

2020

## Strategies to Improve Millennial Employees' Engagement Within the Hospitality Industry

Duane Stephens  
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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Duane O. Stephens

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Strategies to Improve Millennial Employees' Engagement in the Hospitality Industry

by

Duane O. Stephens

MBA, Saint Leo University, 2011

BA, Saint Leo University, 2009

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Self-Design

Walden University

June 2020

## Abstract

In the United States, engagement levels of the multigenerational workforce are negatively affecting the overall business value. Employee engagement is important to hospitality industry leaders as an indicator of job performance, turnover, employee intentions, and organizational commitment. Grounded in Kahn's employee engagement theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore effective strategies used by leaders in the hospitality industry to improve Millennial employee engagement. The participants were 5 hotel leaders in Virginia who successfully engaged their Millennial workforce. Data were collected from semistructured interviews, company documents, and note-taking. Data were analyzed using Yin's 5-step data analysis, member checking, and methodological triangulation. Four themes emerged: coaching through education, rewards that improve engagement, enhancing engagement through motivation, and communication enhances awareness and receptiveness. Managers could use mentoring, communication, and incentives to engage millennial employees and decrease employee engagement barriers. The implications for positive social change include providing hospitality industry managers with a framework for understanding their Millennial workers that can potentially promote positive relationships and improve employee morale. Employee engagement strategies could potentially lead to an improvement in the societal workforce, reduce unemployment rates, and increase the U.S. economy and tax base.

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## Dedication

First, I would like to acknowledge my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, without whom I would not have made it this far. Without His peace, protection, grace, mercy, love, faithfulness, strength, and guidance this journey would not have been possible. I dedicate this accomplishment to my mother, Priscilla Millington; my father, Carl Stephens; my lovely wife, Dr. Esther M. Stephens, and my beautiful children, Tiara Leshai Stephens and Imani Priscilla-Rose Stephens. From a young age, my parents instilled in me the importance of education and the importance of following your dreams and challenging your boundaries as you place your own limits on yourself. I am especially grateful and thankful for my lovely wife for supporting, pushing, and loving me through it all, and being a great mother to our children. My wife is truly my rock and my biggest cheerleader and words cannot describe the respect, admiration, and love that I have for her. I dedicate this accomplishment to my girls, the two treasures that the Lord has seen me worthy to father, protect, and raise. These two young ladies, Tiara and Imani, have truly changed my life and continue to make me better every day, and through them, I can see God's love for me by entrusting me with these gifts. This journey has given me the opportunity to show my two daughters that you can accomplish anything that you put your mind to and how important it is to set goals, work hard toward the target, and then achieve the goal. This accomplishment has allowed me to "be the change that you want to see in this world," which is something that I always tell my girls. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might, He increaseth strength (Isaiah 40:29). And lastly, the Bible does not say "some things," it says, "I can do ALL things through CHRIST who strengthens ME!!!" (Philippians 4:13).

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies used in the hospitality industry to engage Millennial employees in the workplace. In the hospitality industry, employee engagement plays a role in the success of the company because engaged employees provide good quality customer service (Karatepe, 2013). An engaged employee in the hospitality industry may increase productivity, increase profits, and improve business outcomes (Putra, Cho, & Liu, 2017). A disengaged employee may reduce the quality of service; therefore, resulting in customer dissatisfaction (Meng, Reber, & Rogers, 2017).

Highly engaged Millennial employees have the potential to improve profitability and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Millennial employees may be more engaged at work if they find the job to be meaningful, interesting, and flexible (Raza, Ansari, Humayon, Hussain, & Aziz, 2017). Therefore, leaders in the hospitality industry use innovative strategies to improve engagement levels among Millennial employees.

### **Background of the Problem**

Employee engagement is one of the most discussed topics among human-resource professionals and academics as it is an indicator for job performance, turnover, employee intentions, and organizational commitment (Krishnaveni & Monica, 2016). Furthermore, an engaged employee goes beyond assigned work duties (Anitha, 2014). Engaged employees exceed in productivity because they want to see the organization succeed and want to do their part to ensure its success (Bolino, Hsiung, Harvey, & LePine, 2015). The workforce is going through a generational shift as the older generations moving to

retirement (Kuron, Lyons, Schweitzer, & Ng, 2015). Individuals born between the mid-1980s and the early 2000s are known as Millennials (Nolan, 2015). Millennials, referenced as Generation Y or trophy kids, consist of about 80,000,000 people who will dominate the workforce in the year 2040 (Anderson, Buchko, & Buchko, 2016).

Different generations view job involvement, organizational commitment, professional commitment, and team commitment differently because various generations base their view of these concepts on events that happened economically, politically, and socially during their early years (Singh & Gupta, 2015). Political, economic, and social events develop different and unique undertones in a generation, and these undertones stay with an individual throughout their lifetime (Fishman, 2016). Managers have found it challenging to maintain Millennial workers (Bannon, Ford, & Meltzer, 2011). Once managers have invested time to recruit, hire, and train Millennials, they may take their talents to another organization (Ferri-Reed, 2014a).

### **Problem Statement**

Lack of employee engagement is an increasing problem in the hospitality industry (Brown, Thomas, & Bosselman, 2015). Organizations that have highly engaged employees benefit from 41% lower absenteeism and a 17% increase in productivity (Verčič & Vokić, 2017). The general business problem is that some leaders do not engage Millennial workers in the hospitality industry. The specific business problem is that some hospitality leaders lack strategies to improve Millennial employee engagement.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some hospitality leaders use to improve Millennial employee engagement. The target population for this study was leaders of five hotel organizations who have successfully engaged Millennial workers in Virginia. The implications for positive social change from this study include a potential increase in employee confidence and motivation resulting from more effective engagement of Millennials, which could increase company revenue and allow businesses to attract and retain talented employees. This increase could reduce unemployment rates in the hospitality industry, in all business sectors in Virginia, and strengthen financial resources for families in the various local communities.

### **Nature of the Study**

I selected the qualitative research method for this study. In qualitative research, researchers compile comprehensive and detailed data regarding participants' expertise, philosophy, wisdom, and understanding of particular phenomena (Du Plessis, 2017). Quantitative research requires a deductive approach and relies on numerical data collection and analysis to test theories using statistical hypotheses (Groeneveld, Tummers, Bronkhorst, Ashikali, & Van Thiel, 2015). Researchers may use mixed methods, which include quantitative and qualitative research elements (Palinkas et al., 2015), allowing for more complex research questions in addition to collecting stronger evidence (Yin, 2018). I did not select either of these research methods because quantitative and mixed methods were not necessary to answer the overarching research question in this study.

I selected a case-study design to explain the methods leaders use to improve employee engagement among Millennials. I considered the narrative, phenomenological, and ethnography research designs. The narrative design is appropriate when discussing participants' experiences through personal stories and developed narratives (Lewis, 2015). I did not choose the narrative design because I did not construct narratives of participants' experiences in this study. Phenomenological researchers explore the meanings of the lived experiences of participants; however, the phenomenological research design does not properly address which phenomenon is of utmost importance to a group or an individual (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). I did not choose the phenomenological design because the meaning of participants' lived experiences was not the focal point of this study. Ethnographers incorporate interviews with observations to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon through participants of a particular culture (Case & Light, 2011). I did not choose ethnography because I did not use observation of a culture. As a result, I chose the case study design so I could question participants from different hospitality industries about their individual experiences and combine that information to answer my research question.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do some hospitality leaders use to improve employee engagement among Millennial workers?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies did you use to improve employee engagement among Millennial workers?



2. What strategies worked the best to improve employee engagement among Millennial workers?
3. What were the key barriers to implementing the strategies for improving Millennial employee engagement?
4. How did you address the key barriers to implementing your successful strategies for increasing engaging Millennial employees?
5. What additional information could you share about Millennial engagement that we have not discussed?

### **Conceptual Framework**

For this study, employee engagement theory served as the conceptual framework. Employee engagement theory provides a method to view employee commitment to the organization, employee commitment to organizational goals, and employee engagement levels (Kahn, 1990). Employee engagement materializes when employees are fully involved mentally, emotionally, and physically with their activities at work. Employees engage by committing themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically. Organizational leaders must understand what motivates their employees for leaders to effectively take advantage of employee engagement efforts. Employee disengagement occurs when employees disconnect psychologically, emotionally, and physically from their work activities (Kahn, 1990). Employees exhibit engagement and disengagement throughout the workday (Kahn, 1990). Based on a review of the literature, I expected employee engagement theory to provide a useful lens for me to analyze the data to

understand the best engagement strategies of participants and answer the research question.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Employee engagement:* Employee engagement is a strategy used by management to include employees in the day-to-day activities of an organization (Slack, Corlett, & Morris, 2015).

*Hospitality:* Hospitality entails services provided by businesses such as restaurants, casinos, and hotels to patrons for business and pleasure (Durna, Dedeoglu, & Balikçioğlu, 2015).

*Leaders:* Supervisors, managers, and owners are leaders in the hospitality industry and are involved in the decision-making processes (Matzler, Veider, Hautz, & Stadler, 2015).

*Millennials:* Millennials are people who were born between 1980 and 1999, sometimes referenced as Generation Y (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016).

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

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are information in the study that the researcher believes to be true, but cannot be verified in the study (Gandomani, Zulzalil, Ghani, Sultan, & Parizi, 2015). One assumption for this study was that participants would answer my interview questions truthfully and with sincerity. I expected participants to answer the questions with no motive to intentionally design a predetermined outcome. In addition, the interviews were

conducted at places of employment or other private locations, where I assumed participants were able to participate without restrictions.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are external factors that could impede or confine the scope of the research and may ultimately affect the outcome of the research (Evans, Feng, Hoffman, Moser, & Van der Stede, 2015). The organizational leaders may create limitations on the type of room used for the interviews because the interviews took place at the participants' workplace. Another limitation in this study included the inclination for research participants to provide the strategies they used to improve Millennial employee engagement.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are factors that narrow the research and determine the boundaries of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The delimitations of this study included hotels in Virginia that had been in operation for at least 3 years and had a minimum of five Millennial-generation employees who were full-time employees. I did not consider the engagement strategies of baby boomers or Generation X employees, but some leaders in the organization fit into those generations. This study did not include participants working in motels.

### **Significance of the Study**

Organizational leaders may use the results of this study to develop recommendations and advise other leaders in developing and deploying effective employee engagement strategies. Organizations may be able to retain workers longer by

effectively engaging Millennial workers (see McGinnis Johnson & Ng, 2016). Employees regularly engage and disengage themselves throughout the workday, which affects work commitment and work performance (Brooks & Califf, 2017; Kahn, 1990).

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Employee engagement leads to increased competitiveness and profitability for the company (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016). Moreover, employee engagement could decrease employee turnover and burnout (Swensen, Kabcenell, & Shanafelt, 2016). The effective engagement of employees might enhance overall business operations by increasing organizational profitability and creating a better business environment for employee and customers (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014).

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings from this doctoral study may help hospitality leaders use strategies to increase employee confidence and motivation and thereby improve employee engagement among Millennial workers. Hospitality leaders could potentially increase revenue through improved employee engagement, which may ultimately lead to job creation, a reduction in unemployment rates, and greater prosperity for the families who reside in Virginia.

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

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore effective employee engagement strategies used by leaders to engage Millennial workers in the hospitality industry in Virginia. The conceptual framework for this study was the employee engagement theory, which was developed by Kahn in 1990. In this study, I used the

employee engagement theory to better understand the topics of employee engagement, Millennials, and the hospitality industry. For the literature review, I explored books and peer-reviewed journal articles from several databases including ABI/Inform, Business Source Complete, Emerald, and Academic Search Complete. In my research, I searched the following key topics to locate the information: (a) *employee engagement*, (b) *Millennial generation*, (c) *work factors in the hospitality industry*, and (d) *motivational ideologies*.

### **Employee Engagement Theory**

The conceptual framework for this study was employee engagement theory, which focuses on employee behavior throughout the workday as employees engage and disengage during the performance of their job (Kahn, 1990). In the theory of employee engagement, Kahn (1990) discussed the employee's level of engagement through their commitment to the organization. The theory of employee engagement was essential to counteract the old ways of thinking and practices managers used to engage employees. The factors that affect an employee's level of commitment to the organization could reveal an index of motivators to boost employee engagement (Schmitt, Den Hartog, & Belschak, 2016).

Personal engagement occurs when employees assert themselves fully in fulfilling their work roles (Kahn, 1990). Engaged employees do not spend time focusing on anything other than work and how to better their performance or their work environment (Jensen, 2017). Additionally, employees who engage are working to improve the organization with their talent (Christensen Hughes & Rog, 2008). Employees' own

experiences impact their commitment level, how they are involved with the organization, and their level of performance. Employee involvement or lack of involvement in an organization is explained in the theory of employee engagement (Kahn, 1990).

In contrast, employee disengagement occurs when employees withdraw themselves and do not work for the betterment of the organization (Kahn, 1990). In this case, employees spend time thinking of solutions to problems outside of work and spend more time withdrawn from the organization (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Leaders who understand the principles of employee engagement could help employers establish tools to better analyze how employee engagement affects an organization (Milliken, Schipani, Bishara, & Prado, 2015).

Kahn's theory of employee engagement has been used to explain the level of commitment and engagement employees experience while working for specific organizations (Bal & De Lange, 2015; Jin & McDonald, 2017; Kahn, 1990). Employees engage on emotional, physical, and intellectual levels (Kahn, 1990). Manager evaluations of key objectives in the hotel industry reveal a correlation between engagement methods, the success of the organization, and productive employees (Jin & McDonald, 2017).

### **Contrasting Theories**

Strauss and Howe (1991) designed generational cohort theory to hinge on an individual's values, beliefs, and motivations, which are the result of the political and social events that occurred in a certain timeframe (Cohen & Sherman, 2014).

Generational cohort theorists believe that individuals who were born around the same time share commonalities in beliefs and values (Curran & Hill, 2019). Organizational

commitment theory is a social exchange between organizations and employees that affects an employee's level of dedication to the organization (Kang & Busser, 2018). The employee's level of dedication affects their job satisfaction and job performance, which are components of organizational commitment. Different generations have different levels of commitment to the organization for which they work (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015). I did not select generational cohort theory or organizational commitment theory as the conceptual framework for this study because I did not explore values, beliefs, or motivations that occurred during a certain timeframe to a generation. Moreover, I did not study the social exchange between an organization and an employee as a basis for employee commitment.

### **Defining Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement relates to the level of trust, commitment, and communication between an organization and its members. The concept of employee engagement is a combination of psychological, emotional, physical, and mental states of an employee (Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011). Employee engagement involves many different elements, such as the treatment of employees and how the employee is empowered to make work-related decisions (Ugboro & Obeng, 2000). Employers must construct a workable and reliable method to effectively engage employees, therefore helping employees remain satisfied or happy (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

An employee's happiness does not make that employee more productive or more committed to the organization (Huang, Ahlstrom, Lee, Chen, & Hsieh, 2016). Benefits such as higher compensation can positively affect job satisfaction (Dobrow Riza,

Ganzach, & Liu, 2018); however, a higher salary does not necessarily increase employee engagement levels (Marasi, Cox, & Bennett, 2016). Employers may want to have happy and satisfied employees, but it is employee engagement that directly links to increases in productivity and decreases in employee turnover (Raina & Roebuck, 2016). Keeping Millennials engaged should be the priority of any organization as Millennials become the largest group in the workforce (Cahill & Sedrak, 2012).

Leaders use employee engagement to connect with the employees in an organization (Kang & Sung, 2017). Employers that implement employee engagement initiatives may feel a sense of empowerment and feel their voices matter to their employees (Jiang & Luo, 2018). Organizations that strive to engage employees tend to have a loyal and dedicated workforce (Kang & Sung, 2017). Employers can potentially leverage relationships with their employees to strengthen their associations with their customers.

Managers use employee engagement strategies to increase the chances of business success; engaged employees contribute to organizational performance due to increased productivity and well-being. Employers who connect with employees have greater success with employee support for growth and innovation (Mazzei, Flynn, & Haynie, 2016). Organizations that practice good employee engagement initiatives are quicker to react to changes in the industry (Seppälä, Hakanen, Tolvanen, & Demerouti, 2018). Organizational growth, innovation, and employee retention may either increase or decrease depending on how well an organization keeps its employees engaged.



## **Employee Engagement and Job Performance**

Employee engagement and job performance are related (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). Engaged employees tend to operate at a higher level of proficiency. A review of an employee's work history may indicate if positive work experiences helped the employee understand their role in the organization and perform at or above expectations (Conway, Fu, Monks, Alfes, & Bailey, 2016). Employees who feel heard by management tend to be more concerned with the success of the organization (Bolino & Grant, 2016). Employees who have input about the future direction of the organization feel empowered and tend to make decisions based on the good of the organization (Bolino & Grant, 2016). Employees who make key organizational decisions can potentially feel a sense of empowerment, belonging, and engagement.

Organizational leaders who recognize the connection between employee engagement and job performance can connect employee engagement to the overall success of the organization. Leaders who understand the connection between employee engagement and job performance can identify the least effective policies in the organization and adjust them accordingly (William & Thompson, 2017). Leaders can use surveys or employee suggestion boxes to gain an understanding of ways to better engage employees and gauge the overall effectiveness of changes made. The results of these surveys can aid leadership in adjusting the overall decision-making process based on employee feedback. Leadership can gain a better understanding of work outputs such as productivity and customer satisfaction when they understand the relationship between employee engagement and job performance (Bowling, Khazon, Meyer, & Burrus, 2015).

Managers who work to build a strong and successful team understand that employees must be motivated appropriately (Ford, Piccolo, & Ford, 2017). Employees who cannot see the value in their efforts may feel taken for granted and might not work to achieve success in the organization (Raghuram, Gajendran, Liu, & Somaya, 2017). Managers should work to motivate and communicate the overall objectives for their employees. Managers who build loyalty and confidence with their team could potentially benefit from a group of high performers.

Employees who pride themselves with achieving the organizational goals and work toward successfully executing the organization's vision have fully committed themselves to the organization (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). These employees take pride in their job performance and work hard to maintain both their success and the success of the organization (Van Wingerden, Derks, & Bakker, 2017). Managers could consider recognizing when an employee wants to excel in the organization and help that employee grow; employee growth benefits the employee along with the organization.

An engaged employee may do all the necessary things to keep the organization moving forward (Crosina & Pratt, 2019). An organization that is moving forward maintains high levels of employee engagement, customer service, customer satisfaction, innovation, and profitability (Menguc, Auh, Yeniaras, & Katsikeas, 2017). Managers must continue to keep employees engaged, as an engaged employee will have better job performance and continue to push the organization forward. Organizations continue to thrive when their employees outperform their competition (Walumbwa, Muchiri, Misati, Wu, & Meiliani, 2018). One facet of employee engagement includes employees' putting

extra effort into their jobs, having a sense of pride and loyalty working for an organization, and being an advocate for the organization.

### **Leadership Influences on Job Satisfaction and Performance**

Organization leadership should consider a variety of initiatives to increase employee engagement levels. In many organizations, manager leadership is judged by the performance outcomes of their employees (Tu, Bono, Shum, & LaMontagne, 2018). The manager may be considered responsible for an underperforming work staff, and top management may address this underperformance by either retraining or terminating the manager (Amankwah-Amoah, Ifere, & Nyuur, 2016). Managers who understand their influence on employee behavior and performance and act on that understanding could have greater organizational success. Managers should always look for ways to keep employees working at their best, as employee performance is often a direct result of their leadership.

Leaders who model positive attitudes and behavior to improve business outcomes could trigger and reinforce employee engagement. Employees will usually underperform their job duties without a solid example of expectation and leadership from management (Maltarich, Nyberg, Reilly, Abdulsalam, & Martin, 2017). Managers set the tone of the organization and employees look to management for direction and training (Belle, 2016). Therefore, managers could try to understand what motivates their workforce. Managers who know what motivates their employees could use that information during stressful times or when the organization needs a significant boost to sustain or improve employee efforts.

An organization's leadership is directly involved in ensuring employee job satisfaction and performance (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Leadership sets the tone in any organization. Employees usually fall into one of three categories when working for the organization (Maurer & London, 2018): employees who want to see the organization excel (Buckingham & Goodall, 2015), employees who want to do the bare minimum to keep their position (Ni & Van Wart, 2015), and employees who are willing to get fired or removed from their current responsibility and have no regard for their work (Alesina, Algan, Cahuc, & Giuliano, 2015). Knowing in which category to place an employee is a learned skill that a leader develops over time by connecting with employees (Bolden, 2016). How a leader interacts with employees is critical to the overall work culture and work environment (Leroy, Anseel, Gardner, & Sels, 2015).

Various leadership styles bring different results in employee commitment and the quality of service employees provide to patrons (Tung, Chen, & Schuckert, 2017). Managerial styles of leadership in the hospitality industry directly affect employee job satisfaction (Kumar & Krishnaraj, 2018). The mixing of different leadership styles from one individual or multiple individuals can have a positive or negative impact on an organization (Kumar & Krishnaraj, 2018), which could potentially lead organizational leaders to hire a variety of people with varying personalities (Erickson, 2017). Each person will act differently in particular situations and approach challenges with different modes of seeking solutions.

Ineffective leadership affects job performance and job satisfaction in a negative way. Leaders who do not know how to lead can compromise employee morale and cause

talented employees to leave organizations (Warrick, 2017). Organizations spend a great deal of money recruiting employees and spend even more money training and retaining them (Cloutier, Felusiak, Hill, & Pemberton-Jones, 2015). Managers who do not collaborate with their employees may find themselves consistently seeking new talent (Cascio & Boudreau, 2016). Millennials want to work in environments where their voice matters and where they can contribute to the overall success of the organization (Follmer, Talbot, Kristof-Brown, Astrove, & Billsberry, 2018).

Managers who lack the skillset to effectively lead, train, and develop the Millennial worker create the risk of Millennial workers seeking employment at another organization (Meola, 2016). In addition, leadership has a significant impact on organizational culture, employee job satisfaction, and employee performance (Gatling, Kang, & Kim, 2016). Managers must constantly assess the work environment and individual performances to understand the workload, manager influence, or other factors that may have a positive or negative impact on work outcomes.

### **Importance of Employee Engagement**

Strategic human-resource managers, social psychologists, and psychologists are exploring the effects of employee engagement on performance outcomes (Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013). Sometimes organizational leaders focus more on investigating and documenting the need for employee engagement rather than focusing on implementing systems and programs in the organization to address this need (Matthews, 2018). This situation presents an opportunity for organizations to use

creativity in their methods because employees have different needs that conventional methodologies and applications may not address.

Human-resource departments and organizational leaders work to attract the most effective workers and find ways to retain them as employees and keep them motivated to work with the organization (Willie et al., 2017). Leaders must effectively address these issues to maintain an organization's ability to retain top talent and be innovative and sustainable. The cost of training and retaining an existing employee is less than that of attracting, hiring, and training someone new to the organization. Employers are shifting their focus to make employees feel connected to the company (Matthews, 2018). Organizational leaders that focus on the retention of quality frontline employees find themselves gaining knowledge that cannot be gained from work manuals (Afsar, Shahjehan, & Shah, 2018). Frontline employees are the face of the organization and have the most contact with the customer (Quirke, 2017).

Managers who ensure that the frontline employees are actively engaged will directly impact the way customers are treated and increase the likelihood of the customer's return to doing business again with the organization (Colm, Ordanini, & Parasuraman, 2017). Hotel management should focus on keeping employees engaged and focused on moving the business further as pressure increases from other hotel brands and new entrants to the hospitality industry, such as Airbnb (Koh & King, 2017). Employees who feel included in company decisions are empowered to make decisions and feel appreciated for their work. Valued employees may see themselves as essential parts of the organization and work to grow the organization.

## **Multigenerational Workforce**

A multigenerational workforce can be beneficial to any organization due to the creativity, diversity, and depth of knowledge that members of various generations possess (van Zyl, Mathafena, & Ras, 2017). Organizations must research how to maintain a multigenerational workforce. Ignoring generational differences may have a significant impact on the overall leadership, direction, and success of an organization (Lord, Day, Zaccaro, Avolio, & Eagly, 2017). The entire organization benefits from the values, expectations, insights, attitudes toward problem-solving, and other day-to-day work activities of different generations in the workplace (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

Further research on the different generations could include information on whether any similarities exist among them. Revealing any shared life experiences between generations will help leaders understand similarities in attitudes and beliefs (Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, & Cohen, 2016). Similarities are the underlying factors that reveal employee motivations. Although shared life experiences reveal similarities in different generations, a difference in age can reveal differences in work preferences and work ethics (Lu & Gursoy, 2016). Generational differences are still a debatable topic, with some scholars taking the position that generational differences are perceptions and not reality (Evert, Martin, McLeod, & Payne, 2016). Employers who understand each generation further understand how to motivate their employees.

The multigenerational workforce may have a positive impact on the organization; however, it is the responsibility of management to help members of different generations work together (Kidwell, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2018). Managers must understand

the importance of their roles in leading the multigenerational workforce by understanding generational differences in motivation and work ethic (Stewart, Oliver, Cravens, & Oishi, 2017). Managers acquire knowledge by understanding the various leadership styles and determining which leadership style most effectively motivates which employee from which generation (LePine, Zhang, Crawford, & Rich, 2016). With an understanding of various generations, managers can develop effective strategies to lead and motivate the workforce and strengthen the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Leaders who aim to build a strong organization should have a better understanding of the multigenerational workforce and understand how to engage members of each generation (Blattner & Walter, 2015). Leadership must be receptive to unconventional methods as the world and the needs of employees continue to change (Dwyer & Azevedo, 2016). Leaders can make decisions that are best for the company, multigenerational employees, and customers (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002).

### **Generational Differences in the Workforce**

The demographics of any company consist of baby boomers, Generation X, and Millennials (Glass, 2007). Different generations have different communication styles and motivating factors (Dörnyei, 2003). Baby boomers are good at communicating, hardworking, and motivated by flexible retirement options, monetary rewards, or incentives (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). Members of Generation X are good at communicating and value work bonuses and stock options as compensation for good work (Earle, 2003). Generation Y, or Millennials, engage less in face-to-face communication and value feedback and other work communication through social media



(Ferri-Reed, 2014b). With multiple generations working at the same time (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010), the motivating factors and communication styles of employees vary; therefore, organizations must provide innovative ways for members of each generation to understand directives and execute them effectively (Nadler & Tushman, 1989).

Generational differences exist in how each generation views work expectations and values (Kuron et al., 2015). Baby boomers value their jobs and keeping them, while Generation X members seek to pursue advancement opportunities such as management and Millennials seek to challenge management (Rani & Samuel, 2016). Generation X and Millennials are highly motivated by employers that recognize work-life balance (Martin & Ottemann, 2016). Additionally, Generation X and Millennials are less likely to compromise their personal lives for the betterment of the organization (Öz, Unsal, & Movassaghi, 2018). Younger generations may switch jobs every 2 years if there is no upward progression, while older generations will tend to stay for a longer period with the same employer, regardless of whether they receive a promotion (Benson, Brown, Glennie, O'Donnell, & O'Keefe, 2018).

Generational differences can range from work ethic, job title, and money, to employee commitment and job satisfaction (Lub, Bal, Blomme, & Schalk, 2016). Baby boomers have higher organizational commitment and job satisfaction; therefore, baby boomers are less likely to resign from their positions, unlike Generation X members who value job security and manager support (Ennis, Gong, & Okpozo, 2018). Members of older generations value status, including workplace influence and responsibility, whereas

members of younger generations value freedom, including anything that affects work-life balance (Weeks & Schaffert, 2017).

Multiple generations in the workforce create employee engagement challenges for inexperienced managers (Stewart et al., 2017). Managers who can connect with different age groups can keep a motivated and dedicated workforce focused on providing excellent customer service and completing tasks timely (Shalley & Gilson, 2017). For example, older generations find motivation in job security and pay incentives. Some Millennials find more motivation in flexible work schedules and working with an organization that has a social action mission or social action background (Suomäki, Kianto, & Vanhala, 2019). Some Millennials feel they are doing their part to help society advance when they work for employers that have a social action mission.

Motivating factors differ between Millennials, Generation X, and baby boomers (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015). Work-life balance, training regularly, opportunities for continuous feedback, and coaching are factors that motivate Millennials workers (Gulyani & Bhatnagar, 2017). Job mobility motivates Millennials, whereas older generations are more comfortable remaining in a job (Bogosian & Rousseau, 2017). Generation X members do not work overtime as much as Millennials and baby boomers to accommodate work-life balance (Tsaor & Yen, 2018). Advancement opportunities and feeling appreciated are consistent values across all the generations, and job satisfaction does not play a factor in generational differences. Failing to effectively understand the motivating factors of each generation can lead to poor organizational performance and a

loss in organizational competitive advantage (Pillai, Hodgkinson, Kalyanaram, & Nair, 2017).

Employee engagement continues to be a troubling issue for employers that employ a large number of younger workers and Millennial employees (Greatwood, 2016). Generational differences are among the root causes of this division between Millennials and other generations (Anderson, Baur, Griffith, & Buckley, 2017). The need to close this division has become even greater as Millennials slowly overtake the workforce as the largest working generation (Clark, 2017). Organizations must develop new and innovative strategies to effectively communicate, motivate, and reward Millennials (Canedo, Graen, Grace, & Johnson, 2017). Traditional methods of pay are ineffective for Millennials, who are more interested in work-life balance and other perquisites than merely an increase in salary (Thornton, 2016). Older generations, Generation X in particular, are driven by a solid career path and financial security (Greatwood, 2016). In contrast, Millennials look more to social needs such as being appreciated and the ability to work with peers as drivers in their career paths (Greatwood, 2016).

### **Millennials (Generation Y Members)**

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, were born in the mid-1990s to early 2000s (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Millennials are most notably known for being driven by social issues and attitudes toward work (Ertas, 2015). Millennials are lazy and less willing to commit to an employer; therefore, millennials move from employer to employer with no loyalty to any particular one (Dziewanowska, Pearce, & Zupan, 2016).

Millennials work for organizations that respect work-life balance and employers that offer flexible work schedules (Bennett, Beehr, & Ivanitskaya, 2017). Millennials will be the largest generation in the workforce as the older generations move into retirement (Hoyle, 2017). To retain Millennial employees, employers must learn the work habits of Millennials, understand what drives Millennial employees, and speak the same language as the Millennial worker (Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2017).

The Millennial generation has a better understanding of new technologies and social media. Millennials use social media as their primary source of communication and engagement with coworkers, friends, and family members (Beam, Child, Hutchens, & Hmielowski, 2018). Social media is the quickest way to communicate with a larger audience while delivering the same message at the same time (Key & Czaplewski, 2017). Technology and social media could be drivers of engagement among Millennials, and companies could incorporate technology and the use of social media to engage their Millennial workforce. Employers that incorporate current communication channels with innovation through social media will have a greater opportunity for successful connection with Millennials (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016).

### **Motivation Factors of Millennials**

Motivating factors for Millennials are different from the motivating factors for baby-boomers and members of Generation X. The method of attracting and retaining employees with benefits such as pension plans or giving employee performance-based bonuses does not register as a benefit with the Millennial generation (Eversole,

Venneberg, & Crowder, 2012). Leadership must find unconventional ways to motivate and achieve desired outcomes from Millennials.

Millennials' motivation comes from flexible workdays, which means Millennials work at the office a certain number of days during the week and may work from home the rest of the week (Smith, 2010). Millennials seek to avoid being tied to a desk for the work week and view flexibility as more time to be creative and productive (Lowe, Levitt, & Wilson, 2008). Millennials value employers that recognize that employees are more productive when they balance work and home (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001). For example, baby boomers are tied to work emails and cellular phones even when they are not at work; these employees are expected to respond to calls or emails even when home with their families (Porter, 2004).

Motivational techniques in regard to today's workers come from information collected from research about Millennials (Loughlin & Barling, 2001). Leaders who connect to the Millennial worker are critical to an organization's growth, innovation, and sustainability (Yang & Konrad, 2011). Employers could develop written policies to attract talented Millennial workers and modify policies as needed to retain Millennials (Nelson, 2012). Millennials seek to support causes and look at organizations' treatment of employees quite critically. Organizational leaders could ask Millennials to take part in solutions and internal discussions regarding how to motivate the Millennial worker (Hershatler & Epstein, 2010).

Employers continue to be challenged by the new and innovative ways to attract new workers. Staubli and Zweimüller (2013) noted that some employers consider

pensions as a benefit to a younger generation of workers. Leaders who understand how to attract and retain the Millennial worker could benefit from dedicated, forward-thinking, and innovative employees (Woods, 2016). Organizational leaders who create a thriving Millennial base could potentially remain competitive in the hospitality industry (Slocum, Lei, & Buller, 2014).

The Millennial generation were born in a world where innovative communication methods are incorporated into everyday life (Mihalcea, 2017). Millennials can offer ideas and express their views as businesses begin to use alternative methods to communicate information to employees. The use of computers and hand-held devices make communication options flexible with local, national, and international workforces (Grant & Meadows, 2016). The use of computers and hand-held devices in the workplace enable employers to distribute the same message to employees in a shorter timeframe and connect to a larger audience (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Howcroft, 2014). These faster forms of communication can solve organizational problems, address employee challenges, and even conduct workforce and development training.

The business world uses technology to enhance communication with employees and connect with stakeholders. However, the use of technology fueled the Millennial workforce to distance themselves from organizations and decrease their engagement with peers and managers (Spreitzer, Cameron, & Garrett, 2017). Leaders must enhance their strategies to improve the connection between Millennials and the organization to maintain organizational innovation and sustainability (Zuraik, & Kelly, 2019). Organizations struggle to connect with employees and motivate them; motivational

strategies that worked on other generations must change, as Millennials are motivated by innovation and inclusion of technology.

Millennials communicate through technology, and organizations that incorporate innovative technological initiatives could have a better chance of engaging and retaining the Millennial employee (Canedo et al., 2017). Additionally, Millennials may not consider longevity with an organization as a motivating factor to stay with an organization (Gorczyca & Hartman, 2017). Millennials' ability to explore new opportunities and take risks could allow the Millennial worker to easily transition from one organization to another. The Millennial generation tends to follow the social causes of the organization, which could lead Millennials to stay longer with that organization. Organizations that continue to rely on loyalty incentives of the past such as 401Ks and retirement plans, may tend to keep older generations longer versus targeting Millennials by using incentive programs tailored towards Millennials (Tulgan, 2016).

### **Employee Engagement in the Hospitality Industry**

Varying models of accommodation in the hospitality industry are to satisfy today's leisure and business travelers (Blal, Singal, & Templin, 2018). Families rent rooms within their own homes with platforms such as Airbnb, in addition to using traditional accommodations such as hotels and motels (Gurran & Phibbs, 2017). Travelers have many options for places to stay; therefore, travelers consider the cost of accommodation and traveling distance when making final itinerary decisions. In addition, travelers consider the experiences gained from workers from their place of stay. The industry must consider how it connects with prospective travelers through organizational

employees to keep the use of hotels and motels the best option for travelers (Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2017). Employees are the frontline connection to guests, and employee engagement will be evident in the type of service they provide to patrons (Cain, Tanford, & Shulga, 2018).

Hospitality managers have challenges in attracting qualified employees and subsequently retaining them (Kim, Knutson, & Choi, 2016). Managers are redirecting their focus to other issues such as challenging work conditions, high employee turnover, and the influx of younger workers (Serini, Toth, Wright, & Emig, 1997). Employers need strategies to effectively engage employees for the industry to continue to thrive and properly service customers.

### **Hospitality Employee Environment**

Employees can directly control the quality and service they provide to travelers. The hospitality industry seeks to satisfy customers with commodities such as modern rooms, the latest amenities, and free high-speed Internet (Kariru, Kambona, & Odhuno, 2017). Those items are effective, and the list of amenities continues to grow as hotels attract old and new customers; however, none of these amenities can outstrip the human interaction customers feel when they encounter a hospitality industry worker. To be competitive in the hospitality industry, companies must cater to varying customer demands by introducing innovative and creative services and products (Horng, Hu, Tsai, Yang, & Liu, 2016). The fast-paced nature and attentiveness to even the most difficult of customers have significantly drained the hospitality industry and its employees (Kowalkiewicz, Safrudin, & Schulze, 2017).



Some hotels are effective at connecting with employees; therefore, employees treat hotel customers very well. Other hotels do not treat customers well and lack the strategies needed to retain quality employees (Mansour & Mohanna, 2018). The demands are high for hotel employees; employees become stressed and seek other opportunities if not provided with support, clear direction, and empowerment by leadership (Harms, Credé, Tynan, Leon, & Jeung, 2017).

The hospitality industry will always need dedicated workers (Suan & Nasurdin, 2016). A large portion of the hospitality workforce is transient and uses a position in the hospitality industry as a stepping-stone to other opportunities (Alberti & Danaj, 2017). Workers in the hospitality industry are young and may not have prior job experience (Mooney, Harris, & Ryan, 2016). Millennials play a key role in the hospitality industry because Millennials will soon be the largest workforce in the industry; yet, Millennials will move to another industry once the opportunity presents itself (Hughes, 2018).

Managers could recognize when they hire quality Millennial employees and use resources to properly retain them. Managers can accomplish this by providing the Millennial worker with advancement opportunities, training, and work flexibility (Johnson, Piatak, & Ng, 2017). Managers who establish a good relationship with a Millennial worker will have a dedicated worker who will help the business grow.

### **Hospitality Employee Turnover**

The hospitality industry is adversely affected by employee turnover (Rehman & Mubashar, 2017). The hospitality industry ranks among the highest in employee turnover worldwide (Willie et al., 2017). The hospitality industry suffers from high turnover,

typically because the industry attracts younger workers who may be using their position as an entry to the workforce (Mooney, 2016). Employee engagement has become a critical component of organizational success since the economic recession in the early 2000s (Lee & Ok, 2015). Employee engagement initiatives could address the needs of members of multiple generations and could be everyone's responsibility (Stohl, Etter, Banghart, & Woo, 2017). The hospitality industry must routinely reinvent itself to fend off competitors, employ innovative solutions to engage and retain employees, and keep employees focused on organizational goals and commitments (Iatridis & Schroeder, 2016).

Stress is another reason for the higher turnover rate in the hospitality industry (Tongchaiprasit & Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016). Employee turnover decreases when managers address and manage employee workplace stressors (Rehman & Mubashar, 2017). High levels of work stress lead to high rates in absenteeism, low morale, low employee motivation, low productivity, and workplace violence (Guest, 2017). The hospitality industry must address internal and external pressures to thrive in this challenging landscape (van der Zee, Gerrets, & Vanneste, 2017). Employee engagement is among the leading topics when discussing how to address challenges and learning how to communicate with a multigenerational workforce (Lester, Standifer, Schultz, & Windsor, 2012).

The hospitality industry could potentially thrive as companies recognize the critical impact of employee engagement (Lee & Ok, 2015). A reduction in employee turnover may occur as the Millennial generation continue to saturate the workforce

(Mooney, 2016) and employers address the various stressors that plague the hospitality industry (van der Zee et al., 2017). The key to reducing work stress and decreasing employee turnover will be for employers to listen to employee feedback, give clear direction, and immediately address concerns; otherwise, employees could potentially seek other opportunities (Harms et al., 2017).

### **Millennial Engagement**

Engaging Millennial employees is an essential factor in the success of any organization. Millennials are dominating the workforce, and it is vital that employers find innovative and creative ways to keep Millennials involved with the organization (Zaharee, Lipkie, Mehlman, & Neylon, 2018). Engaging the Millennial workforce will benefit the organization in areas such as development, innovation, and relationship to the Millennial consumer (Wagner & Compton, 2015). Understanding how to bring the generations together might be a challenge for employers that do not understand the importance of multigenerational communication.

Millennial exposure to social, political, educational, and economic situations are different from previous generations (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). The technology users, such as smartphone operators, appreciate the separation and distinction between work and family obscurities (Richins, 2017); however, smartphone employees manage work and family activities with the push of a few buttons (Derks, Bakker, Peters, & van Wingerden, 2016). Millennials are shaping the world to correlate with their demands for instant communication and widespread social expression.

Employers must understand Millennials' need to constantly access technology. Employers should provide Millennials with forward-thinking communication strategies and work benefits such as telecommuting to attract and retain talented Millennials in their organizations. Furthermore, employers could give Millennials a voice by involving Millennials in decisions that affect the growth and direction of the organization. Leaders must continually measure their progress through their development of communication methods (Dong, Bartol, Zhang, & Li, 2017).

Engaging the Millennial employee can have a profoundly positive impact on an organization. Millennial employees usually work on the front line of the organization, meaning that Millennials have the most initial customer contact. Millennials set the tone for the entire customer experience. Customers may have a positive experience if the Millennial worker is engaged correctly, as the Millennial worker may be friendlier and more willing to assist. Conversely, the customer experience may be negatively impacted if the Millennial employee is not engaged. In a scenario with no engagement, the Millennial worker may not be sufficiently helpful and courteous to the customer. Leaders who opt to keep the Millennial employee engaged could experience benefits because the engaged employee could maintain employment with the organization for an extended period (Li, Lee, Mitchell, Hom, & Griffeth, 2016).

### **Millennial Expectations and Leadership**

Millennials have expectations for the organization that must be understood and addressed. Employers must listen and respond appropriately to Millennials' expectations as Millennials become the dominant generation in the workforce (Espinoza & Ukleja,

2016). Millennials expect their employer to have an understanding of and support social issues that affect local and international communities (Blancero, Mouriño-Ruiz, & Padilla, 2018). Millennials also expect their employer to operate with a flexible work schedule and recognize the importance of work-life balance (Durocher, Bujaki, & Brouard, 2016).

Organizational leaders must understand Millennial expectations and make strides to meet them while still following company policies, regulations, and guidelines. Organizations often have policies, regulations, and guidelines to address Millennial expectation; however, leaders may do the opposite, which can cause a division in the organization (Anderson et al., 2017). Having a division will stifle innovation and affect long-term organizational sustainability.

Understanding Millennial expectations and developing company policies to address them will help organizations retain and attract top talent, thereby servicing customers effectively (Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017). Organizational leaders must have the same understanding and execution of written policies when working with and addressing Millennial expectations (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016). Leaders' ability to accomplish this will strengthen the organization and build a strong customer base.

Millennials expect leadership to allow Millennial employees to operate in their own space and guide them without micromanaging their every move (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Millennials are concerned with the quality of work they produce but have a problem receiving negative feedback from their employer (Ferri-Reed, 2014a). Leaders must understand this so that they communicate effectively with the Millennial employee.

### **Communication Preferences of Millennials**

Members of the Millennial generation respond to their exposure during their shaping years (Schoolman, Shriberg, Schwimmer, & Tysman, 2016). During the mid-1990s and early 2000s, technology was rampant with designers trying to find the next big technological advance that would connect with consumers (Vecchiato, 2017). Previous generations were not so technology-intense and mainly communicated with others by writing letters and holding face-to-face conversations to conduct business and share ideas.

The integration of technology is effective for society as a whole; however, some things are lost in the shuffle of old and new technology. Millennials rely on technology to connect and communicate with others (Lin, 2014). Millennials are driven by social media, texting, and other forms of communication that do not necessarily involve speaking with another person face-to-face (Lai & Hong, 2015). As a result, employers must use innovative ways to engage and communicate with the Millennial workforce. For some employers, a text message is acceptable when discussing work; in contrast, older generations would not accept anything other than a face-to-face meeting when discussing work.

### **Areas of Opportunity for Millennial Employers**

Employers must identify the areas in which they can improve their connection with Millennial employees. Employers fall short when they impose work initiatives, policies, and procedures that may have worked for previous generations onto Millennial employees (Rudolph, Rauvola, & Zacher, 2017). Motivating the Millennial employee is

different from motivating individuals who are of the same generation as managers. The events that influenced society at the rearing time of each generation shape those growing at that time (Twenge, 2014).

Organizations that manage the engaged Millennial workforce will have a loyal workforce that is strongly committed to building and maintaining relationships with customers (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016). Organizations consistently try to gain advantages over the competition; the challenge of sustainability is daunting for many companies as new companies are constantly entering the market and organizations cross over to multiple industries (Slocum et al., 2014). Organizations must have plans in place to connect with and help Millennial workers feel valued in the organization (DeVaney, 2015).

Leaders may better understand why Millennials make certain decisions and process information in certain ways through understanding what events shaped the Millennial generation (Arsenault, 2004). Understanding what motivates Millennials may help increase efficiency and productivity among Millennial workers (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). This understanding is particularly important in industries that rely on outcomes, such as the hospitality industry.

Understanding the past experiences of Millennial workers could potentially help leadership to drive Millennials to perform above and beyond their current work capacity (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Organization leaders who provide Millennial workers with initiatives to perform at higher levels could potentially gain a competitive advantage over other organizations in the hospitality industry (Slocum et al., 2014). The effect of

competitive advantage could appear through improved treatment of customers, therefore creating the experience that customers seek when using the services of the hospitality industry (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016).

### **Leadership Strategies**

Leadership must get creative when addressing the Millennial worker. The idea that Millennials will stay with an employer for good benefits and stability is a past work motivator (Glazer, Mahoney, & Randall, 2019). Millennials look for jobs where they can make a difference and follow a cause, usually a cause with which they have a connection (Crosby & Bryson, 2018). Leaders must identify new strategies and become creative when attracting and retaining the Millennial worker. This is an opportunity for long-lived companies to retool themselves to connect with a younger and savvier consumer.

One of the first changes organizations made to recruiting and business benefits was the introduction of the 401K plan to replace traditional pension plans (Thaler, 2016). Pensions are used less often as a recruiting tool; instead, employers are making employees more active in preparing their financial portfolio for future retirement (Cheah et al., 2015). The absence of the retirement pension incentive works well with the Millennial worker because Millennials usually do not stay at one company long enough to receive a pension (Börsch-Supan & Weiss, 2016). In this way, society seems to align with the transient mindset of Millennials.

The inspiration for new initiatives for Millennials come from listening to what Millennials have to say and understanding what factors shaped them when they were growing up. Many questions about individuals and groups of individuals can be answered



by considering the history of the individual or group (Fischer et al., 2018). Managers can find valuable information about how to motivate Millennials when considering Millennials' past (O'Connor & Raile, 2015). To uncover revelations about Millennials, managers need to closely consider what was happening during the rearing years of Millennials.

The various generations that now occupy the workforce differ, and managing those differences are vital in today's business environments (Milligan, 2016). Managers who possess the ability to effectively communicate with the multigenerational workforce can assist in creating strategies to help organizations thrive. Managers can use the following tactics to effectively engage a multigenerational workforce and keep them productive: improving communication, improving how employees see themselves fitting in the organization, and building greater trust with employees (Woods, 2016). Employees will be more productive if they view themselves as important parts of the organization (Menges, Tussing, Wihler, & Grant, 2017).

Organizational leaders who encourage collaboration, create a flexible work environment, understand and respect work-life balance, have a system in place for educational opportunities, and provide feedback and recognition for work performance will benefit from a more productive and engaged multigenerational workforce (Walumbwa et al., 2018). Managers who maintain a close connection to the workforce can quickly address issues as they arise (Hayes, Parks, McNeilly, & Johnson, 2018).

Organizations should continue to train employees and develop programs to increase positive interaction among a multigenerational workforce (Richardson, 2017).

Employees will gain a better understanding of the members of generations with whom they work when organizations implement programs to develop better cohesiveness among workers of different generations (Argote & Guo, 2016). Building a better understanding of differences in the workforce will give the organization's leadership an opportunity to adjust leadership styles to increase the quality of work, productivity, and overall employee morale (Bolino, Klotz, & Turnley, 2016). An understanding of the different generations' actions and behaviors can create and foster better relationships among employees in the workplace (Methot, Lepine, Podsakoff, & Christian, 2016).

Employees can work behind their generational counterparts to familiarize themselves with the roles employees of other generations fill and to get to know their colleagues better (Lim, 2016). Starting a mentoring program for Millennial workers would allow Millennials to work with baby boomers, therefore enabling the two generations to work more harmoniously and foster better communication in a multigenerational workplace (Flynn & Duesing, 2018). Millennials have the following expectations when it comes to working: compensation, recognition, promotions, opportunities for professional growth, manager support, and flexibility from an employer. In exchange, Millennials are expected to do their job (Duxbury & Ormsbee, 2017). The different generations share some similarities and display some differences; however, the collaboration between generations has the potential to yield overall organizational success. The integration of the most effective strategies determines whether managers are successful in engaging Millennials and a multigenerational workforce.

To attract the talented Millennial worker, leaders must be more creative in how they attract and manage new talent. Leadership must understand that motivational factors change from generation to generation (Singh, 2016). Millennial generation workers like to express individuality and recognize different causes (Risman, 2017). Leadership should consider the mobility of the Millennial generation and realize that Millennials will leave their current employer to work at another company if the other company supports a cause or allows the employee to support the cause without jeopardizing their employment (Bannon et al., 2011). Today's Millennial worker wants to be understood and supported, and organizational leadership must create innovative ways to allow Millennial employees to fit in the work culture without having to sacrifice their identity.

Organizational leaders could examine multigenerational workforce equal opportunity to offer ideas and express Millennial views in the lens of organizational goals and processes. The Millennial generation is the future in the hospitality industry; therefore, leaders may target Millennial worker motivations to create more productive workers (Singh, 2016). An understanding of Millennial motivators could potentially create a more productive work environment (Methot et al., 2016), which could result in more satisfied customers and higher revenue for the organization (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Leaders who pay attention to Millennial workers and use innovative ways to engage Millennials will create a loyal workforce (Kang & Sung, 2017). Additionally, leaders could gain from Millennial employees' knowledge and ideas for innovation, organizational communication, and process improvement.

## **Transition**

Section 1 included an introduction of the topic for this qualitative multiple case study. Section 1 included the general and specific business problems regarding effective strategies managers use to engage Millennial workers in the hospitality industry. The literature review consisted of an in-depth discussion of the following topics: multigenerational employees; the relationships, commonalities, and differences of various generations; strategies for engaging Millennials in the hospitality industry; challenges in the hospitality industry; communication preferences for Millennials; potential leadership strategies; and areas of opportunity for engaging Millennials in the hospitality industry.

Section 2 includes the dynamics of the project. Section 2 details the data collection process, my role as the researcher, the role of participants, and an overview of the research method and design. In the data collection process, I outline a description of the population used for the sample, along with the sampling method, sample size, and criteria for eligibility. Section 2 includes a discussion on data organization, data analysis techniques, and ethical research procedures used for this doctoral study. I explain the reliability of the data and provide details of internal and external validity.

Section 3 is the last section of this doctoral study. Section 3 contains an explanation and conclusion of the data analysis results, along with a discussion of application to professional practice and implications for social change. Recommendations include the best-practice strategies managers can institute to engage Millennial employees. Recommendations for further research will integrate suggestions for additional and future research.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 reviews the purpose statement, a discussion of my role as the researcher, and the roles of the participants. This section consists of more comprehensive information regarding the design and research method. I provide greater detail on the population used for the sample, the sample size, sampling method, and the eligibility requirements. Section 2 discusses the ethical research procedures and the procedures for data collection, organization, and analysis are explained. The section concludes with an examination of the validity and reliability of the doctoral study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some hospitality leaders use to improve Millennial employee engagement. The target population for this study was leaders of five hotel organizations who have successfully engaged Millennial workers in Virginia. The implications for positive social change from this study include a potential increase in employee confidence and motivation resulting from more effective engagement of Millennials, which could increase company revenue and allow businesses to attract and retain talented employees. This increase could reduce unemployment rates in the hospitality industry and all business sectors in Virginia.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I was the primary data collection source in this qualitative study; therefore, my ability and accuracy in collecting, interpreting, and reconstructing the data were paramount to the success of the study. The information-centered method is one recommended option for data collection (Karamitri, Talias, & Bellali, 2017).

Additionally, researchers must avoid bias and maintain an open mind when gathering data, especially when the collected data deviates from the expectations outlined in the study (Yin, 2018).

My experience with Millennials and the hospitality industry included raising a Millennial, educating Millennial students, and hiring and developing Millennials in various industries. As an independent consultant with a social-change mindset, I wanted to understand the challenges employers face when recruiting, engaging, and retaining Millennial employees. With that understanding, I wanted to explore how relationships among coworkers and between coworkers and leaders fit into the overall growth and success of an organization. As the human information-centered recording instrument, I encouraged participants to share their experiences and knowledge of how to improve the engagement of Millennial employees. It is recommended that open-ended questions with a semistructured interview approach be used for data collection (Bryman, 2017). Researchers should examine the subject matter to ensure that the research questions are adequately addressed (Kennedy, 2016). Similarly, I explored all aspects of employee engagement among Millennials in the workforce to answer the overarching research question.

Ethical standards must be adhered to when conducting research (Koivisto, Janhonen, Latvala, & Väisänen, 2001). *The Belmont Report* protocol includes basic ethical principles and guidelines involving research using human subjects and enforces the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). *The*

*Belmont Report* guidelines can be used to ensure the biomedical and behavioral research of human subjects is conducted according to ethical principles (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The ethical guidelines outline careful consideration of informed consent, risk-benefit assessment, and selection of participants in research (Metcalf & Crawford, 2016). I adhered to the principals within *The Belmont Report* for the protection of human subjects in biomedical research. Researchers protect the rights of human subjects and ensure equal and fair treatment and sensitivity to populations that are defenseless (Koivisto et al., 2001). Before interviewing the participants, I disclosed details of the interview process and the collection of information in a letter of consent and obtained written confirmation of agreement to participate.

Researchers and scholars must engage with the subject matter to adequately address a research question (Kennedy, 2016). I explored all aspects of employee engagement among Millennials in the workforce to answer the overarching research question. To mitigate bias, I asked five participants to verify whether my interpretations of their responses were representative of their beliefs; this process is referred to as member-checking. I used data triangulation from other sources of data, such as employee training manuals, to verify that the results of my study were legitimate. I did not interview anyone with whom I had a past or present relationship to avoid potential influence on participants' answers.

An interview protocol (see Appendix A) is essential to the interview process. Researchers use the interview protocol to stay focused on the research topic; this protocol

includes a list of the interview questions, and interview guidelines (Heydon & Powell, 2016). Researchers use the interview protocol to ensure consistency (Shaw & Satalkar, 2018). My interview protocol included an introduction, thank you letter, audio and notation recording, the identification of participants represented by coded information, open-ended interview questions, the final analysis of the recorded information, and member-checking information.

### **Participants**

Participants were required to meet four qualifications to participate in the study: (a) participants must have worked in the hospitality industry in Virginia for a minimum of 3 years, (b) participants must have been in a leadership position, (c) participants were not Millennials, and (d) participants supervised Millennial employees and had knowledge of strategies used to engage Millennials in the workforce. A Millennial is someone who was born between 1980 and 1999 (Sogari, Pucci, Aquilani, & Zanni, 2017).

I discussed employee engagement initiatives at various business meetings and social settings in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia to find potential participants for this study. The study population consisted of leaders in Virginia who worked in the hospitality industry. The specific sample for this study included five hotel leaders in Virginia. The sampling location was convenient for me and allowed for last-minute flexibility with scheduling conflicts (O'Connor et al., 2016). For participants to qualify for participation in the study, they must have had experience working in hotels, demonstrated experience in the hospitality field, and supervised employees belonging to the Millennial generation. Yin (2018) suggested that participants be evaluated before



collecting any data in a multiple case study. I evaluated participants before collecting any data. To collect useful data, participants must know about the studied phenomenon (Bryman, 2017). For each hotel, I interviewed at least one leader who supervised Millennial workers.

Gaining access to participants is critical to the success of the study (Blomberg, Giacomi, Mosher, & Swenton-Wall, 2017). I requested participation from the organizations' employees through email correspondence. Participants must meet certain requirements to participate in a study (Joyner, Rouse, & Glatthorn, 2018). Researchers seek participants who meet the study requirements to increase the overall success, validity, reliability, and replicability of the study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

I developed open lines of communication with the intended organizations, built rapport with the employees through a face-to-face introduction, and provided a thorough explanation of my purpose. Researchers can develop a working relationship with the organization and the employees who are participating in the study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Researchers should develop a working relationship with participants that allows for open communication and respect for the viewpoints and experiences of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

I was professional, punctual, and prepared at all times when soliciting participation and conducting interviews. I used a letter of cooperation to request permission to review the company's training manual and to formally introduce and provide details of my study. I followed-up with the front-line person via telephone call and email if the manager was unavailable at my initial introduction.

A researcher's professionalism, preparedness, and approach may help build a credible relationship with participants, thereby increasing the chances of collecting accurate data (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). A formal process, such as a letter, is an effective way to introduce the study and request participation (Galvin, 2015). A follow-up phone call or visit to the organization may be needed, as the front-line person or gatekeeper usually controls the flow of information given to organization leaders (Peticca-Harris, deGama, & Elias, 2016).

Upon receiving a favorable response from the email correspondence, I reconfirmed with the organization and conducted an in-person meeting with participating employees to reiterate information about the study process and goals. I used our meeting to build rapport with the participants and further explain the purpose and importance of the study. I explained the purpose of the study to hotel managers to ensure that the managers had a clear understanding of the research topic, which could encourage collaboration and engagement during the study. I developed a working relationship with the organization by answering any questions and making my time flexible if the participant's work schedule changed. I ensured that the participants had a clear understanding of the study to establish a sense of trust, encouragement, and collaboration. I fostered engagement throughout the study by explaining every step of the process to the participants, and I assured participants that their answers and personal information remained confidential.

## **Research Method and Design**

A researcher who selects an appropriate research method and design establishes an integral means to conduct a credible doctoral study (Venkatesh, Brown, & Sullivan, 2016). I selected the appropriate research method and design for this doctoral study to establish credibility. The research method and design I selected for this doctoral study was the qualitative method and the multiple case-study design. The qualitative case study was selected to provide a means to explore the best strategies for improving employee engagement among Millennial workers in the hospitality industry.

### **Research Method**

The three research methods I considered for this doctoral study were quantitative, qualitative, and mixed. Qualitative methods can be used to understand complicated social phenomena as well as the underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations of various individuals (Šulentić, Žnidar, & Pavičić, 2017). The qualitative method builds on theoretical conclusions derived from research questions that address certain phenomena in the setting of occurrence (Park & Park, 2016). Researchers use the qualitative method to understand why people behave or process ideas in a particular way (Barnham, 2015). The qualitative method is also used to gather data through in-depth interviews and draw conclusions that address the phenomena (Polak & Green, 2016). I used the qualitative research method to explore the strategies hospitality leaders used to improve Millennial employee engagement.

Quantitative research methods are structured to provide the facts and phenomena objectively, whereas qualitative research methods form data using the accounts of

participants (Park & Park, 2016). Quantitative researchers use measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns in research (Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014). Furthermore, quantitative researchers do not allow participants to offer their accounts to address the research question (Berger, 2015). The statistical hypothesis in a quantitative research method is formulated using common themes and patterns uncovered during the interview (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). In the quantitative research method, the hypotheses generated guides the researchers in asking additional questions and searching for evidence (Noyes et al., 2019). The frequency distribution for the observation derives the common themes through sampling a population with the same common themes (Barnham, 2015). The testing theory is guided by a common question that develops an understanding of the phenomenon in a collective experience between participants and the researcher (Park & Park, 2016). The quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study because I did not examine measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns.

The advantage of using mixed methods is the profound understanding gained using scientific-data triangulation (Turner, Cardinal, & Burton, 2017). Mixed-methods research involves combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect and analyze data (Molina-Azorin, Bergh, Corley, & Ketchen, 2017). A mixed-methods approach is used to deeply consider a phenomenon that requires additional data compilation and analysis in order to draw a conclusion (Marsal-Llacuna, Colomer-Llinàs, & Meléndez-Frigola, 2015). Mixed-methods research was not appropriate for this study because I did not use numerical data or test a theory using statistical hypotheses.

## **Research Design**

I selected a case study design for this research. The case study design is suitable when the research question requires a deeper look at a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). A case study design can be used to expand readers' knowledge of an individual, group, social, political, or organizational phenomenon. A case study research design is useful when various data sources are available, such as artifacts, documents, observations, and interviews (Yin, 2018). The statistical approach for a case study design is to allocate aggregated levels from the ordinal type ordered quantitative survey answers (Yin, 2018).

I also considered narrative and phenomenological research designs for this study. Narrative researchers categorize and code large amounts of data from open-ended interviews and written materials (Yin, 2018). Narrative research can be used to document complex written stories (Le Roux, 2017). Additionally, researchers may use the participants' environment when documenting narrative research (Seitz, 2016). Narrative researchers combine elements of researcher interpretation, in-depth stories, and environmental factors when constructing a study (Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016). The narrative research design was not appropriate for this study because I did not use in-depth stories from the participants and environmental factors to construct this doctoral study.

Researchers may use a phenomenological research design to invoke doubt by questioning the information they receive from the participant (Conklin, 2014). The phenomenology research design can be used to gain an understanding of participants' lived experiences as articulated in their own words (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). With a phenomenological design, the researcher has the ability to investigate a phenomenon

through the lived experiences of the participants (Alase, 2017). Phenomenology is an analysis of unique experiences shared by a group (Callary, Rathwell, & Young, 2015). The phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study because I did not seek the shared or unique experiences of the participants.

Failure to achieve data saturation in a qualitative study significantly affects the quality and the overall validity of a study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In case studies, data saturation is achieved through using interviews, company documents, and physical artifacts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Member-checking can be used to ensure that no new information is revealed. The lack of new information indicates data saturation (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & De Lacey, 2016). The member-checking process involves reviewing the information collected during interviews with participants to allow participants an opportunity to elaborate on their responses (Morse, 2015). I requested company documents, asked participants open-ended interview questions, and asked participants to elaborate on their responses until no new information materialized. I ensured data saturation by interviewing all participants and comparing the collected information and documents. Next, I conducted member-checking by providing the participants with my interpretation of their responses and allowing participants time to review and respond for accuracy and validation.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population for this qualitative multiple case study consisted of managers from five hotels in Virginia. The minimum criteria for participation were as follows: (a) participants must have worked in the hospitality industry in Virginia for a minimum of 3

years, (b) participants must have been in a leadership position, (c) participants were not Millennials, and (d) participants supervise Millennial employees. The participants were managers of Millennial workers who have successfully used strategies to engage Millennial employees. Hotel managers who met these criteria were able to reflect on their experiences and current knowledge of working with Millennial employees. I used qualitative research to explore employee engagement in the hospitality industry and discovered strategies to effectively engage Millennial hospitality workers.

I used the purposive sampling method for this study. Purposive sampling is the preferred method of participant selection when exploring an issue, question, or dilemma (Robinson, 2014). Purposive sampling is effective because it can use a small sample size of participants who may share the same mindset and similar attributes and convictions (Barbour, 2013). Purposive sampling is the favored method of selection for the examination of a phenomena (Elo et al., 2014). The sampling technique was appropriate for this study because of its convenience in selecting participants who were knowledgeable in employee engagement of Millennials and who were easily accessible to participate.

The sample size for this study included five managers from five different hotels, and I interviewed at least one manager from each hotel. I chose a small sample size of participants who shared similar experiences to represent a larger population as I sought to uncover more about the phenomenon. The depth of the interview questions allowed for a small sample size (Mason, 2010). The sample size was limited, which allowed me to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Case studies can have three to five participants (Yin, 2018). A multiple case study should have a large enough sample size to achieve the required results. A multiple case study with a small sample size and appropriate interview questions can comprise a successful study (Fink, 2015; Morse, 2015) and provide the researcher with an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). I limited the sample size for this multiple case study to achieve the necessary results and to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Data saturation occurs in a study when no new information or additional themes emerge after interviewing participants (Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley, & McKenna, 2017). The key points to data saturation are (a) no new data emerges (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2015), (b) no new themes develop (Malterud et al., 2016), and c) the reproduction of the study is achievable with ample information (Heckemann, Breimaier, Halfens, Schols, & Hahn, 2016). Data saturation can develop by interviewing three to 50 participants (Constantinou, Georgiou, & Perdikogianni, 2017; Yin, 2018). Data saturation is very important because it can reveal possible themes through the exhaustion of information (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Cypress (2017) posited that member checking is a way to ensure data saturation. I reviewed responses from the interviews, employer training materials, and member-checking to ensure data saturation.

Managers listed in the hotel directory at one hotel received an invitation to participate in the study until I reached the required number of study participants. I contacted the hotel front-line person or corporate office to get permission to speak with the hotel manager. Then, through a brief conversation, I invited managers from five



different hotels to participate in the interview to reach the target of at least five participants for this multiple case study, as suggested by Yin (2018). Inviting managers at each hotel ensured that I accrued the sample size needed to complete this study. I ceased inviting managers when I received the minimum number of interested participants to reach data saturation. Interviews were conducted with hotel leaders during hotel leaders' break time, slow time, or lunch hour. If participants were unavailable to meet during those times, I requested to conduct interviews through video call or face-to-face interviews after their workday. The interviews were semistructured and included open-ended questions (see Appendix B) in a setting that was comfortable for the participant. Kolar, Ahmad, Chan, and Erickson (2015) suggested conducting the interviews in a setting that is comfortable for the participants, with the preference being a face-to-face meeting (Denzin, 2017). I suggested that the interviews take place in a private office or a conference room at the participants' place of work. I made every effort to accommodate other meeting places that participants suggested.

### **Ethical Research**

The ethical protection of participants is the basis of the informed consent process (Iphofen, 2016). I made the ethical protection of the participants a priority during the study and conformed to the informed consent process. I maintained standards for ethical research at all times during this study and each participant completed an informed consent form. It is important to consider the ethical implications and protections of privacy of all involved in the study (Iphofen, 2016). I obtained the appropriate permissions to conduct the study before starting the data collection process. I provided

the participants with the written informed consent form; participants signed the consent form if interested in participating in the study and opted out if not interested. I gave participants ample time to read and accept or decline to participate.

I emailed prospective subjects a recruitment letter with information about the study. Generally, it is appropriate to provide recruitment letters to inform participants about the study, give instructions on how to volunteer or decline to participate, and tell participants where to find answers to additional questions (Yin, 2018). I included information on who was conducting the study and why and provided an overview of any risks or potential benefits in my recruitment letter. To comply with ethical standards, study participants read and signed the consent form before starting the interview process.

Participants were allowed to freely rescind their desire to participate in this study at any time throughout the interview process. Participants received a \$5 gift card for their time and participation. Giving a small gift to participants is an acceptable way to show gratitude for participation (Yip, Lee, Chan, & Brooks, 2018). Additionally, participants were informed that this incentive was strictly for their participation and not meant to influence their responses.

I addressed the confidentiality and privacy of information gained from this study during the data collection and analysis phases. I did not share the collected data between the participants and ensured that procedures were in place to protect the names and personal data of participants. During the data collection phase, I protected the names and of participants by replacing participant names with pseudonyms. I used an alphanumeric technique to generate the pseudonyms; I used the pseudonyms M1, M2, M3, M4, and M5

to identify study participants. The recording from the in-person interview did not contain information that identified respondents or the organization. The interview transcript did not contain any personal information. I deleted any personal identifiers from the file once the identifiers were no longer needed and used different pneumonic identifiers in ascending sequential order to identify each participant. I permanently removed hotel names, addresses, and phone numbers after the interview.

I protected the confidentiality of participants by storing all voice or written data in a secure filing cabinet with no access to anyone except for myself. It is recommended that participant information is stored on a computer that requires a password to control unwanted access to private information (Blanke & McGrady, 2016). After 5 years, I will destroy all voice and written data by deleting files from the computer, erasing voice data, and shredding or incinerating paper documents that would render them usable. I abided by Walden University's Institutional Review Board approval number 08-29-19-0731267.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The researcher is the primary data collection tool or instrument (Kahn, 1990) and collects various forms of data when conducting a case study (Yin, 2018). I was the primary collection tool for this study; therefore, I needed to collect various forms of data to complete this case study. Two types of collection methods can be used: semistructured interviews and questionnaires (Unluer, 2012). Semistructured interviews were the primary source of data for this study, and I conducted these interviews with hotel managers who had successfully supervised Millennial employees. The semistructured interviews used open-ended questions and were conducted in a relaxed setting suggested

by participants. The use of open-ended questions enabled participants to freely discuss their lived experiences (Soss, 2015). Semistructured interviews are instrumental in collecting the information needed to conduct a study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016).

I used semistructured interviews to explore the concepts in this study. Interviews consist of collecting data by asking questions and listening to individuals' responses. In semistructured interviews, researchers use predetermined questions to reveal information and participants reveal more details throughout the interview (Peters & Halcomb, 2015). The semistructured interview for this study included questions that elaborated on the levels of employee engagement among Millennial workers. Interviewers use semistructured interviews to gain greater control over the order and flow of questions and to introduce changes in the interview schedule based on initial results (Wildavsky & Hammer, 2018). Semistructured interviews may produce powerful data that provide an understanding of participants' experiences, views, or ideas (Peters & Halcomb, 2015).

I reviewed company documents that included training manuals with any archival data or company artifacts regarding employee engagement strategies or initiatives. Company artifacts are company documents (Marshall & Rossman, 2016); therefore, I used company documents that related to this topic of employee engagement. As another source of data, I collected company records, such as the employee training manual, that directly related to the company's efforts to engage Millennial employees. Company documents or company records are essential to a case study, as they are specialized, stable, and timeless (Yin, 2018). For this reason, I requested to review the employee handbook and any training materials that directly related to employee engagement.

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) included questions geared to identify strategies used to improve employee engagement among Millennial workers. I created the interview questions to address barriers to improving employee engagement among Millennials in the hospitality industry. The interview protocol served as the guideline for the inquiry-based conversation and consisted of a variety of questions and scripts with prompt queries and possible follow-up questions (Zielinski, 2017). Interview protocols organize and document important information for the interviewer to ask during the interview (Jaskiewicz, Combs, & Rau, 2015). An acceptable interview protocol is an essential method for obtaining the best information from study participants (Namey, Guest, McKenna, & Chen, 2016). The interview protocol is an instrument used by the interviewer to discuss the aim of the study and inquire about specific topics (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Yin (2018) recommended that an interview protocol be used to manage and organize the interview questions and determine if each interview question is essential to the research question. Study participants received a copy of the interview protocol at the time of the interview to keep for their records.

I used an interview protocol, member-checking, and data triangulation to ensure the validity and reliability of the information. Member-checking involves sharing the researcher's summary of a participant's responses with the corresponding participant to ensure that the information was accurately captured (Koelsch, 2013). Granting the participant access to the final summary to validate their responses helps improve the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of a study (Ranney et al., 2015). I collected data from volunteers who participated in the research. An interview protocol

(see Appendix A) ensured consistency between participant responses. I asked colleagues in similar job positions in different organizations to review the interview questions. Researchers should use feedback from colleagues to help determine whether the interview questions are well-defined, clearly understood, presented consistently, and properly align with the research purpose (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). A pilot study is a simplified variation of the main study that can be used to test the interview questions and the theory, yielding a more robust study (Armstrong & Rimes, 2016). I did not conduct a pilot study because of the time it would have taken away from the completion of the primary study. Data triangulation was conducted using the interview responses, the employees training manual, and the information received from member-checking. Data triangulation ensures that the data collection instruments are in alignment with the questions in the study (Yin, 2018). Researchers who use data triangulation, member-checking, and the interview protocol enhance the validity and reliability of the study (Yazan, 2015).

### **Data Collection Technique**

Semistructured interviews were the primary data collection technique in this qualitative research study. I visited multiple hotels in Virginia and asked for the manager's contact information. Hotel managers whom I selected to participate in the study received an email invitation requesting their permission to participate. I scheduled an interview with five managers from five hotels for face-to-face interviews. Hotel managers who agreed to be part of the study were interviewed at their place of employment. It is important for researchers to conduct face-to-face interviews at a place

where the participants feel comfortable (James, 2016) to allow for an in-depth and open conversation (Fritz & Vandermause, 2018). I did not begin to collect data until I received approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board with an approval number.

Before the interviews, I notified the participants that the interviews would be recorded using Dragon Naturally Speaking software. I notified participants that I would take notes during the interview and only record information pertaining to the interview. All participants answered the same open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B) and had an opportunity to ask questions about the interview if needed. I organized participants' responses by date of interview, the location of the interview, their position in the organization, and added a pseudonym to separate and identify participant responses after the interview sessions.

Digital recording is the most common method of recording interview data because the digital recorder allows the interviewer to save the verbal part of the interview for later analysis (Namey et al., 2016). I used a digital recorder with an external memory card slot to record the interview and additional side conversations. Digital recordings are generally better quality and include more detail than note-taking, which may not be entirely accurate (Bailey, 2008). I used an external memory card to easily transfer the audio interviews into a computer. I performed member-checking by interpreting what I heard the participants say and then allowing the participants the opportunity to validate my interpretation of the voice recordings. I recorded the conversations that occurred during the interview; therefore, I had the opportunity to synthesize the conversation, which I reviewed later for accuracy and completion (Clark, Birkhead, Fernandez, & Egger, 2017).

Data were collected by listening to and recording participants' responses during an approximately 45-minute interview. The semistructured interviews included questions geared toward identifying strategies managers use to increase employee engagement among Millennial workers. The use of face-to-face interviews allowed me to ask follow-up questions to further clarify answers to the research questions and to focus on body language when it appeared that a participant looked confused and needed further explanation (Garbarski, Schaeffer, & Dykema, 2016). I interpreted verbal and nonverbal messages to ensure participants fully expressed their responses and I rephrased questions and pursued a different line of questioning when necessary to ensure that participants fully understood what was being asked of them (Namey et al., 2016). I monitored changes in tone and word choice to gain a deeper understanding (Petr, Belk, & Decrop, 2015). Face-to-face interviews are helpful because they establish rapport and help participants feel more comfortable and at ease, which can generate more insightful responses, especially regarding sensitive topics (Devotta et al., 2016).

One advantage of semistructured interviews is the ability to collect complete information with greater understanding (Peters & Halcomb, 2015). Interviews as a data collection technique can gather more in-depth and robust information from fewer participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). All participants were asked the same questions; however, the wording, order, and the type of follow-up questions varied (Peters & Halcomb, 2015) depending on whether a participant needed more clarity or if I required additional information to fully exhaust the question and reach data saturation. I asked the same questions in the same order as listed in the interview protocol (see



Appendix A). Additionally, I took notes and requested relevant company documents as a part of data collection for this research study. The semistructured interviews were advantageous because (a) the interviews were conducted in a place that was familiar to the participant, (b) the participant was comfortable and relaxed, and (c) the interviews could foster relaxed conversation (Wolgemuth et al., 2015).

A semistructured interview can be disadvantageous because interview answers are difficult to compare and the flexibility of the conversation may lessen reliability (Rowley, 2012). In addition, semistructured interviews can (a) interfere with participants' schedules (McIntosh & Morse, 2015), (b) cause participants to withhold information due to timidity and shyness (Seifert, 2016), (c) contain ambiguous research questions (Wolgemuth et al., 2015), and (d) give faulty results if the researcher lacks the ability to conduct an interview (Malterud et al., 2016). However, interviews have a higher quality of sampling compared to other data collection methods and require fewer participants to reveal useful and relevant insights (Cyr, 2016). Therefore, I choose semistructured interviews with open-ended questions as the primary data collection technique to gather perspectives from managers in the hospitality industry.

Member-checking is essential to the research process, as participants have the opportunity to add, delete, and edit any captured information (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). I conducted member-checking for each participant by emailing each participant a copy of their interview summary and setting up a follow-up interview. Participants received a summary of the interview findings, which were thoroughly review and validated for accuracy. I was able to review, edit, and make any

needed changes through sharing my interpretation with the participants for validation. Next, I met with the participants for a 30-minute follow-up interview to validate results and to provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on personal experiences, therefore creating potential opportunities to add data. I focused on confirmation, modification, and verification of the interview transcript during the follow-up interviews. Member-checking ensures the information is accurately noted, which is different from a transcript review where the interview is written verbatim (Tsai et al., 2016).

### **Data Organization Technique**

Data organization should reflect a manner that achieves the overall objective of the research (Rabiee, 2004). Data should be stored in two separate databases: one to document the report and the other for the collected data (Yin, 2018). An important first step in data collecting is to observe the participants closely through repeated careful listening and observation (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). The first set of data for this study consisted of all data recorded during the interview. During the interview, I included journaling based on my observations of the participant such as the participant's impressions and body language along with any observations or ideas that emerged during the data collection. The second set of data included the hotels' training manuals about employee engagement. To protect identities, I referred to individuals using codes: M1, M2, M3, M4, and M5. I referred to the hotel names using the following alphanumeric codes: N1, N2, N3, N4, and N5.

I included a coding process to identify similar themes that emerged from the data from the recorded interviews, handwritten notes, and the training manuals. I uploaded the

interview into Dragon Naturally Speaking software to transcribe the interviews and ensure the information was accurate. Statistical software can aid in coding and organizing during the data analysis process (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014). I uploaded the interview recording into NVivo software, which allowed me to store the information based on similar themes.

The two sets of data were stored as raw files and as soft copies in a secure computer (Yin, 2018). I stored the recordings on an external memory card and a computer, and the participants' identifying information was kept in a separate location for security. All raw data will be stored securely for 5 years. Securing data is a vital and essential component of the research process (Kothari, 2004). The study information should be secured for the specified period of time (Reichman & Uhlir, 2003), and it is my responsibility to securely maintain study information for the specified period.

### **Data Analysis**

The goal of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies hotel managers use to engage Millennials employees. Data analysis is an iterative means of saturating oneself in the data (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017). Qualitative data analysis occurs in three stages: (a) the introductory saturation into the data, (b) the secondary assemblage of codes and formation of themes, and (c) the final approval of themes and analysis of results (Bernard, 2017). The steps of qualitative data analysis are scaling down, incorporating, and certifying or authenticating (Scholl, Kubicek, Cimander, & Klischewski, 2012). The means of coding is repetitive and comprises at least two

cycles of codes with more cycles added if needed (Sarkis et al., 2016). Provisional coding lists predetermined themes that build on existing research (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015).

I used the findings from previous research and opinions from the study participants to check the validity and understand participants' opinion about the phenomena; this process is referred to as data triangulation. The four types of triangulation are methodological triangulation, environmental triangulation, investigator triangulation, and theory triangulation (Joslin & Müller, 2016). I used methodological triangulation to compare various sources of data (Kern, 2018). Methodological triangulation can be used to compare various sources of data using the same method, ensure consistency, increase credibility, and reduce research bias (Flick, 2017). Methodological triangulation can also be used to achieve data saturation and form a valid research project (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used methodological triangulation to cross-check data for consistency, reduce bias, and add credibility to my analysis. I reached credibility by methodological triangulation using interviews, employer documents, and interview transcripts.

Data sources used for this study consisted of interview responses, notes from the interviews, and company training manuals. Various forms of evidence can be assembled to reach conclusions and thereby establish credibility (Yin, 2018). The interview protocol is a step-by-step instructional tool for note-taking and guidance during each interview (Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin, & Horowitz, 2007). The interviews were recorded with a digital recorder using the interview protocol as a guide and were transcribed using Dragon Naturally Speaking software. I conducted member-checking for each participant

by emailing each participant my interpretation of the interview and providing participants with a timeframe in which to email me with any edits or changes to my interpretation. I reviewed the interview interpretation or member-checking information, the notes that I recorded related to body language or voice inflection, and any given training materials. I used statistical software to extract common themes for my data analysis.

I uploaded the digital interviews and the review of documents into NVivo after the completion of the member-checking process. Qualitative research software can be used to assist with data analysis (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). Descriptive coding is where a phrase or word is used to classify and organize the data and can be traced back to the original code (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). After the first cycle of coding, second cycle codes—such as pattern coding—can be used to organize first cycle codes into themes or sets (Dillaway, Lysack, & Luborsky, 2017). I generated nodes in NVivo for underlying ideas for each research question to code the data and authenticate themes. Next, I selected the common themes for each research question based on the participants' responses.

I used the information gathered using NVivo data analysis software and employee engagement theory to answer the research question and analyze the data. NVivo qualitative data analysis software assists researchers in coding, classifying, and formulating emerging themes (Davidson, Thompson, & Harris, 2017). The foundation for a complete review and determination of information gathered from NVivo was the parallel between key primary themes and the conceptual framework (Bandara, Furtmueller, Gorbacheva, Miskon, & Beekhuyzen, 2015). The parallel between the

primary themes and the conceptual framework relate to employee engagement theory and the central research question (Lehnert, Craft, Singh, & Park, 2016). The foundation of employee engagement theory is the evaluation of engagement or disengagement of employees and their commitment level to achieving the goals of the organization (Kahn, 1990). The central or primary research question was as follows: What strategies do some hospitality leaders use to improve employee engagement among Millennial workers?

After collecting the data, I reviewed all participant responses to familiarize myself with the data. I transcribed the interviews using Dragon Naturally Speaking software and uploaded the transcription into NVivo software. I created codes and nodes consistent with the research questions, noted the themes that emerged, and presented the findings. Upon conclusion of the data analysis, I interpreted the data findings based on the common themes derived from NVivo. I used methodological triangulation to validate the data findings from NVivo. Researchers who use multiple data sources can find additional benefits from the data rather than using a single data source (Krause, Herbst-Irmer, Sheldrick, & Stalke, 2015). Researchers should use proper data interpretation techniques to clarify the analysis and presentation of the collected data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). I reviewed the data for the purpose of arriving at an informed conclusion. As the researcher, I answered the research question by interpreting the data using information obtained from the NVivo analysis and the theories of the conceptual framework.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are fundamental in establishing trustworthiness, demonstrating rigor in the research findings, and ensuring the findings are significant and

worthy (Yin, 2018). I ensured that the methods used to retrieve and secure data were reliable and valid. Dependability is a component of reliability. Credibility, confirmability, and transferability are components of validity; these components are used to strengthen a study.

### **Reliability**

Reliability is the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results (Yin, 2018). Researchers use dependability synonymously with reliability because a reliable study's findings and conclusions can be replicated (Santiago-Delefosse, Gavin, Bruchez, Roux, & Stephen, 2016). Researchers should avoid including participants with whom they have a relationship because of the potential to add bias to the collected information (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2018). The decision to use participants with whom I do not have a working, personal, or professional relationship ensured the dependability of the data collected. I performed the member-checking of data interpretation to ensure dependability by providing an opportunity for participants to review and approve my translation or analysis of their interviews. I emailed the participants responses from their first interview and scheduled a follow-up interview to gather any additional information or to clarify any previously given information. I increased the study's reliability by interviewing five hotel managers.

### **Validity**

Validity is the end result to which a test measures what it claims to measure (Watkins, 2012). The two main types of validity are internal validity and external validity. Internal validity refers to the validity of the measurement and test itself, whereas

external validity refers to the ability to generalize the findings to the target population (Watkins, 2012). The elements of validity are credibility, confirmability, and transferability in qualitative research, (Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2007; Riege, 2003; Watkins, 2012). The purpose of validity is to determine how well a test measures what it is purported to measure (Watkins, 2012). Validity is important in analyzing the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of a research study (Watkins, 2012).

For this qualitative study, I focused on employee engagement strategies for Millennial workers in the hospitality industry; therefore, it was critical that I obtained credible and reliable data to achieve validity. A test must be valid to be considered reliable. I increased validity for this study by matching the interview questions with the study goals and objectives. The results of my study are meaningless if the results are not valid. Additionally, I obtained feedback from an outside party regarding the interview questions. It is important to have the instrument measure what it is intended to measure so the results can be used to answer the research question.

**Credibility.** Researchers attain credibility through the processes of data triangulation and member-checking (Thomas, 2017). Credibility must include trustworthiness of the evidence presented, and the findings must be believable and truthful (Newell & Goldsmith, 2001). Member-checking can be integrated into research procedures to ensure the collected information is credible (Rosenthal, 2016). I provided each participant with a synthesized copy of their interview responses and allowed each participant the opportunity to amend incorrect translations to contribute to the study's



validity. Saldaña (2015) suggested that researchers use member-checking to ensure that the study findings are credible. I used member-checking to interpret the data.

The use of an interview protocol aids in obtaining credibility (Lamb et al., 2007). For this qualitative research, I used the interview protocol as a systematic way to interview all participants. Each interview followed the same criteria and script while asking the same line of questioning, as suggested by Padgett (2017). The use of the interview protocol in this study established credibility. Credibility focuses on whether the research conveys with certainty what the participants do, feel, or think (Smythe & Murray, 2000).

**Transferability.** Transferability is a component of validity and is vital to the study (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Transferability is obtained when the data can transfer from one group to another and provide detailed information about the population sample (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Researchers determine if a study is transferable and consistent with the original study by following the same guidelines and asking the same questions. The use of the interview protocol, including detail information about the setting and location of the research study, approach, and attitudes of participants will allow another researcher to transfer the information to another group. In qualitative research, the reader determines whether or not the findings of the study can transfer to another group. Researchers who follow the criteria of the study can transfer this study's findings to another group. Additionally, an interview protocol can be used to ensure transferability and consistency by asking the same questions and following the same procedures and guidelines (Amankwaa, 2016).

**Confirmability.** Confirmability exists once plausibility, creditability, and transferability occur (Colepicolo, 2015). A case study is valid when methodological triangulation is achieved (Yin, 2018). In this qualitative research study, triangulation involved examining data from the five interviews. The responses from the five participants were combined to answer the research question. Confirmability refers to the level of confidence that the study findings are based on the participants' narratives and words rather than potential researcher biases (Colepicolo, 2015). Confirmability of the research elements can be established through member-checking (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I confirmed the gathered information by issuing a copy of the synthesized interviews to the participants for review and revisions (Caretta, 2016). Next, I emailed participants a synthesized copy of their interviews and reminder for the follow-up member-checking process. Member-checking involved another interview session that took approximately 30 minutes and allowed the participants an opportunity to add any additional information that was relevant to the study and discuss whether they agreed with the information contained in the document. Participants made changes as necessary to the finalized document and signed the document for completion of the study. The interview protocol and notes from the interview containing researcher thoughts and reasoning behind certain comments is a good tool to help in future explanations (Dumay, 2016). I served as the primary data collection instrument; therefore, I used journaling to guarantee the accuracy of the recorded information.

**Data saturation.** Data saturation occurs when (a) no new themes emerge from participants, (b) themes are repeated, and (c) the collected information is enough to

answer the research question (Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015). Data are considered saturated when the study is replicable (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I ensured data saturation by using a semistructured face-to-face interview and member-checking. To achieve data saturation, I followed the interview protocol (Appendix A) and structured the interview questions to ensure that the same questions were answered by multiple participants. I conducted member-checking to validate the correct recording of the participant's responses, to ensure the accurate recording of participant answers during the interviews, and to confirm that no new themes or information emerged.

Conducting a multiple case study enabled me to reach data saturation. Data were collected from different companies to explore responses from five hotel managers. I stopped data collection after the fifth interview when I noticed the responses were not adding new information to my understanding of the phenomenon (Guest et al., 2017). I engaged in data triangulation by collecting data from company training materials to ensure data saturation. Data saturation was ensured by reviewing the information from the company manuals, conducting member checking, and using an interview protocol.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 2 contained a reintroduction of my role as the researcher and the purpose statement, in addition to the research method and design and an in-depth look at the participants. I explained the population and sample size used in the study and pointed out the importance of conducting ethical research. Section 2 discussed the data collection instruments and data organization techniques for this doctoral study.

Section 3 is the final section of this doctoral study. In Section 3, I discuss the findings that result from the data analysis and the applicability of this study for professional practice and implications for social change. Recommendations for action include strategies hotel management may implement to engage Millennial employees. Section 3 also includes recommendations and suggestions on expanding this research for future studies.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some hospitality leaders use to improve Millennial employee engagement. I conducted semistructured face-to-face interviews with five managers from a hotel group with multiple brands in Virginia to obtain data to answer the central research question: What strategies do some hospitality leaders use to improve employee engagement among Millennial workers? The findings of this study indicated that coaching, mentoring, and education are strategies used to improve Millennial employee engagement. Participants in this study expressed that the use of incentives and rewards are strategies that work to motivate and keep Millennial employees engaged.

Participants were selected for their expertise in managing Millennial employees. The interviews took place in either a private conference room or in the participants' office so that no one could hear the conversation. Participants responded to five semistructured research questions (Appendix B) focused on the strategies hotel managers use to engage their Millennial employees. To ensure data saturation, I completed member-checking and methodological triangulation. In addition to an overview of the study, Section 3 includes (a) presentation of findings, (b) applications to professional practice, (c) implications for social change, (d) recommendations for action, (e) recommendations for further research, (f) reflections, and (g) the conclusion of the study.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The central research question for this doctoral study was as follows: What strategies do some hospitality leaders use to improve employee engagement among Millennial workers? Participants were interviewed in either a private conference room or in the participants' office. Data collection consisted of semistructured interviews and note-taking during the interviews. The data were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo to identify the themes that emerged from the data. I shared the interpretation of the findings with the participants for validation and conducted member-checking to ensure that participants' answers were accurately recorded during the interviews and to ensure that no new themes or information emerged. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) coaching through education, (b) rewards that improve engagement, (c) enhancing engagement through motivation, and (d) communication enhances awareness and receptiveness. The conceptual framework for this study consisted of the employee engagement theory introduced by Kahn (1990); the employee engagement theory helped determine the strategies used to improve employee engagement among Millennial workers. The employee engagement theory aligned with the literature and themes that unfolded in the findings for this qualitative multiple case study. The themes that emerged were in line with the previous studies on strategies used to improve Millennials' engagement; therefore, the themes that emerged from participant interviews were strategies used to engage Millennials in the workplace.

**Emergent Theme 1: Coaching Through Education**

The first themes that emerged were coaching, mentoring, and education as strategies used to improve employee engagement among Millennial workers. These themes aligned with findings by Flynn and Duesing (2018), who asserted that mentoring programs in the multigenerational workforce forced Millennials to work with older generations, therefore fostering better communication among the different generations. Managers described using coaching and mentoring as strategies to improve employee engagement among Millennial workers. One manager (M1) stated, “You must coach them and lead by example.” M1 asserted that Millennial workers should be mentored rather than solely given tasks to complete. Ghosh, Shuck, Cumberland, and D'Mello (2019) found that coaching and mentoring were influential in employee engagement. Leaders who promote coaching and mentoring could potentially create workplace relationships based on meaning and worth. M2 stated that Millennials like to be led by example. An engaged employee works to improve the organization with their time and talents (Schaufeli, Shimazu, Hakanen, Salanova, & De Witte, 2019). M1 explained by saying, “I set the tone, and they follow my lead and guidance to perform to expectations. I lead by example.” A successful coaching and mentoring environment taps into all these areas and allows for productive two-way dialogue.

In addition to mentoring, another theme was the need for managers to provide more clarity when dealing with Millennial workers. Managers can minimize the disengagement cycles by contacting employees through communication channels (Moore et al., 2019). Millennials need an explanation of why they must complete a particular

task. Sometimes a simple question to the employee, such as “How is your day going?” can allow the manager an opportunity to gauge how engaged or disengaged an employee is. Employee engagement occurs when employees are involved with the organization cognitively, physically, and emotionally (Kahn, 1990). Starting dialogue helps to break down barriers that separate the multiple generations and provides the Millennial employee an opportunity to express themselves and verbalize what they need help with and how they comprehend what is expected of them.

Another strategy was the need to spend time with Millennials to explain the reason and purpose behind a task in detail (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2018). Some leaders may notice the importance of explaining the company’s vision and mission to Millennials. When directing Millennials to perform new tasks, a written manual or visual aid could work best to assist in the explanation. M4 stated, “You have to be visual and clear; this way, the Millennials can go back and use the information as a tool of reference as it is easy to follow.” M4 added that communication with the older generations is straightforward; you do not have to spend a lot of time explaining how to do a particular task or why the job needs to be completed. In the fast pace of the hospitality industry, employee engagement directly links to the customer experience (Xiong, So, Wu, & King, 2019). M1 explained that managers must explain other ways to solve problems to Millennials because the manager has been through it before; providing better examples to help Millennials improve what they are doing is key to successful problem resolution. Furthermore, M4 emphasized that with Millennials, the conversation will be a bit more time consuming due to the added “why” piece to the discussion; however, in a fast-paced



industry such as the hospitality industry, the conversation needs to be quick to accommodate the guests. M3 explained that Millennials might have an idea of a team concept, but they still look at how the job benefits them individually. Managers must be transparent to allow the Millennial to see the big picture and understand how a task aligns with the overall goals or finished product.

Additionally, Millennials may look at what coworkers are doing and question why someone else gets to do something while they do not have that same opportunity. Millennials have a reputation for their concern regarding particular assigned tasks and avoiding additional responsibilities (Waples & Brachle, 2020). One participant in this study, M3, asserted that the Millennial generation has a “me” way of thinking and processing information, as opposed to “we” or “us” thought process. M1 added the need to talk and educate the Millennial worker and make them understand that “I am not just your boss, it is not ‘me, me, me,’ it is ‘us.’” M1 further asserted that managers must engage the Millennial worker and help them to understand where the manager is coming from so that everyone can get on a “nice even keel.” Older generations were not necessarily concerned with what others were doing; they were only concerned with their tasks and may offer help when their responsibility is completed. M2 noted that the communication between all generations should be the same and consistent. This consistency ensures the transmission of the same message and ensures that no one receives different treatment and that the expectations are the same for everyone. M2 added that Millennials are less receptive when they perceive that they are being

reprimanded and not being recognized for progress. M2 stated that leading by example allows managers to set the standard for the work and foster a “we” environment.

### **Emergent Theme 2: Rewards That Improve Engagement**

The second theme that emerged was the use of incentives, applause, compliments, and recognition as strategies that improve Millennial employee engagement. Leaders may attribute incentives and recognition as effective strategies to improve employee engagement in the workforce (Busse & Regenber, 2018; Lewis & Wescott, 2017; Litvin et al., 2018). Millennial employees want recognition for work; it does not matter whether the work deserved attention (Eisenberger, Rockstuhl, Shoss, Wen, & Dulebohn, 2019). M5 stated the following regarding workplace recognition with Millennials.

You have to applaud the Millennial worker when they do something right or without any direction . . . if you had an issue with the way they were dressed the day before, but today they corrected the behavior after you spoke to them yesterday, you must recognize the fixed behavior.

Managers in the hospitality industry may consider celebrating the Millennial worker as a way of encouraging good behavior to positively recognize behavior and avoid alienating the Millennial worker (Litvin et al., 2018). One manager emphasized that paying a Millennial a compliment such as, “You look nice today,” is acknowledging that the Millennial employee took the time to iron their clothes. The fact that a manager showed appreciation for the new effort makes the Millennial employee feel good and reinforces the positive behavior.

In addition, the use of incentives and recognition emerged as a way to improve engagement among Millennials. Lewis and Wescott (2017) noted that Millennials are the “trophy generation” and need a positive message when engaging with employers to maintain productivity. M5 instituted a reward program to provide Millennials with rewards for positive behavior in the form of gift cards to their favorite restaurants or merchants. M5 added “the gift cards range between \$5 and \$10, with the \$10 reward given for above and beyond work.” Employees, particularly Millennials, are recognized with a higher amount of gift card if a guest gives them praise. Additionally, the employee’s name is entered into an employee of the month and year contest. Most of the study participants stated that giving Millennials the excitement of positive response helps Millennials to be more engaged and work harder to treat guests better.

### **Emergent Theme 3: Enhancing Engagement Through Motivation**

The third theme that emerged was Millennials’ lack of interest or motivation as a barrier to implementing strategies for enhancing Millennial employee engagement. Motivation is a key component of engagement (Delaney & Royal, 2017; Singh, 2016). Moreover, the extent of employees’ motivation to do more than is required is a top predictor of overall engagement (Delaney & Royal, 2017; Singh, 2016). Four out of five of the participants stated the lack of interest or lack of motivation among Millennials was a barrier to engagement in the workplace. According to M4, “Millennials feel entitled as if they do not need to do the work and that someone owes them something.” Kahn (1990) asserted that employees who view their tasks as meaningful justify their commitment to the organization. M3 included, “The barriers that managers’ face are that Millennials are

not responsive when managers do not accept their lack of motivation or work ethic.”

Participant M4 emphasized that Millennials’ non-responsiveness, lack of motivation, lack of interest, and entitlement are a barrier to Millennial engagement in the workplace.

Millennials believe that they should automatically ascend to a leadership role as soon as they get hired. Additionally, managers can face barriers when Millennials feel that management is not being transparent. The perception of no transparency can cause Millennials to be unresponsive, unmotivated, and display a lack of interest.

Another theme is the lack of support from upper-level management as a barrier to implementing strategies for enhancing Millennial employee engagement. Singh (2016) asserted that effective employee engagement is based on the company’s interpretation of employees that do more than is required. M5 found that managers who treat Millennial workers like family can use tone or body language to improve outcomes when something does not meet the standard. The calmer tone or body language technique allows the Millennial workers to better receive the feedback and retain the message.

Communication, teamwork, and collaboration are critical points to any successful organization (Jones & Thoma, 2019). Participant M2 asserted that management must receive support from upper management and hospitality ownership when it comes to implementing new ideas. Managers who invest in motivation can potentially yield the highest return on overall engagement while maximizing utility (Dyck, Lins, Roth, & Wagner, 2019).

**Emergent Theme 4: Communication Enhances Awareness and Receptiveness**

The fourth theme that emerged was awareness, documentation, and receptiveness as ways to address the key barriers to implementing successful strategies for increasing Millennial employees' engagement. Communication can be tailored to the Millennial lifestyle to create a friendly and familiar environment for Millennials to feel they are part of the team (Merriman, Sen, Felo, & Litzky, 2016). Managers must understand what they are saying, who they are saying it to, and how they are delivering the message. M3 affirmed that honest and direct communication is an essential tool for breaking down barriers. On the flip side, documentation is a great asset to notate and recap the conversation for future reference. M3 added that the older generation interprets repeating the conversation back to the manager as a lack of comprehension. Managers use documentation to ensure that everyone is on the same page and has a clear understanding of the expectations and goals. Furthermore, communication allows the manager to relay to the Millennial worker that the manager understands them and wants to assist the Millennial in reaching their goals. In contrast, the older generation is offended when asked to repeat a conversation with a manager.

Managers must be careful with perceptions when interacting with Millennial employees. M3 noted that managers must be aware of the workplace surroundings, tone, and inflection when relaying information to Millennial workers, as these factors influence whether the Millennial employee understood the information. Tone and inflection help to break down the stereotype that individuals who are asked to come to the general manager's office should expect an adverse meeting regarding work performance or some

other negative action that needs addressing or correction. M4 asserted that older generations may need to change how they approach engagement strategies because Millennials will take over the workforce in the next few years. M4 further stated that managers would become “dinosaurs” if they do not recognize that the workforce is shifting; change within the workplace is imminent. Participant M5 addressed how older generations can change to adapt to the Millennial workforce.

Millennials are the growing workforce, and we have to understand them and make them feel a part of and include them. We have to be not as strict as we once were and have more patience than what we would usually tolerate.

The findings of this study aligned with Kahn’s (1990) employee engagement theory. The study participants addressed the drivers and barriers of employee engagement regarding engaging Millennial employees. The findings of this study support the engagement theory and noteworthy strategies were discussed in the emerging themes. The response from participants indicated the role of leadership as a potential driver in fostering employee engagement. Participants for this study incorporated the following strategies to engage their Millennial workforce: (a) coaching through education, (b) rewards that improve engagement, (c) enhancing engagement through motivation, and (d) communication enhances awareness and receptiveness. Kahn (1990) provided the basis for these findings by yielding an understanding of factors that prevent employee engagement from occurring. The barriers for incorporating strategies of engagement noted in this study included lack of interest, lack of motivation and supports, and lack of awareness, documentation, and receptiveness.

The themes of this study can be used to understand the importance of improving productivity and Millennial employee engagement by incorporating strategies involving incentives, communication, and mentoring and coaching. The five managers who I interviewed expressed the importance of communication between managers and Millennials and the need for each group to understand one another. Employee engagement theory provides a method to reach organizational goals, helps close the barrier of disengaged employees, and improves Millennial employee engagement levels. An engaged employee works to improve the organization with their time and talents. Managers' abilities to develop and implement employee engagement initiatives will encourage Millennials to be more productive and stay with the organization longer (Book, Gatling, & Kim, 2019). Managers can use employee engagement theory to better understand the best engagement strategies and apply those strategies to understand and solve the barrier of disengaged Millennial employees in the hospitality industry.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some hospitality leaders use to improve Millennial employee engagement. Increased Millennial employee engagement is vital for the overall strength and sustainability of the hospitality industry and determines productivity levels within various organizations (Datta & Singh, 2018). As asserted by M2, Millennials should understand that advancement in the industry involves a progression, and hard work should further Millennials' careers in the hospitality industry. The generational disparity could continue to occur as a direct product of the workforce configuration as different generations

continue to embody the modern-day workforce (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017). Managers who understand Millennial employee engagement will have the ability to implement appropriate leadership initiatives to increase engagement, performance, retention, and Millennial performance (Naim & Lenka, 2018).

Four themes emerged based on the interview responses and the analysis of the central research question. The main themes included (a) coaching through education, (b) rewards that improve engagement, (c) enhancing engagement through motivation, and (d) communication enhances awareness and receptiveness. The interview responses provided an understanding of both strategies and barriers that affect workforce engagement and employee perceptions in the workplace. Hotel managers who effectively and consistently provide an improved quality customer experience may increase profits and decrease Millennial employee turnover (Kandampully, Zhang, & Jaakkola, 2018). The participating managers all recognized and agreed that effectively engaging Millennials in the hospitality industry would set some hotels apart from others by providing a better customer service experience.

These findings are applicable to business practices, as these themes could be applied to other businesses as strategies managers can use to effectively engage their Millennial workers. Managers interviewed in this study emphasized that communication is the most vital tool to breaking down barriers with Millennial workers; therefore, other practices could foster effective communication strategies in the workplace and further engage Millennial workers. As recommended by M3, managers could adopt the use of visuals to enhance communication, show exactly what the results from performing a task



looks like, and explain what they plan to achieve with the completion of the task. Other managers could be straightforward and reinforce to Millennials that they are an essential part of the overall success of the organization. These revelations are essential to developing healthy and robust business practices and to strengthening effective communication between managers and their Millennial workers.

Study participants used certain strategies to foster a healthy work environment, increase innovation, and strengthen teamwork. Due to the increased competition from other hotels and alternative lodging accommodations such as Airbnb, hotels should use alternate ways and creative methods to continue improving strategies to engage Millennials (Apte & Davis, 2019). As M5 suggested, managers could implement the use of incentives and recognition to engage Millennial workers. Millennial workers who feel that they are part of the success of the hotel may feel encouraged to perform quality work and complete work assignments with pride, dedication, and speed. The increased knowledge of strategies to engage Millennials could enable managers to retain Millennials longer and close organizational gaps in communication, which could strengthen customer service and business practices (Woods, 2016). The implementation of effective engagement strategies is the determining factor of excellent customer service and financial success in the hospitality industry.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The study findings may contribute to positive social change by providing managers in the hospitality industry with a framework to increasing engagement strategies and increasing confidence and motivation among Millennial workers.

Managers who use effective engagement strategies with Millennial workers could potentially increase company revenue, attract and retain talented Millennial employees, and improve relationships with coworkers, communities, and families. Additionally, Millennials who feel heard in the organization are less likely to speak negatively about their managers, coworkers, and members of their communities. First, organizations should acknowledge that different communication strategies can be used among Millennials, and various engagement strategies exist within organizations. The process of finding solutions to effectively engage Millennial employees may resolve engagement issues within various organizations in Virginia, lower unemployment rates, and strengthen financial resources for families in the local communities.

Hotel managers who stay up to date with shared innovative engagement strategies and provide managers and Millennials the necessary training aids can demonstrate practical initiatives to impact social change, motivate workers, and decrease Millennial turnover. Unmotivated Millennial workers can have adverse effects on an organization (Eisenberger et al., 2019), which can contribute to higher unemployment rates if the Millennial employee feels unappreciated. Employee engagement strategies can affect the sustainability of an organization (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). An organization can increase productivity among their workers by understanding the barriers that prevent employee engagement. In addition, providing incentives to Millennial workers can create a positive work environment among managers who understand Millennial employee engagement. Managers who understand effective communication strategies can help create a positive working relationship between themselves and the Millennial worker and

ultimately create a healthier organization and better customer experience. Finally, employee engagement strategies could lead to improvement in the societal workforce, reduce unemployment rates, and increase the U.S. economy.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Most organizations thrive after improving Millennial employee engagement. Improved Millennial employee engagement increases Millennial employee productivity and enhances customer service. The strategies that the study participants shared could prove beneficial to any organization that employs a combination of multiple generations in the workforce.

My recommendations for action include sharing the participants' years of experience shown through their successful initiatives to increase Millennial employee engagement. The first strategy includes the introduction of innovative training initiatives to keep Millennials involved and engaged; these initiatives could potentially help organizations retain talented Millennial employees and increase the customer experience for the organization. A second strategy is to implement 2-way communication between the Millennial employee and the manager. Millennials are more productive when included in the decision-making process and given a thorough explanation of work processes. Another strategy for managers to implement is to provide Millennial employees opportunities within the organization to advance their careers and involve Millennials in the organization's innovative initiatives. This strategy shows the Millennial employee that the organization is investing in them and confirms that the Millennial employee has a voice within the organization.

Managers who implement mentorship programs where the older generation employees can work one-on-one with Millennial employees will allow both generations an opportunity to understand each other better and give the Millennial employee the inclusion opportunity they seek. Organizations can look for innovative ideas from their Millennial workers to identify Millennial's motivational needs and identify what motivational initiatives management can integrate. Listening to ideas from within the organization can be very beneficial, and managers must tap into internal knowledge and resources.

Another initiative is to engage in off-site and non-work related activities that require engagement through communication and teamwork. Activities such as laser tag, team bowling, and even escape rooms are great ways for managers to think outside the box and foster more camaraderie among their older generations and their Millennial workers. The strategies and initiatives from this study may be of great interest to managers in the hospitality industry because Millennials are the fastest growing workforce.

The findings and recommendations of this study may be shared through professional conferences, training initiatives, and any other professional forums and events. I plan to contact the National Society of Leadership and Success and the Society of Human Resource Management to discuss presenting the findings of this study to their participants and members at training sessions and conferences. For public review, my study will be published in the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Databases. In addition, I will give a copy of this study to my participants and write a peer-reviewed journal article.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The recommendations for further research combine the exploration of other business sectors, such as the public sector versus the private sector. The limitation in this study included the reluctance of managers who do not provide the strategies they use to improve Millennial employee engagement. Future researchers may ask Millennial workers what strategies work best to improve Millennial engagement in the workplace. Furthermore, I recommend the research expand beyond the geographic area of this study. The focus of my study was eastern Virginia. The inclusion of other southern states may provide more information on strategies to engage Millennial workers.

I recommend increasing the sample size and inviting other hotel chains to gather additional strategies that may be used to increase Millennial employee engagement. I recommend a more in-depth inquiry of the participants' backgrounds—such as their education, length of time in the industry, and previous management experience—as an individual's background could play a factor in their responses to the questions and their approach to engaging multiple generations in the workforce.

I would recommend including Millennial managers, as Millennial managers could provide different points of view as they reflect on their experiences while responding to the survey questions. Expanding on ways to improve Millennial engagement in workforce can prove beneficial to organizations, as it will help organizations engage their growing Millennial workforce and the growing Millennial consumer base that will patronize their businesses. Finally, I recommend representation from participants with a minimum of 10 years in management. Individuals with more years in management may

bring a variety of strategies to engage a multigenerational workforce and may have written the corporate policy on how to engage a multigenerational workforce (Chawla, Dokadia, & Rai, 2017).

### **Reflections**

The Walden University Doctor of Business Administration Program has challenged my thinking positively and been a rewarding experience. I am grateful for all my supporters—my wife, family, colleagues, chair, and professors—who gave me the much-needed push, kept me focused, and encouraged me to push through the mental anguish when I felt discouraged and overwhelmed.

I have obtained an increased knowledge of strategies to engage Millennial employees because of this study. Additionally, I have acquired more in-depth research skills, including an understanding of how to identify business problems and increased my knowledge base on gathering and analyzing data to solve the business problem. I have worked hard to obtain this prestigious degree, and I will not stop conducting research to solve business problems with Millennial employee engagement. I want to partner with other researchers, explore opportunities in academia, and delve into business consulting.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore practical and useful strategies hotel leaders can use to engage Millennial employees. Managers who engage the Millennial workforce could benefit any organization through ensuring that Millennials employees are included in organizational decisions, properly trained, and communicated with using innovative techniques. Productivity and customer satisfaction

could potentially increase as different generations understand each other and feel important within the organization.

Organizations may consider facilitating training for managers to learn more about how to communicate and motivate the Millennial employee. Employee engagement usually occurs when individuals better understand the challenges in their organization and know how to address and correct them. The workforce consists of multiple generations; therefore, organizations can benefit from providing employees with ways to communicate, motivate, and express work expectations without excluding a portion of the workforce. Managers should engage in open, honest, and encouraging communication with Millennial employees. Managers who listen to employees and encourage them to express themselves authentically promote healthy relationships and productive workplaces.

Organizational leaders may consider team-building activities in individual departments and company-wide. Team-building activities are great mediums for Millennial employees and managers to strengthen relationships within departments and throughout the organization. Leaders use team-building skills to introduce Millennial talents that may not have been noticed before, therefore allowing the Millennial worker an opportunity to display those talents. Managers can separate which strategies work best in different environments and decide on the most useful approaches to use when engaging their Millennial workers.

The strategies discussed within this study may serve as a framework for hospitality leaders to use to engage their Millennial workers. Hospitality leaders can

expound upon these strategies to implement innovative programs to effectively engage Millennials, therefore increasing Millennials' productivity and bettering customer service experiences. Organizations that adopt an innovative approach to Millennial employee engagement will strengthen their workforce by retaining and attracting talented Millennial employees and potentially impacting organizational growth and profitability.



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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. I will ask the participant for permission to participate in the interview with the completion of the Letter of Cooperation form. I will ask if I can conduct the interview in a private setting at their place of business. I will ask the participant for consent to activate my digital recorder for transcribing purposes. If the participant agrees to an audio recorded interview session, I will turn on the recorder and announce the time, date, and the location of the interview and record any pertinent information on a notepad and proceed to #3.
2. If the participant does not agree with being recorded, I will not turn on my recorder. I will politely ask the participant why they wish to not be recorded and respectfully ask if they wish to continue with the interview. If not, I will thank them for their time and promptly end the interview.
3. The interview will commence with introductions and greetings. “My name is Duane O. Stephens. I am a Doctoral student at Walden University studying Employee Engagement strategies among Millennial workers in the hospitality industry. Thank you for making time out of your schedule to participate in my doctoral research. I truly appreciate it! The total time of this interview should not exceed 45 minutes.”
4. If the participant refuses to be recorded but still wishes to participate in the interview, I will tell them “Thank you (participant’s name), I respect your decision to not be recorded during this interview. However, I will need to

record your responses on my notepad which may increase the time of this interview. I will record your responses in an effort to ensure the accuracy of your statements. Do you still wish to continue with the interview?"

5. Prior to the interview, participant's will have previously read the Letter of Cooperation form and given their verbal authorization to participate in the interview. Before commencing the interview, each participant will sign a hard copy affirming their willing participation with the study. Participants will receive a copy of their signed form to retain for their records.
6. Once the participant's sign their Letter of Cooperation form, I will thank them for their participation.
7. I will then reassure them any personal identifying information will not exist within the study.
8. I will declare the coded information for each participant e.g. "P1" on the recorder or notepad, and subsequently notate it on the Letter of Cooperation form, and proceed to the interview questions.
9. I will allow each participant enough time to freely answer each interview question (Appendix B) and follow up questions. I will synthesize each participant response and read it back to him or her to validate the accuracy of my written recording of their responses.
10. At the conclusion of the interview questions and the participant does not wish to add any further information, I will inform each participant that they will receive a summarized copy of the interview which they will need to review

for accuracy, sign it and return to me confirming the recorded accuracy of the interview summary. I will conduct a follow-up interview if the participant does not agree with the synthetization of the responses.

11. I will thank the participants for participating in the study and for the information that they provided.
12. I will turn off the recorder and close my notepad.

### Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to improve employee engagement among Millennial workers?
2. What strategies worked the best to improve employee engagement among Millennial workers?
3. What were the key barriers to implementing the strategies for improving Millennial employee engagement?
4. How did you address the key barriers to implementing your successful strategies for increasing engaging Millennial employees?
5. What additional information could you share about Millennial engagement that we have not discussed?