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## Technology Business Leaders' Strategies to Increase Employees' Engagement

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Desmond Browne

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Technology Business Leaders' Strategies to Increase Employees' Engagement

by

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MS, State University of New York, Oswego, 1995

BS, College of New Jersey, 1988

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2020

## Abstract

Employee disengagement is costly and reduces an organization's ability to meet its full potential to produce business results. Technology business leaders who have engaged employees can positively alter the company's rapid transformation to be more competitive. Grounded by the social exchange theory, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies 6 technology leaders in the Atlanta metropolitan area use to engage employees. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and company documents. Data were analyzed using Yin's 5-step data analysis process. Three themes emerged: communicate with transparency, provide offerings for training and rewards, and identify and implement assessment tools. A key recommendation is for technology leaders to be transparent and communicate with clarity when engaging their employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential to provide technology leaders with a framework of strategies for understanding workers and increasing their employee engagement, which will be an improvement in the societal workforce, reduce employee disengagement, support civil organizations by contributing time and talent to people in the society, and increase the economic stability of local communities.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to God, the father, son, and Holy Spirit, without whom I would not have made it this far. He kept me lifted even when others lost their faith in me.

Thank you, Lord.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

When leaders gain insights into employees' needs, they are likely to motivate others, build trust among employees, and create a vision for their team. Technology business leaders could improve organizational performances if they understand the benefits of employee engagement (Warrick, 2017). Technology business leaders who use effective employee engagement methods have successful leader-subordinate relationships, increased employee satisfaction, and higher employee participation (Choy, Djurkovic, & McCormack, 2016). Organizational leaders who place emphasis on developing good leader-subordinate relationships increase employee engagement, which leads to enhanced productivity (Griffin, 2015). A long-term goal of leaders' work relationship with employees is to increase communication, grow commitment levels beyond personal aspirations, and sway workplace approaches to execute the company's vision with vigor.

### **Background of the Problem**

Business leaders influence workplace changes by implementing work methods. However, without fundamental principles of engagement, such as cooperation and commitment, leaders may not gain the trust and confidence of employees (Den Hartog et al., 2017). Business leaders who engage their workforce report enhanced productivity (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016) and improved work ethics with concurrent positive financial results. By being engaged themselves, leaders can improve employee job satisfaction and build trust (Hartnell, Misati, & Walumbwa, 2017). Therefore, making efforts geared toward improved employee engagement is important for business success.

Organizational leaders who expect their businesses to remain profitable must recognize the improvement of employee engagement as an ongoing process. Leaders' failure to engage employees could lead to loss of business (Dong, Liao, Chung, Zhou, & Campbell, 2015) because the workforce becomes counterproductive when employees are disengaged (Simon & Tepper, 2015). Leaders can enhance employee engagement by building relationships with employees and promoting a sense of pride in the organization (DuBrin, 2015). Without knowledge about managing employee engagement issues, business leaders might not be able to build a productive workforce.

The introduction of strategic business principles and core values for improved engagement within the workplace have long-term benefits for leaders and employees. Otherwise, employee disengagement festers and becomes damaging with no gains to the work team (Rose, Shuck, Twyford, & Bergman, 2015). Strategic business principles set the common ground for companies and enable leaders to gain the trust and confidence of employees (Leavy, 2016). The focus of the current study was to explore strategies that business technology leaders use to engage employees.

### **Problem Statement**

In 2015, U.S. business organizations spent 70 billion dollars on business leadership strategies to enhance employee engagement (Adkins, 2017). In the Atlanta metropolitan area, 50% of surveyed employees reported high levels of disengagement with their workplaces (Hu et al., 2016). The general business problem was that employee disengagement is costly and reduces an organization's ability to meet its full potential to

produce business results. The specific business problem was that some leaders of technology companies lack the strategies to engage employees.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that some leaders of technology companies use to engage employees. The targeted population comprised three leaders from one technology company in the Atlanta metropolitan area who used successful strategies to engage employees. Leaders who master effective engagement strategies build productive organizations (Routhieaux, 2015) and contribute to the well-being of employees (Rupp et al., 2018), which affect their societal behavior (M. Gupta, Shaheen, & Das, 2018). The social change implications of this study included the potential for technology leaders to gain information needed to engage employees, which could lead to improved profitability and growth of technology companies. In addition, effectively engaging employees could positively affect the well-being of employees and positively influence the health of the people in the community.

### **Nature of the Study**

There are three research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015). I chose the qualitative method for this study. The qualitative method enables researchers to understand processes or the meaning given to phenomena by those involved or those who lived the experience (Yazid, 2015). Quantitative research involves the collection, collation, and analysis of numeric data (Goertzen, 2017). Mixed methods involve combining qualitative and quantitative research methods (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). The purpose of the current study

was not to analyze numeric data or to combine quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the problem in this study. Therefore, the quantitative and mixed-methods approaches were not suitable for this research.

Before I decided on the qualitative case study, I considered phenomenological, ethnographic, and narrative designs but did not select one of these designs. Researchers use a phenomenological design when the focus is a descriptive account of peoples' lived experiences about a specific phenomenon (Lewis, 2015). The phenomenological design was not proper for the current study because the purpose of the study was not to provide a descriptive account of peoples' lived experiences. Ethnography involves investigating the culture of a group that shares common traits (Lewis, 2015; Richie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014), which was not the purpose of the current study. A narrative design entails documenting events from the stories recounted by individuals about their lived experiences (Patton, 2015). Because the narrative design is suitable for studies in which researchers tell a story to describe human action, the narrative design was not suitable for the current research. A case study involves gaining in-depth knowledge about a phenomenon from the perspective of the research participants (Almutairi, Gardner, & McCarthy, 2014). A case study design is appropriate when researchers desire to explore a question of *how* or *why* concerning a phenomenon (Patton, 2015). The case study design was appropriate for my study because it enabled me to explore the problem from the perspective of participants. In addition, I was able to review multiple sources of information to understand the study phenomenon.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do leaders of technology companies use to engage employees?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies are you using to be successful in engaging employees?
2. What successful engagement strategies do you know are common in technology businesses?
3. What successful strategies are you using to increase employee engagement?
4. What leadership strategies are you using to establish a top-down culture of engagement?
5. What training strategies are you using to engage employees?
6. How is effective communication helping to lead engaged employees?
7. How do you define disengaged employees?
8. How does an engaged, productive employee become disengaged?
9. What strategies exist in your organization for prompt identification of disengaged employees?
10. What additional comments would you like to share with me regarding your experience in engaging employees?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The theory that served as the conceptual framework for the study was the social exchange theory (SET) developed by Homans (1958). Later, Kelley and Thibaut (1959), Blau (1964), Emerson (1976), and Hollander (1980) worked to advance the fundamentals of SET. Homans explained social behavior as an exchange of material and nonmaterial



goods presenting as either a reward or cost. Across the submissions of the various proponents of SET already mentioned, the prevailing idea was that the recurrence or sustenance of interactions between people was a function of material or nonmaterial reinforcements (rewards or punishments). Human interactions, being common phenomena in everyday life, exist in the workplace with attendant rewards and costs.

In a workplace setting, continuous interactions exist between leaders and their subordinates as well as between employees and their contemporaries. Given the main thrust of SET, interactions within the workplace can elicit approvals or disapprovals with possible outcomes of motivation or demotivation. SET is useful for understanding how individuals have a change of attitude, with a desire to accept and engage with other people (Hsiao & Chiou, 2017). Relationships between individuals and groups may contribute to growth and resources over time (Hollander, 1980) or result in disengagement. I expected SET to provide a useful lens to understand what successful strategies technology leaders use to engaging employees.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Business productivity:* Business productivity refers to an organizational measure of the utilization of inputs or resources to achieve optimal performance (Ugoani, 2016).

*Cognitive engagement:* Cognitive engagement refers to whether employees see work as meaningful or have the essential tools to complete assigned tasks (Reio & Shuck, 2014).

*Employee disengagement:* Employee disengagement is the range of behaviors associated with dysfunctional leaders, lack of resources, and the gravity of stress, which

act as a stimulus for employee disengagement (Oswick, 2015).

*Employee engagement:* Employee engagement is an individual's degree of emotional attachment to their organization, job, and colleagues (McGraw, 2017).

*Leadership disengagement:* Leadership disengagement is a leader's sense of separation employees feel because of poor leadership from subordinates, giving the impression of not caring or wanting to lead (Mintzberg, Simons, & Basu, 2002).

*Leadership engagement:* Leadership engagement involves the use of inspiration, pride, and enthusiasm to help employees invest in work that is vital to the organization (Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014).

*Perceived supervisor support:* Perceived supervisor support is the subordinate's perception of the leader's ability to motivate and train employees, influence behaviors, and care about their employees' well-being for achieving a high work performance and psychological empowerment (Jose & Mampilly, 2015).

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

Researchers' experiences reflect in their work, but there may be shortcomings in the reasoning process of carrying out a study. Stating the restrictions and basis for taking some position may help readers have an open mind toward conclusions and recommendations being made. The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations in the current study enable readers to better understand controllable and noncontrollable factors, and the position is taken while exploring strategies for employee engagement. In the following sections, I delineate the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study.

**Assumptions**

There were several assumptions in this study. Assumptions are premises that a researcher considers to be accurate and are the basis for some viewpoints (C. Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first assumption was that interviewed technology business leaders would provide honest answers to the interview questions. Another assumption was that the participants had time to take part in this study. I also assumed that company documents provided by the participants would provide an accurate portrayal of events at work. A final assumption was that the findings in the study would reflect that participants provided an accurate description of their experiences. All of the assumptions appeared to be accurate upon completion of my study.

**Limitations**

There were some limitations that may affect the validity of the findings in this study. Limitations are potential weaknesses evident during the research process (Carter & Weible, 2016) that are beyond the control of the researcher (Svensson & Doumas, 2013). A limitation of the current study was the selection of a single qualitative case study design. Researchers who conduct a single case study focus on a single individual or organization (Yin, 2012). The study findings from a single organization may not reflect the views and experiences of technology business leaders in other organizations. The geographic location was also a limitation of the study because only six technology business leaders from Atlanta metropolitan area participated in the study. Therefore, the findings may not be applicable to technology companies in other parts of the United States.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations are narrowing characteristics or established parameters within the control of a researcher to narrow the scope of a study (Domingos et al., 2014). Given the qualitative single case study design chosen for the current study, the first delimitation was that participants were from a single organization. The second delimitation was that the participants were business leaders from technology companies in Georgia. The final delimitation was the selection of participants who were in a leadership position in a single technology company. For the purpose of this study, employees who were not leaders were excluded from participation.

## **Significance of the Study**

Scholars and researchers contribute to the existing pool of knowledge in various ways. An important aspect of this doctoral study was to add to the extant pool of knowledge on the issue of employee engagement. Outcomes of this research might influence business practices on employee engagement and have implications for social change.

## **Contribution to Business Practice**

The findings of this study may benefit leaders of technology businesses who lack strategies for engaging employees. The sharing of information about successful strategies of technology business leaders could enhance employer and employee relationships in other organizations, contribute to the success of a new organization, and invigorate employee engagement practices (Chowhan, 2016). The drivers of employee engagement may improve organizational competitiveness and help leaders understand the specific

strategies that have an impact on performance (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Organizations with healthy workplace relationships may experience a strong cohesion that results in productivity and concurrent profitability.

The findings of this study may also provide insights for developing and implementing successful strategies to engage employees. As technology business leaders develop effective strategies to engage their employees, new processes may evolve into business practices promoting the development of loyal employees who perform beyond their job expectations or salary. The technology business leaders can implement better business practices that would heighten a sense of community and employee engagement.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Efforts to improve business processes and practices should impact the immediate community and society at large. The information derived from engagement studies affects employers' view of positive social change while increasing the quality of employee work-life (Udechukwu & Watty-Benjamin, 2014). The social implication of this study was that employees could find work happiness, pride, more balanced work lives, and increased motivation volunteering for community service opportunities. An increased number of engaged workers could lower employee turnover.

Innovative influence of technology businesses on the community could become evident. Communities may gain innovative strategies from collaborating with technology businesses for social change (Coward, 2014). Collaboration between leaders and employees around shared causes may create bonds and improve employer and employee relationships (Hsieh & Liou, 2016). Similarly, collaborations between the community and

employee volunteer initiatives to improve the local community may result in improved relationships and growth of parties involved.

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

No business starts with the aim of failing in the short or long term, and the ability of organizational leaders to manage resources, including human capital, can make a difference in the ever-competitive business environment. Technology businesses can help the community (Cai, Ocampo, Restubog, Kiazad, & Deen, 2017) but may fail because of problems resulting from employee disengagement. An organization with a disengaged and disgruntled workforce cannot claim to record high productivity and improved performance. Business leaders play a role in showing the symptoms of employee disengagement before it becomes a large-scale problem. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies that leaders of technology companies use to engage employees.

Organizational leaders must understand constructs such as motivation, job satisfaction, commitment of workers, organizational culture, and social interactions to managing the broad scope of employee engagement (Kompaso & Sridevi, 2010). Exploring workable strategies on employee engagement in this qualitative exploratory single case study might enable business leaders to address the problem of disengagement and its effect on organizational performance. I used seminal books and peer-reviewed journal articles to ensure rigor and gain insights into successful strategies that business leaders use to solve the problem of employee disengagement.

## **Organization of the Review**

The review of scholarly sources in this study supports the chosen viewing lens to answer the research question. I sourced relevant research studies from the following databases: ABI/INFORM Complete, Business Source Complete, EBSCO, Emerald Management, ProQuest Central, SAGE Premier, and Science Direct. In addition, I used Google Scholar and focused on articles from 2015 to 2020 in selecting literature to review. The search key terms were *leadership disengagement*, *social exchange theory*, *engagement*, *employee disengagement*, *work-life balance*, *employee turnover*, *employee retention*, *community relations*, *employee engagement*, and *leadership engagement*.

The organization of the review starts with discussions on technology businesses and the specific business problem. Further discussions include critical analysis and synthesis of scholarly sources about the social exchange theory, comparison with alternate theories, employee engagement and disengagement, leadership, and workplace strategies. Other aspects covered include organizational benefits of engaging employees, the role of leadership in achieving these benefits, and how leadership strategies may use the main idea in the social exchange theory. Of the 253 references I cited in this study, 167 (86%) were scholarly peer-reviewed articles. The non-peer-reviewed references included five books representing less than 1%. The references published from 2015 to 2020 constituted 153 (92%) of the total number of references in the study. The literature review contained 84 peer-reviewed sources.

The evolution of technology has changed the way of accomplishing tasks. Before the advent of technologies, human intervention was prevalent in various activities to

produce goods and services. With newer inventions, automation of processes became prevalent, and technology itself became business. Technology business involved organizing mechanical or social materials and energy resources to accomplish tasks (Hacker, 1992). The clamor for technological innovation continues to give rise to business opportunities for organizations that can produce the required technology. Until now, the demand for technology in various spheres continued to increase. Hence, technology businesses have the potentials for continued existence, relevance, and patronage (Faris, 2018)..

Humans are valuable resources that technology businesses should not lose. Given that technology businesses require innovative ideas that are products of human knowledge, human resources become essential intangible assets (Han, Chiang, & Chang, 2010). Beyond offering innovative ideas, employees can perform roles that contribute to improved organizational efficiency (Han et al., 2010). Implementing systems that promote employee engagement can enhance business performance (Han et al., 2010). Disengagement, if not addressed, may result in poor outcomes for the technology business. A review of literature on social exchange gave insights into the problems of disengagement and provided insights into identifying successful strategies for improving employee engagement.

### **Historical Review of Social Exchange Theory**

The social exchange theory (SET) developed by Homans (1958) influenced the works of Kelley and Thibaut (1959), Blau (1964), Emerson (1976), and Hollander (1980). Homans focused on voluntary interactions between individuals. Thibaut and



Kelly considered the underlying psychology of behaviors in small groups, forming relationships, controlling influence, and the inclination toward rules and regulations. Blau interpreted the social exchange between individuals on a principle of reciprocity: an action carried out anticipated a reciprocal reward. Blau also argued that social exchange might not occur without an existing personal relationship. Emerson supported adopting an economical approach to deciding on noneconomic social interactions between people. Hollander examined social exchange in leadership classified into transactional (leader-follower relationship), system progress (group or organizational effectiveness), and individual enhancement (desire for fair treatment).

Hollander's SET analysis (as cited in Hisrich, Shuangxin, & Xueyan, 2015) indicated that work friendships might enhance work-life if there are collaborations between leaders and employees. Organizations are empowered when employees change (Molero, Moriano, & Valsania, 2016), and the effectiveness of a team depends on collaboration within the team. Hollander suggested the use of SET may aid supervisors. Supervisors have intangible resources to influence subordinates and help employees meet obligations by using diplomatic, economic, and targeted leader-subordinate exchanges to influence social exchanges (Epitropak, Guillaume, Lee, Martin, & Thomas, 2016). Such intangible resources include promoting interdependence, compatibility, and efficient communication, which may reward the organization and increase employee engagement.

Homans (1958) explained social behavior as an exchange of material and nonmaterial goods presenting as either a reward or cost. Homans theorized that the behavior of humans is a function of experiences lived in the past. The experiences,

conditions, and learning for the persons involve exchanges or interactions with other people, and there is an expectation of a cost (disapproval, punishment) or reward (approval). Homans explained that perceived or expected rewards outweigh the possible cost that humans look for in daily exchanges.

In a workplace setting, continuous interactions can exist between leaders and their subordinates and employees and their contemporaries. Given the main thrust of SET advocated by Homans (1958), interactions within technology companies between business leaders and employees elicit either approval or disapproval. The natural response of the parties in the workplace exchange is to seek more approval than disapproval. Homans noted that individuals in an exchange measure the value attributable to rewards and repeat any interactions that increase positive returns. Furthermore, based on information or knowledge from experiences, people rationalize and avoid interactions when confronted with adverse outcomes.

The general propositions of Homans's (1958) study included human behavior, relationship interchange for maximizing economic satisfaction, distributive justice, and the exchange of material and nonmaterial goods between individuals. Homans did not consider that social exchange, sometimes a function of either negotiation or coercive power, focuses on voluntary interaction between individuals. Nevertheless, Homans's work can be applied to interactions and exchanges in the workplace to improve relationships that may enhance team spirit and productivity.

Continuous interactions exist in the workplace between leaders and their subordinates and between employees and their contemporaries. Across the submissions

of Homans (1958), Kelley and Thibaut (1959), Blau (1964), Emerson (1976), and Hollander (1980), the prevailing idea was that the recurrence or sustenance of interactions between people is a function of material or nonmaterial reinforcements (rewards or punishments). Human interactions, being common phenomena in everyday living, exist in the workplace with attendant rewards and costs. Given the main thrust of SET, interactions within the workplace can elicit approval or disapproval, with possible outcomes of motivation or demotivation.

Relationships that show characteristics of trust maintain connections until there is no further redeeming value. Social exchanges rely on social interaction in relationships that evolve into trusting and sharing similar mindsets (Oparaocha, 2016). SET is useful for understanding how individuals accept others and display a change of attitude that makes them want to engage with others (Hsiao & Chiou, 2017). Managed relationships between individuals and groups may contribute to growth and resources over time (Hollander, 1980) or result in disengagement. Zhang, Avery, Bergsteiner, and More (2014) examined emotional behaviors and intellectual commitment as barometers to emphasize the role of engagement in business successes.

Understanding targeted behavioral interventions of individuals and groups may encourage leaders to improve their organizations. Gaining an insight into social behavior interactions may help with the impact of behavioral and physical resources on employee engagement strategies (Hsu, Chuang, & Hsu, 2014). Using SET as the viewing lens for the current study may enhance understanding of successful strategies for engaging

employees. The goal-setting conceptual framework of SET can be helpful for understanding the underlying assumptions, perspectives, and challenge-related constructs.

Some underlying assumptions of SET became plain from the viewpoints of the proponents mentioned. These assumptions used in totality may serve as a guide in applying SET in solving the specific business problem. Sabatelli and Shehan (1993) summarized the assumptions of SET. Concerning reward and punishment, in any social exchange, people engage in interactions that supply rewards and avoid punishments. As it relates to independence, for an exchange to occur, people exist in a societal setting with cultural norms of reciprocity, equity, and justice. There is interdependence on one another for rewards. Concerning benefit maximization, people rationalize and are calculative based on information available before interaction to engage in activities that yield maximum benefit with concurrent cost minimization. As it relates to trust and commitment, consequent upon the experience of interdependence on other people, the resulting learning may create a feeling of trust and stimulate repeated interactions. Trust becomes the bedrock of a sustained relationship with opportunities for continued interactions (Russell, 2012). Trust is the culmination of communication over time.

As it relates to value measurement, Sabatelli and Shehan (1993) noted that as the need to maximize benefits and minimize costs in social exchange, people place value on costs and rewards in each interaction. An assumption in SET is that individuals compare the benefits and costs of an interaction to determine its worth. Positive interactions have benefits outweighing the associated costs, and negative interactions have costs that are greater than the benefits. Anthony, Cropanzano, Daniels, and Hall (2017) pointed out that

individuals may engage in an activity because of the positive benefit of justice or support. Conversely, the disengagement from another activity may be because of undesirable outcomes such as abusive supervision or injustice (Anthony et al., 2017). In a workplace, employees may disengage due to the lack of a desirable benefit or presence of an undesirable factor.

Social exchange in the workplace involves interaction between at least two people. Leaders and line managers are valuable in an activity the employees do. Employees exhibit beneficial or harmful behaviors, just as business leaders might (Anthony et al., 2017). By implication, business leaders may become irritable when employees display undesirable attitudes. The resultant effect may trigger negative high-cost emotion toward the employee that can result in disengagement. On the other hand, a positively responsive employee may motivate positive high-value emotions and behavior of the leader. The question then arises as to how individuals manage emotions to avoid creating a negative perceivable value in the social exchange.

### **Alternate Theory Considered**

An alternative framework for addressing the problem of disengaged employees was Mead's (1934) role theory. According to this theory, role expectations influence human behavior within given rules or norms. Individuals, while performing assigned roles, display routine daily social behavior. This theoretical viewpoint presupposes that social behavior, conditioned by role requirements, is predictive. An individual's behavior changes when playing the role of another person (Mead, 1934). With role theory, an

individual's behavior working as a production supervisor in a technology company can become a distribution manager.

Applying the fundamental rule of the role theory to the context of this study, a disengaged employee may show a change in behavior and attitude toward work with a change in the assigned role. Homans's (1958) SET indicated that individuals have the opportunity to make decisions on behavior based on available information gained from experience. There is an anticipation of a reward; repetition of interaction is deliberate, self-motivated, genuine, and not playacting to live up to the requirements of a role change. The change in behavior is because the new role exists within a social structure with behavioral expectations and definitions. An individual takes on the attitudes or viewpoints of others because of the role stimulus. With role theory, however, the individual is merely playing the part of the role and living up only to expectations without developing the self. In this light, role theory was not appropriate for addressing the specific business problem of exploring strategies for engaging employees.

Another theory for addressing employee engagement is the conservation of resources (COR) theory by Hobfoll (1989). COR is a motivation theory that presupposes that the need to protect existing resources and acquire newer ones motivates people. Hobfoll defined the resources as including everything that an individual considers valuable, including positions, state of being, and properties. Employees use available resources as a coping mechanism for stress (Hobfoll, 1989). The application of COR theory, in the context of the current study, was that employees are less engaged at work with reduced or unavailable job resources. The pursuit of excellence may be satisfying to

employees who may experience possible financial and operational success yields (Jaeger, 2017). In other words, employees draw motivation from the desired increase in resources that they give high value and seek newer challenges to achieve the objective.

Going by the COR theory, business leaders have to make provisions for a pool of resources such as salary increase, job enrichment, support from leaders and teammates, and participation in decision-making that stimulates motivation (Chen, Westman, & Hobfoll, 2015). Employees are likely to seek opportunities for acquiring and increasing resources when the organization creates such a pool (Chen et al., 2015). The ideology of the COR theory aligns with the concept of reward and punishment in Homans's (1958) SET. Employers may create rewards (Homans, 1958) or resources (Hobfoll, 1989) that meet the anticipation of employees to motivate engagement. The dissonance between the two theories is that with SET, the withholding of reward is a reinforcement to influence engagement, but with COR theory, the absence of the resources may lead to disengagement.

The use of SET already builds in the concept of conditioning such that the resources exist but withheld to compel action or required change. COR theory implies that the resources must be available for the employee to derive motivation. The SET, thus, becomes more relevant to the context of motivating a disengaged employee to be engaged than the COR theory.

### **Understanding Employee Disengagement and Engagement**

The application of SET to the research question can be transparent with a succinct definition of employee engagement and disengagement. Understanding what employee

engagement means is imperative to answer the central research question of this study.

Different authors defined employee engagement in different ways. Macey and Schneider (2008) explained employee engagement as a physical state of being vigorous, dedicated, and absorbed in one's work. Consistent with the viewpoint of Macey and Schneider (2008), other researchers (Keating & Heslin, 2015) considered that engaged employees experience work as a meaningful activity that they want to concentrate on, devote time and apply vigor. This state of being may imply that the employee has a deep-rooted interest in connecting with the work.

In another study, Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014) defined employee engagement as emotional and intellectual commitments to assigned roles or tasks. Human emotions may reflect in their behaviors and attitudes. Wrong attitudes, like destructive behaviors and their consequences, may affect organizational development and performance (Du, Dworkis, Olsen, & Young, 2016). Kumar and Pansari (2016) wrote that the attitude driven behavior of co-creations, interactions, and solutions that connect an individual to the workplace connoted employee engagement. The definition by Kumar and Pansari has an element of an attitude of cooperation by the engaged employee with other colleagues. Co-creation indicates working with other people to achieve a goal.

Businesses exist for value creation, with profit maximization as one of the targeted objectives. Two significant resources for value creation of an organization are its customers and employees (Mittal, Han, & Westbrook, 2018). Given the context of this study, the focus is on the employees as one of the vital value creation sources. Employees create value by converting raw materials into consumable goods and services sold to



customers (Loveman, 1998), giving rise to cash inflows for the business (Gupta & Zeithaml, 2006). Thus, ensuring workers' engagement is essential for business profitability and survival.

Considering that engagement has profitability implications for businesses, understanding employee disengagement gives insights into its effect on organizational performance. Employee engagement enhances productivity and profitability (Cording, Harrison, Hoskisson, & Jonsen, 2014; Fletcher & Robinson, 2015). In other words, employee engagement is essential for sustained competitive advantage (Groening, Mittal, & Zhang, 2016). The aim of the organization is to build a team where everyone is pulling together for the profitability of the company. Engagement does not always happen well in an organization.

The existence of disengagement in an organization is a problem. Employee disengagement is a situation of workers becoming unenthusiastic, unhappy, pessimistic, and lacking vigor at the workplace (Bakker, Breevaart, & Demerouti, 2014). Notably, an employee becomes disengaged when a person disconnects from work roles for physical, mental, or emotional self-preservation from perceived threats (Wollard, 2011). In other words, disengagement means detachment from work during job time. Disengagement occurred in the vast majority of the working population and resulted in a considerable loss for organizations (Rastogi, Pati, Krishnan, & Krishnan, 2018). Organizations with a considerable number of highly engaged employees outperform companies with a disproportionate number of disengaged employees (Chandani, Khokhar, Mall, & Meh, 2016).

Early detection of disengagement may improve the rate of retention of talented employees. Hill and Miller (2017) found that 50% of employees experience disengagement, while Harter (2017) noted 85% of disengaged workers languished in organizational roles because of indifference to the workplace and may not exert their best effort. In comparison, engaged employees are essential for productivity (Gao, Jing, & Yang, 2017), while disengaged employees impede workplace productivity (Damian & Stoeber, 2016; Maxwell, 2013). Given that employee disengagement is a negative phenomenon, business leaders should take necessary actions to mitigate its effect on organizational performance. Leaders may not be able to solve employee disengagement if they do not understand its cause and symptoms.

### **Symptoms of Employee Disengagement**

At the onset of disengagement, some noticeable indications or signs may draw the attention of sensitive business leaders. The manifestation of detachment from work differed from detachment from individuals and may be progressive (Patnaik, Satpathy, & Das, 2015). Naturally, detachment is permissible for an off-work period (Sonnentag & Kühnel, 2016). However, business leaders should curb situations whereby employees' detachment extends into work hours. Some of the symptoms advocated by Patnaik et al. (2015) noted that declining performances and change from being proactive to becoming reactive.

Another symptom of employee disengagement on the job includes disinterest, extended periods of distraction, poor decision making, untimely job execution, incessant absenteeism (Pech & Slade, 2006). Also, other disengagement indicators are withdrawal,

lack of self-drive, dissatisfaction, and counterproductive work behaviors (Rastogi et al., 2018). A degenerative problem had not only to have symptoms, but there has to be at least a cause. While an individual business leader may focus on the symptoms of disengagement, its root causes do not get the required attention (Pech & Slade, 2006). Focusing and trying to address the symptoms without identification and prevention can cause disengagement may result in a waste of time and resources. Thus, discussions on the causes of disengagement or factors influencing employee engagement become necessary.

### **Factors Influencing Employee Engagement**

Whatever influenced employee engagement if not addressed, may cause disengagement. Various researchers pointed to different causes of employee disengagement, but some of the examples discussed may supply insights into general aspects requiring attention. Pech and Slade (2006) pointed out that disengagement in the organization might arise internally or from the external environment because of the absence of a declining level of trust between leaders and their followers. Employees may develop feelings of insecurity because of government policies or prevalent issues.

On the part of leadership, an individual in a position of high authority without leadership strategies may create a work atmosphere of disengagement consciously or unconsciously (Pech & Slade, 2006). Careless outbursts or comments by leaders while supervising a subordinate may trigger wrong assumptions by employees. The likelihood of layoffs may increase levels of disengagement of employees with innate natural strength, not because employees are weak but because the work atmosphere has a lack of

organizational trust (Christie, Park, & Sype, 2014). Technology business leaders may misrepresent their personality to their subordinates and thereby, create mistrust or disrespect.

In another viewpoint, most employees become disengaged because of feelings of (a) incompatibility with the leader, (b) insecurity about the future in the organization, or (c) insignificance to the team or organizational objective (Patnaik et al., 2015). From another angle, engagement may result from a poor hiring decision: a mismatch of the employee's skill set and the job requirement (Patnaik et al., 2015). The interviewer lacked an assessment skill, or the applicant divulged complete and correct information that aided in making the right decision (Patnaik et al., 2015). Eventually, the wrong job fit may cause demotivation for the employed personnel.

A differing view but supplementing the list of causes of disengagement is about organizational resources. A hostile work environment lacking employee-friendly policy may also give rise to disengagement (Patnaik et al., 2015). Each author found causes of disengagement in different ways. Rastogi et al. (2018) argued that employees disconnect from work when organizational resources required to carry out tasks become inaccessible or unavailable. Rastogi et al., using the job demand resources (JD-R) model, argued that job demands cause exhaustion, and without the required resources results into disengagement.

Leaders should be mindful on the influence of lack of job resources and work engagement outcome. Hunter et al. (2013) considered that sour leadership relationship degenerates into employee disengagement. Koch and Binnewies (2015) conclusion in his

study harmonizes the viewpoint of Hunter et al. (2013) and Rastogi et al. (2018). Leaders that balance the focus on job resources (task orientation) and friendly relationship creates an atmosphere in which employees do not quickly become exhausted, such leaders are, most likely, able to retain subordinates (Koch & Binnewies, 2015). There are some employees are can display shifts in disengagement

The various causes of disengagement discussed summarize into five categories or groups. These groupings are the five factors Mansoor and Hassan (2016) proposed as influencing employee engagement: communication, teamwork and collaboration, job role, company management, and learning and development. One of the assumptions of SET theory was that employees have free access to information. Effective communication within the organization enables employees to have information about the economic or growth position of the business and can make personal decisions about their future (Mansoor & Hassan, 2016). The knowledge minimizes the feeling of insecurity about the future in the organization mentioned by Patnaik et al. (2015). The transparency when present ends possible wrong employees' presumptions about the future of the organization.

Honest and open communication reduces the anxiety that comes with overwhelming thoughts. Employees with the motivation to voice their opinions are prosperous at work and may improve the organization's overall goals (Gao et al., 2017). In addition, the process of building winning teams involves constant communication to help increase employee engagements (Men & Hung-Baesecke, 2015). Technology

business leaders may gain from understanding how to motivate and encourage subordinates through effective communication.

Teamwork and collaboration are essential ingredients for a productive workforce. The viewpoints about the absence or declining level of trust (Pech & Slade, 2006) and incompatibility with the leader (Patnaik et al., 2015) align into the teamwork and collaboration factor proposed by Mansoor and Hassan (2016). Building loyalty and trust and insisting on employee relationships should be deliberate and pleasant (Bonardi, Herz, & Zehnder, 2017). Without trust, a team or workgroup may not effectively collaborate and achieve the cohesion necessary for improved productivity.

Leaders and employees may collaborate to face workplace challenges. Collaborations may begin with making room for reflection on ways to encourage positive outcomes for employees (Blass & Hayward, 2014). Teamwork and collaboration require the involvement of both the followers and the leader in the organization to achieve quality improvements in the production of goods and services (Mansoor & Hassan, 2016). There were focus on achieving organizational success when its workforce and leaders are collaborating. Business teams with a winning spirit commit to achieving their full potential and may have the strategies to produce ambitious output. The cooperation of the team may strengthen a friendly work environment.

There is some clarity of purpose for an employee with a well-defined job role. Mansoor and Hassan (2016) identified job roles as one of the factors influencing employee engagement. The authors' proposition covers the viewpoint of Patnaik et al. (2015) that a feeling of insignificance to the organization's objective due to poor job fit

may result in an employee's disengagement. Mansoor and Hassan (2016) noted that there was a positive correlation between job roles and employee engagement. With the right job fit, employees showed more commitment and worked to meet or even exceed expectations (Mansoor & Hassan, 2016). However, employees may exceed expectations with the supervisor's support, encouragement, and consideration (Afsar, Ali, Dost, & Safdar, 2017). Inversely, poor attention given to ensuring the right job fit may result in disengagement.

Business managers or leaders have an important role in ensuring a work-friendly atmosphere that mitigates the occurrence of employee disengagement. Proper company management (Mansoor & Hassan, 2016) subsumes addressing various issues of hostile work environment lacking employee-friendly policy (Patnaik et al., 2015), sour servant leader relationship (Hunter et al., 2013), and inaccessibility to organizational resources required to carry out tasks (Rastogi et al., 2018). Company management, as a factor influencing employee engagement, connotes business leaders' effort to build a strong relationship with employees (Mansoor & Hassan, 2016). The strong interaction ensuing from the relationship motivates workers to better performance and productivity.

Encouragement of their leaders may help employees reach their full potential and maximize their efforts toward fulfilling the company's goals. Kumar and Pansari (2016) mentioned, 84% of highly engaged employees work to drive productivity and exceed performance expectations, while 31% of disengaged employees achieve minimum performance goals. Management support maximizes the individual potential to achieve outstanding personal gains (Maxwell, 2013). The challenge of a leader is to engage

employees by increasing their competitive drive so that the organization is sustainable and meets the competitive demands of the industry.

Maintaining a balance is collective advocacy in most spheres of living, and effective business leaders may grasp on the advice to encourage employees. Mansoor and Hassan (2016) shared the viewpoint of Koch and Binnewies (2015) that a balanced task orientation and friendly servant leader relationship created an atmosphere that inspires employees to work towards company's goal. Thus, tilting the balance such that more focus is on task orientation that proved and supported a healthy relationship with employees may result in disengagement. Business leaders may need to learn how to keep the necessary balance.

Learning and development are the last of the five factors mentioned as influencing employee disengagement. The efforts of employees and leaders by reducing barriers to participation, increasing engagement in beneficial practices, fostering group acceptance, and offering a sense that the goals of the organization are worth pursuing may sharpen leader-employee knowledge (Gau, 2014). A strategy for improving employees' work capabilities for successfully achieving organizational goals is for management to invest in learning and development (Mansoor & Hassan, 2016). Thus, the focus on building experiences where there is a sense of achievement is a joint effort between employees and leaders is necessary.

Specifically, leaders and supervisors require training in handling issues and decision making affecting the employee. Leaders without proper training may not develop the right hiring and job assessment skill and may result in poor decision making



on employee matters (Patnaik et al., 2015). In a diverse workplace, it might be challenging to construct organizational effectiveness at all levels without effective leadership. Leaders have a plethora of practical models to apply in building multi-cultural teams and enable successful adaptations that may lead to positive outcomes (Erez & Lisak, 2015). Without paying attention to learning and development, an organization may lose potential benefits of increasing employee morale, confidence, and creating an efficient workforce with capabilities for ensuring sustained business profitability. Leaders, having responsibility for the profitability of the business, must ensure to find strategies for engaging employees to avoid a loss financial position.

### **Effective Workplace Strategies to Engage Employees**

Various causes and symptoms discussed serve as a platform for exploring strategies to curb employee disengagement and promote engagement on the job. The issue of creating an atmosphere of security to cushion the effects of government policies or prevalent issues in the neighborhood (Pech & Slade, 2006) becomes relevant. Some other issues include effective communication (Botha & van Niekirk, 2017; Cathcart, McDonald, & Townsend, 2016), support for employees on the job (Hollander, 1980), and organizational commitment to the well-being of workers (Arif, Azeem, Cheema, & Imran, 2014). Leaders need to seek new ways to empower employees to achieve positive organizational performance (Roman & Tobaben, 2016). Strategies put in place to address the points stated may contribute positively to engaging employees.

Employees concentrated when conditions that threaten their basic physiological needs exist. Company leaders should not assume an indifferent standpoint when

government policies create a harsh economic climate for employees. Strategies for business leaders may be to perform selfless service by focusing on ways to serve their subordinates and finding out what employees need. Leaders may do this by listening, understanding, and experiencing some of the issues (Andre, 2015). A good leadership that thinks first of the employment condition and human needs such as security, safety, and growth is essential.

A leader's willingness to focus on ways to serve subordinates may influence the corporate efforts at engaging employees. Leaders' actions may pass across the message of genuine concern, attention, and acceptance to promote positive relationships (Day, Kelloway, & Hurrell, 2016). A safe feeling at work may influence the outcome of employee engagement and affect career growth. Incentives to mitigate the effect of socioeconomic policies have to go a long way to ease the burden of employees and promote concentration at work. Leaders need to understand how emotional stress influences an employee's feelings towards work.

Leaders have the responsibility for interacting with employees, especially those pinpointed as disengaged, to know what challenges they face and suggest to management reliefs that can mitigate the impact of such a problem on the individual. When a change occurs in the workplace, employees may implement strategies to manage emotional stress and avoid potentially disastrous situations (Bergman, Lornudd, Tafvelin, & Thiele-Schwarz, 2015). The elimination of the distraction of insecurity may address the issue of disengagement.

Management should create an atmosphere for vertical and horizontal communication. A close bond with employees grows from continuous communication and mutual strategizing. Leaders who address the needs of their followers show value and shared leadership (Sausser, Sutton, & Washington, 2014). The ability to have straight communication is vital to ensure the work culture is one of trust, with a focus on healthy two-way communication between coworkers. A healthy communication system in an organization promotes participation and may improve the attitude of employees towards leaders.

A leader's ability to build healthy relationships where employees may improve work attitudes and perform at the highest possible levels of productivity daily is an essential strategy. Employees ought to engage and talk with each other in the team (Botha & van Niekirk, 2017) because active communicating among co-workers resulted in a greater sense of unity (Cathcart et al., 2016). For leadership to be successful, interactions, involvement between leaders, and subordinates are critical (Deichmann & Stam, 2015). The attitude of employees towards the organization stimulates business leaders to improve job and company effectiveness (Anitha & Begum, 2016). The willingness to share goals and consequences is an exciting outcome of team collaboration between leaders and employees.

Employee participation in decision making may trigger positive relationships that are essential to improving the company's effectiveness, especially when leaders are collaborating. Hollander (1980) confirmed that the leader's role is to meet the expectations of subordinates; otherwise, unmet roles violate the norm of reciprocity. The

interdependence of relationships is best when all parties who give and take in the work arrangement agree to the relationship culture. Hollander indicated that a two-way relationship between leaders and subordinates endure when leaders influence that exchange. Therefore, developing strategies that have the potential to motivate and influence subordinates to perform at the highest levels offer the gratification of enhancing organizational success (Leung & Zhang, 2016). Leaders with strategies for enabling favorable collaborative relationships may affect employees' motivation towards working.

Instead of micromanaging employees, leaders may entrust employees and empower them to take calculated risks. The social connection between leaders to solicit an employee's mental and physical engagement may yield greater employee satisfaction, participation, and productivity (Cording et al., 2014). Awareness and emotional beliefs influence positive employee behaviors (Dufour, Ladhari, & Souiden, 2016). In other words, leaders may influence subordinate demeanor by passing across as seeking help from employees but indirectly steering the direction of the activities. Alternatively, leadership with innovative ideas may introduce new management practices that may drive solid performances (Mihalache, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2014). Organizations should influence and change behaviors.

Organizational commitments influence the desire to work and inspire an employee to perform (Arif et al., 2014). Research on employee engagement shows positive associations between organizational commitment and positive attitudes toward work. Leaders may evoke passion and excitement but may not follow-up. Leaders who are uncommitted to inspiring their group might not display passion, and Arif et al. (2014)

asserted that commitment is essential to forging engagement. The ability to commit to and engage with organizations is an act of loyalty.

Furthermore, business leaders may apply a supportive leadership approach versus controlling or demanding characteristics associated with authoritarian leadership styles. The appearance of inappropriateness and questionable actions by leaders erode the foundation of trust (Pearce & Stahl, 2015). Such concerns may result in employees withdrawing instead of engaging. When leaders deploy strategies to promote employee engagement, the employee environment may transform into one of trust, dignity, and respect. Leaders must be alert and recognize that employees are observant and may recognize when something is wrong.

Business leaders' role is essential in reflecting the organization's capabilities, strengths, and commitment to be a bonded team. To engage employees successfully, leaders had relinquished control as one of their strategies. Leaders must trust employees to make decisions that are consistent with the aims and values of the organization (Naouar, 2014). Building trust helps to enhance the quality of work output from the employees. Leaders may interact and guide subordinates to follow business aims. When leaders foster an environment that reinforces trust, there is the likelihood that leaders increase employee engagement.

Organizational leaders need to align employee involvement and engagement with the needs of the company. Employee engagement or behaviors in the execution of work tasks may drive participation and job satisfaction within the work teams (Carmeli, Brammer, Gomes, & Tarba, 2017). Several methods for improving productivity exist, yet

methods fail. The attitudes and actions of immediate leaders are integral to the successful implementation of employee engagement methods and may provide invaluable work-behavior lessons for employee participation.

When employees build and enhance their work strategies, it may amplify their engagement. Gatling, Kim, and Milliman (2016) examined the relationship between meaningful work for employees and their investment in that work. Leaders may analyze how employee job tasks contribute to work fulfillment. Understanding the connection between work and personal goals may create a sense of fulfillment in the workplace (Gatling et al., 2016). A leader may assign tasks that fill a dual role in meeting organizational goals while contributing to an employee's skill development aspirations. Dual role tasks may offer a performance management strategy that may increase engagement.

Practical goal setting with the buy-in of employees may stimulate engagement. Goal settings may build competencies for achieving personal and professional goals (Day et al., 2016). Leaders and employees may jointly create a career roadmap that includes achievable goals. One of the primary leadership roles for empowering employees is to address organizational goals, internal conflicts, and task performances with the use of management practices (Hassan, Park, & Wright, 2016). The potential for professional growth may have effective strategies critical for a rewarding career.

Leaders need to define the organization's work culture that motivates engagement on the job. Organizations should have a reputation for hard work (Nayak & Venkatraman, 2015). The idea is to build a community of hard-working individuals and

challenge others who do not want to work to exceed the organization's norm. Leaders may work with subordinates, promote positive employee attitudes, and contribute to the organization's performance. Successful leaders encourage productive employees, inspire, and transform team members to developing and operating by the same work ethic (Lucas, Manikas, Mattingly, & Crider, 2017). Leaders may reinforce openness by being present to experience positive emotions and consider new experiences. Some engaged business leaders seek constructive criticism and feedback by challenging individuals to share their views within work teams.

Leaders helping others may create a sense of community. The decision to support others encourages a family-like atmosphere and an employee atmosphere that involves meaningful activities (Gau, 2014). Technology business organizational requirements may include a reward of one-on-one direct mentoring to challenge better employees' better performance. When employees receive direct encouragement lessons from leaders, the learning experience may develop a feeling of connectedness, leading to a thriving workplace environment. Leaders want to reward employees because they are loyal and create value to the company (Witasari & Gustomo, 2020). High satisfaction reduce can energize the trust and commitment that can support relationships between employees.

The crucial role of leaders is to make lasting contributions to the business. Organizational success may depend on the effectiveness of management and leadership supervisory strategies. Mahajan and Sharma (2015) conducted a study to examine whether effective leadership enhances employee engagement. Mahajan and Sharma (2015), used a Q12 employee engagement questionnaire, established that there was a

positive correlation between leadership characteristics and employee engagement. Leaders may help shape the perception of employees (Anitha, 2014). The confidence and positive attitude to try without failure develop from being part of a supporting team (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018). Leaders may share beneficial work behaviors, promote creativity, and encourage participation with suggestions to improve performances. The feeling of empowerment may have a profound effect on the work teams.

Other than training employees, encouraging communication, and improving management strategies for handling subordinate leader relationships, there should be strategies taught to employees as a conscious effort to help them reengage with work. Sonnentag and Kühnel (2016) pointed out that a healthy practice is for employees to disengage mentally from work during the off-work period. However, becoming immersed in returning to work may be a struggle. Employers must understand that the opposite process is necessary to reestablish mental and physical work engagement (Sonnentag & Kühnel, 2016). Hence, an activity should be in a place that stimulated the re-engagement when employees return to work from either a holiday or vacation.

An improvement team strategy was to act together as a team. The involvement of team members in formalizing the agenda and executing the organizing the entire meetings were underscoring on the importance of two-way communication (Cook, 2008). The involvement of the planning of the meeting to include rotations of team members to host the meetings improved the knowledge, perspectives, project successes, and keen focus to other parts of the business according to participants (P1, P3, & P4). The building



blocks of engagement was to think as one team. The team who cares, works together to dismantle obstacles, work across teams to build a camaraderie of ideas and encourage high levels of involvement.

The team meeting involved how best to benefit from role-modeling continuous involvement. The focus was the ability to influence others to have effect changes. Arasli, Arici, and Kole (2020) claimed a key ingredient to demonstrate involvement is innovating and influencing at work. The creativity of employees solving problems can be positive when leadership intervene and empower employees to solve challenging job tasks.

With a focus on reengagement, employees may need to perform specific activities that aid in becoming immersed in work with ease. Sonnentag and Kühnel (2016) advocated that employees should engage in activities that promote dedication and absorption during work time. Sonnentag and Kühnel suggested that employees think ahead about the workday, outlined tasks, and the energy required to accomplish set targets. The authors argued that the anticipation stimulates the required energy before the actual work undertaking. Therefore, business leaders would need to learn a how-to guide or teach disengaged workers how to reconnect mentally with work to promote engagement.

Measuring employee engagement identified a decline in the productivity level of individuals for quick intervention. Sorenson and Royal (2015) proposed that measuring employee engagement and variables in job demands may prove beneficial for motivating employees. The measurement of various aspects of employee attitude, behavior, and

relationships may help leaders enhance social exchange to result in improved employee engagement within the organization. Business researchers to include, Menara, Ruck, and Welch (2017), and Buntak, Drozdek, and Klopota (2016) recommended that business leaders should measure employees' trustworthiness, engagement, and communication towards the organization.

The assessment of disengaged workers yielded valuable information on the cost and benefits of employee engagement, the cost of employee disengagement, and other aspects that are essential to working together. Some other disengagement measurement tools include the *Early Warning System* (EWS) and *Stability Meter* (Patnaik et al., 2015). The EWS gauges the onset signs of employee disengagement for quick intervention with a performance improvement plan (Patnaik et al., 2015). The stability meter indicates the emotional state of the employees as to whether or not they are happy (Patnaik et al., 2015). The essence of such measurements and sharing results with employees is to stimulate and encourage positive attitudes and behaviors. Technology leaders' ability to identify symptoms of disengagement early from measurement indicators for quick corrective actions may result in improved employee engagement.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 1, provided a background of the employee engagement problem and discussed the business problem and purpose statement. I identified and justified the selected research methodology and design, and I also discussed the selected theory used as the viewing lens for this study. Section 1 also includes a discussion about possible applications to the business practices and implications for social change. I provided a

succinct synthesis of various literature sources, which included a historical academic review of employee engagement, employee disengagement, strategies to promote employee engagement, and concepts of SET.

In Section 2, I elucidated my role as the researcher for this study and expand on the selected research method and design. I conducted a thorough assessment of ethical academic research for this study. I identified and explained the methods for data collection, organization, and analysis with the focus on enhancing the study's reliability and validity. In Section 3, I presented the findings related to the conclusions of my study. I shared the applications to professional practice, implications for social changes, recommendations for action, recommendation for further the study, and my reflections.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 begins with a restatement of the study purpose. Next, I describe my role as the researcher, the participants, and the selected research method and design. In addition, this section includes a discussion of the population and sampling, ethical research practices, data collection instruments, data collection techniques, and the techniques for data organization and analysis. This section concludes with a discussion of reliability and validity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that some leaders of technology companies use to engage employees. The targeted population comprised three leaders from one technology company in the Atlanta metropolitan area who used successful strategies to engage employees. Leaders who master effective engagement strategies build productive organizations (Routhieaux, 2015) and contribute to the well-being of employees (Rupp et al., 2018), which affect their societal behavior (M. Gupta et al., 2018). The social change implications of this study included the potential for technology leaders to gain information needed to engage employees, which could lead to improved profitability and growth of technology companies. In addition, effectively engaging employees could positively affect the well-being of employees and positively impact the health of the people in the community.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Business researchers using the qualitative method and case study design may choose from a variety of techniques collect data. Conducting a study involves activities

requiring proper coordination. A researcher's role in qualitative research is to explore the experiences of participants, collate data, and analyze results (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). My role in the data collection process was to collect data from participants during face-to-face interviews and review company documents. In addition, I analyzed the data and evaluated the findings.

I used an interview protocol (see Appendix) as a guide to ensure consistency and prevent bias during the face-to-face data collection process. The use of an interview protocol ensures research credibility and reliability (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Mitchell, 2015). I adhered to an interview protocol designed for the interview sessions.

Because bias may appear in any part of the study, I did not rely on any preconceptions on the study topic. Identification and recognition of bias ensure the neutrality of research conclusions (Algozzine & Hancock, 2016). I had no prior business relationships with the participants or related work experience on the subject. Interacting with participants requires caution to avoid a conflict of interest or research bias (Halvarsson, Ståhle, Halén, & Roaldsen, 2016). I ensured that all interactions with business leaders in the chosen technology company in the Atlanta metropolitan area were professional. Furthermore, adopting the suggestion by Moustakas (1996) to set aside individual experiences, beliefs, attitudes, culture, and generational views helped me to mitigate possible bias. I had no work experience with engaging employees. I conducted the study with an open and unbiased mind.

I complied with the guidelines on conducting research with human subjects and the ethical principles outlined in *The Belmont Report*. Respect for persons, beneficence,

and justice are the three principles outlined in the *Belmont Report* (U.S. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). After careful review of the proposal, Walden University's Institutional Review (IRB) granted approval to collect data. Following the IRB approval, I collected and analyzed the data.

### **Participants**

To meet the eligibility criteria for participation in this study, prospective participants had to be technology business leaders in the Atlanta metropolitan area who used successful strategies to engage employees. Using selection criteria is critical to ensure the relevance of participants in answering the research question and solving the business problem (Yin, 2014). Gökmen et al. (2017) noted that study participants should have the ability and familiarity with the problem under investigation to answer the research question. I contacted a technology business whose leaders had used successful strategies to engage employees and sought approval from the management to conduct the study at their organization. After obtaining the management team's consent, I invited eligible participants from the technology company in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

Siu, Hung, Lam, and Cheng (2013) recommended maintaining a professional relationship with participants. A continual dialogue throughout the interview process is indispensable to developing a working relationship that mitigates bias and discord to achieve accurate and honest responses (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2015). Communication with participants was professional, and I created rapport for a mutual working relationship.

## **Research Method and Design**

A key decision in carrying out research is choosing the appropriate methodology and design. Depending on the worldview of individual researchers, different methods and designs are evident in studies. Yin (2014) identified the (a) research focus, (b) central research question, and (c) degree of control over events as the three conditions that influence the choice of research method and design. I considered the three conditions before making a choice to carry out a qualitative research study.

### **Research Method**

The three methods to choose from were qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Employing a quantitative method of hypothesis testing and exploring relationships among variables is not appropriate for exploring human experience (Yin, 2014). Quantitative measurements may not describe human experiences of participants (Bernard, 2013; Honeycutt & Savage-Austin, 2011; Yin, 2012). Given these assertions, the quantitative research method was not suitable for my study.

Combining quantitative and qualitative methods also did not align with the research question of this study. Researchers who conduct mixed-methods studies apply qualitative and quantitative methodologies for data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation (Bernard, 2013; Guercini, 2014). My goal was not to use quantitative data or conduct a statistical analysis. Therefore, the mixed-methods approach was inappropriate for this study.

I selected the qualitative research method. A qualitative study enables researchers to collect data to gain insights into participants' perceptions and experiences about a set

of events, actions, or processes in a social context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2007). Bradshaw, Atkinson, and Doody (2017) noted that the qualitative method is useful for having participants express their insights when responding to open-ended questions as well as uncovering patterns and themes. The purpose of the current study was to gather data about successful employee engagement strategies from participants in the technology industry. The qualitative research method best aligned with the purpose of this study. The qualitative research method enabled me to explore the successful strategies that some technology business leaders in the Atlanta metropolitan area use to improve employee engagement.

### **Research Design**

Selecting the best research design was essential for the success of this study. Qualitative research designs include phenomenology, case study, and ethnography (Hays & Wood, 2011; Yin, 2012). I selected the single case study design for this study. Case studies are comprehensive and reflect various data sources in the course of exploring a specific phenomenon (Algozzine & Hancock, 2016; Cronin, 2014; Harland, 2014). Multiple sources of data collection include document reviews and interviews suitable for answering questions of how, what, and when. The goal of researchers who choose this design is not to control the behavioral events but to focus on contemporary events (Yin, 2014). The qualitative case study is a research design for understanding the evolving practices of leaders within a business (Brown & Lunsford, 2016). The case study design was appropriate for this study because I reviewed multiple sources of information related to the phenomenon as well as the experience of participants.



Phenomenology was not a suitable design for this study. Researchers who conduct phenomenological studies focus on a descriptive account of peoples' lived experiences about a specific phenomenon (Berterö, 2015; Flint & Woodruff, 2015). In an incident or singular event, people have different encounters, but the related lived experience becomes relevant to a phenomenological study. Phenomenology is about people's related retrospective reflection on everyday experiences (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Conversely, case study involves gathering data about occurrences in real-life settings (Patton, 2015). Because the purpose of the current study was not to explore participants' lived experiences, the phenomenological design was not suitable.

I considered ethnography as a design but did not select it. In ethnography, the researcher examines the culture of a group that shares common traits (Lewis, 2015; Richie et al., 2014). Researchers who conduct ethnographic studies examine the experience of individuals and groups in a social world through in-person observation (Hallett & Barber, 2014). In the process, complexities of the day-to-day lived experience of a large group become plain. Ethnography research requires extensive information about participants over a long period of time (Patton, 2015). Ethnography was not a suitable choice because the purpose of the current study was not to gather data on individual stories over a long period of time.

Achieving data saturation in qualitative research is important. Data saturation, the collecting of enough information and determining that no new information or themes are emerging, is a critical milestone (B. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). According to some methodologists, achieving data saturation may be possible by

conducting three to five interviews, while others suggest having six evidentiary sources (B. Marshall et al., 2013). The number of participants required to reach data saturation can vary (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Yin (2018) mentioned that researchers can conduct a narrow case study with a small sample size. Data saturation occurs when no new themes emerge (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). One of the researcher's goals is to identify relevant themes that may highlight the characteristics of the experiences (Enslin & Schulz, 2014). The repetitive themes that produce no new data and the ability to replicate the study can indicate data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I collected and analyzed data until no new information and no new themes emerged, which was achieved after interviewing six participants.

### **Population and Sampling**

To select research participants, I used purposeful sampling. The process to reduce a large, targeted group of individuals identified in a sample population is purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015). Purposive sampling is useful for gaining transparent insight into a phenomenon (Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015). Bell, Olsen, Orr, and Stuart (2016); Gentles et al. (2015); and Yin (2014) recommended the adoption of a purposive sample of participants for qualitative studies. Therefore, purposive sampling was appropriate for my study.

To ensure that I reached data saturation, I selected six technology business leaders and reviewed company documents. Fusch and Ness (2015) opined that having a manageable sample in research promotes reaching data saturation with ease. When data become repetitive, the researcher has achieved saturation (Cleary et al., 2014; Fusch &

Ness, 2015; Meyer & Ward, 2014). For this qualitative single-case study, I conducted semistructured face-to-face interviews in an enclosed room that the participant selected for the interview. The timing of the interviews was convenient for the interviewees. Comfortable location and convenient timing of interviews make participants more at ease to share relevant information (Richie et al., 2014). Therefore, I conducted the interviews in a quiet and safe room at an agreed location.

### **Ethical Research**

For this study, I adhered to the ethical standards in academic research. Study participants require notice to ensure the informed consent is available for adequate review and questioning (Ahern, 2012). After signifying a willingness to participate in the study, each participant reviewed and signed the informed consent form before the interview commenced. Participants deciding not to take part in a study may withdraw with a notification either by email or by telephone (Gainotti et al., 2016). I informed participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time, by email or phone call, without any consequence. None of the participants expressed a desire to withdraw from the study.

Avoiding harm to participants and protecting the confidentiality of participant data are very important. The informed consent form provides prospective participants with information about withdrawal from the study and any monetary compensation (Wilson, 2016). Participants in the current study did not receive an incentive or monetary compensation. An informed consent form is a tool for participants to declare their consent to partake as volunteers in the study. As a researcher, I had demonstrated respect for persons by emphasizing that participation in the study was voluntary. Each participant

signed the consent form. In compliance with the principle of mitigating injury to human subjects, I ensured no participant was a minor, prisoner, or mentally challenged individual.

The informed consent form includes information on the participants' individual privacy protections and the right of refusal if there are any reservations (Regmi et al., 2016). I had two copies of the consent form before meeting each participant. I reviewed the consent form with participants before the interview and obtained a signed copy from the participant for safekeeping.

Once the interviews started, I reassured participants that their information would remain confidential and secure. I replaced the name of each participant and the technology business company with arbitrary codes to keep their identities confidential. I will keep all data and code keys in a locked fireproof safe for 5 years. After 5 years, I will destroy all hard and soft copy materials related to this study by shredding. I was granted the Walden University IRB approval number 01-15-20-0311581. The protection of the rights of participants is paramount. After I introduced the research purpose, all participants who opted to participate in this study received and signed the consent form.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

I was the primary data collection instrument. For qualitative case studies, researchers are the primary data collection instrument because researchers talk with subjects, listen to participants, and interpret the data (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2010; Yin, 2014). There are several types of data collection methods including observations at on-site visits, focus groups, interviews, and review of archival records

(Hurst et al., 2015). The data collection methods used for the current study were interviews and review of company documents, including strategic plans and human resource documents.

I used an interview protocol during the interview process. I probed with questions to have participants give their insights and experiences to increase engagement. This process included initial interviews and member checking with participants. I used 10 open-ended interview questions as a primary data source. I also collected data by reviewing company documents. The process of member checking may enhance the validity of the study (Anyan, 2013; Byers & Onwuegbuzie, 2014). After collecting the data, I returned to the participants for a second interview requesting feedback on my interpretations of their responses, also called member checking. Member checking involves presenting participants with a summary of the researcher's interpretation of interview responses for verification to increase reliability and credibility (C. Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Through member checking, I enhanced the validity and reliability of the study findings.

### **Data Collection Technique**

The primary data collection technique for this study was face-to-face interviews. Semistructured interviews serve as a primary data collection technique in a qualitative case study for achieving an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Bernard, 2013; Qu & Dumay, 2011). I sent each participant an invitation email, sharing my contact information, introducing myself, briefly discussing the purpose of the study, and sharing that participation in the study is voluntary without remuneration or incentives. I

conducted face-to-face interviews with participants who expressed willingness to take part in this research. Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Before each interview began, I asked each participant for permission to use an audio recording device. During the interview process, I used the interview protocol to ensure consistency. Following the interview protocol, I informed each participant of the interview starts and asked the interview questions in sequence. Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012) to the importance of ensuring that the recorder works before the beginning of the interviews and that social interaction is comfortable before the interview.

Conducting semistructured interviews has advantages. Unlike closed questionnaires, the semistructured interview may allow elaborate responses from the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Milne and Reiser (2014) referenced other advantages to interviews, such as the ability to follow-up for clarification on answers with ambiguities, a high response rate, and obtaining detailed information. I used semistructured interviews to gain in-depth participant perspectives on the phenomenon and follow-up interviews, called member checking, to ensure that I interpreted the participants' responses to the interview questions correctly.

I had the opportunity to gather detailed information from the participants using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions allow the exploration of the totality of participants' experiences (Medhurst & Albrecht, 2016; Yin, 2014;). The use of semistructured interviews with open-ended questions also gives participants the freedom to expand their responses. An advantage of using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions is the in-depth insight into the participants' perspectives on a subject

matter (Frechtling & Sharpe, 1997). The interviews are between the researcher and the participants, build on the development of rapport, and help generate rich qualitative data (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013). I gained rich data using the semistructured interview process. I used a recording device to save the data gathered during the interviews so that I can focus on listening, taking notes, and capturing all nonverbal interview data. Yin (2014) emphasized the researcher may revisit the recorded data and not rely on interview notes only when conducting the analysis. Furthermore, the use of devices such as audio recordings has the benefit of reducing note-taking bias and increasing reliability and validity (Neal, Neal, VanDyke, & Kornbluh, 2015).

Disadvantages of conducting face-to-face interviews include the cost of traveling to the case site. Yin (2012) identified cost, participants' noncooperation arising from fear, and a feeling of discomfort as disadvantages of interviews. The interviewer effect is a disadvantage of using interviews for research because of the potential to focus on the researcher's age, ethnicity, and gender (Potter, Mills, Cawthorn, Donovan, & Blazeby, 2014; Winker, Kruse, Menold, & Landrock, 2015). The participants that I interviewed were cooperative and did not express fear. The interviews took place in conference rooms at the company they worked at. Thus, the participants were familiar with their surroundings and in a setting comfortable to them. I was able to answer participants' questions before the interviews to put participants at ease. The benefits of semistructured interviews override potential disadvantages, which appeared to be the case with my study.

I verified my interpretation of participants' responses through member checking. With member checking, researchers gain the assurance that responses accurately represent the intended meaning of the participants (Harvey, 2015). I used member checking in my study, which enhanced the reliability and validity of the results in my study. The data collection process started after receiving approval from IRB. The initial step involved emailing prospective participants from a single company to set up interviews to collect data from technology leaders. Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013) noted that the visit to business and talking to senior leaders is recommended after conducting prospects to collect data via email. The working relationship established trust and rapport to prevent failure that could result in adverse outcomes.

I reviewed the company documents as the secondary data collection technique. I sought and received signed letters of cooperation as proof of authorization to proceed. The company documents came from the participants. I established a working relationship with participants, and some participants shared websites on employee engagement and productivity to support the data from the interviews. These documents included newsletters, meeting notes, training documents, insights on employee engagement leadership strategies shared by leaders, and employee engagement survey tools.

To achieve triangulation, the study involved collecting company to help with the analysis of the responses of the participants. Through this study, I explored leadership procedures to manage and interpret engaged employees. The process for confirming company practices also involved memoranda, team training meetings, and leadership meetings to corroborate statements from the interviews. I stored all documents in a



password-protected zip file and audio from the interviews. U.S. Department of Education (2012) stated the importance of destroying research documents and recommends shredding paper formats. There are safeguards of all information surrounding participants and the study that must be done. Thus, I will carefully store all data and dispose of it as required after 5 years.

The collection of the various data collection techniques was helpful for understanding the problem under exploration. Bernard (2013) stated that the gathering of data through an in-depth, semistructured interview in qualitative studies is essential for gaining insight into a problem. However, the use of archival documents, according to Tsede (2015), presented a biased outlook from the participants.

Leaders who strive to engage employees can create opportunities for promoting social change platforms—the results of improvements in transparent conversations. The local communities benefit from the dedication, energies, the focus of employees with creative job skill sets, quality work life, and a desire to give their time and talents for the betterment of the community (Steiner & Atterton, 2014). The contribution to programs in the community impacts the team's ability to influence the sustainability of communities, foster team member growth, and promotes organizational activities, which in turn puts the focus on increasing productivity and encourage partnering.

### **Data Organization Technique**

To the organization and filing of collected data, I used a tracking system. A tracking system is an organizational model for keeping accurate data, gathering a cluster of themes, and organizing data in a way that is consistent, a hallmark of the data

organization technique (Anyan, 2013). In addition, I used a Microsoft Word document to keep notes on the themes from the interviews. The monitoring of themes is essential in the organization of the cluster of themes and their distinct ideas (Houghton et al., 2015). I used a reflective journal to include key themes and concepts. I also used Livescribe Echo Smartpen's software for the electronic recording and playback of participants' responses.

To mitigate the loss of data, duplicate data such as audio recordings, consent forms, and transcribed interview responses, I stored all raw data securely so that I am the only one that has access to it. I cataloged the data for ease of retrieval. St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) underscore the importance of storing data in a catalog. The filing system of cataloging data with a labeling system reduces redundancy and minimizes researcher bias (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). I stored a soft copy file of all data collected on a password-protected personal computer to prevent unauthorized access. I will safeguard the hard copy of data in a safely locked container for 5 years then later destruction by shredding. Similarly, after 5 years, all secured soft copy of data will be shredded.

### **Data Analysis**

For the purpose of this study, I used methodological triangulation. Researchers ensure the completeness of data by using methodological triangulation from multiple sources (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The data collection techniques used in my study to ensure completeness included interviews and review of company documents. Triangulating data collected through the combination of interviews and documentation further enhanced reliability and validity. Triangulation from multiple sources helps in the validation of data through cross verification (Buchin & Mulzer, 2011).

I used the Yin's five-step data analysis process to analyze the data. Yin (2014) described five steps of data analysis: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpretation, and (e) conclusion. To compile data, I sorted and cataloged all data collected from the various sources. Bengtsson (2016) noted that the process of compiling as identifying, grouping, and arranging by themes. The disassembling of the data involved dividing the data and finding each subset with labels. According to Watkins (2017), a thorough examination of the data collected can be put into categories. The reassembling of the data involved the labeling and sequencing of data into groups. Researchers can use data analysis software tools such as NVivo to reassemble data from voice to text (Palinkas et al., 2015; Saxena, 2017). Interpreting the data required the creation an explanation of the sequences and groups. Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, and Redwood (2013) revealed that the steps involved in analyzing data include transcribing, data coding, and developing a framework of the study. The organization of the data in the methodological triangulation in my research was crucial. To conclude, the data involved summarizing the relationship between the data and drawing conclusions of the findings. Bennett and McWhorter (2016) concluded that rich, correct data with relationships between data would help develop themes.

Cross-referencing data from multiple sources using automated analysis software results in thorough analytic triangulation (Street & Ward, 2012; Torrance, 2012). Therefore, I used specialized software for analyzing the data. The data analysis software I used for this study was NVivo. Researchers find the use of NVivo in identifying themes in the studying as very helpful (Franzosi, Doyle, McClelland, Putnam Rankin, & Vicari,

2013). I identified recurring themes that answered the central research question. The identification of themes and sub-themes while coding helps to name patterns, trends, and differences in participants' responses (Atkins, Macklin, Paulus, & Woods, 2016; Castleberry, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). I used this process to create clusters of themes and subthemes from data that I analyzed. I then correlated these themes and subthemes to themes that I identified in the literature and conceptual framework, including new studies.

### **Reliability and Validity**

An important aspect of qualitative research is to ensure notable levels of reliability and validity. Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted, criteria for qualitative studies include dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

#### **Reliability**

Quality research is reliable and valid. The bedrock of evaluating the quality of a case study is by assessing its reliability and validity (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015; Prion & Adamson, 2014; Yin, 2014). The four components of reliability and validity are dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Aschaeur, Fink, Moro, van Bakel-Auer, & Warming-Rasmussen, 2017; Cope, 2014). I incorporated the criteria of dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability in this study.

#### **Validity**

Literally, a valid study implies research without errors or biases. Magilvy and Thomas (2011) described validity as the degree of accuracy in the analysis of the findings associated with the study. Leung (2015) defined validity in qualitative research as centering on the credibility of the tools, process, and the ability to use accurate results to

make decisions. Guala and Jiménez-Buedo (2015) noted that validity refers to enhancing the confidence placed in research within a real-world context. A study must remain valid across all the stages of research (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Yin, 2014). Credibility and transferability are the linkage of data and findings to different contexts, which are essential to ensuring the validity of the study (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013).

Explanations of the concepts of credibility, transferability, and confirmability will follow.

*Credibility* is an allusion to preserving the transparency in research (Noble & Smith (2015). The absence of bias in research strengthens the credibility (Algozzine & Hancock, 2016; Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013).). Thus, I used the process of member checking and methodical triangulation to increase research credibility.

*Transferability* is a feature of research whereby application and linkage of data and findings to different contexts are possible (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Transferability occurs when research users can decide whether a study is relevant to the contexts of their inquiry (Parker & Northcott, 2016). According to Patton (2015), qualitative researchers had the responsibility to provide thick descriptions to assist future researchers with replicating the research study under similar conditions in varying settings. To enable readers, determine if the study findings are transferable, I provided a detailed description of the participants, research context, and data analysis process.

*Confirmability* relates to keeping and establishing the accuracy of collected data (Noble & Smith, 2015). Maintaining objectivity and accuracy of the data leads to confirmability (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). According to Patton (2015), confirmability is the degree to which the findings of a research study

accurately convey the experiences of the participant rather than the researcher. One way to promote confirmability is member checking (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Through member checking, research participants can review the interpretation of their interview transcripts. To ensure confirmability, I used member checking and allowed participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations of the responses.

*Data saturation* happens when no new themes emerge (Fletcher & Robinson, 2015; Unluer, 2012; Walker, 2012; Yin, 2012). A goal is to identify relevant themes that can help highlight the characteristics of the experiences (Enslin & Schulz, 2014). The repetitive themes that produce no new data and the ability to replicate the study can indicate characteristics of reaching data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The point is if one collects additional data from the same case, no new themes are found (Cleary et al., 2014). The collection of data from participant interviews and company documents enabled me to reach data saturation. I reached data saturation after interviewing six participants.

Data saturation occurs once the reviewed data and the new relevant information, perspectives, and experiences no longer appear (Anyan, 2013; Byers & Onwuegbuzie, 2014). Data saturation ensures no new themes, and no replications exist in the results (Anyan, 2013; Walker, 2012). Data saturation is to collect as much new information until that new data does not provide any subsequent new knowledge or bits of information on the issue (Bowen, 2008). Houghton et al. (2015) noted that an advantage of using a case study is the comprehensive approach of overwhelming data to ensure rigor. However, the identification of themes is important to the insight into a phenomenon.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I reintroduced the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, eligibility criteria of participants, and the approach to this study without compromising ethical standards. In addition, I provided detailed information about the research population and sample size. In addition, I discussed the data collection instrument, techniques, and organization, with a succinct explanation on ensuring the credibility and validity of the research. For Section 3, I will present findings, document reflections of the research process, and state recommendations.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that leaders of a technology company used to engage employees. The data came from leaders' interviews and company documentation at a technology company in the Atlanta metropolitan area. The data collected were from interviews with six technology leaders and company documentation from technology companies. The findings revealed successful strategies that leaders used to engage employees. The three themes that emerged from the data analysis were to communicate with transparency, provide offerings for training and reward, and identify and implement assessment tools.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

The research question for this qualitative single case study was the following:  
What strategies do leaders of technology companies use to engage employees?

#### **Theme 1: Communicate With Transparency**

The first theme that emerged from analyzed data was the importance of communicating with transparency to engage employees. The participants expressed that transparent communication was essential for an effective strategy to engage employees in the workplace. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 used processes, techniques, and approaches to support the teams' approach to fostering and ensuring clear communication as a goal to ensure transparency. An important strategy for ensuring transparency was keeping the lines of communication open. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 shared that they often participate in team meetings, team training, and coaching to communicate with



employees as often as possible. These actions are to keep employees informed about the mission of the company so they have an in-depth understanding of their role in the company and how their contributions help in the overall mission of the company's future. The leaders' commitment to being transparent with all employees in the organization is evident from the leaders' efforts to prepare a communication plan. The communication plan included strategies to communicate with employees formally and informally through formalized regular face-to-face meetings as well as workshops and company-sponsored off-site team bonding events.

**Clear communication.** Clear communication played an important role in communicating effectively, which was essential in relaying information between leaders and employees. Scheepers and Elstob (2016) noted that leaders influence workers through open, ethical, honest, and practical communication. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 expressed that communication was one of the highest priorities for leaders in the organization, with the goal of consistent and direct messaging across the team. P6 pointed out that clarity of communication in the workplace is essential and should be supported. To ensure direct messaging and clear communication, participants shared that they schedule and plan team meetings regularly. Arasli et al., (2020) found that team meetings provide a work setting that allows employees to address any areas of the psychological impediment to being creative, innovative, and safe to express themselves.

In addition to highlighting the importance of clear communication, P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 emphasized the importance of saying what you mean and meaning what you say. P1 stated "You got to say what you mean and mean what you say." P4 added that

“Effective communication is enormous and, in my opinion, is a two-way street, not just effective communication but also active listening.” P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 shared that the ability to communicate the necessary information affects both the individual employee and the team. The conversation from a personal and career standpoint made work enjoyable and employees were involved in completing deadlines (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, & P6).

According to Yap, Abdul-Rahman, and Chen (2017), communication with clarity is the understanding and relaying of information between leaders and employees. P5 stated, “I want to have very candid conversations with folks to make sure that we all understand the kinds of things that can happen.” Understanding each other is very important. Zarifian (1999) stated that communication implies understanding the other and oneself; it means agreeing on organizational goals and sharing norms about their management. P3 supported the notion that effective communication occurs when a leader has an open, honest, and transparent dialogue with their subordinates. P3 stated “I am going to tell you if I cannot tell you something. I will say it is something I cannot do. I will tell you, but I am pretty transparent because I kill any kind of rumors.” In the words of P3, having an open and honest dialogue with employees is important in addressing employees’ concerns, whether the concerns are justified or not, and can have a negative effect on the people within the organization. These findings are similar to those from Cunha da Silva, Veloso, Nelmi Trevisan, Rosa Veloso, and Souza Dultra’s (2016) study. Although rumors are informal channels of communication, they are an important source

of information and emerge as a reaction to situations that are important to people, when there is ambiguity, and under conditions that arouse anxiety (Cunha da Silva et al., 2016).

Technology leaders were expressive when explaining that feedback was valuable from employees. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 shared that team meetings were crucial in relaying information to employees and ensuring that leaders and employees understand each other. In addition, the participants expressed that talking instead of letting things fester clears up anyone's way of thinking. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 noted that the meetings with their teams enabled them to keep their employees informed by sharing information about the company's goals and strategic priorities. Team meetings are an open forum to voice legitimate interests that may enhance the team (Arasli et al., 2020). The team meetings are essential because they enable the leaders to know "Where employees are, what they are thinking, and if they are enjoying their job (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, & P6), which plays an important role in employee engagement and employee trust.

P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 identified communication as important in engaging employees and mentioned communication more often (52%) than behavior, listening, and collaborating combined. During the interviews, participants mentioned several keywords as it pertains to the importance of communication with clarity. When asked about the role of effective communication in leading engaged employees, participants mentioned leadership behavior as critical in ensuring transparent communication. Leaders must listen to their employees and communicate with them regularly. Communication is crucial in engaging employees (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, & P6). The data from the interview responses also revealed that the second most important aspect of engaging employees

was the impact of the leaders' behavior. Participants referred to leadership behavior 28% of the time. Listening and collaborating also played a role and were mentioned 7% and 6%, respectively, but these keywords were not mentioned as frequently as communication and behavior. I reviewed the organizational reports provided by P1 about markers for excellent communication practices. P1 stated "You got to say what you mean and mean what you say."

Table 1 provides a summary of the word frequencies related to the first theme that emerged during data analysis.

Table 1

*Frequency Related to Theme 1: Communication With Transparency*

Theme 1 resources	Frequencies of key theme	# of References /theme
Behavior	18	10
Listening	7	4
Collaboration	6	5
Transparent communication	34	10

*Note.* Total references in theme 1= 29

P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 stated that a lack of communication could lead to work pressure and make it challenging for employees to get the work done. P6 found that communicating through formalized channels was necessary for both corrective actions and rewarding employees for exceptional performances.

To understand the leaders' goals, efforts, and tools used to communicate with employees and ensure transparent communication, I explored the strategic engagement

plan that the participants provided. Because 80% of the leaders recognize that workforce challenges involve communicating, engaging, and commitment, the organization's strategic plan included information and guidelines about how to communicate effectively with employees. The strategic engagement plan entailed executing the company vision and allowing employees to speak without fear of retribution on sensitive topics. In addition, the strategic engagement plan revealed that the leadership team is committed to making content available on smart devices so employees can learn about the organization's vision at their convenience. The company's strategic engagement plan also highlights the leaders' efforts to ensure excellent and effective implementation of the use of a communication strategy to communicate benefits of social data by highlighting successful cases (Gikaru, 2016). The communication plan can influence and address the concerns of internal and external audience with a roadmap for success.

The company's strategic plan, which is included in the external company reports, shows the leadership's commitment to ensuring excellent and effective implementation of the use of a communication strategy to reach internal and external customers to provide satisfaction and good organizational practices. Reviewing the organization's strategic plan was important because an organization's mission, vision, and values influence the leaders' strategic choices and action plans. As Mezhouda (2019) noted, strategic planning is the process of conceiving the institution's future and defining appropriate ways to achieve the agreed objectives. In addition, the HR guidelines contain information for employees about effective job performance, expressing concerns, expectations at work, and the vision of the organization, which are available in the Checkpoint portal. These

efforts show the leadership's commitment to keeping employees informed. A well-designed internal communication system involves communicating to everyone that each employee matters and ensuring that everyone is aware of changes to the company's vision, which can lead to promoting the commitment of employees to the mission of the organization (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, & P6). Krajcsák (2019) noted that leaders could be successful if they are friendly and if they use communication as a tool to increase employees' commitment.

In addition to reviewing the strategic employee engagement plan, I also reviewed the feedback that employees provided to the participants in this study about their experience with communication within the team. The provided feedback revealed that leaders with effective communication skills motivated employees to do their best and were able to unleash their full potential. These findings are similar to the findings of Bond-Barnard, Fletcher, and Steyn (2018) and Fletcher, Alfes, and Robinson (2016) who found that leaders who communicate with their employees and provide ongoing guidance and support have employees who are more engaged at work. P1 and P6 shared that their employees appreciated the opportunity to be heard. P1 and P6 shared that their employees said it was important for them to know that their leaders are listening to what their followers have to say. These findings are similar to Merrick's (2018) finding that listening is a key component of effective communication. The partnership between leaders and employees, no matter the leadership styles, can be successful if the employees' voice is taken into consideration. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 shared that they

recognized the value of the employee feedback, which is a reminder of the critical role that effective communication plays within teams.

**Techniques for transparent communication.** Recognizing the adverse effects of lack of communication, P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 used techniques to communicate with employees, including frequent meetings at the workplace as well as internal and external social media. The use of meetings and internal and external social media enabled leaders not only to communicate with their employees in a transparent manner but also to tailor the communication processes to align with the work environment and project needs (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, & P6). A lack of communication, when that was the case, exacerbated the difficulties of candid conversations. The observations of the interviewed participants about the effect of lack of communication are in alignment with the position of Jha and Kumar (2016), who noted that the lack of open, bilateral communication between the employees and the leader impedes employee engagement. P5 shared an example of an employee who has no reason to trust the leader; if that leader does not affect or influence any communication between them, then the leader and the employee are minimally engaged.

When asked what strategies worked well in engaging employees, P4 and P3 identified personal meetings as an effective way of being transparent. P4 stated “The first thing I do and have done is real-time coaching, which allows me to interact with my sellers on a regular and daily basis.” During the regular interactions with employees, P3 supported the belief that effective communication occurs when there is an open, honest, and transparent dialogue with people. Mansoor and Hassan (2016) found that effective

communication plays a key role in day-to-day management, teamwork, and leadership in enabling employees to reach their goals. P3 stated “It was useful when I could address issues at once and the feedback helped the employees.” Participants noted that the feedback was valuable from employees. Participants expressed that talking instead of letting things fester clears up any one way of thinking. It is essential to know where employees are, what they are thinking, and whether they are enjoying their job.

P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 noted that listening is an essential leadership skill, which enables the leader to be able to communicate with and respond to employees effectively. P4 shared that listening is an effective communication technique because employees have the opportunity to ask a question and receive a response no matter how awkward the silence. P4 stated “We will not get anything accomplished if we are not listening to the needs of employees who know how well to execute practice and recommend adjustments.” The overall sentiment was that employees can determine whether the leader is addressing their concerns or promoting their leadership agendas. Demonstrating a commitment for addressing employees’ concerns was an indication of employees being heard, which increased employees’ confidence in leaders’ interest in issues important to employees (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, & P6). These findings are similar to the findings of Reed, Goolsby, and Johnston (2016) who noted that leaders who listened to employees actively and gave feedback strengthened employees’ confidence.

P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 shared that they make efforts to avoid miscommunication. The possibility of miscommunication can occur when someone is angry and upset; when such emotions cease, communication can be improved. The



leaders underscored the importance of the use of professional language and avoiding dialect as a technique to avoid miscommunication and ensure transparent communication. One way to avoid miscommunication is implementing communication education. P4 noted that as part of communication education in the workplace, the focus was on listening exercises, and more specifically on making sure that each employee knows that they are valuable and can contribute to team success. Gamero-Burón and Lassibille (2018) noted that training and education from leaders, the company, and external resources can have a favorable impact at work and that it can lead to instilling into each employee a coaching opportunity to learn from each other.

P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 shared their thoughts about communication, coaching, and areas for improvement in communication. Inability to ensure transparency leads to ambiguity. In one case, P1 asked an employee to try to use the mirror techniques to be transparent and explain the reason for the thought processes honestly and openly. P1 explained that “It is necessary to pull everybody together and deal with the issue right then and there rather than letting the issue fester.” Employees can build trust and respect the leaders who are patient while communicating instead of jumping to conclusions.

**Correlation to the conceptual framework.** The findings in theme 1 relate to Homans’ (1958) social exchange theory (SET). The SET provides a theoretical foundation to explain why employees choose to become more or less engaged in their work. The basic premise of the SET is that human relations are formed based on subjective cost–benefit analysis, so that people tend to repeat actions rewarded in the past, and the more often a particular behavior has been rewarded, the more likely its

recurrence (Homans, 1958). According to the SET theory, social relationships are based on the trust that gestures of goodwill will be reciprocated (Blau, 1964). In addition, Kahn (1990) suggested that people are emotionally and cognitively engaged when they know what is expected of them and have what they need to do their work.

In this study, P1, P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 stated that communicating openly and clearly about the expectations in the workplace was important because there is less confusion and anxiety when employees understand others and oneself. In the words of six participants, leaders have power when engaging with participants through communication. Communicating with employees often also demonstrated the leaders' commitment to being transparent, which led to increased satisfaction and engagement. These findings are similar to the findings of Dimitrov (2015), who stated that the implementation of strategies that fosters a safe space for transparent communication reduces misperceptions with employees and builds confidence amongst the teams (Dimitrov, 2015). Some of the methods that P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 used to communicate with employees, including frequent meetings at the workplace as well as various internal and external social media mediums, were very effective. Stoyanova and Lliev (2017) noted that the effective use of communication in organizations is important because it promotes a high interest in transparency, and the free exchange of ideas can propel things forward. Recognizing the negative effects of lack of communication with employees, ensuring effective communication and transparency became a priority for P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6. Anand (2017) noted that limited employee feedback and transparency, resulting from lack of communication can be disruptive to organizational

processes. In a competitive environment such as in the technology industry, the dominant concern is meeting and exceeding customer expectations, which can be achieved through effective employee engagement. Iyer (2012) identified internal communication as a key driver of employee engagement. The P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6's decision to make effective communication a strategy to engage employees resulted in increased employee engagement and performance.

### **Theme 2: Offerings for Training and Rewards**

The second theme that emerged in the findings of this study offered for training and rewards. Lardner (2015) noted offering career growth opportunities and valued rewards encourage employees to become more engaged in the workplace. The participants expressed that leaders' and employers' engagement in ongoing discussions was essential to promote an employee-centric environment that encouraged training and rewards. The study finding showed that the company leaders' performance and exceptional training opportunities built skills. The participants found that when there is a need to fill in for someone that is not there, a trained employee can easily fill the role.

An essential training strategy for the leader is to assist employees and to focus on one-on-one reviews. The support of training and development in improvements in employees' performance is an acceptable premise by Chaudhry, Jariko, Mushtaque, Mahesar, and Ghani (2017). P1 explained that everyone must have a career development plan that is knowing what their next job is, what they want to do, and what they aspire to do. Employees must be equipped to do what needs to be done as guided by the mission statement in the company's Human Resources Handbook. Engaged employees were

receptive, according to P2, when the employees felt there were opportunities to be creative and assist with moving a project forward. The development of the new employee experience index was transformational feedback from the Pulse internal surveys. Engaged employees were more accepting of the practices and engaged in the transformation process after a global pulse survey. The survey results were consistent with more enthusiasm than those who were engaged and less engaged employees as a function of training and coaching.

**Employer-sponsored training and education programs.** Employer-sponsored training and education programs was a recognition after reexamining the workplace experience the role in supporting employees' quest to gain knowledge and strategies in professional development. Reynolds (2013) pointed out that training and education programs with potential career opportunities effectively engage employees. Participants shared that having the strategies in course work, career, and educational roadmaps to be experts in critical areas effectively engaged employees in the workplace to align with the company strategy. The learning journey had skills that can be acquired for a specific role according to the skills gateway portal. P1 used the opportunity to prepare a career development plan for each of the leader's followers. The employees could attend events, get a skill badge, or earn a certificate.

As the technology leaders shared their work knowledge, a developmental plan aims to get to know the employees' next job goal, what they want to do, and what they aspire to do from a career standpoint. Participants have certifications in one or more of the following specializations: Project Management Institute (PMI) certification, Six

Sigma, Agile, Scrum Master, and digital credentials to drive career growth in one or more of the following specializations, Artificial Intelligence Engineer, Cloud Architect, Developers, and Data Scientist. DuBrin (2015) stated that it is vital for leaders to retain employees to keep them job engaged, which is necessary for high mental demands job development. The findings from DuBrin's (2015) study are similar to the statements of P1 - P6. DuBrin found that a supportive culture encourages employee engagement. This study's findings noted that leaders who emphasized training and rewards build confidence, team cohesion, and self-development.

The interviewed technology leaders noted that they use several tools for career development. The company's benefit documents include tuition reimbursement and assisting employees with technology-related degree programs. P5 found a substantial benefit of training when "The teams have very candid conversations with folks to make sure that we all understand the kinds of things that can happen." P1 insisted that every employee should be doing 40 hours of training per year to main competencies. The participants noted that allowing employees to have a career discussion with their leaders was essential. P2 insisted that it is about really helping people get to where they want to go, so when there are people who are not a good fit for what the company does, the leaders offer a learning path is a little different than the direct path. It is essential to know employees can negotiate with their leader to an agreed-upon schedule; the schedule can be two hours on two days during the week to focus on certifications, skill badges for those professional certification programs, and educational specific degrees for undergraduate and graduate degrees to be proficient in their job.

Leaders can supply the tools that employees will need to survive. Employee training enhances employees' understanding of the tasks or projects that they must complete. P1 noted the importance of continued education in the workplace. Because the company's education budget is limited, employees' education requests must align with the business strategies needed at the organization (P1-P6). Education in the workplace can help employees have a better understanding of the tasks or projects. A simple task and accessing benefits information or requesting time off can be daunting if no one takes the time to train you properly from the get go. The improvement in education helps with their education and minimize discouragement and frustration from not understanding and contributing to the success of the team (Ajzen, 1991). The ability to contribute to the team and feeling motivated for doing so is consistent with providing a meaningful level of engagement in the workplace. The training opportunities to impact the world, minimizes discouragement and frustration from a lack of understanding and inability to contribute to the success of the team, and the way that employees can engage charitably, the opportunity to shape the interactions with other employees is a worthwhile endeavor in a complex work community process.

All participants noted that the company offers some specific training programs, but employees were encouraged to create their learning path to get them to where they want to go. The learning path can be a little different than the direct path of the company as long as the learning meets the objectives and self-directed. The learning journey has product documentation, orders, contracts, support guide, support websites with the ability to earn points by being an active participant. The support options are available externally

and internally with notification updates. P1 noted that individual goals must align with department goals, ensuring an understanding of where the business is going. The company does offer some tuition reimbursement for portion aligned with business goals but will not support other educational interests.

To understand the leaders' perceptions, I reviewed the participants' feedback.

Table 2 represents the coded data and their frequency.

Table 2

*Frequency Related to Theme 2: Offerings for Career, Skills, Training, and Rewards*

Theme 2 resources	Frequencies of key theme	# of References /theme
Career	9	6
Skills	4	3
Training and rewards	6	6

*Note.* Total references theme 2= 15

**Rewards.** Leaders are responsible for defining guidelines for employee rewards (P1, P2, P4, P5, and P6). According to Anthony et al. (2017), the goal of offering performance rewards is to offer incentives to employees to perform well and increase employee. The participants shared that they, as well as the employees, like the rewards program. Rewards assisted the leaders as employees like recognition because the acknowledgment shows the company care, and the company must make sure they keep the right people, recognize diversity and change, meets and exceed what to be expected. The company provides rewards such as company bonuses, quarterly or annually, for good performance. According to Anthony et al. (2017), the goal of offering performance

rewards is to offer incentives to employees to perform well as well as increase employee satisfaction and engagement. Leaders are expecting to accomplish job satisfaction and productivity for playing a significant role in rewarding performances.

All participants underscored the importance of fair and unbiased evaluation of employee performance and the distribution of rewards. P1 noted, “A key aspect is the inducements for meeting Checkpoint goals are the performance and business performance end of year money available for the top contributor to the business.”

Employees are evaluated on timely delivery of performances, whether they are doing what is expected of them according to the job title, willingness to mentor employees, and help them with certificates, patents, and community volunteer initiatives to increase the company’s giving back to the community efforts. There are other sources of funding to include profit share, and a salary raise explained P1. Leaders are committed to rewarding top performers with funding incentives.

While not all employees are performing well, interviewed leaders shared a commitment to improving employee performance, which leaders try to achieve by supplying feedback. Mosley (2013) noted that feedback evaluation is an opportunity to take action. P3 and P4 shared documents on putting together exercises, examples of role-playing to reinforce a path towards executing the mission of the organization. Leaders are willing to work with employees to prioritize and come together for an hour, share notes, engage with subordinates to have fun with each other instead of each person in hiding in their cubical and office. The participants’ outlook is continuously thinking of ways to keep engaging employees, focusing on the positive, work together as a team. The logical



connection of role-playing is a challenge for the employee, to include listening, which encompasses a good leader, and the rewards are developing not a robot but an individual that cares about people and the organization.

P1 noted the importance of all virtual teams' participation in training. The environments are different; however, unlike face-to-face collaboration, the employees adapt to this paradigm (Bass, & Riggio, 2006). Participants noted that training remotely would require mandatory training to assist in employees receiving the proper coaching or compliance training. In those cases where face-to-face communication is unavailable such as the COVID pandemic, teams and employees have to self-train instead of formal training. P2 pointed out that, despite small gathering other than together in one location, an educational experience is to create a learning path no matter where employees sit.

The participants noted that accepting feedback was a challenge because performance evaluations are not readily accepted, making it difficult for each employee to be coached and work on areas for improvement. Encouraging team members to accept feedback was a challenge though (P1-P6), and leaders employed various strategies to motivate the teams. Constructive criticism can be awkward, as well as challenging. Nevertheless, participants noted that constructive criticism is beneficial in improving employee performance, resulting in rewards for employees.

All participants shared the view that leaders should build trust with a road map to the mission of the organization and avoid language that is discriminatory or describes a personality when evaluating employee performance. Leaders within the organization and in the company try to maintain competitive advantages with underscoring the values,

vision, long term success with the enthusiasm of a reward program to produce new levels of creativity and innovation (Witasari & Gustomo, 2020). Leaders should get to the point, explain the purpose of the conversation, share what they know about the situation, and describe the consequences if there are no improvements (P1-P6). P1 explained that it is essential to gather everybody and deal with the issue right away. It is the positive outcome that comes with hard work, and the dedication to do the job well with the hope of acknowledgment can be impactful to performance and satisfaction.

**Correlation to the conceptual framework.** Theme 2 reflects Ferreira and Almeida's (2015) study findings that companies with reward programs benefit both employees and leaders. The theoretical underpinning of SET types was the theoretical foundation to explain, for instance, an exchange in monetary awards from the company for work performed by the employee employees may decide to work or not to work at their best at work. Slack, Corlett, and Morris (2015) noted that productive relationships between the company and the employees existed when employees felt some obligation and appreciation of the commitment from the employer. The implementation of a reward program acknowledges that employees like professional recognition and can help reduce the cost associated with employees (Mandhanya & Agrawal, 2017). Employees who go above and beyond the call of duty received several rewards, monetary and nonmonetary.

Employee attributes are factors as training, employee handbooks, incentive badges, and leadership meetings to relationships with other employees that engage employees. Zhang, et al. (2014) used the significance of training to remove malicious behavior to have a bearing on employee satisfaction and organizational effectiveness.

Supportive leaders can identify and address employee weakness through training to help reach their full potential. Conversely, low-quality training, such as only peer-to-peer training, lack of sharing of knowledge, and not celebrating employee achievement and milestones, can result in a lack of trust and not caring about the company mission and goals.

The analyzed data also revealed that the leaders have the power to influence employees through training and rewards positively. The findings in this theme are similar to the study findings in the research of Jiménez, Winkler, and Bregenzer (2017), who found that using self-assessment to perceive stress, burnout, and the association of sickness and recovery was an effective strategy. The leaders interviewed had experience and adapted engagement principles from training, leadership conferences, and business forums. The experiences and behaviors of the leaders helped to create an environment that has emotional closeness now with experiences knowing how to engage employees and using tools to make assessments to have course correction intervention.

### **Theme 3: Employee Disengagement Assessment**

The third theme that emerged was to identify and implement assessment tools. Carlson, Barnes, and McCreanor (2017) found that evaluations need to have goals for improvement. The participants expressed a strategy to engage employees by making sure business goals, document expectations and identify when those expectations were unmet, and tools such as Checkpoint for goal setting and tracking effective, engaging employees in the workplace. Carlson et al. (2017) found that evaluation involving active

participation from the employees enhanced sustainability. Assessment tools criteria were similar for P1 - P6.

The findings of this study included leaders who emphasized using the tools to assess, identify, with indicators to guide complex inputs about engagement. Six interviewed leaders used the same five dimensions in their Checkpoint goals; these dimensions were: impact business results, customer satisfaction, innovation, the responsibility to others, and skills to engage the teams to measure the end of year performance. An existing strategy was the facilitation of team meetings, quarterly reviews, discussions on how to measure progress in terms of the Checkpoint, strategies required, and how leaders are doing against the strategic priorities of the company. The leaders were able to determine who were targeting their goals and those who were not using goal setting as a criterion. Goal setting is an essential component of how to align with the business.

**Assessment.** Assessment and the ability to determine those employees who are disengaged are to access an inner state and emotions. Employees who lack the commitment to a company's goals and demonstrate behaviors that are passive to pay attention to the policies and lack concerns are the opposite of engaged employees (Pater & Lewis, 2012). P6 noted that an assessment tool is used with each employee that enables the leaders to have an adequate level of communication and allows leaders to either reward or course correct in those conversations. Communications around those are all critical dependencies for successful employee engagement. Leaders use the Checkpoint assessment to see if employees are adapting to goals and measuring up to the

expectations or missing the goals because they are uncommitted. Engaged employees were more accepting of the practices and engaged in empowering employee with assessment tools with frequent updates and communicate equally.

**Methods used to identify disengaged employees.** Identifying disengaged employees played an essential role in starting the process to help employees experience fulfillment. People are the most valuable asset in a company, so the ability to identify whether the basic needs of the employee has not been met is essential. During this unprecedented time, leaders need to step up and lead from the heart to avoid frustration, low morale, a mental health condition, disengagement, loss of productivity, and loneliness. Leaders have to understand what it means to build hope, competence, confidence, and trust between leaders and employees.

Leaders who have the strategies and methods to identify disengaged employees effectively detected a change in behavior, especially in high performers. Disengaged workers' attitude can harm an organization and its customers (Judge & Watanabe, 1993). There are some signs participants could equate as identifying behaviors for disengaged workers in general. The participants noted that employees with no drive focus less on the quality of their work. Leaders can observe several identifying behaviors. The lack of caring by some employees can result in fewer questions to address how to resolve roadblock on a project or deliverable. As a result, the quality and volume of work are reduced, and the employees cannot focus, and it takes longer to complete their work. P5 found a "Substantial benefit of training when the team has very candid conversations

with folks to make sure that we all understand the kinds of things that can happen. There is no energy to go beyond what is expected of them.”

Participants noted that training done remotely would require compulsory expectations to assist in employees receiving the proper coaching or compliance training when one-on-one meeting at the office is not possible. In those cases where face-to-face communication is inconvenient, such as during the COVID 19 pandemic, teams and employees of the employees have to self-train and attempt to replicate the processes established by already completed formal training before the coronavirus. P2 pointed out that the goal of a training or educational experience, whether gathering remotely or together in a one location, is to create a learning path no matter where employees sit.

To understand the leaders’ perceptions, I reviewed the participants’ feedback.

Table 3 represents the coded data and their frequency.

Table 3

*Frequency Related to Theme 3: Employee Disengagement Assessment*

Theme 3 resources	Frequencies of a key theme	# of References /theme
Retention tools	6	4
Trust	12	7
Disengaged	29	10
Valued engagement	82	24

*Note.* Total references theme 3=45

One of the immediate concerns is an employee who does not seem to care anymore and lacks interest in being at work. The lack of employee interest to engage can

have an adverse effect on the organization (Leon, Bellairs, & Halbesleben, 2015). The participants noted that the behaviors could differ and change over time. The ability for leaders to help with tools to have ongoing discussions about the business goals and career goals for each member of the team is a strategy to incorporate with the company provided tools. The company's strategic plan appeared in the external company reports to ensure excellent and effective implementation of a communication strategy.

A well-designed internal communication tool involves promoting the commitment to the mission of the organization, that everyone matters and everyone is aware of the changes, and to grasp their roles in that vision. MacLeod and Clarke (2009) cautioned against enabling staff to make some sense of their roles in the leadership vision. The Checkpoint tool is one of the tools to use when having quarterly and annual discussions about meet the organizational objectives as well as performance measurement tools. The tool effectively builds a culture of talented, skilled, and diverse individuals with experiences to support business needs.

**Engaging disengaged employees.** The strategic plans to identify and assess engaged employees could include Employee Appreciation Day that is multidimensional fill with surprises each time the event is held, so it is exciting. P2 noted that an employee becomes disengaged when that employee does not open up an email or pick up the phone, call, or I never get them on the first, second, third, or fourth ring. I wait an hour, two hours for a response; to me, that is an employee who is not engaged. You know they have not predefined what they are doing in a particular time ban. P2 continued to note that the company does not have defined strategies. The interviewed leaders used automatic check-

in with employees to keep employees updated during meetings and scheduled one-on-one meetings to keep an open line of communication and build rapport.

The interviewed leaders can supervise employees once leaders identify and assess disengaged employees. The leaders incorporated principles that identified employees who were disinterested, employees who felt disconnected, afraid to share their problems, gave excuses, and underperformed. Leaders can order employees to do things on the job, or things can be done together to be productive, enjoyable, optimistic with using employees' time and their abilities. The increased number of projects affect results while reducing employee downtime rewards accomplishments, on-time performances, and builds on stellar industry results. The transformation that can occur when employees are keen to unleash the best performances for the well-being of the employees and the profitability of the company succeeds.

All participants stated that they want to do something about the issue. In this post-COVID world, leaders should use collaborative tools to do virtual work. They implemented the suggested acronym S.P.R.I.N.T.S. to engage disengaged employees. Capital S stands for speak to each employee's individual needs. There are opportunities to innovate and learn from each other. Capital P stands for the promise to stay engaged with a purposeful intent to find out what employees need going forward. Leaders can learn from each other, and the process starts with giving employees the benefit of the doubt. Capital R stands for that leaders can rely on the wisdom of employees' input, which is essential for inclusion. There is no one size fits all playbook. Leaders have to revisit the purpose and concept of the office as we move into a new era. There is no



longer just equipment in a factory where employees congregate; we have laptops and video conference capabilities to work from home. It is not as easy to collaborate in a virtual space to get to know people and innovate. The company and its leaders have to (I) invest in education and help with career growth to identify the next opportunity. The charge is to (N) never let the job title prevent the leader from implementing agile sensible actions.

There is strength in the diversity of ideas. The team or individual can work on an idea; just do it. When execution is noticeable and successful (T), take time to celebrate each other. Leaders are in a new digital experience where leaders must be up to date on employees' strategies. Leaders must integrate and use those employees' expertise to work on proposals or product launches. In the end, (S) the leader shows an interest in personal understanding challenges and the future sprints of employees. The effectiveness of the activities for leaders who fail to use positive feedback can utilize sprints to help avoid employees from leaving their jobs because the employees do not feel appreciated.

**Correlation to the conceptual framework.** Theme 3 reflects Liden, Sparrowe and Wayne's (2017) acknowledgment for a formal sharing of information for development at work. This relationship is consistent with the exchanges in SET theory with support from leaders who look for individual employee attitudes and behaviors with an emotional attachment and identification with the company goals to form strong leader-employee relationships. Liden et, al. developed the Leader-member exchange theory more than 20 years ago, and researchers consider this theory effective for evaluating job

feedback, usefulness, and exchanges from a leader (Herold, Liden, & Leatherwood, 1987). Some employees go above and beyond the call of duty and the job description.

The analyzed data also revealed that the leaders have an environment focused on removing disengagement behaviors in the work environment. The leaders interviewed had experience as non-management employees, so they have firsthand awareness of what helps to make the work environment satisfying and to reduce bickering, lack of empowerment, a lack of emotional relationship. The experiences and behaviors of the leaders helped to create an environment that has emotional closeness now with experiences knowing how to engage employees and using tools to make assessments to have course correction intervention. The theme also connects to research by Jiménez et al. (2017), who found that using self-assessment to gauge individuals' stress levels, symptoms of burnout, and other sickness is useful to identify factors contributing to low engagement. Leaders can create a survey assessment to gauge low engagement.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The results of this study included the following leadership strategies: transparent communication played a crucial role in engaging employees, continued training, and education provided in the workplace was an effective strategy in engaging employees and the importance of assessing for and identifying disengaged employees so that they can engage them. Technology leaders regularly work on engagement strategies to help their company succeed and reduce problems that can cost millions of dollars each month (Wray, 2016). The information shared by the interviewee to establish the findings of this

study were relevant to improving the development of training courses as well as measuring the progress and identifying the training tools for employees to do their job.

Leaders who struggle to engage employees can be detrimental to the company. For leaders who lack strategies to sustain employee commitment, it is essential to implement successful employee engagement strategies to increase productivity levels (Ahammad, Tarba, Liu, & Glaister, 2016; Gonzalez, 2016; Ugoani, 2016). Understanding the need for additional strategies may increase operations and improve the role of the leader to facilitate growth.

The study findings are useful to business practice improvement and successful strategies to engage employees that the technology company leaders have used. Other professionals will have access to the study findings and could benefit from using the same strategies. Technology leaders understand that engaging employees can create an environment of accountability and develop performance plans to meet the company's aims and each employee's professional career goals.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Kinkle (2015) noted that positive social change was a deliberate process of creating and applying strategies to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, and institutions. The findings of this qualitative case study on leadership strategies to engage employees may contribute to increasing positive social change by improving the well-being of employees, in which leaders have a transformative impact on the health of the people in the workforce. Increasing employee engagement can lead to a happier work environment and a positive interaction between

colleagues and customers (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2016; Jevé, Oppenheimer, & Konje, 2015).

Gupta and Sharma (2016) noted that employees who experience active engagement in the workplace reciprocate by displaying discretionary effort resulting in improved performance, profitability, and growth. Technology leaders strive to engage employees so that they are productive and motivated, show enthusiasm to exceed the job requirement, and display devotion to the company (Leary et al., 2013). Engaged employees have positive experiences, and the benefits of such experiences might carry-over to their personal lives as well (Young, Glerum, Wang, & Joseph, 2018).

The joy of volunteering and working with the community gives employees a chance to spend time outside of work with others. An engaged workforce is also more prone to volunteering, which can have a significant impact on the community (Susan, Gautier, Pache, & Güntert, 2019). In addition, employees can launch several service initiatives, such as collaborating with neighboring communities to establish a mini-hub where a local university can access the company equipment.

The company's lab is near a university and could create apps and artificial intelligence software that can benefit industries and communities. This symbiotic relationship can yield rewards for students, programmers, and the company with new patents. Volunteer organizations also benefit from engaged employees (Krasnopolskaya, Roza, & Meijs, 2015). Technology employees have high-level expertise, which is necessary for nonprofit work in the community (Jha & Kumar, 2016). Engaged technology employees who volunteer in the community could provide valuable technical

insights to support the economic stability of nonprofit organizations with programs that have access to fiber, computers, cloud storage, and information towards the future of artificial intelligence (AI).

The stakeholders who will be affected by the findings of this study extend beyond just those in technology companies and include academic, community organizations, healthcare, government institutions, and software companies. The strategies identified in this study might provide additional guidance to technology leaders as they make efforts to engage their employees. The study may allow technology leaders to promote a learning environment to recognize disengaged employees and develop and implement strategies that motivate employees to be more engaged in the workplace. Technology leaders who recognize the negative consequences resulting from disengaged employees can promote positive social change by creating a work environment conducive to employee engagement, enabling employees to improve their well-being and living conditions while maintaining a balance between work and personal lives. The feeling of experiencing meaningfulness at work and having a sense of belonging and purpose are antecedents to increased employee motivation (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). The company can address some of the needs of the community while focusing on motivating their employees.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The primary problem under study was that some leaders of technology companies lacked strategies to engage employees. One increasing concern of leaders was the ability to identify which employee engagement strategies were effective and critical (Schlechter, Hung, & Bussin, 2014). The results of this research study can be useful for promoting

organizational growth by helping leaders execute strategies for engaging employees to help them grow and go beyond their job profile by displaying expertise in the community. The findings can be used to implement effective employee engagement strategies and maximize productivity.

I recommend using business leadership strategies to increase the understanding of employee engagement by communicating with clarity and transparency, being consistent with ongoing career development professional goals, being intentional providing ad-hoc training with disengaged employees, being willing to adapt seed goals to align with the company's mission statement, continuing and offering for training and rewards, and using employee engagement identify and assessment tools. Excellent communication is a part of Human Resources and Marketing. Participants noted that career development is part of the Human Resource leadership. Internal dimensions are opportunities for updating goal attainment. Using goals setting with employees will develop trust, so at the end of each year the leader has an end-of-year meeting to discuss if the goals are reached.

Leaders want to consider ways to effectively help their employees and find solutions to employee disengagement that is costly and reduces an organization's ability to meet its full potential to produce business results. By being positive, leaders can allow themselves to be empathetic, learn from the new experiences, and provide the resources to be successful to the team (Doz & Kosonen, 2009). Leaders must create a culture of sharing with employees to develop a system of continuous strategies development (Wu & Lee, 2017). Making training available to get professional certifications and the empowerment that results from sharing the knowledge between teams is positive for

company leadership. I can share the strategies found in this study with the technology industry in metropolitan Atlanta at the Leadership 2020, Ripple Effect, REFACTR, Tech, Atlanta Technology Angels conferences, training, and business forums.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

My first recommendation for further study is for future scholars to conduct the same study but in other organizations, industries, and locations outside of the Atlanta metropolitan area. The results from my single case study were restricted to explore one organization; whereas, a multiple case study may allow additional or different findings. The geographic location was the metropolitan Atlanta area. The inclusion of other regions of the country and other companies in the same technology industry could be an added focus. Another recommendation would be to do a case study using different data collection techniques to determine if the results would be the same or similar to those findings in this study. I also recommend that further research studies employ a quantitative or mixed-method approach so that the researchers can gather data from larger groups of participants. With more participants, a researcher could determine if there is a correlation between certain leadership behavior, employee engagement, and productivity or profitability. Examining the relationship of employees from different generations or age groups to determine if age or ethnicity plays a role in employee engagement would shed light on relationships or differences between the engagement of employees from different age groups and ethnicities. In addition, while the focus in this study was on the strategies that leaders used to engage employees, researching the leadership style of

leaders using the same strategies might provide insight on other leadership aspects as they relate to employee engagement in technology companies.

### **Reflections**

The process of completing my doctoral degree has been one of perseverance and believing in myself. The Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) educational process was different from what I anticipated. I entered the program wanting to develop my knowledge, strategies, and academic growth. The challenges that I faced during the DBA journey were a process of embracing my fears. I am thankful to God for choosing to not give up on me. Upon reflection on my experiences during the DBA journey, I have noticed an increase in my patience and changes in my self-discipline. Over the process of completing the study, I had to learn time management strategies to gain some work-life balance. I had to overcome family issues that I encountered along the way, but I wanted to become a doctor in the true sense despite facing significant challenges that were life lessons resulting from the hard work. I had to put into my academic pursuits. I also wanted my accomplishment to motivate and challenge my children to achieve their academic goals, which that can be a blessing to themselves and others. I hope that sacrifice that I had to make is a good example for my children, who had to be more independent when their dad was locked away studying in his room.

I attribute my academic growth to my enrolment in the DBA program at Walden University. While in the program, I developed strategies that I will use for the rest of my professional life. An analysis of each skill I developed in this program was beyond the scope of this discussion; however, a few comments were worth nothing. With the help of



the many caring professors in the program, I was able to understand why anthropomorphism is an issue in academic writing. I eventually recognized the importance of paragraph structure and organization in my academic writing. In the process of working on my doctoral study, I realized that the alignment of key components was paramount and that my writing needed significant improvement. The journey continues as I apply the strategies I developed while working on my doctoral study in my personal and professional life.

The changes in my personal and professional life have been unusual; I was thrust to another level. Although things seem uncertain, a shift in my approach eventually became a place of peace. I am thankful to God for the emotional fortitude, the grit to move forward, and the strength to avoid listening to the naysayers. I strongly believe that the challenging journey helped me to grow. I slept well at night when I could, which was not often, and made continued efforts to complete my study while trying to maintain a decent work-life balance. I felt overwhelmed by the size and scope of writing a doctoral study. There were setbacks and delays along the way, but they only empowered me to work harder to achieve a life dream.

I am blessed with financing my own education. This helped me become more aware of my biases and better understand the concepts of credibility, validity, and reliability as it pertains to research. I am now more aware of my own personal biases that discovered during the research study. I have a profound understanding of effective leadership strategies to engage employees in the workplace. The consistency and protocols used to mitigate bias from the data collected from the participants were

reassuring, but I was surprised at the overlaps. Some of the strategies were enlightening and were beneficial to my professional life, especially when I will be consulting with companies in the future.

I plan to use the knowledge that I gained to educate technology leaders on effective employee engagement strategies. After conducting my research, I want to find ways to assist leaders in the post-COVID-19 era to deal with the challenges as well as increase their economic and financial sustainability. To overcome these challenges, leaders must treat each encounter with a determination to succeed.

I had to trust the process each step of the way. I had to be comfortable with participants who were eager to share their successful strategies on employee engagement. I discovered that the participants felt they were making a meaningful contribution to the study with the hopes that their experience would help other leaders to do their best while engaging employees. The participants appeared comfortable sharing information and appreciated the opportunity to answer some challenging questions, which is something I am genuinely grateful.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore the strategies that leaders of technology companies use to engage employees. The following themes emerged related to leadership strategies used in a technology company in the metropolitan Atlanta area, Georgia: (a) communicate with transparency, (b) offerings for training and rewards, and (c) identify and implement assessment tools.

The theory that served as the conceptual framework of this study was the social exchange theory. An analysis of the responses, I was piloted the theorist of the social exchange theory. I reviewed the findings and made recommendations to technology leaders, academicians, human resource experts, sociologists to build upon this study to help other industry leaders explore leadership employee engagement strategies on how to engage employees. The goals of achieving innovative strategies into successful business growth and employee engagement are pivotal in integrating some of the challenges of leaders lacking successful strategies.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

<b>Interview Protocol</b>	
<b>What you will do</b>	<b>What you will say—script</b>
<p>Introduce the interview and set the stage</p>	<p>Script: Good Day. My name is Desmond Browne, and I will be conducting this interview for my study. My study relates to technology business leaders' strategies to increase employee engagement.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch for non-verbal queues</li> <li>• Paraphrase as needed</li> <li>• Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What strategies are you using to be successful in engaging employees?</li> <li>2. What successful engagement strategies do you know are common in technology businesses?</li> <li>3. What successful strategies are you using to increase employee engagement?</li> <li>4. What leadership strategies are you using to establish a top-down culture of engagement?</li> <li>5. What training strategies are you using to engage employees?</li> <li>6. How is effective communication helping to lead engaged employees?</li> <li>7. How do you define disengaged employees?</li> <li>8. How does an engaged, productive employee become disengaged?</li> <li>9. What strategies exist in your organization for prompt identification of disengaged employees?</li> <li>10. What additional comments would you like to share with me regarding your experience in engaging employees?</li> </ol>



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Wrap up interview thanking participant	Script: Thank you very much for participating in this research study. Your participation in this study helped me to explore the strategies that some leaders of technology companies use to engage employees. I will be returning in a few days to conduct a follow-up member checking interview to review the transcribed notes, make any changes you might want to offer, and obtain any other information.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	Script: The follow-up member checking interview will occur on this date and time. If you are unable to meet at the last minute, please contact me to reschedule.

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