy levels will match the level of energy exerted to complete a task. The expectancy theory also has links to motivation, where employees are further encouraged and motivated to work hard (Bandow & Self, 2016; Furlich, 2016; Whittington, 2015). The expectancy theory comprises behavioral choices through which an employee feels inspired to be productive to receive rewards.

Vroom argued that an employee's performance is based on the attractiveness of the outcome (Vroom, 1964). Where employees believe that they will receive commendations for their work, where management must create work roles, while taking into consideration the staff's physical capabilities, so employees can experience a sense

of pride and accomplishment upon task completion (Bandow & Self, 2016; Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2017). Job satisfaction, wage increases, incentives, and work recognition are motivational factors that increase employee engagement (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). According to Whittington (2015), individual rewards in the form of monetary bonuses, team participation, and employee inclusion in decision making positively influence employee engagement. Managers must find out what motivates their employees from an individual and holistic standpoint.

Instrumentality is the belief that employees will receive rewards because of their hard work (Bandow & Self, 2016). According to Vroom (1964), instrumentality is an outcome-driven relationship in which employees expect rewards based on the high value (valence) of work performed. For example, employees may feel that if they work hard, they may avoid layoffs or reductions in pay. According to Choi and Moon (2016), instrumentality also involves helping, where employees believe that if they adopt a helping behavior, it becomes instrumental to their interests. Managers in retail stores should understand the motivational needs of their employees to increase performance levels.

Several scholars have concluded that instrumentality has a positive effect on employee engagement (Bandow & Self, 2016; Barakat & Moussa, 2016; Furlich, 2016). Crafting an organizational culture where trust and performance-based incentives and respect are prevalent can augment instrumentality (Heisler & Bandow, 2018). Control and trust are factors associated with instrumentality among individuals (Kuranchie-Mensah & Amponsah-Tawiah, 2016). When employees perceive they have a modicum of

control over the distribution of rewards, instrumentality increases (Heisler & Bandow, 2018). When there is no trust in management, there is also no trust and control of the reward system (Kuranchie-Mensah & Amponsah-Tawiah, 2016). When employees believe and trust their managers, employee engagement levels increase.

Valence is the final factor of the expectancy theory related to the desired outcome expected by an employee. Vroom (1964) explained that individual motivation is dependent on how much value is perceived to be placed on the incentive, which further increases the desire to achieve the intended outcome. Managers could manipulate their employees' expectations. According to Furlich (2016), leadership plays a vital role by influencing employee needs and behaviors. Participative leader behavior increases the positive valence of work for individuals who can work independently (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). Valence relates to cognitive behavior, which signifies that if an individual feel supported, rewarded, recognized, and encouraged by leadership in the workplace, employee engagement levels increase (Jin & McDonald, 2017). Some employees believe that rewards should have monetary value, whereas others believe that recognition is more important. Managers need to determine which outcome is the best way to increase employee engagement.

Valence exists when employees feel motivated, display high levels of engagement, and are duly rewarded (Furlich, 2016; Heinonen, 2018). Recognition and awards are some of the best ways to motivate employees to improve engagement (Johnson, Friend, & Agrawal, 2016). Managers must set the stage by providing clear expectations on how to recognize employees for awards. According to Furlich (2016),

employees can achieve clear communication during evaluations and assessments and when managers provide information on methods of awarding employees for past performance. Employees are motivated to work when they are confident that rewards merit the effort. One of the major tenets of Vroom's expectancy theory is that employees are motivated to change their level of effort when rewards are tied to their performance (McGinley, Wei, & Gao, 2019; Vroom, 1964). I did not choose the expectancy theory as the conceptual framework for my study because some employees are not interested in motivation or engagement (Nimri et al., 2015), and are more concerned with leader-employee mutually beneficial relationships.

Researchers use various theories and models to acquire a thorough analysis of a study. To understand which theory is suitable for the research, I conducted an in-depth analysis of each theory and presented them in the conceptual framework. In my literature review I focused on Kahn's engagement model and Sak's SET to illustrate the connection between employee engagement and motivation factors of employee's behaviors in the workplace. I also provided information on employee engagement, employee disengagement, leadership styles, and management strategies and explored an alternative theory on employee engagement. Employee engagement is critical for an organizations' continuous growth and development. Organizational leaders play a vital role in ensuring that managers acquire the strategies necessary to engage employees.

Summary and Transition

In Section 1 of this qualitative, single case study, I provided information on the background, problem statement, purpose statement, the central research question, and

interview questions. The business problem is that some retail store managers lack strategies to engage employees. The results of this study could provide strategies that some retail store managers might use to engage employees to achieve high levels of productivity and profitability for a business. In this section, I introduced the conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. In the literature review, I provide an analysis and synthesis of existing research on employee engagement theories, concepts, and strategies, including the themes necessary to provide a conceptual view of, and insight into, the research topic. The results of this study are expected to offer strategies that some retail store managers could use to engage employees and achieve high levels of productivity and profitability.

In Section 2, I provided an explanation of cover the following topics: my role as a researcher, the participants, the research method and design, the population and sampling, and ethics. I include a description of the data collection, organization, and analysis techniques, which includes avenues to increase the reliability and validity by applying verification strategies. In Section 3, I present the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for action and future research. The section closes with reflections and a conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

The objective of section 2 is to describe the purpose of the study and the research conducted. The research method and design used was a qualitative single-case study. For this study I plan to interview participants and review company documents to identify strategies the retail business managers use to effectively engage their employees.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that some retail store managers use to engage employees. The target population was five retail store managers located in Atlanta, Georgia, who have a proven track record of successfully implementing strategies to engage employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential to provide managers with a deeper understanding of the strategies necessary to increase employee engagement, which may also contribute to decreasing employee turnover, and improving the overall success of the organization, which may lead to employees performing positively in social settings by contributing their time and talents to the people in their community and society.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher involves collecting, organizing, and analyzing data. The researcher plays an active and vital role in the data collection process in case study research (Gog, 2015; Göttfert, 2015; Yin, 2018). To establish rigor, researchers must take the appropriate steps to avoid the subjective views of a phenomena (Dikko, 2016). Qualitative researchers serve as the primary data collection instrument (Yin, 2018). In addition to collecting, organizing, and analyzing data from human subjects, the researcher

is responsible for protecting the rights of the participants, implementing a plan to secure the data provided, and ensure the outcome of results adequately captures the information provided by the individuals who participants in the research study (Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, & Gonzalez, 2018; Dikko, 2016). To conduct the interviews, I served as the primary data collection instrument for this qualitative case study. I ensured that the participants chosen were not associated with me and I conducted the interviews in a private setting to minimize distractions.

Conducting ethical research and reducing bias involves the researcher to be transparent and objective during the research process (Newington & Metcalfe, 2014; Shaw & Satalkar, 2018). In addition to conducting semistructured interviews and interacting with the participants, I reviewed the documents provided following all ethical procedures in adherence to the guidelines set forth in *The Belmont Report* (U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). The specific guidelines established in the report were to ensure that when human subjects are involved in research, procedures must be implemented to ensure ethical and respectful handling of the data collected (Adashi, Walters, & Menikoff, 2018). I adopted ethical practices using the guiding principles set forth in *The Belmont Report*, where I showed respect for the participants, acted in a beneficent manner, and ensured that the participants rights were not violated by (a) providing them with an informed consent, (b) making sure that they were not harmed, and (c) promoting impartiality and equality to them all (U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979).

In my role as the researcher, it is important for me to understand my own assumptions and biases before the data collection process occurs. While I do not have a personal relationship with the participants, I do have some knowledge of employee engagement in workplace settings, because I manage routine work-related activities for employees and collaborate with other supervisors to find ways to improve work relationships. To reduce personal bias, and to avoid interjecting my own personal views related to the research topic requires bracketing. Bracketing is used by qualitative researchers to remove previous beliefs or theories that may develop while capturing pertinent information during data collection and analysis (Hay & Samra-Fredericks, 2016). Research integrity involves ensuring that the data collected is free from bias which may include the researcher's personal beliefs, experiences, and interpretation (Shaw & Satalkar, 2018). I plan to avoid interjecting my own personal experiences and reduce bias following an interview protocol (See Appendix A).

The interview protocol is a checklist used by the researcher to ensure that all relevant topics are covered while the interview is in process (Hilton, 2017; Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Conducting semistructured face-to-face interviews using an interview protocol guarantees that the process follows a specific method. Hilton (2017) posited that the interview protocol consists of four major steps. The steps include: a process to ensure that the interview questions are in alignment with the research questions, that the questions asked are open-ended used to invoke detailed responses, that feedback is provided, and lastly, that the process is tested using pilot practice sessions (Hilton, 2017). The interview protocol is a tool the researcher uses to build a connection, attain deeper

insight from research participants (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). In addition, for each interview I used an audio recorder, took notes, and compiled the data collected without changing the information provided. I also validated the data through member checking, allowing the participants the opportunity to review and validate the information provided. Member checking is a process that allows the participants who took part in the research study to review the paraphrased responses provided to ensure that the researcher accurately interpreted the responses given for each interview question (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016).

Participants

Identification and recruitment of eligible individuals to take part in a qualitative study is an important part of the research process. Bansal, Smith, and Vaara (2018) suggested that individuals must be willing to take part in the process and have adequate knowledge of the research topic. The target population for this study was retail store managers from the southeast United States. I interviewed five retail store managers from the same retail store in Atlanta, Georgia, who had the requisite expertise and insight needed to identify trends, characteristics, and strategies attributed to successful employee engagement. Setia (2016) explained that purposeful sampling is a non-probability method of sampling that qualitative researchers use to focus on a targeted audience who can answer the research questions. The individuals who participate in the research study must be able to make meaningful contributions providing insight and knowledge necessary in response to the research questions (Setia, 2016; Yin, 2018).

To ensure that the participants I selected aligned with my research question, it was important to identify participants that meet a specific criterion and have implemented successful strategies to engage employees in the workplace. I gained access to participants through purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling is used by the qualitative researcher to ensure that the individuals are qualified to take part in the research (Yin, 2018). I acquired access to the participants and research data by contacting the director of the retail store chain who has shown interest in employee engagement research. Using purposeful sampling allowed me to target managers who had the knowledge and expertise to provide useful information in relation to my research. The criteria for managers to participate in the study included: (a) participants who were current employees of the retail department store and had over 5 years of experience in a supervisory or managerial capacity, (b) who have implemented successful strategies to engage their employees, and (c) managers or supervisors who have effectively led more than ten employees. According to Yin (2018), developing a participant-criteria is a useful tool for the researcher because it makes it easier to validate the study and increases compelling data accumulation.

Interaction and access to participants requires planning and a process. There are several strategies that qualitative researchers use to gain access. One strategy includes reaching out to professionals by reviewing organizations databases with the intent to identify superiors or top-level managers who can approve participant contact (Amundsen, Msoroka, & Findsen, 2017; Maramwidze-Merrison, 2016). Another strategy involves using gatekeepers to act as an intermediary to influence access (Amundsen et al., 2017;

Hoyland, Hollund, & Olsen, 2015; Maramwidze-Merrison, 2016). According to Maramwidze-Merrison (2016), snowball sampling is also efficient, where the initial individual contacted may not be able to provide the data necessary and may provide a name referencing the appropriate person who can. The use of social media sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook may also provide an avenue for the researcher to identify potential participants and form relationships (Maramwidze-Merrison, 2016).

Building a working relationship with the participants is extremely important and should immediately occur after IRB approval and permission is granted. It is my responsibility to fully explain the purpose and intent of my study and share information with the participants. Communication and sharing of information provide the researcher with an opportunity to build a strong relationship with the individuals participating in the study (Abrahamsen, 2016; Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Encouraging rapport further creates a level of comfortability, where the participants feel at ease sharing valuable information which may play a vital role in the data collection and data saturation process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I used purposeful sampling to select participants for my research.

Research Method and Design

The research method for this study is a qualitative single case study. Engaging employees is crucial to the success of the organization. Conducting a qualitative case study is best suited when the researcher needs to use multiple sources of data to explore a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The qualitative method is appropriate when the researcher needs to gather data within a real-life context (Yin, 2018). I used a single case design

instead of a multiple case design because the focus of my study is geared towards a single retail business chain.

Research Method

While several methods exist for doctoral study research it is important to identify which method best fits the type of research performed. The three most popular methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research studies. Qualitative research is most appropriate when the researcher could choose from design choices such as case studies, lived experiences, artifacts, interviews, and personal experiences (Yin, 2018). Quantitative researchers emphasize evaluation and gaining knowledge from results, making predictions, and testing the relationships between variables (Park & Park, 2016). Quantitative research is used to understand trends and behaviors and measure quantifiable data (Goertzen, 2017). Quantitative research results are statistical; researchers use hypotheses and research questions that can be quantified. The focus of my research is to understand how department store managers influence employee engagement using their own stories and because experiences cannot be measured, quantitative research is not suitable for my study. Using the quantitative research method was not suitable for this study, because an examination and testing of variables was not the intent of the study.

Combining both methods, referred to as the mixed methods approach is best used to produce more scientifically sound and transferrable results, adding insights and understanding in areas that may have otherwise been overlooked (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018). Additionally, a mixed methods approach is necessary when the research requires

more than one method or worldview (Thiele, Pope, Singleton, & Stanistreet, 2018). A mixed approach is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research that may be challenging for the researcher because it is time consuming and expensive (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018). The mixed methods approach was not necessary because I did not incorporate qualitative and quantitative elements in the same study and combine the findings to answer the research question.

Research Design

In this sub-section, I will describe my research design and the reason why I chose this approach. It is important as a researcher to choose the research design that provides the framework to effectively complete the study (Göttfert, 2015; Yin, 2018). Researchers use case study designs to seek information from individuals who have expertise on a specific subject matter (Yin, 2018). When researchers conduct case study research, they can explore a phenomenon within its context using multiple data sources. I decided to use a qualitative single-case study design to explore the strategies used by retail store managers who have successfully implemented employee engagement within their respective businesses.

There are several qualitative research design approaches including phenomenological and ethnographic theory. I reviewed each design and found that the case study design was the most appropriate approach for my research study. I used a single case study because interviewed five store managers from a retail chain to gain insight on strategies managers use to engage employees. I analyzed company documents as an additional source to gain a deeper understanding on the research question.

A phenomenological research design is useful to researchers who need to capture information from participants who can share the meanings of experiencing a phenomenon (Oliveri & Pravettoni, 2018). Social science and public health researchers use the phenomenological approach to gain insights from participants who share information on what they are experiencing while undergoing treatment for terminal illness (Oliveri & Pravettoni, 2018). The phenomenological approach was not suitable for this study because I did not explore meanings given by employee's experiences, but rather explored strategies.

For ethnographic research, the researcher conducts fieldwork to learn about a social or cultural practice over a long period of time (Chughtai & Myers, 2017; Walford, 2018; Yin, 2018). Ethnographic researchers live among individuals within small communities with the purpose of understanding their culture (Pallares-Barbera & Casellas, 2019; Walford, 2018). The ethnographic research method was not suitable for this study because the topic I researched does not require an extended period to study and observe a culture in a real-life setting.

To enhance the quality and validity of my research it is critical to reach data saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) explained that saturation occurs when the researcher is unable to identify new information during data analysis. McIntosh and Morse (2015) posited that saturation involves the collection of rich data captured via the qualitative interview process. To ensure data saturation, I interviewed five retail store managers using an interview protocol and reviewed the themes that emerge from the data captured

until no new information or themes become apparent. I achieved data saturation after the fifth interview.

Population and Sampling

The study comprised of five retail store managers who are currently employed in a retail business in the Atlanta, Georgia. While it may be more appropriate to interview an entire population of participants when conducting research, it is not possible (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). For this reason, I used purposive participant sampling for this study. Researchers use purposive sampling technique to choose participants who can provide expert knowledge and useful information on a topic of interest (Boddy, 2016; Etikan et al., 2016).

The participants were asked to provide specific information based on their knowledge and experiences in conjunction with successfully engaging their employees. Each participant was asked to respond to the same interview questions (see Appendix B), in a similar setting to avoid biased results. Shaw and Satalkar (2018) argued that research integrity can be achieved when the researcher follows an interview protocol (see Appendix A) and asks the same relevant questions to each participant to avoid biased results. The size of the sample depends the goal of the study, the specific sample, incorporation of the established theory, value of the discourse, and analysis approach (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). The population sample size for this qualitative single-case study was five retail store managers from a retail store in Atlanta, Georgia.

I used purposive sampling to select managers who have worked in the retail stores for a minimum of 5 years and effectively and successfully implemented strategies to

engage employees and managed more than 10 employees. Purposive sampling is highly recommended for qualitative research (Etikan et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). Using purposive sampling, the researcher may identify participants who can provide rich data on a phenomenon related to a research study (Palinkas et al., 2015). While there are many other sampling methods, the purposive sampling technique, affords me the opportunity to retrieve the rich data from the participants in a comfortable setting.

As a researcher it is critical to ensure that data saturation is achieved. Data saturation is related to the research method chosen and the sample size in qualitative studies (Malterud et al., 2016). Data saturation occurs when the researcher can no longer retrieve new data or themes, and repetitions occur in coding and patterns (Lowe, Norris, Farris, & Babbage, 2018). I interviewed the participants about strategies retail managers use to engage employees. Additionally, I identified new themes based on the participant's responses until the data collected became repetitive and no new themes emerged.

Ethical Research

One of primary benefits of conducting research that includes human subjects is to benefit society (Loe, Winkelman, & Robertson, 2016). As a researcher, it is critical that the information provided by the participants is protected in accordance with high ethical standards (Chen, 2016). To ensure that I understood the parameters regarding conducting research on human subjects, I completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) training course on *Protecting Human Research Participants* and received a certification approval number 2551826.

I adhered to the recommended guidelines as set forth in *The Belmont Report* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). The established guidelines include justice, beneficence, respect for persons, and information on how to address any problems that may arise when conducting research (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). Before I proceeded with data collection, I attained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Walden University (IRB) approval number is 03-04-20-0613604.

I gained informed and written consent from the participants prior to data collection. Bhaskar and Manjuladevi (2016) suggest that informed and written consent should be approved before the study commences. Additionally, all participants were informed that the information provided will remain confidential, along with their identity, and they had a right to withdraw by phone, email, or text, from the study at any time without penalty. Participants did not request to withdraw from this study, all collected data was included in the data analysis and findings. The ability to withdraw from the study should be a decision that the individual participant makes on their own (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). I provided each participant with a written consent form which explained their rights and commitment level to the research study. I gave each participant time to review the consent form and ask any questions pertaining to the process. To protect the participants' privacy, the signed consent forms will not be made available in the appendix. I did not provide any gifts or incentives to the individuals that participated in the study.

Goodrich and Luke (2017) posited as a researcher it is critical that ethical standards and practices are implemented to protect the individual participants. It is critical that participants are provided with expectations for the use of the data provided and given a chance to review the data collected to ensure validity. FitzPatrick (2019) suggested that validity checks should be run continuously in qualitative research. The researcher should collect rich data, engage by building rapport and trust among participants, provide detailed descriptions, and use at least one form of data triangulation (FitzPatrick, 2019).

The researcher is obligated to safeguard the information provided by the participants and discard the information after a designated period (Bhaskar & Manjuladevi, 2016). The use of a pseudonym code when discussing participants is an ideal way to protect their identify (Yin, 2018). I assigned each participant a pseudonym code using the nomenclature SP1, SP2, SP3, etc. I informed the individual participant that the data will be held in a secure place for a period not to exceed 5 years, after which time all documents and files will be shredded and permanently deleted. I will store all hard copy documents provided by the participants in a locked and coded file cabinet, and any electronic data provided was password protected on my personal computer and thumb print hard drive. Individual participant names and company logos were redacted from the documents to ensure that the information was void of identifiable information.

Data Collection Instruments

For qualitative research, the role of the researcher is to capture the viewpoints and opinions of the participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The qualitative researcher is the

main data collection instrument because they have access to interview the participants (Clark & Vealé, 2018). I was the primary data collection instrument for this study. van den Berg and Struwig (2017) found that conducting open-ended semistructured interviews provided additional insight surrounding the phenomenon; while Akanji et al. (2018) argued that semistructured interviews were the best way to ask the participants open-ended questions in order to attain detailed data in relation to female business owners in Nigeria. I conducted semistructured interviews asking open-ended questions pertaining to strategies retail managers use to engage employees, in a quiet convenient setting using an interview protocol (see Appendix A) as an instrument of inquiry.

To mitigate personal bias and to provide structure to the interview process, I used an interview protocol. Following an interview protocol is an ideal way to reduce personal bias (Arsel, 2017; Yin, 2018). To reduce bias, I asked all the participants the same open-ended semistructured interview questions (see Appendix B) to capture rich data. Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to develop awareness of the central research question (Yin, 2018). In addition, interview times must be brought into consideration and should be no longer than one hour, to keep the participants fully engaged (Keis, Grab, Schneider, & Öchsner, 2017). Using the interview protocol kept me on track to ask semistructured open-ended questions and limit my interviews to 30 - 45-minute intervals. This time frame was necessary to allow participants adequate time to share the strategies they used to engage employees, without losing their attentiveness.

Researchers use multiple data sources to find evidence to address the research question when conducting qualitative research (Yin, 2018). The qualitative researcher

may use interviews, company documents, archived material, observation of the participants, and physical artifacts as data collection sources (Arsel, 2017; Yin, 2018). In addition to asking open-ended semistructured interview questions, I reviewed and analyzed company documents, observe participants' and used an audio recorder with the participant's permission to ensure accuracy. Reviewing company documents enabled me to gain additional insight on responses provided and verify any information asked during the interview process.

It is critical for qualitative researchers to understand that validity and reliability of the data collection process is of the utmost importance, and that their personal opinions and perspectives can affect the outcomes of the study (Clark & Vealé, 2018). After each interview, I conducted member checking to ensure that I had accurately interpreted participants' responses. After paraphrasing and interpreting the participant's responses, I planned a follow up session with each participant to ensure that the interpreted information accurately represents the responses they provided in the interview. Through member checking, the participants can confirm that the information they provided was captured accurately (Arsel, 2017; Milosevic, Bass, & Combs, 2015; Yin, 2018). Researchers use member checking as a mechanism to improve the validity and reliability of the data collected, which is a critical part of the qualitative research process (Yin, 2018). Additionally, asking the participants to confirm the paraphrased interpreted data using member checking adds to the credibility of the study (Arsel, 2017; Milosevic, Bass, & Combs, 2015; Yin, 2018).

Data Collection Technique

To collect data, permission to contact the participants must be acquired from a top-level manager. Once permission was granted, I emailed an invitation to all the participants identified to briefly describe the process (see Appendix C). In addition, the participants received a consent form explaining the purpose of the study and what to expect, which was signed before the interviews commenced. Face-to-face semistructured interviews were the primary data collection technique used for this study. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, face-to-face interviews were conducted via Skype. Fusch and Ness (2015) argued that data saturation is important; therefore, the same questions must be asked several times to each participant. I used the interview protocol (see Appendix A) as a guide to ensure that I asked questions that aligned with my research study. Arsel (2017) posited that the interview protocol provides an outline for the interview that should include three parts: a mini introduction, which includes a brief explanation of the research to be conducted, an explanation of the interview process, and some time for the participant to ask questions relative to the study and procedures. The participants were notified that their participation was voluntary without penalty, and that they could withdraw at any time. Participants did not request to withdraw from this study, so all collected data was included in the data analysis and findings. It is important to provide each participant with flexible times and dates to increase the chance of involvement (Yin, 2018). Each interview took place in a quiet comfortable setting where there were no distractions. The interviews were conducted in my home office via Skype

and the participants were located in a meeting room at their business location which allowed me to make a verbal recording of the proceedings.

To gather data, qualitative researchers can use interviews, company documents and audio tapes (Yin, 2018). The interview process is the main data collection technique I used for this study. I asked open-ended semistructured interview questions. When a researcher asks open-ended interview questions, participants respond by sharing in-depth experiences and details about a phenomenon (Dikko, 2016; Yin, 2018). The interviews, with the participant's consent were recorded and transcribed with a voice recorder and note taking. Using a voice recorder, to audiotape an interview is the most standard approach used by qualitative researchers to capture responses verbatim (Greenwood, Kendrick, Davies, & Gill, 2017). In addition, I also reviewed the organizations archived documents, company website information, and official and unofficial agency documents and reports. This process is referred to as method triangulation. Method triangulation adds rigor to research providing a more wholistic view of the research topic, as the information is corroborated via several sources (Yin, 2018). Additionally, it is critical to look for non-verbal cues. Researchers observe the participants body language and voice levels to capture behavioral data that can add value to the information collected (Greenwood et al., 2017).

There are several advantages with respect to data collection techniques used for qualitative research. The first advantage relates to the opportunity for the researcher to gain useful insight from the participants' viewpoint. Maramwidze-Merrison (2016) found that qualitative research provides rich contextual research information from participants,

who have a wealth of knowledge on a research topic (Seitz, 2016; Yin, 2018). Another advantage relates to the opportunity for the researcher to conduct face-to-face interviews providing a better ability for the researcher to establish a more precise assessment and have more control over the entire interview process. Oltmann (2016) found that conducting face-to-face interviews is the *gold standard* and most effective way to handle interviews. In addition, when a researcher conducts face-to-face interviews, they become aware of non-verbal cues that cannot be captured via the telephone or an online questionnaire (Oltmann, 2016; Yin, 2018). Some researchers conduct pilot studies to detect flaws that may arise prior to the actual interview process (Dikko, 2016; Seitz, 2016; Yin, 2018). Pilot testing was not conducted for this study, because it was not a complicated case study.

There are also several disadvantages with respect to data collection techniques used for research. These disadvantages may include the cost, quality of information provided, biased responses, and time constraints. One disadvantage of the data collection technique was the document review process. Researchers take a lot of time reviewing documents to support themes (Cardno, 2018). Another potential disadvantage is the accuracy of information. For example, participants may refuse to provide an official policy document for research purposes, which in turn creates a challenge for the researcher who needs to authenticate the information. Another potential disadvantage is the need for additional participants (Kılınç & Fırat, 2017). I obtained data saturation after the fourth interview; therefore, no additional participants were needed for my research study.

When each individual interview concluded, I transcribed the audio tape recorded responses captured via the voice recorder using Microsoft Word. Immediately after, I compiled the notes taken, along with the documentation presented after each interview. Compiling the data collected after each interview is critical, so that insightful information is not lost during translation (Rajesh & Ramesh, 2016). The participants had the opportunity to review and confirm the compiled data to ensure that their conversations were accurately noted, using a process called member checking. González and Campbell (2018) found that member checking transcript interviews will enhance the reliability and integrity of the data.

After the data was reviewed by the respective participants, and all the updates completed, I analyzed the data. I analyzed and sorted the data utilizing some manual manipulations as well as NVivo 12 Plus software. Data analysis includes the compilation and disassembling of data collected, data interpretation, and wrap up (Yin, 2018).

Data Organization Technique

Organizing the research data is a critical part of the research process. Creating an efficient way to organize data is an important part of data analysis (Yin, 2018). For qualitative studies, data should be organized providing a candid explanatory synopsis of the information provided by the participants (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). Keeping track of data involves coding, which will be useful tool that qualitative researchers use to sort and organize data (Clark & Vealé, 2018; Yin, 2018). To protect the participants, I created an electronic filing system and used pseudonyms assigned during the interview process.

The method I chose to organize the data collected included creating a journal that captured information provided from the participants during the interview process. The use of reflective journaling enhances student understanding and stimulates critical thinking. Hood, Haskins, and Roberson (2018) found that reflective journaling was an ideal tool for nurse educators to use to gain insight into nursing student's emotional experiences. Researchers use reflective journaling to document their learning experiences (Hermansyah, 2016; Hood et al., 2018). Hughes (2016) described reflective journaling as a forum for expressing emotions, which allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the research subject. I used reflective journaling to gain a deeper insight as it relates to strategies managers may use to engage employees. I used a voice recorder, and NVivo 12 plus software to organize and manage the data collected.

Safeguarding data collected is critical when conducting research. Access to the data should be restricted, where only the person(s) that has clearance should be allowed to retrieve it (Almalki, 2016). According to Walshe et al. (2016) all research data collected should be password protected, encrypted, and stored in a locked compartment. I stored audio recorded data and electronic files on a password-protected personal computer. Labeling data so that participants are kept anonymous is key. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016) using pseudonyms to disguise individual participants and an alpha moniker to represent the name of the organization is another way to protect confidential research information. Company documents and memos will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Collected data will be stored for 5 years, after which I will destroy the data stored electronically and shred all paper documents.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a major part of the qualitative research process, which includes the conversion of unanalyzed data into a new and logical representation of the research topic (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015; Yin, 2018). Researchers conduct data analysis to effectively process and share outcomes which leads to maximum rational insight (Mayer, 2015; Williams & Moser, 2019; Yin, 2018). Interpretive and reflective thinking is important for individuals who conduct qualitative research so that a precise evaluation of the topic is determined (Clark & Vealé, 2018). Data analysis is the process of analytically applying rational techniques to explain, demonstrate, reduce, and evaluate data.

Qualitative researchers use triangulation techniques to analyze data (Yin, 2018). Data, theoretical, researcher, and methodological triangulation are the four triangulation methods researchers use to gain a rich insight of the phenomena (Abdalla et al., & Gonzalez, 2018; Jentoft & Olsen, 2019; Yin, 2018). Methodological triangulation is a way that researchers can intensify the legitimacy of their research and is best suited with qualitative case studies (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). I used multiple data sources, including audiotaped semistructured interviews, company documents, and interview notes to guarantee validity as a part of the analysis phase and the methodological triangulation.

Data analysis involves several steps for optimal analysis. It is important to remove personal bias during the data analysis process. According to Yin (2018) researchers must remove personal bias during the data analysis phase, so that the data reduction and analysis can identify themes. According to Mayer (2015) and Yin (2018) once the first

step of the process which is data collection is accomplished, where data is compiled and disassembled, the following steps include: data display, where a constant review of the data collected includes organization and preparation for data analysis. Next, is data reduction which allows the researcher with the ability to filter out and interpret information that does not align with the study or respond to the research question (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The final step involves forming conclusions verified after all the data has been analyzed, reduced, interpreted, and verified (Mayer, 2015; Yin, 2018). I manually compiled the data collected based on common responses created themes, and then loaded the information into NVivo 12 Plus for further interpretation before making the final conclusions.

Traditional qualitative analysis is time-consuming to code and evaluate the entire process manually. Using a qualitative computer data analysis program, the researcher can conduct a more accurate analysis and insert codes (Humble, 2015). Woods, Paulus, Atkins, and Macklin (2015) found that ATLAS and NVivo were the most frequently used by qualitative researchers. I used NVivo 12 Plus software to assist with data transcription. I used the software to sort and code my data and identify relationships using themes.

The conceptual framework ties the research findings with the literature, findings, and the method (Borrego, Foster, & Froyd, 2014; Mayer, 2015). Kahn's (1990) EET and Saks (2006) SET was the conceptual lens for this study. According to Kahn (1990) an individual must be fully immersed in their work roles for optimal performance, and Saks (2006) argued that employees respond and become engaged based on how management responds by providing organizational support and resources. Both theorists' constructs

align with my research because management and how they treat their employee's affect employee engagement. I used the data collected to identify key themes and identify new categories. In addition, I reviewed my notes and identified any information that needed to be included in a new category, which enabled me to identify the strategies that retail store owners use to engage employees.

To ensure that the information was current, it was important for me to stay abreast of new research related to the field on employee engagement. Wray (2016) explained that keeping up with current topics in your research field while overwhelming, can be accomplished by creating email alerts or setting up library features on common peer reviewed websites. To stay abreast of current research, I set up the *My Library* feature in Google Scholar, and in addition used the email feature in ResearchGate. These features allowed me to manage current articles and get recommendations and updates on related research.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Maintaining reliability is a critical component of the qualitative research process (Abdalla et al., 2018). Marshall and Rossman (2016) explained that reliability in research is determined when a study is replicated using the same instruments, where similar answers are achieved. Dependability and reliability share a common criterion, seeking the stability of results throughout the entire research process (Harvey, 2015). The researcher must document how credibility and dependability are maintained in qualitative research (Simon & Goes, 2013). It is the researcher's responsibility to build rapport with the

participant to glean open and honest responses (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). I formulated clear questions that aligned with my research study and created a dialogue with all the participants, setting the stage for honest and open feedback.

In qualitative research, member checking is used to verify the researcher's interpretations of the data collected. The possibility for researcher bias might be diminished by conducting member checking (Birt et al., 2016). Cypress (2017) explained that member checks are completed when the researcher verifies data and interpretations with the participants. Member checking can take place during several stages in the research process. Member checking can occur during the qualitative interview process, at the end of the study, or using both processes (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). I conducted member checking directly after the qualitative interview process.

The member checking process requires several steps to increase reliability. The first step entails conducting the interview using an interview protocol (Birt et al., 2016). Next the researcher is responsible to interpret the data provided by the participants; and finally, the interpreted data is shared with the participant for validation (Birt et al., 2016; Nandi & Platt, 2017). I ensured dependability and reliability by incorporating member checking data interpretation with the participants and following the steps outlined.

Validity

According to Leung (2015), validity in qualitative research depends on (a) whether the research question is valid; (b) whether the methodology choice best suits providing the desired outcome; (c) whether the method chosen is ideal to respond to the research question; (d) whether the design choice is valid for the methodology, sampling,

and data analysis; and (e) whether the data analysis is applicable, and the results and subsequent conclusions are in line from a contextual viewpoint. Seminal constructs found by Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four different techniques qualitative researchers may use to establish rigor in research that were dissimilar from a quantitative approach, where validity and reliability is assessed using statistical analysis. The technique identified credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability concepts associated with the concept of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Validation in qualitative research occurs when there is participant verification (FitzPatrick, 2019). Member checking and methodical triangulation increases the opportunity for case study validation (Yin, 2018). Methodological triangulation is one way to ensure credibility in qualitative research where more than one method is used to collect and analyze data (Leung, 2015). Abdalla et al. (2018) further explained that to gain a concise overview of the research topic, qualitative researchers may use semistructured interviews, archived documents, and field notes to ensure data triangulation, which further boosts credibility. To validate my findings, I collected data conducting semistructured interviews, reviewed and analyzed company archived documents, and field notes. I also conducted member checking following up with the participants, providing a copy of the interpreted data for review and possible additional clarification, and validation.

Using an interview protocol to capture rich thick descriptions ensures that the information is transferable for future scholarly use (Morse, 2015). Readers gain knowledge and insight when the researcher provides detailed descriptions pertaining to

the research topic, thereby ensuring transferability (Carminati, 2018). To ensure transferability, I provided detailed descriptions which include a summary and analysis of the information provided. The information provided included responses from participants with regards to semistructured interviews, research framework, and document reviews. This information may be instrumental for use in future studies on similar topics.

Confirmability is the impartiality that the findings are reliable and can be replicated (Connelly, 2016). It is important that the findings are tied back to the participants and not representative of the researcher's personal views (Rapport, Clement, Doel, & Hutchings, 2015). Qualitative researchers use member checking or transcript reviews to ensure confirmability (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To ensure confirmability, I asked probing questions, carefully documented the interview proceedings, and returned the interpreted data back to the participants for member checking.

A critical part of the qualitative research process is obtaining data saturation. Data saturation is extremely important in qualitative research because it heightens the validity of the research study (Yin, 2018). Data saturation occurs when the researcher can no longer identify new information related to the research question from the participant's responses (Lowe et al., 2018). To achieve data saturation, I interviewed retail store managers asking questions related to strategies they used to engage employees until no new data or coding emerged.

Transition and Summary

In section 2, I provided detailed description of the qualitative research process, to include restating the purpose of my research, to explore strategies that retail store

managers may use to engage employees. I described the role of the researcher, the participants, the research method, the research design, and the population and sampling techniques related to the qualitative method. I also addressed ethical concerns, data collection instruments, the data collection techniques, data collection instruments, and the data organization techniques used. Finally, I explained the importance of reliability and validity of qualitative research.

In Section 3, I include the findings of the study, significance of the study, and possible implications for social change. In addition, I provide recommendations for action and opportunities for future study on the research topic

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, single- case study was to explore the strategies that some retail store managers used to engage employees. In this section, I introduce four major themes outlined by the retail managers who participated in the research study. In my interviews with the retail store managers and my review of company documents provided by the participants., I found the company valued their employees and took the time to implement strategies to effectively engage employees. The following themes emerged: (a) communication, (b) employee training and development, (c) recognition and rewards, and (d) transparency. Each theme aligned with Kahn's theory of engagement (1990) and Saks' theory on social exchange (2006), as described in the conceptual framework.

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question in this study was: What strategies do some retail managers use to engage employees? To answer the question, I conducted semistructured one-on-one interviews with five retail store managers from a single retail store chain in Atlanta, Georgia. Using semistructed interviews and asking open ended questions provided participants with the opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise on strategies they used to engage employees. Before the interview commenced, each participant was given some time to review the consent forms, ask questions regarding the interview process, and sign the consent form. I also took the time to reiterated that participation was voluntary, and the participant had the right to withdraw from the study

at any time. Interviews were convened via Skype because of concerns for participant safety from the Coronavirus pandemic and social distancing guidelines as set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coronavirus Disease COVID-19, 2020). The Skype interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour. In addition to the interviews, I reviewed organizational documents provided by the participants. The documents included memorandums, emails, organizational sales, policy and procedures manuals, sales reports, newsletters, and customer service training documents. The participant interview data were coded based on themes generated by the topics as follows:

Table 1

Themes Generated from Participant Interviews

Themes	Frequency	% of frequency of occurrence
Communication	38	32
Employee training & development	29	25
Recognition and rewards	27	23
Transparency	24	20

Note: ***n*** = frequency

Theme 1: Communication

Communication is a critical strategy used by retail store managers to engage their employees and one of the first themes that emerged from the data collected. SP1 explained that the company implemented a communication strategy to find multiple ways to communicate with their employees. “We conduct weekly standup meetings, send daily

correspondence via emails and text alerts, and monthly strategy sessions with staff to formulate sales strategies and set goals." SP1 added that due to the coronavirus pandemic, face-to-face meetings were conducted via Skype.

SP2 explained:

> I meet with staff as a group 30 minutes before the store opens to set daily priorities, to discuss issues or challenges with regards to products, sales, or services, and allow the staff some time to share experiences they may have encountered the day before.

SP2 further explained that employees have first-hand knowledge concerning what is not working well, and that it is important to create an environment where employees feel free to provide feedback and the ability to exchange ideas and solutions to address issues, concerns, and problems. SP3 shared, "Managers must take time to interact with employees on a daily basis, in return the employee feels comfortable sharing ideas about challenges and opportunities for improvement." SP3 also shared that the exchange of ideas and interaction allows employees to build relationships with team members and managers via daily communication.

SP4 noted:

For the past 10 years I have sent weekly emails to every employee, the email adds a personal touch. While the email may contain important topics pertaining to business, I also include recipes, pictures, or an anecdote. Communication via email provides an opportunity to connect and engage with all employees on a

> weekly basis. Response back to employee's emails is important, I try to answer every employee email within a 24- to 48- hour period.

SP5 stated, "We conduct weekly sales meetings, where we discuss items that are selling, sales promotions, and what we can do to motivate employees throughout the day." SP5 further explained that in one of their weekly sales meetings, an employee suggested focusing on launching our credit card loyalty program. "Pushing our merchant credit card with points is a big deal for many customers when financing is available." SP5 also shared that the merchant card program creates customer traffic, increased sales, and loyal and repeat business."

All five participants noted that for years each store had different techniques with no clear set of rules, and some stores struggled, while others thrived. All the participants stated that providing an avenue for employees to communicate and share ideas has been one of the major reasons why XYZ Company was profitable. All the participants explained that providing employees feedback on their performance during the evaluation process is also a great way to communication and engage employees. SP1 stated, "I used the performance evaluation process to address areas where employees may make improvements;" while SP2 noted:

> Employee evaluations provide me with the opportunity to congratulate staff on areas that are going well, and areas where improvements are necessary, and at the same time the employee is allowed to provide feedback and openly explain any challenges they may be facing.

All participants stated that without an effective communication strategy, employees are less likely to become engaged. An analysis of the retail businesses' strategic plan and company documents detailed the impact of the communication strategy indicating that since the execution of the plan, employee engagement increased by 40% in the first year, and by 60% the second year. Comments from email correspondence and minutes provided from managers strategy sessions on communication initiatives, further supported that the employees felt more connected and satisfied after the communications strategy was implemented by management.

Connection to existing literature and conceptual framework. Existing research corresponds with findings in theme one on the importance of communication in the workplace. Tarnowski, Quinn, Alvero, and Sadri (2019) noted that managers must effectively communicate the company's goals and objectives to actively engage employees. Ruck, Welch, and Menara (2017) contended that engaged employees are more loyal, productive, and useful in persuading customers to try new products or suggest sales. For example, SP1 explained why conducting regular standup meetings, and monthly strategy meetings were so effective. Meetings are used by managers to create dialogue and create an environment where employees can share information, learn from each other, conduct group problem solving, and spark innovate ideas (Berges & Kon, 2019; Lehmann-Willenbrock & Allen, 2020; Medeiros, 2020).

Theme one included communication and correlated with Khan's (1990) theory of engagement and Saks (2006) theory on social exchange. Establishing a clear and consistent way of communicating is important. Mazzei, Butera, and Quaratino (2019)

found that planned communication between employees and managers creates an inclusive environment, which supports Kahn's employee engagement theory. Communication leads to employee interaction which is essential for employees to become engaged. Khan (1990) argued that for employees to become engaged psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability are all conditions that must be satisfied. Saks (20016) SET further proposes that relationships are fostered around reciprocal commitments. Saks theory is applicable because when management creates an avenue for a two-way relationship through communication and feedback the rules of social exchange predict that employees are more likely to become positively engaged. Both Kahn and Saks theories correspond with Theme one where constant communications between managers and employees is a critical strategy necessary to actively engage retail store employees.

Theme 2: Employee training and development

Employee training and development was the second theme that emerged from the data collected on engagement strategies for retail workers. An engaged workforce that has the requisite expertise, experience, and skills is essential to any company that wishes to achieve high rates of business performance (Jiang & Men, 2017). SP1, SP2, SP3, SP4 and SP5 indicated that one way in which leaders may improve employee engagement is through successful training and growth development. SP1 explained that annual customer service training is mandatory for all employees. SP1 stated, "all employees are required to take annual customer service training, online practice tests on safety and security

measures, shelter in place, and other types of training specific to their respective departments."

SP2 stated that employees who are interested in becoming managers are offered special leadership training classes and are provided with an opportunity to attend retail seminars. SP2 stated, "it is important to provide training opportunities for staff who want to make retail management a career." SP2 further explained that a group of senior managers and employees created a "train the trainer" type of program so that they can work with new and existing employees providing training and expertise that is critical when dealing with customers on a daily basis.

According to SP3, "some training is specific to employees who work in certain areas; for example, the deli employees are required to have a SERV Safe certification, and must take annual refresher training; while stock clerks are trained to look for pull dated or expired merchandise, how to generate shrinkage reports, and file vendor credits." SP3 and SP4 also mentioned that cashiers are required to take cash handling classes. SP4 explained that employees are also offered tuition and licensing reimbursement. SP4 remarked, "our managers implemented the license recertification and tuition reimbursement program to encourage employees to continue to refine their skills. At XYZ company we let our employees know that we have a vested interest in their overall success."

SP5 stated:

Employees need to understand that we support their growth and development, so it is important to take time to speak with them about future plans, encourage their

career initiatives, which includes higher education like taking college courses, training, and prospective career paths.

SP5 further revealed that in training sessions employees share the information they have learned with other staff members and conduct role playing exercises providing real-life scenarios for cross selling and customer service-related issues. SP4 and SP5 also discussed the importance of creating an environment where employees can share their knowledge and experiences. SP4 explained:

> We encourage knowledge sharing activities and the employees look forward to the role-playing exercises because they see themselves in some of the situations, and through knowledge sharing they are able to make better decisions when confronted with complicated situations. Our employees come from diverse backgrounds, so when they openly share information, it provides different perspectives, innovative ideas, and employees are more engaged.

Upon a review and analysis of documents provided by XYZ retail managers; specifically, emails, employee bulletins, and employee feedback; the train the trainer program SP2 discussed made a significant impact on nurturing employee growth and engagement. Llopis and Foss (2016) argued that for training and development to have a substantial effect on employee engagement, employees must perceive the advantages of conducting training activities. Employees are dedicated and committed to their work when they know that managers support and encourage them by providing opportunities for training and development.

Connection to existing literature and conceptual framework. The information provided by SP1, SP2, SP3, SP4 and SP5 supports existing literature on employee engagement, providing evidence that managers who support training and development programs for employees, reap the benefits of a highly engaged workforce. Linking training and development to employee interests and expectations is powerful way to build employee engagement within an organization (Guan & Frenkel, 2019; Rexworthy, 2020). Training designed to improve employee's performance is important. Managers who invest in training and development programs provide opportunities for employee growth, keeping employees challenged, motivated, and engaged with further leads to productivity gains (Burlacu & Mura, 2019; Maity, 2019).

Knowledge and skill enhancing programs are likely to improve employee engagement and work performance within the organizations (Maity, 2019; Susomrith & Coetzer, 2019). The train the trainer program the company adopted, is a perfect example of knowledge sharing, identified in the literature by Mura, Lettieri, Radaelli, and Spiller (2016) as an effective way for employees to interact and learn from each other. Creating settings where employees feel comfortable embracing different cultures and sharing information is an important part of engagement (Creek, Kuhn, & Sahaym, 2019; Gabel-Shemueli, Westman, Chen, & Bahamonde, 2019; Smith & Garriety, 2020). Training and development exercises where managers use innovative ways for their employees to share knowledge and skill leads to high levels of engagement, high productivity, and increased sales (Maity, 2019). Dedicated training and development programs foster employee

engagement which is critical to an organization's overall productivity and financial performance.

In the theory of engagement, Kahn (1990) defined training and development as a form of maintenance, as a proposal to advance efficiency within organizations by increasing behavioral routines and predictability. Offering training and development opportunities for employees embodies Kahn's theory that psychological meaningfulness must be present for employee to become engaged. Kahn (1990) contended that psychological meaningfulness in theory entails making sure the employee understands that their work contributions are meaningful and adds value to the organization. Kahn's (1990) availability concept also applies because the physical environment must be sufficient for employees to be able to function. The participants explained that they create an environment where employees feel comfortable working collaboratively and share knowledge and information.

Employee training and development programs provided by XYZ Company aligns with Saks theory on social exchange and his description of perceived organizational support. Perceived organizational support is defined as an employee's belief that managers care about their well-being and create programs that meet their socio-emotional needs (Saks, 2006). Training and professional development programs help employees to develop interest and acquire the requisite skills needed to complete job-related tasks. High levels of employee engagement are more prevalent when managers provide organizational support, create an environment where employees can learn, and there are opportunities for career development (Saks, 2006; Gruman & Saks, 2020). SP1, SP2 and

SP3 shed light on the fact that employees are more likely to become engaged when they are offered training and development programs thus supporting Saks theory that perceived organizational support is one of the factors that influence employee engagement.

Theme 3: Rewards and Recognition

Rewards and recognition were the third theme that emerged from the data collected from participants. All five participants mentioned that rewards and recognition are used to motivate and engage employees. According to Saks (2017) taking steps to raise employee's motivation levels to determine the correlation between their behavior and the company's objectives is a critical part of effective engagement. SP1 explained that acknowledging the contributions made by employees encourages employee engagement, which contributes to improved efficiency and the achievement of organizational goals. SP1 stated, "we give our employees cash awards, gift cards, preferred parking, time off and free movie tickets, each store manager comes up similar recognition incentives." SP1 further explained that he recognizes the outstanding individual publicly in staff meetings and features the employee in the company newsletter.

Bonuses are also offered as a reward for outstanding work. SP2 explained that offering bonuses had a positive effect on employee performance. SP2 stated, "setting monthly targets is something I have initiated for the past 2 years, the employees receive a quarterly bonus if we attain the goals." SP2 also emphasized that using a bonus as an incentive worked well for his company and SP3 added that the company's incentive

system helped to foster the value of recognizing the contributions made by employees, which can be further attributed to the company's overall success. Both SP2 and SP3 mentioned that offering a competitive incentive is a good way to measure how successful managers are as it relates to employee retention and achieving productivity goals.

SP3 explained that employee recognition aligns with employee engagement. SP3 stated, "employees are happy to work for a company that appreciates their hard work and are less likely to leave." I corroborated SP3's statement by reviewing the personnel report. SP3 also stated, "we use different settings to recognize employees; informally we recognize staff at luncheons, picnics, or standup meetings. Formally, we recognize employees by giving bonuses, employee appraisals, and major prizes at our annual employee awards ceremony." Both SP2 and SP3 explained that pizza parties, Mexican fiestas, and potlucks are used as a form of immediate recognition when the team meets monthly targets. In addition, SP3 said, "just a simple email, or a personal thank you makes the employee feel special."

SP4 stated, "time off awards are used as an incentive to motivate and engage staff." SP4 further explained that employees like time off awards because spending time away from work and focusing on the family is important. SP4 further explained that non-monetary incentives such as time off awards and preferred parking are some employee rewards ideas that managers can use to immediately commend an employee for outstanding work. Employee emails and the company documents highlighted employee feedback showing appreciation for getting the opportunity to park in the employee of the

month dedicated parking space, along with the time off awards which gave them more time to spend with their loved ones.

SP5 explained that customer service is one of XYZ's top priorities. SP5 noticed that employees were receptive to cash awards. Managers created customer service competitions with various outcomes linked to cash awards. SP5 stated:

> We give employees cash awards up to $500 monthly based on the number of merchant cards activated, positive customer service feedback, or when a manager feels like an employee has gone above and beyond to provide the customer with excellent care!

Guay, Kepler, Tsui (2019) found that offering cash incentives is one of the top motivators that managers use to engage employees.

Support for Theme 3 was found in the company's policy and procedure manual that clearly stated that employees who provide excellent customer care can receive monthly cash awards not to exceed $500. In XYZ's marketing plan, cash awards were also mentioned as an incentive tool for employees to self-promote their merchant cards and loyalty program. The goal of the awards and recognition program was to compensate employees for their hard work attributed to increased sales and outstanding customer service.

Connection to existing literature and conceptual framework. Theme three closely aligned with the literature on the effect of rewards and recognition as motivators used by managers to increase employee engagement. Several studies have shown that when employees earn rewards and benefits, their performance increases. Dysvik, Kuvaas,

and Buch (2016) found that when employees are recognized for their hard work in social settings, whether they receive a cash award or a certificate of appreciation, other employees become interested and strive to also be recognized and rewarded. Managers should consider offering benefits that may contribute to the employees' quality of life (Belgio, 2019; Verčič & Vokić, 2017). White, Hamrick, Hepner, and Toomey (2019) found that understanding an employee's personality type provides managers with an idea on how they want to be shown recognition. Rewards and recognition are tools used by managers to incentivize their employees to work hard. Nasreen, Varshney, and Waseem (2019) further explained that when employees are rewarded and recognized by management as top performers and leaders in the workplace, they inherently strive to continue to work hard and help the company meet organizational goals.

Expressing employee recognition is supported in the literature and aligns with Kahn's (1990) theory on engagement. Kahn found that the following conditions: psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability must be present for employees to be engaged in the workplace. All the participants shared information on the importance of showing employee's appreciation and recognition for their hard work and dedication which correlates with psychological meaningfulness. According to Kahn (1990) for psychological meaningfulness to exist, employees must be recognized by management for high productivity levels and outstanding work. The mutual benefit of giving rewards is supported by Saks (2006) theory on social exchange; where employees feel a sense of pride and belonging when they are rewarded by management for their work. According to Saks (2006) showing workers gratitude for a

job well done is a reciprocal approach to consistently promote corporate values and make the employee feel respected.

Theme 4: Transparency

Employees gravitate more towards organizations that are transparent and have a mission that they can believe in and support. All the participants mentioned that transparency in operations is key in improving employee engagement in an organization SP1 noted, “it’s important to include employees in the decision-making process and openly discuss issues and concerns regarding products, sales, business strategies, and customer service campaigns.”

SP2 stated, “it is better to keep the employees in the loop, instead of them hearing about it on the news!” SP2 recalled a story from earlier in his career where the retail store he worked with for over 10 years filed for bankruptcy, locked the doors, and left the employees blind-sided. SP2 explained, “as managers it is important to provide employees with details on internal matters that are about to become external issues.” SP2 added that it is important to consistently keep employees up to date on the status of the company, not only sharing the good news. SP3 added, “that employees feel respected and included when managers share information and ask for feedback.” SP3 further explained that being transparent gives employees a sense of belonging and security because they feel like managers respect them enough to share important details.

SP3 mentioned the importance of embracing change and being transparent with employees when changes need to be made to keep up with competition, embrace new technology, and work under adverse conditions. SP3 stated, “anticipating change and

providing detailed information on why the change is needed is important; employees are more tolerant to change if they are kept in the loop concerning events that are about to take place." SP3 shared that a big box store opened across the street from their store and employees were concerned that they may be laid off or forced to close. Employees shared their concerns with management, who in turn worked with their staff to develop strategies to remain viable. SP3 explained the idea to have the merchant card and loyalty program came about from managers being transparent about competition and employees responded by suggesting viable solutions to build customer loyalty and branding. Archived company documents detailed minutes from the various meetings, marketing, and strategic initiatives the company developed to respond to the anticipated competition. The results revealed that during the time that the new store opened, sales remained constant with a slight increase.

A vital component of employee engagement is developing a culture of trust in an organization especially related to hiring and promotion practices. SP4 and SP5 explained the importance of being transparent about compensation and hiring and promotion procedures. SP4 added, "job announcements include a description of the duties, pay range and scale, and educational requirements." SP5 added, "a clear path on how to get promotions is equally important and should be offered to everyone." I corroborated SP4 and SP5's statements by reviewing XYZ personnel hiring guidelines and procedures which included recruiting requirements, background checks and screening requirements, and compensation structure. A transparent hiring and promotion process require proper due diligence on behalf of human resources and management to devise a plan to ensure

applicants know what to expect when seeking work or a promotion within an organization.

Connection to existing literature and conceptual framework. The information provided by the participants supports existing literature on the importance of transparency leading to employee engagement. When managers allow employees to use their voice and be a part the decision-making process, they are more likely to become engaged, providing innovative ideas and workable solutions to business challenges (Gruman & Saks, 2020). Managers play a key role where employee voice and engagement are concerned. According to Gyensare, Arthur, Twumasi, Agyapong, and Ratajczak-Mrozek (2019), leadership behaviors inspire employees to feel supported to speak up and provide innovative ideas that may benefit the organization. Further, SP2 and SP3 mentioned the importance of sharing critical information with staff. Mazzei, Butera, and Quaratino (2019) contended that without transparent leadership, employees are less focused and become detached and disengaged. Literature from Rieley (2016) aligns with SP3's response on employee's resistance; employees are less likely to resist change, if they are treated fairly, obtain regular feedback and updates, are allowed to provide input, and have a clear understanding on the reason and the benefits for the change.

Transparency within an organization supports Kahn's theory on psychological safety. According to Kahn (1990) for psychological safety to exist, managers must create an environment that supports the transparency of an employee's freedom of opinions where employees can voice their views without fear of retaliation. Additionally,

transparency within organizations align with the SET. Saks (2006) explained that management and employee relationships are built on mutual obligations, where if the employee feels like managers are transparent about the organization's intentions, they are more likely to become engaged.

Applications to Professional Practice

Business leaders can benefit from this study findings because it provides detailed strategies to enhance employee engagement within their organizations. Specifically, retail store managers can use the results from this research study to effectively engage employees which would in turn lead to increased productivity and profitability within their organizations. The data provided by the participants from this research reinforced existing and prior knowledge pertaining to employee engagement. Osborne and Hammoud (2017) identified $350 billion annually as the costs associated with disengaged employees. The findings of this study provide successful employee engagement strategies managers could use in retail settings (a) communication, (b) training and development, (c) rewards and recognition, and (d) transparency.

In Theme 1, the participants expressed how important communication is between management and employees to achieve organizational goals. Potoski and Callery (2018) found that managers who constantly communicate with their employees not only increase employee engagement, but their employees are motivated to work harder which results in increased productivity and profitability. Employees thrive in an environment where there are open lines of communication and they are aware of the companies' overall goals and mission (Mazzei, Butera, & Quaratino, 2019). Retail store managers could implement

strategies found within this study to implement communication strategies to effectively communicate with their employees.

In Theme 2, the participants explained the importance of employee training and development to successfully engage employees. Providing training and development, along with access and opportunities will enable employees to learn essential skills and awareness to improve performance (Guan & Frenkel, 2019; Krishnaveni & Monica, 2016; Rexworthy, 2020). Retail store managers could use some of the strategies found within this study to implement training and development programs within their organization creating an environment where employees can learn and share knowledge and potentially advance in the retail industry.

In Theme 3, the participants discussed the importance of creating a good rewards and incentive program to recognize employees for outstanding work performance. Providing employees with various reward and incentive options makes the process more impactful, thereby increasing the likelihood for the employee to continue to participate (Galvas, 2016). The rewards and incentives programs identified by the participants can be used by retail store managers to positively impact employee engagement within their organizations.

In Theme 4, the participants expressed the importance of transparency within their organization. Mazzei, Butera, and Quaratino (2019) contended that transparency is essential for employees to feel happy in the workplace. Jian and Men (2017) explained that managers are open and honest with employees, gain their respect and trust and in return, employees become more engaged. Retail managers can use the information based

on the findings from participants' responses to harness open and honest relationships with employees, which is necessary for the overall success of the organizations.

The results of this study provide strategies that are beneficial to managers who represent various business industries. The themes support proven employee engagement strategies which can be implemented by retail store managers to increase profitability and productivity. Implementation of different strategies revealed in this study could influence social change.

Implications for Social Change

There are several positive social change implications associated with the results of this study. One significant implication is that highly engaged employees are more productive, which in turn leads to increased profitability. Mazzetti, Guglielmi, Chiesa, and Mariani (2016) found that employees who work in retail companies are more engaged and productive when they feel good about their jobs. Another implication is that engaged employees who are satisfied and loyal, take pride in providing quality customer care, and recommending their company to people in the community (Kumar & Pensari, 2016; Madan, 2017; Mazzetti et al., 2016). Further, when retail businesses flourish, business owners reinvest in the community offering jobs, which in turn allows employees to upgrade their standard of living, positively impacting the economic well-being of the residents in the community. Additionally, retail businesses support local community events by providing charitable donations such as contributions to food banks, monetary donations for sporting events, and youth activities.

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Recommendations for Action

The information detailed in this study can be used by retail store managers to efficiently engage employees in the workplace. An engaged workforce results in motivated employees, which in turn leads to increased productivity and profitability (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Retail store managers, service managers, and human resource managers should consider this study's findings because retail managers who understand and execute these successful engagement strategies will likely improve employee efficiency and organizational performance.

Managers may adopt some or all of the strategies that the participants shared in this research study to effectively engage their employees. I recommend that retail store managers who are trying to actively engage employees, adopt the four strategies: (a) communication, (b) training and development, (c) incentives and rewards, and (d) transparency for optimal engagement. It is important to note that businesses are focusing more on finding ways to actively engage employees in the workplace. According to Gupta and Sharma (2016) companies are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of implementing employee engagement strategies, further creating an environment where employees are happy and motivated to be productive and innovative.

To increase awareness of the importance of employee engagement in the workplace, I will disseminate this research study via digital platforms and at retail conferences. I will also circulate the findings of this study at management training events and seminars, and to organizations that need information on strategies retail managers

may use to engage employees. Additionally, I will publish this study on ProQuest/UMI, the dissertation database used by scholars.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that some retail store managers used to engage employees. The target population was five retail store managers located in Atlanta Georgia. I recommend for future research and to address the geographic limitation and sample size of this study, efforts should focus on including a larger population sample comprising of participants from other geographic locations who have also implemented successful strategies to engage retail store employees.

Recommendations for further research may also include obtaining data from other retail industries. I conducted a qualitative single case research study focusing on a single retail store chain. Future researchers may contribute to the understanding of employee engagement strategies by conducting a multi-case study. Conducting a multi-case study would allow the researcher to collect different points of view from a more diverse community of retail managers to extend their research pool. Further research can provide useful feedback to managers and leaders to boost employee engagement, which in a competitive market may increase efficiency, enhance competitiveness, and increase productivity, improve sustainability, and approach survivability.

List recommendations for further study related to improved practice in business. Identify how limitations identified in Section 1, Limitations, can be addressed in future research.

Reflections

The road to completing a doctoral degree is not for the faint at heart. Throughout the process I experienced several setbacks from internal and external forces (fatigue and frustration, family emergencies, hurricanes, and job demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic; to name a few), but I never gave up. For anyone who is considering going back to school, I would recommend that time management and planning be a part of your daily priorities. My experiences juggling family and work life, in conjunction with working on my doctoral degree have been life changing. The knowledge, experience, and friendships I have formed are immeasurable.

I had minimal prior experience in retail, therefore, I was unfamiliar with the participants for this study. As a researcher, it is always important to understand and recognize that personal bias may exist, especially if you have worked in a specific field or have personal experience dealing with a topic. Therefore, it is equally important that prior to collecting data, to use an interview protocol (see Appendix A). I also conducted member checking with the research participants to ensure that I adequately interpreted the information they provided.

My outlook on employee engagement and finding ways to engage employees has changed significantly. From my own perspective, I realized that employee engagement initiatives will continue to evolve, as managers work on satisfying a more diverse workforce that may include managing up to four generations. It is equally important as a manager to embrace differences by creating an environment where diversity and inclusion is recognized and supported. The findings from this study provide successful

and effective strategies that can be used by organizations to increase employee engagement in their respective organizations.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies that retail managers may use to engage employees. High-level employee engagement organizations are more effective and competitive than those with low rates of worker involvement. Data were collected from participant interviews, company documents, and the company's website to explore strategies that retail managers used to engage employees. In the study, I used Kahn's (1990) engagement theory and Saks (2006) theory on social exchange. From the data collected four themes emerged: (a) communication, (b) training and development, (c) awards and incentives, and (d) transparency. The findings revealed that managers must adopt engagement strategies to constantly engage employees for the organization to be successful.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Before the interview commences, I will begin by acknowledging each participant, make personal introductions, and provide an overview of the research topic.
2. I will give the participants the opportunity to review the consent form and ask any questions before they sign it.
3. I will give the participants a copy of the consent form for their personal records.
4. I will remind the participants that the information they provide will remain confidential and code the information using a numbering scheme (SP1, SP2, SP3, etc).
5. I will remind the participants that they have the ability to withdraw at any time and that their participation is voluntary.
6. I will remind the participants that I will be using a voice recorder so that I can adequately transcribe the data. I will make the transcribed data available to them via email for their review. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes for responses to nine interview questions, including any follow-up questions,
7. I will remind the participants that I will meet them at a later date to verify if the information was captured correctly.
8. When the interview ends, I will thank the participant for taking the time to be a part of the research study.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Organization: _____

Interviewee: _____

Introductions: _____

Beginning Comments: _____

1. What strategies do you use to engage the employees within your organization?
2. How did the employees react to the implemented engagement strategies?
3. What engagement strategies have you found to be the most successful?
4. What engagement strategies have you found to be least successful?
5. Based upon your experiences, how have disengaged employees affected the work environment?
6. What role does leadership play in engaging employees?
7. How do you assess the effectiveness of the strategies for employee engagement?
8. Based upon your experiences, what are some of the benefits of successful employee engagement strategies?
9. What additional information would you like to provide regarding the strategies used to improve employee engagement?

Other information discussed:

_____

Post interview comments:

_____

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate

Dear ( )

My name is Bianca Maynard, and I am a graduate student working on my doctoral research study at Walden University. The study I am working on pertains to strategies retail managers use to engage employees that could contribute to the productivity and profitability in the workplace. Research collected in this study will be used to explore successful strategies that retail managers use within your organization to improve productivity and profitability in the workplace.

The only requirements for your participation will be to meet with me for no more than 60 minutes at (a facility to be determined) to respond to some interview questions about your experiences which you used to implement successfully strategies to engage employees in your organization.

Please rest assured that your identity or the identity of your company will not be shared and will be kept confidential. As a participant in the study, you will receive a copy of the research, upon completion. The copy of the research may provide you a documented source that provides information that you can use to further enhance your business, which may lead to increased profitability.

I would like to speak to you in person or by phone to briefly address and explain my research study and answer any questions you may have prior to your participation. This meeting will be very brief and should not last more than 10 minutes. I will call you at your office on (Insert date and time). If you would prefer to change the time, please contact me via the email listed.

Regards,

Bianca O. Maynard

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