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Trust-Building Strategies Laboratory Managers Use to Cultivate the Engagement of Laboratory Employees

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Jessica Treadway

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Trust-Building Strategies Laboratory Managers Use to Cultivate the Engagement of
Laboratory Employees

by

Jessica Treadway

MBA, South University, 2015

BS, Middle Tennessee State University, 2011

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

Walden University

December 2021

Abstract

Employee engagement significantly impacts organizational outcomes; however, it is also a significant issue for leaders since employees who are not engaged impact organizational performance and profitability. Through the perspective of the social exchange theory, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore trust-building strategies laboratory managers use to cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees. The population comprised five laboratory managers across various industries and geographical locations in the United States who successfully implemented trust-building strategies that cultivated employee engagement. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and public organizational documents such as annual reports, employee testimonials, and media/news articles. The two themes that emerged from the thematic analysis were effective communication and effective leadership behaviors. A major recommendation is for laboratory managers to seek frequent feedback from their employees to evaluate the effectiveness of their trust-building strategies, and where appropriate, modify their employee engagement strategies as needed. The implications for positive social change are that organizational leaders may experience increased financial success when their workforce is engaged. As a result, the prospect of creating new employment opportunities may arise, which may contribute to the economic welfare of those in surrounding communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate my work to my mother, father, and sister, who have overwhelmingly supported me throughout this journey and in life. Without your continued love and support, I would not be who I am.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Despite the large volumes of information made available to organizations on employee engagement, researchers revealed that the levels of engagement among employees are steadily declining (Saks, 2017). Basit (2017) identified that 60% of employees worldwide report feelings of disengagement, as well as feeling unsupported and detached. Employee engagement may have a direct impact on organizational success. The lack of employee engagement threatens the success of an organization. Engagement impacts various organizational outcomes, such as intent to leave, absenteeism, employee retention, innovation, and productivity (Jeske et al., 2017). Not only does the lack of engagement negatively impact the organization, but the wellbeing of the employee is at risk.

In this study, I explored trust-building strategies that laboratory managers successfully implement to cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees. The findings of this study may bring awareness to laboratory managers of the significant impact employee engagement has on individual and organizational health and performance. Laboratory managers may implement the identified trust-building strategies to build and sustain the engagement of their employees. To accomplish this goal, I selected a qualitative multiple case study.

Background of the Problem

Many factors influence the engagement levels of employees. Some of those antecedents of engagement include trust, career advancement opportunities, training and development, rewards and recognition, supervisor support, and colleague support (Bailey

et al., 2017; Iqbal et al., 2017). Researchers have shown that of all the factors identified in current literature, trust, particularly trust in leadership, is one of the main influences of employee engagement (Basit, 2017; Heyns & Rothmann, 2018; Kelliher et al., 2018). Laboratory managers must have awareness of what trust-building strategies are useful in establishing and maintaining engagement among their analytical chemists in order to obtain and sustain positive organizational outcomes. While researchers have noted the impact of trust in leadership on employee engagement, minimal research exists highlighting specific trust-building strategies that cultivate engagement (see Basit, 2017; Heyns & Rothmann, 2018; Kelliher et al., 2018). The study may address the gap in current research on employee engagement through identifying successful trust-building strategies that laboratory managers can implement within the laboratory setting to cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees.

Problem Statement

When employees lack meaningfulness in their work environment, it poses a significant threat to organizational success, especially when competing in the global business environment (Basit, 2017). Within the U.S. workforce alone, disengagement among employees results in organizations losing \$350 billion in revenue annually (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). The general business problem is a lack of trust in managers negatively affects employee engagement, and ultimately, impacts organizational performance, such as lower profitability. The specific business problem is that some laboratory managers lack strategies to build trusting relationships that cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies laboratory managers use to build trusting relationships that cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees. The target population consisted of five laboratory managers in laboratory settings across the United States who have successfully employed trust-building strategies to cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential to have a fulfilled, engaged workforce. Having an engaged workforce serves as a driver for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage, leading to organization success (Iqbal et al., 2017). In response to increased financial and market success, organizational leaders could create employment opportunities, which may contribute to the economic welfare of those in surrounding communities.

Nature of the Study

The three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Saunders et al., 2019). Researchers use qualitative methodology to study phenomena based on the participants' perspective (Mohajan, 2018). I chose a qualitative method because the data obtained is rich, descriptive, and the most appropriate for answering the research question. Researchers select a quantitative methodology to understand the relationship between two or more variables (Creswell & Clark, 2017). I did not select quantitative because this study did not involve understanding relationships between variables. Therefore, using this method would have produced needless information for answering the research question. Researchers employ mixed-methodology information when a solo

research method is insufficient (Creswell & Clark, 2017). A qualitative method, solely, may yield satisfactory information to provide answers to the research question.

Therefore, I did not select mixed methodology.

I considered three qualitative designs: narrative inquiry, ethnography, and case study. Narrative inquiry centers on expressing an individuals' experiences in the form of storytelling (Ford, 2020). I did not select narrative inquiry because understanding participants' experiences in the form of a narrative is irrelevant for answering the research question. Ethnography involves investigating a cultural groups' customs and culture (Mohajan, 2018). I did not select ethnography because understanding participants' culture or collective beliefs is unnecessary for this study. A case study involves an in-depth investigation of an individual(s) or social unit (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). I selected case study because the data collected from a case study may yield answers to the research question.

Research Question

What strategies do laboratory managers use to build trusting relationships that cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies are you currently using to build trusting relationships with the employees in your laboratory?
2. How do you determine if trust exists in the manager-subordinate relationship?
3. How do you measure trust in the manager-subordinate relationship?

4. Based upon your experiences, how effective are those trust-building strategies in positively influencing active engagement among the laboratory employees?
5. How did your employees respond to your different trust-building strategies?
6. What changes did you notice after implementing trust-building strategies to build active engagement among the laboratory employees?
7. How do you assess the effectiveness of your engagement strategies to achieve trusting relationships with your employees?
8. What other information would you like to provide regarding increasing the active engagement of laboratory employees through the cultivation of a foundation of trust within the manager-subordinate relationship?

Conceptual Framework

Homans (1958) developed the social exchange theory (SET) as a means of explaining workplace behavior. The central theme of SET is that the relationship between two parties centers on reciprocity. Homans posited that when one party rewards another party, the party issuing the reward expects an equal exchange (Homans, 1958). Trust is a crucial component in the exchange that takes place between the leader and employee, and without it, can result in attitudes and behaviors that are detrimental to organizational success (Ertürk & Albayrak, 2019). Ertürk and Albayrak (2019) argued that with the absence of trustworthiness, the social exchange that takes place between leaders and subordinates will not develop.

According to N. Yin (2018), SET centers on maintaining a balance of giving and receiving between employees and leaders. When leaders' actions result in trust between

themselves and their employees, the employees will be more likely to respond by positively engaging in their jobs (N. Yin, 2018). The SET should align with this study's focus through the exploration of trust strategies used by laboratory managers to cultivate the engagement of analytical chemists. In an organizational context, if employees perceive leadership's actions as positive and trustworthy, employees will reciprocate with behaviors and attitudes most valued by their organization (Ertürk & Albayrak, 2019). Following the perspective of the SET, if employees perceive leadership as trustworthy, employees should reciprocate through their engagement.

Operational Definitions

Employee Engagement: An employee's willingness to allocate their cognitive, emotional, and physical resources to their jobs in hopes of achieving the best results for their organization (Basit, 2017).

Employee Disengagement: Employees who display little to no commitment to their organization, which ultimately leads to undesirable actions such as absenteeism and intent to leave (Victor & Hoole, 2017).

Propensity-to-Trust: The expectation an individual has of the trustworthiness of others, as well as their willingness to extend trust to others (Alarcon et al., 2016). In this study, the employee's propensity to trust leadership is of particular interest.

Social Exchange: The relationship between the employee and the supervisor, with trust being the basis of the relationship. When an employee perceives their supervisor to be trustworthy, they will respond with behaviors that are beneficial to the organization in which they work (Ertürk & Albayrak, 2019).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

For every study, there are the underlying assumptions, limitations, and delimitations associated with it. According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018), it is a necessity that researchers include these three components in their study to improve the quality of their findings. In the following three subsections, I define assumptions, limitations, and delimitations and identify these underlying components associated with this study.

Assumptions

Often unavoidable, assumptions refer to an idea or position that the researcher considers to be true without question and widely accepted (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). There is one primary assumption identified for this study. The main assumption of this study was that the interviewees would provide honest and unbiased responses to the interview questions.

Limitations

Ross and Bibler-Zaidi (2019) regarded limitations as weaknesses of a research design that could impact the conclusion and outcomes of a study. It is the researcher's responsibility to communicate the limitations of their study openly and honestly (Ross & Bibler-Zaidi, 2019). The main limitation of this study was the target population. The target population was limited to the perspective laboratory managers and excluded the employees' perspective on the phenomenon under study. While the geographic location and industry varied, other types of management were not included. Due to the target

population limitations, the findings may not be generalizable to all management populations.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the bounds or scope of a study set by the researcher, making the objective and aim of the study achievable (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The focus of this study is on trust-building strategies that laboratory managers, within the laboratory setting, use to build engagement. The scope of this study was limited to a sample size of five laboratory managers from five different organizations across the United States. The emphasis is solely on the laboratory managers' perspective on successful trust-building strategies for building employee engagement.

Significance of the Study

Value to the Business

Employees are the backbone of organizations, and the success and profitability of organizations depends on employees' engagement and performance (Hammoud, 2017; Yadav & Morya, 2019). Engaged employees exhibit outcomes that are beneficial to organizational success such as higher job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and lower intent to leave (Saks, 2017). Because of its importance, organizational leaders must focus on building employee engagement. Trust in leadership is shown to be the greatest mediator of employee engagement (Basit, 2017). According to Victor and Hoole (2017), when employees exhibit a high degree of trust, the resulting outcome is an increase in engagement. Heyns and Rothmann (2018) argued that the trust

in the leadership variable has the most significant impact on the attitudes, behaviors, and performance of employees, within the confines of the workplace.

Contribution to Business Practice

Organizational leaders may discover that the findings of this study are useful in training current leaders, as well as hiring leaders with the ability to foster an environment of trust. By building trusting relationships with employees, organizational leaders can have an engaged workforce that is productive, motivated, and energized (Basit, 2017). It is important that leaders develop a deeper understanding of their role in driving engagement, as well as learning the skills necessary to sustain engagement. Having an engaged workforce can result in increased organizational performance outcomes, such as higher customer satisfaction and loyalty, sustained growth, increased profitability, and higher productivity (Basit, 2017; Jiang & Luo, 2018).

Implications for Social Change

Organizations with employees who exhibit high levels of engagement are more likely to increase profitability and achieve competitive advantage (Bailey et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017). Profitable organizational leaders have the opportunity to not only sustain their current employment but also to create new employment opportunities. Increased employment opportunities can catalyze economic well being, or financial security, of members of surrounding communities. When communities and individuals experience financial security, they can meet their basic life needs such as food, clothing, education, and pay taxes for benefiting needy citizens and families.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The objective of this qualitative single-case study was to identify trust-building strategies laboratory managers use to cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees. The content within this in-depth literature review centers on employee engagement, the importance of trust in leadership on engagement, and current trust-building strategies leaders use to build engagement amongst their employees. I am viewing my study through the perspective of the SET. I synthesized current literature on the social exchange theory and discussed its connection to my business problem. According to Fisch and Block (2018), a literature review is an essential component of a study and consists of in-depth analysis and synthesis of current and prior research on a topic.

The databases I used to search for peer-reviewed articles were ABI/INFORM Complete, Business Source Complete, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Emerald Insight, ProQuest, and Science Direct. Keywords searched included *employee engagement*, *employee engagement and trust*, *trust in leadership*, *trust in managers*, *employee engagement strategies*, *trust-building strategies*, *employee disengagement*, and *social exchange theory*. I chose these keywords to identify successful trust-building strategies some managers use to cultivate the engagement of employees. I used a total of 144 sources for this study. Of the 144 sources used, 134 (93.06%) were peer-reviewed sources, with 123 (85.42%) sources published within 5 years.

Conceptual Framework

Emerson (1976) attributed the concept of SET to the following four individuals: Homans, Kelley, Thibaut, and Blau. In 1958, Homans was one of the first individuals to

introduce the concept of SET. Homans (1958) argued that the exchange that takes place between individuals centers on the following concepts: (a) a person's behavior is reinforced when they receive a reward for that behavior, (b) the probability of a repeated behavior is likely if that behavior resulted in a reward the past, and (c) the value of a reward decreases as the number of times a person has received that reward increases.

Blau (1964) believed that the interactions that take place in exchanges are interdependent and contingent on others' actions. Conversely, Thibaut and Kelley (1959) argued that the exchange that takes place between individuals centers on a reward-cost system. Despite the minor variations between the exchange theories, they all center on the fact that individuals, within social settings, will emit behaviors that maximize the likelihood of reaping the most benefits. Researchers select SET as their conceptual framework to understand and predict the attitudes and behaviors of individuals who engage in social exchanges (Özel, & Kozak, 2017).

SET is commonly implemented as the theoretical foundation of studies that center on understanding various organizational relationships (Harden et al., 2018). For example, researchers use SET to investigate relationships between employees with their coworkers (team-member exchanges), employees with their employers (leader-member exchanges), and employees with the organization (perceived organizational support; Ancarani et al., 2018; Harden et al., 2018; Liaquat & Mehmood, 2017). The strength of these three relationships varies with the organization. For example, in a study conducted by Ancarani et al. (2018), the participants worked closely with each other. Therefore, the strength of the team-member relationship will be more significant compared to an organization with

employees that work independently. While studies on SET are more prevalent in the human resources management field of study, there is an overwhelming consensus that direct managers and leaders play a more critical role in governing the social exchange processes (Davies & Gould-Williams, 2005). The use of SET as a theoretical foundation in leadership research remains vital for understanding the vertical and horizontal relationships within organizations.

Perceived organizational support refers to the exchange that takes place between employees and an organization (Ancarani et al., 2018). Employees are an organization's most valuable asset and can determine whether the organization experiences successes or failures. In terms of SET, the basis of the exchange that takes place between employees and organizations is reciprocity. If employees perceive that the organization acts out of concern for their well-being and is actively involved with socially responsible activities, the employee will, in turn, exhibit positive organizational citizenship behaviors (Liaquat & Mehmood, 2017). Because the employee-organization relationship is critical to organizational success, researchers using the SET as the theoretical framework is necessary. Liaquat and Mehmood (2017), for example, employed the SET in their study to investigate various antecedents that will enhance the employee-organization relationship to increase organizational citizenship behavior.

Some researchers used SET to investigate employees' relationships with their peers (Shkoler et al., 2019). More specifically, they looked to understand the antecedents that will enhance the team-member relationship. Singh et al. (2020) applied SET to explain further why highly embedded employees are more likely to form higher quality

team-member relationships and the moderating effects of outcome-oriented workgroups. Team-member exchange refers to the exchange that takes place between employees and their coworkers (Ancarani et al., 2018). Under the umbrella of SET, team-member exchanges represent horizontal social exchanges. When a quality exchange occurs between an employee and an immediate coworker, the resulting impact may yield mutual trust, knowledge sharing, and willingness to help (Shkoler et al., 2019). Researchers may continue to find SET valuable in gaining a deeper understanding of horizontal social exchanges that occurs within the workplace.

Researchers use SET to understand leader-member exchanges. From the perspective of SET, leader-member exchange refers to the exchange that takes place between employees and immediate supervisors (Ancarani et al., 2018). Immediate supervisors and managers are considered crucial agents when referring to social exchange processes (Davies & Gould-Williams, 2005). Researchers commonly use SET to understand the exchange that takes place between immediate supervisors and employees. Shkoler et al. (2019) investigated the impact of employees' exchanges with their immediate supervisor on counterproductive work behaviors. While SET encompasses the multiple social exchange relationships within an organization, the leader-member exchange is seemingly the most impactful. Although exchanges between employees and their organization and coworkers reinforce positive employee behaviors, the influences of exchanges between employees and their immediate supervisors are much more potent (Agarwal, 2014). While multiple exchanges occur within organizations, the exchange that

takes place between leadership and employees remains the most critical of those exchanges.

Researchers who employ SET commonly pair the theory with other theoretical frameworks to investigate various phenomena. Khalid and Ali (2017) used SET and the transaction cost theory (TCT) to investigate the antecedents of trust concerning interfirm relationships. Ancarani et al. (2018) applied SET to explore the impact of leader-member exchange theory (LMX) and team-member exchange theory (TMX) on work engagement in the public healthcare sector. Cooper-Thomas and Morrison (2018) argued that the workforce is more complex and multifaceted than what SET implies. In order to address the implied shortcomings of SET, Cooper-Thomas and Morrison (2018) suggested expanding the theory to include other constructs such as LMX, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB). Claudia (2018) paired SET with the perceived organizational support theory (POS) to investigate whether POS significantly influenced the job satisfaction of professors at the University of Lambung Mangkurat. The pairing of SET with other theories seemingly supports the belief that SET lacks an adequate representation of the complex social exchanges that occur within the workplace (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018). Conversely, Porter (2018) argued that SET is flexible enough to stand alone and accommodate modern, complex social exchanges and should, therefore, remain unaltered. While researchers may pair SET with other theoretical frameworks to understand a phenomena, using SET independently may still prove to be beneficial as well.

In the following section, I will discuss transformational leadership and LMX as rival theories. LMX centers around the natural progression of a leader-member relationship and how this natural progression results in varying levels of quality in the relationships leaders establish with each subordinate. Conversely, the transformational leadership theory centers on leadership characteristics and behaviors (Wong & Berntzen, 2018). While both theories are prevalent in engagement research (Chin et al., 2019; Gutermann et al., 2017; Hawkes et al., 2017), they lack the reciprocity nature of the SET. I chose SET as the conceptual framework for this study because it seemingly best represents the phenomenon under study. Based on SET, if employees perceive leadership to be trustworthy, they will respond with desirable behaviors, such as work engagement.

Rival Theories

Since its introduction to the literature by Khan (1990), engagement research has significantly evolved over the past decades, and researchers view engagement through a variety of theoretical lenses. A large portion of research centers on the impact leadership style has on employee engagement (Saad et al., 2018). Of all the leadership literature published, transformational leadership is the most researched leadership theory associated with engagement research (Jensen, 2019). While transformational leadership plays a significant role in influencing engagement (Chin et al., 2019), the perspective that the theory provides is limited to the leader and neglects the interaction between the leader and subordinate. Researchers apply the LMX theory when looking to understand employee engagement from the perspective of relationship quality between leaders and employees.

Leader-Member Exchange

Some researchers argue that the LMX originated from the vertical dyad linkage theory (VDL), and by the 1980s, transitioned to what is now known as LMX (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) described, in four stages, how the theory has evolved over the years: (a) vertical dyad linkage, (b) leader-member exchange, (c) leadership making, and (d) team making. During Stage 1 of the theory or vertical dyad linkage, studies described the interaction between managers and their followers as a dyadic relationship (Dansereau et al., 1975). The quality of these relationships fell into one of two categories: high-quality exchange (in-group) and low-quality exchange relationships (out-group; Cropanzano et al., 2017). Due to leaders' time constraints and limited social resources, leaders can establish high-quality exchange relationships with only a select few.

During the leader-member exchange phase of the theory, the focus of research shifted from a general description of the dyadic relationship between leaders and members to explaining the development of those relationships and how those relationships influence organizational outcomes (Weitzel & Graen, 1989). It is during this period that the theory transitioned from VDL to LMX. Research conducted during this period centered on examining the relationship between LMX and organizational outcomes. Researchers found that LMX relationships that are higher in quality lead to positive outcomes for all members involved in the exchange, including the organization. Also, the behaviors and characteristics of those involved in the exchange influence the development of LMX relationships. Research during Stage 3 of the theory, leadership

making, centered on leadership making high-quality relationships available to all subordinates instead of only a few (Graen et al., 2010). Researchers found that those who sought high-quality relationships with leadership were able to form those relationships, which resulted in higher performance. During the team making phase of the LMX theory, research centered on how the differentiated dyadic relationships combine to form a more extensive network or interdependent dyadic relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

According to Yu et al. (2018), LMX is the leading and most practical approach to understanding workplace phenomena and the exchange that takes place between leaders and their subordinates. LMX is very similar to the SET in that it centers on the interactions that take place between leaders and their subordinates. One of the fundamental differences that distinguish LMX from SET is that the LMX theory centers on individual relationship quality between leaders and subordinates. While considered to be the most successful theory applied to understand organizational leadership, some argue that current research is limited and there is much to discover yet (Cropanzano et al., 2017). To address the limitations of past research on LMX, current researchers are filling in those gaps. Moving past LMX quality and the exchanges that take place between leaders and members, researchers are focusing on things such as the complementary relationship of LMX with other theories (Fenwick et al., 2019).

Transformational Leadership

The term transformational leadership was first devised by Downton in 1973 and introduced as an approach to leadership by MacGregor Burns in 1978 (Northouse, 2013). Transformational leadership centers on leaders who inspire and empower their followers

to be successful and become leaders themselves (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership theory is one of the most researched leadership theories, and along with laissez-faire and transactional leadership, it makes up the full-range leadership theory (Jensen, 2019). Transformational leaders are charismatic visionaries and act as role models for their subordinates. They excel in helping their followers realize and work towards their aspirations and goals in a way that brings personal fulfillment to them while at the same time, achieving organizational success.

While Burns' (1978) conceptualization of the transformational leadership theory centered on building the morality of individuals, it neglected those charismatic leaders on the opposite end of the spectrum that displayed immoral behaviors like Hitler, for example. Bass (1998) coined the term pseudotransformational leadership to capture those compelling leaders with a warped sense of morals. While the transformational leadership theory has proven to have significant value to leadership research, it still receives criticism. Fourie and Höhne (2019) argued that theories such as the transformational leadership theory place unrealistic expectations on leadership and fail to include inevitable mistakes and failures that leaders will face.

Lin et al. (2019) contended that while transformational leadership behaviors yield benefits to both the leader and follower, it can also be both taxing and depleting to the leader. According to Hansbrough and Schyns (2018), the transformational leadership theory does not apply to every leader. Despite the transformational leadership theory being the most frequently researched leadership theory, there is a demand for future

research to examine the theory further and disband it from being the one size fits all template for leadership (Hansbrough & Schyns, 2018).

Transformational leaders exhibit specific behaviors that influence their employees. The transformational leadership model consists of four associated leader behaviors that influence employees' intrinsic motivation: (a) idealized influence, (b) individualized consideration, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) intellectual stimulation (Majeed et al., 2019; Prochazka et al., 2017). Idealized influence, often referred to as a leader's charisma, centers on the leader's attributes and behaviors that evoke admiration and gained trust from followers (Faupel & Süß, 2019; Jha & Malviya, 2017; Majeed et al., 2019). Individualized consideration refers to the direct, personal attention a leader provides to each of their followers (Jha & Malviya, 2017). The leader acts as a coach or mentor to foster the personal growth of their followers through the management of personal challenges, goals, and needs (Faupel & Süß, 2019). Inspirational motivation relates to a leader's ability to motivate followers to view the future with enthusiasm as well as highlight shared visions and goals and how to achieve them. Intellectual stimulation refers to leaders encouraging their followers to be innovative and think outside of the box when problem solving (Jha & Malviya, 2017; Kammerhoff et al., 2019). Leaders also challenge followers to question the status quo of organizations' conventional approaches to things (Prochazka et al., 2017). When leaders display the above behaviors, employees intrinsic motivation increases.

The transformational leadership theory has many applications in business and management research literature and more specifically, in the area of leadership (Bosselut

et al., 2018). For example, employee engagement and motivation, team dynamics, employee and organizational performance, entrepreneurship, innovative work behavior, and organizational change (Bosselut, 2019; Chin et al., 2019; Faupel & Süß, 2019; Kenneth, 2019; Pradhan & Jena, 2019). Leadership-based researchers found that leadership has the most significant impact on the work environment, directly influencing employee outcomes such as motivation and engagement. Because of this, research on transformational leadership's effect on factors such as employee motivation and engagement has surged over the years and continues to increase.

Transformational leadership also plays a role in employee trust in leadership research. The idea is that transformational leadership is one of the critical determinants in employees' trust development in leaders (Holland et al., 2017). Researchers apply the transformational leadership theory to team dynamics-based research. Team-based research applies to collocated teams, as well as virtual teams. Transformational leaders positively influence team performance, communication, conflict resolution, innovation, and enhancement of interpersonal relationships. While some researchers supported these outcomes, other researchers discounted transformational leadership as being ineffective within specified bounds (Eisenberg et al., 2019; Kammerhoff et al., 2019). Despite the opposing views on the effectiveness of the transformational leadership model, the theory is yet popular in understanding the impact of leadership's behavior on employees.

Employee Engagement

Claims made throughout engagement literature indicate that levels of disengagement are at an all-time high worldwide. According to a recent Gallup survey,

70% of employees report feelings of disengagement, leaving only a small percent of engaged workers (Schneider & Blankenship, 2017). Over the past few decades, employee engagement has been a hot topic across various fields due to an abundance of research that supports the significant role engaged employees play in positive organizational outcomes (Lee et al., 2017). Meyer (2017) argued that engagement is a fad, and another hot topic will soon replace the current engagement fad. Despite these opposing views, employee engagement remains a challenge for organizational leaders. Osborne and Hammoud (2017) identified that employee engagement is a significant challenge for organizational leaders and will continue to remain a challenge in the future.

Organizations with a highly engaged workforce are more likely to gain a competitive advantage over their competition and notice an increase in profitability. An engaged workforce also influences absenteeism, intent-to stay, engagement in corporate social responsibility activities, turnover rates, customer quality, and more (Saks, 2017). While several factors drive employee engagement, studies show that trust in leadership is the main contributor to an employee's level of engagement (Basit, 2017). Whether engagement is considered a fad, there is no denying its' importance and that it remains a struggle for organizational leaders.

Early research on employee engagement, during the 1950s and 1960s, centered on job satisfaction (Schneider & Blankenship, 2017). Researchers and organizational leaders sought to understand the employee work experience and find ways to improve their experiences in hopes of increasing productivity. During this time, companies employed the use of job satisfaction surveys to measure job satisfaction. Over the next two decades,

job satisfaction research expanded to include other facets of the work environment, such as coworkers, advancement opportunities, and pay. While the above factors' relationship with performance proved to be weak, researchers found that employees with high scores on the surveys were less likely to quit their jobs.

During the 1980s and 1990s, organizational leaders began exchanging job satisfaction surveys with organizational climate and culture surveys (Schneider & Blankenship, 2017). This exchange was mainly due to job satisfaction's weak relationship with job performance. Researchers found that organizational climate and culture had significant outcomes for organizations. Despite these findings, researchers and organizational leaders raised more questions regarding what motivates employees in a way that will result in increased performance. Kahn (1990), was the first to conceptualize the term personal engagement. He believed that individuals express themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically while performing in their various roles (Lee et al., 2017).

According to Smitha (2013), there are three fundamental aspects of employee engagement: (a) social interactions that occur between employees at various levels, (b) leaders and their ability to cultivate environments that encourage engagement of their employees, and (c) employees and their psychological make-up, as well as their personal experiences. Rothbard built upon Khan's work in 2001 by redefining engagement as an individual's intense focus on their job role. Later, researchers specializing in employee burnout deemed engagement as the opposite of burnout. Researchers coined this new approach to employee engagement, the burnout approach. In 2002, Harter, for the first

time in employee engagement history, introduced engagement to the business world (Kaur, 2017).

Saks (2017) later contributed to engagement literature by introducing a multidimensional approach. Saks differentiated employee engagement into two parts: organizational engagement and job engagement. Current research on employee engagement continues to reinforce the significance of engagement on and organizational and personal level. Researchers continue to explore the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement as well as its impact on various factors such as citizenship behavior, diversity, productivity, and organizational success (Iqbal et al., 2017; Kaur, 2017). Research has also expanded across various regions and industries (Altinay et al., 2019). Since its' inception, engagement research has continued to evolve, and will remain a topic of importance due to its' significant impact on organizational performance.

Types of Engagement. Gallup (2020) suggested that engagement levels fall in the following three categories: Actively engaged, disengaged, and actively disengaged. Moletsane et al. (2019) further breaks down engagement categories into five levels, which are engaged, almost engaged, honeymooners, crash burners, and disengaged employees. Often, researchers of employee engagement administer engagement surveys to participants, and based on the survey results, assign a percentage to the three categories of engagement types. Many researchers have reported varying findings. For example, based on a recent Dale Carnegie report, 29% of the workforce report feelings of engaged, while 45% report feelings of disengaged (Schneider & Blankenship, 2018). The remaining 26% report displaying active disengaged. A different source reported that 13%

of employees report being engaged, while the remaining 87% are disengaged (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Despite the varying results between sources, they all suggest that only a small portion of the workforce is engaged.

Yadav and Morya (2019) defined actively engaged employees as those who are whole-heartedly and passionately involved in their roles within the organization and display a high level of commitment to organizational success. Employees who fall in this category are top performers within their organizations and exhibit high satisfaction and contribution (Brunone, & Marlow, 2013). Leaders find that their employees that are actively engaged are more willing to exert effort into their work, resilient, self-motivated, and better equipped with dealing with challenges that may arise (Hawkes et al., 2017). Saks (2017) found that actively engaged employees, along with organizational-level outcomes, experience positive outcomes on an individual level, such as less stress, anxiety, and depression. Employees who fall under this category are passionate about their work, are self-driven, connected to their work, and self-efficacious (Hawkes et al., 2017; Yadav & Morya, 2019). In their study on how to increase employee engagement Stoyanova and Iliev (2017), found that every actively engaged employee constantly demonstrate the following three behaviors: (a) stay-employees are more likely to recommend the organization to potential employees and customers, (b) stay-employees are more likely to stay at their organization even if a job opportunity opens up elsewhere, and (c) strive. Actively engaged employees are ideal for organizational leaders in that they drive organizational performance.

While actively engaged employees are beneficial to an organization's performance, disengaged employees have an opposite effect on an organization's performance. Basit (2017) argued that a disengaged workforce poses a serious threat to an organization's ability to gain and sustain competitive advantage in the industry in which it operates. According to Osborne and Hammoud (2017), U.S. organizations lose 350 billion dollars annually due to disengaged employees. Disengaged employees are individuals who half-heartedly perform their work tasks, and display little to no commitment to the success of the organization. Lee et al. (2017) describe disengaged employees as an individual that once exhibited engagement but gradually removed themselves from their work roles, which eventually led to disengagement. According to Schneider and Blankenship (2018), a majority of the workforce, approximately 45%, makes up this group of employees. Brunone and Marlow (2013) suggested that these employees display low levels of satisfaction and contribution. Disengaged employees report feelings of detachment and a level of disassociation from their work role (Cenkci & Otken, 2019; Jeske et al., 2017). Jeske et al. (2017) described employees' work disengagement as not fully embracing the role that they inhabit. With disengaged employees making up a large portion of the workforce, organizational performance is threatened.

Actively disengaged employees are known to complain about the organization's shortcomings continually and engage in unpleasant conversations with their coworkers regarding their disdain for the happenings within the organization (Yadav & Morva, 2019). Approximately 26% of workers make up this population of employees (Schneider

& Blankenship, 2018). These employees make it their mission to sow seeds of discord often, and can negatively impact the ability of the organization to function (Smitha, 2013). Jeske et al. (2017) suggested that employees who fall within this lack of mutual commitment and team relations within a team environment, which leads to poor team performance. With the abundance of research and literature on employee engagement and ways organizational leaders can cultivate engagement, it would seem that disengagement is no longer an issue. Unfortunately, organizational leaders still report high levels of disengaged employees and are yet experiencing a decline in the number of employees who report feelings of engagement (Saks, 2017).

Outcomes of Engagement. Over the past couple of decades, employee engagement has been the leading topic of Human Resource Management literature due to the positive outcomes an engaged workforce contributes to an organization's success (Jeske et al., 2017). Employee engagement impacts competitive advantage for organizations through better customer service, increased talent retention, and increased production (Jeske et al., 2017). Some researchers estimate that organizations that have a workforce with higher levels of engagement could see a 21% increase in profitability (Moletsane et al., 2019). Employee engagement continues to be a topic of importance in literature due to its impact on organizational outcomes.

There is ample evidence that suggests when employees operate at a high level of engagement, both organizations and employees themselves can yield significant rewards (Chughtai & Buckley, 2013; Hawkes et al., 2017). Employee engagement has positive outcomes at the organizational level, as well as at the individual/personal level. Some

organizational-level outcomes employees experience are but are not limited to, increased employee satisfaction and productivity, employee retention, and organizational citizenship behavior (Iqbal et al., 2017). Engagement not only benefits employees within their work environment but also in their personal lives. Engaged employees are more likely to experience more excellent health and well being. For example, employees may report being less anxious, depressed, and stressed (Saks, 2017). As discussed, the benefits of employee engagement at both an individual and organizational level.

As previously mentioned, organizational leaders benefit from having engaged employees. Some organizational leaders with an engaged workforce have reported higher performance and ability to sustain competitive advantage over their competitors (Iqbal et al., 2017; Yadav & Morya, 2019). Organizational leaders also reported increased profitability. Leaders have attributed increased profitability to factors such as decreased absenteeism, decreased intent to leave, higher productivity, increased innovation, and increased quality of customer service. Employees are considered the lifeline and most valuable resource of an organization. Without them, the organization would not exist. Because employees are influential in regards to an organization's success, organizational leaders must focus on developing and sustain the engagement of their organizational members. For years organizational leaders and researchers have studied and sought to understand employee engagement and its influence on positive organizational outcomes. In a recent study on engagement outcomes, N. Yin (2018) found that job engagement resulted in increased organizational citizenship behaviors, increased task performance, decreased job burnout, and decreased counterproductive work behaviors. Just as engaged

employees result in positive outcomes for employers, the outcomes for employees at a personal level is just as beneficial.

There is sufficient evidence proving the impact employee engagement has on the wellbeing of employees. Saks (2017) argued that highly engaged employees are more likely to experience better overall health, both personally and psychologically. Employees report being less stressed, increased job satisfaction, less anxious and depressed, self-motivated, increased creativity and innovation, increased authenticity, and are less likely to experience burnout (Saks, 2017; Sutton, 2020). In a study on psychological empowerment and work engagement, the researchers found that engaged employees experience enthusiasm, happiness, and satisfaction (Gong et al., 2020). Additionally, Hawkes et al. (2017) suggested that engaged employees report improved mental and physical health, improved well-being, work-family enrichment, an increased sense of work purpose, reduced burnout, decreased exhaustion, decreased antipathy for their job roles, and reduced psychological stress. Conversely, when employees lack engagement, their personal and mental health is jeopardized. For example, employees may experience burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and poor autonomy (Tesi et al., 2019). As stated, the impact of employee engagement on employees' mental and physical wellbeing is evident.

Drivers of Engagement. Employee engagement researchers dedicated several studies to identifying and discussing the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (Basit, 2017; Iqbal et al., 2017; Kaur, 2017). A majority of earlier research on work engagement centered on the relationship between job-demand resources (JD-R)

and employee engagement (Gutermann et al., 2017). More specifically, research centered on how job resources promote employee engagement. According to Hawkes et al. (2017), recent studies shifted to understanding the proximal drivers of engagement, such as feedback, colleague and supervisor support, and recognition. Focus is beginning to shift more towards distal drivers of engagement, such as leadership, organizational culture, and organizational climate (Hawkes et al., 2017). Other drivers include work-life balance, organizational climate and culture, coaching and training, rewards and recognition, relationship with peers and leader, job characteristics, leadership support, organizational communication, impartial feedback and benefits, trust in leadership, and more (Deepika, 2019; Iqbal et al., 2017; Kaur, 2017). Whether proximal or distal, one thing is certain, several factors drive employee engagement.

A major area of engagement research is the impact of leadership style on employee engagement. Several evidence-based studies center on leadership as a major driver of engagement (Gutermann et al., 2017; Hawkes et al., 2017; Oh et al., 2018). Researchers investigate various aspects of leadership to understand the total impact leaders have on driving employee engagement, for instance, leadership style, support, communication, personal engagement, and trust. Over the past decade, some researchers look at leadership styles such as transactional, transformational, ethical, and authentic leadership and determine whether a positive relationship exists between these styles and employee engagement. Researchers have suggested that a positive correlation exists between various leadership styles and employee engagement (McAuliffe et al., 2019).

Based on existing research, leadership style has a significant impact on employee engagement.

While immediate leadership influences the level of employee engagement, trust in leadership seems to be a key component of leaderships' influence on employees' engagement. In McAuliffe et al. (2019) argued that when leaders have employees that perceive them as trustworthy, they will have an engaged workforce. Trust drives engagement when employees feel valued, communication is open and honest, and there is a perception that leadership cares about employees (Basit, 2017). Conversely, when trust in leadership is low or nonexistent, undesirable outcomes such as low engagement, constant preoccupation with leader's behaviors, work safety concerns arise, attention diverted from work task, and a disregard for rules set by leadership, to name a few (McAuliffe et al., 2019). Buil et al. (2019) argued that engaged employees exhibit higher trust in their organizations and better relationships with organizational leaders. As suggested, trust in leadership has the most significant impact on employee engagement compared to all other drivers.

Barriers to Engagement. Organizational leaders must recognize barriers that may prevent their employees from operating at high levels of engagement so that they can effectively avoid those hindrances. By recognizing barriers, organizational leaders may mitigate outcomes that negatively impact the well-being of employees and the success of the organization. Yadav and Morya (2019) identified selecting the best talent for various jobs as a barrier. Another issue is that although an employer may select top talent, that talent may not engage within that particular organization (Yadav & Morya, 2019). Tesi et

al. (2019) studied the well being of social workers. They found that high job demands, the type of job, work pressure, and excessive psychological workload are examples of barriers that extinguish employee engagement. Such barriers will result in low engagement, exhaustion, burnout, absenteeism, high turnover rates, less creativity, and other negative outcomes.

Organizational leaders not assessing the demographic characteristics of the workforce may prove to be a barrier to engagement. For example, millennials are driven by monetary compensation and promotional opportunities, while job security drives and motivates baby boomers (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Without knowledge of such information, organizational leaders would not know how to appeal to various demographics, and cannot thereby engage and retain their workforce.

Another major barrier to employee engagement is an organization's culture. An organization's culture must be conducive to engagement; otherwise, the culture becomes a barrier/challenge. It is the responsibility of organizational leaders to create an environment that cultivates growth, promote psychological safety, promote creativity and innovation, and promote employees to be themselves authentically (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017; Sutton, 2020). Moletsane et al. (2019) suggested a culture of transparency and respect is necessary to boost engagement levels, and therefore, is a driver of employee engagement. Without fostering a culture of engagement, organizational leadership should expect to have a workforce depleted mentally and physically, increased intent to leave, and other negative outcomes that impact both employees and the organization. The high percentages of disengaged workforces are

evident that the lack of engagement is still a pressing issue (Mcauliffe, 2019; Schneider & Blankenship, 2018). Tesi's et al. (2019) study is a prime example of how an organizational culture that does not promote engagement, negatively impacts employee and organizational outcomes. As mentioned previously, some jobs require more from employees, and those organizations need to focus on their organizational culture so that their employees will not experience burnout, which leads to stress.

Trust in Leadership and Engagement. As discussed previously, trust in leadership is a major driver of engagement. Researchers found that trust in leadership has a significant impact on employee's attitudes and behaviors, engagement, job satisfaction, performance, and the like (Basit, 2017). More specifically, researchers argue the significant impact that frontline managers have on cultivating employee engagement (Jiang, & Luo, 2018; Malinen et al., 2013). Basit (2017) highlighted a few studies that indicated that employees' trust in their immediate supervisors significantly impacts employee engagement. An employee-supervisor relationship established through trust results in the employee having fewer feelings of vulnerability and increased commitment and motivation. From the perspective of SET, employees that trust their supervisors may feel obligated to reciprocate through their work engagement (Basit, 2017). Dartey-Baah et al. (2019) argued that when employees perceive organizational members as trustworthy, they have a felt obligation to respond by demonstrating positive organizational behaviors. Conversely, when employees lack trust or confidence in leadership, it leads to undesirable organizational outcomes (McAuliffe, 2019).

Understanding the impact of trust in leadership on employee engagement is beneficial for organizational leaders especially due to the impact on organizational outcomes.

Over the years, engagement researchers sought to understand the relationship between trust in leadership and employee engagement. Basit (2017) argued that earlier studies on employee engagement and trust in leadership were only theoretical based, with only a few studies examining this relationship empirically. Researchers engaging in empirical-based studies investigate the impact that trust in leadership has on engagement by combining Kahn's work on employee engagement and Blau's work on SET. Several studies exist, proving the significant impact that employee's trust in leadership has on employee engagement. McAuliffe et al. (2019) argued that trust is key concerning leadership and engagement. Basit (2017) showed that trust in supervisors promotes employee engagement. In a different study, Maximo et al. (2019) found that authentic leadership significantly impact on employee engagement through employees' trust in leadership. Bhana and Suknunan (2019) found in their study that open communication and trust in leadership drives engagement. It is up to organizational leaders to build a culture of trust, a culture that is employee-centered. The payoff for developing and maintaining an environment of trust is a workforce that is enthusiastic, more productive, higher levels of energy, more collaborative, fewer sick days, increased loyalty, and more fulfilled lives (Zak, 2017). Through research on employee engagement and trust in leadership, researchers discovered the impact on organizational outcomes.

Trust-Building Strategies

With the understanding of the impact trust in leadership has on employee engagement, it is vital that leadership implement strategies to build trust with employees. While strong, trusting relationships within the employee-manager dyadic is key in addressing many of the challenges faced by organizations, levels of trust remain low (Maximo et al., 2019). Building trust empowers employees and leads to achieving vital organizational objectives (Long, 2018). Leaders must develop, on an ongoing basis, practical communication skills to earn the trust of their subordinates. Some trust-building strategies include leaders sharing their personal experiences and perspectives, providing inspiration and vision, being intentional about finding ways to communicate with their workforce, and managing their engagement (Brunone & Marlow, 2013). Another trust-building strategy is transparent organizational communication. Jiang and Luo (2018) argued that transparent organizational communication is the involvement of employees in decision-making processes, resulting in fostered trust among employees, thereby leading to engagement. It is important that leaders implement effective trust-building strategies to address any employee engagement challenges.

To address engagement issues, organizational leaders must create a culture of trust. According to Danese and Mittone (2017), trust, as well as trustworthiness, is vital to organizations. Zak (2017) argued that organizations are experiencing low levels of engagement but are unaware of how to remedy the problem. The answer to the problem is to create a culture of trust (Zak, 2017). Due to its critical role in positive organizational outcomes, research on identifying and exploring various trust-building strategies is

necessary. The following are strategies used build employees' trust in leadership: (a) include employees in the decision-making processes that impact them, (b) demonstrate managerial competency, (c) empower employees when appropriate, (d) demonstrate empathy and understanding, (e) demonstrate emotional intelligence, (f) provide meaningful and timely feedback, (g) communicate often using multiple channels, and (h) promote transparency (Basit, 2017; Long, 2018). Building a culture of transparency and respect is key and will result in boosting employees' engagement in their work. In a recent study, the researcher studied high trust organizations and what sought to understand how these organizations promoted trust throughout their organization. Through this study, the researcher introduced a model for organizations to use to increase trust, as well as examples of how other organizations have accomplished promoting trust (Zak, 2018). As discussed, there are several strategies leaders can employ to create a culture of trust throughout the organization.

Transition

Section one of this study includes the problem and purpose statement. Also included is the nature of the study. Within this section, I provided a brief description of the chosen methodology and design for the study. Also included was the research question, interview questions, conceptual framework, operational definitions, and significance of the study. I discuss the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations associated with this study. Included is a review of the professional and academic literature on the topic of employee engagement and trust.

In section two, I will discuss my role as the researcher, as well as identify the participants. Section two includes an overview of the chosen research method and design and justification for selected participants and sampling method. Additional topics covered are ethical research, data collection instruments, technique, and organization, data analysis, and reliability and validity. In section three, I will present my findings, as well as discuss how the findings' applicability to professional practice and the implication of social change. I will also provide recommendations for action and further research. Section three concludes with a personal reflection of my research experience and concluding statement.

Section 2: The Project

In this section of the study, I will discuss my role as the researcher, provide an overview of the research method and design chosen for this study, and identify the participants. Also included are the population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments used, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies laboratory managers use to build trusting relationships that cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees. The target population consisted of five laboratory managers in laboratory settings across the United States who have successfully employed trust-building strategies to cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential to have a fulfilled, engaged workforce. Having an engaged workforce serves as a driver for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage, leading to organization success (Iqbal et al., 2017). In response to increased financial and market success, organizational leaders could create employment opportunities, which may contribute to the economic welfare of those in surrounding communities.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary data collection tool when conducting qualitative research (Pezalla et al., 2012). Researchers must keep ethics in the forefront of their minds, seeing that some ethical-based questions may arise throughout the research

process (Roth & von Unger, 2018). According to Roth and von Unger (2018), there are some questions that researchers must ask themselves before conducting research: As a researcher, what are my roles and responsibility? Who and what is the researcher accountable? What potential risk may arise with engaging participants? It is also imperative that researchers consider their personal biases and mitigate those biases to avoid the negative impact of research quality by using tools such as reflexivity (Rettke et al., 2018).

An effective tool to counter research biases and establish rigor is reflexivity (Rettke et al., 2018). Reflexivity is the ability of the researcher to examine their thoughts, feelings, and motives before and throughout the research process and is fundamental to qualitative research (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019; Roth & von Unger, 2018). The central purpose of research ethics is the well-being of participants (Kara & Pickering, 2017). The Belmont Report is a document that highlights guidelines and ethical principles that arise when researching with human subjects (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). Researchers can use tools such as the Belmont Report to ensure they are conducting ethical research.

As an analytical chemist, working in laboratories across various industries, I have firsthand experience with the lack of engagement that takes place when employees view their managers as untrustworthy. According to Yeong et al. (2018), researchers may find interview protocols useful in obtaining rich, valuable qualitative data. Also, the use of an interview protocol significantly impacts the effectiveness of the interview process.

Researchers may use an interview protocol to ensure that they can obtain quality data within the allotted time (Yeong et al., 2018).

Participants

Researchers need to consider the criteria of the individuals who will participate in their study. Purposeful or strategic sampling is a beneficial strategy for researchers to use when selecting study participants. Moser and Korstjens (2018) argued that researchers use purposeful sampling to select participants who will provide the most information-rich data. When deciding which participants to select, the researcher must consider the following: (a) whether the potential participants are knowledgeable of the phenomenon, (b) whether those individuals are willing and motivated to share their knowledge about to phenomenon, and (c) whether they are able to clearly articulate their knowledge about the phenomenon under study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The criteria for my study participants included managers who manage employees within a laboratory setting. Also, participants were required to have experience with implementing successful trust-building that increased the engagement of their employees.

I gained access to participants by posting a flyer to social media (i.e., Facebook and LinkedIn). I highlighted the need for laboratory managers who have excelled in engaging their employees through the use of trust-building strategies. Those interested in participating my the study were able to able to contact me via phone or email. Once interested parties expressed interest, they went through a simple screening process where I confirmed, via a phone conversation, that they were laboratory managers and had experience with successfully implementing trust-building strategies to cultivate employee

engagement. Additionally, I searched organizations' websites to verify that they had laboratories.

Once a researcher identifies criteria for selecting potential research participants, it is essential to determine how to establish and maintain a working relationship with the participants. Strategies for establishing a working relationship with participants may include obtaining informed consent from the participants, protecting them from harm and deception, protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, and use purposeful sampling to ensure the absence of unfair exclusion or inclusion of participants from the study (R. Yin, 2018). One method I used to establish relationships with my study participants was to engage in straightforward, transparent communication throughout the recruitment and data collection process. Also, I obtained consent from participants so that they could make an informed decision on whether to continue with participation in the study. As a researcher, it was imperative that communicated my expectations and goals (see Sullivan et al., 2013).

Research Method and Design

When selecting a research method and design, researchers must select a method and design that will aid in best answering their research question (R. Yin, 2018). Researchers may consider the following research methods during the planning process of their study: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Saunders et al., 2019). While a quantitative method involves statistical analysis and empirical calculation, qualitative research centers on nonnumerical data to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the target population (Haradhan, 2018). According to Haradhan (2018), there are

several qualitative designs a researcher may select for their study, but for my study, I considered narrative inquiry, ethnography, and case study. In the following section, I will justify selecting a qualitative research method and a single case design for my study.

Research Method

I considered three research methods and found that a qualitative methodology was the best method to approach my study. Qualitative research is exploratory in nature, and researchers use this methodology to understand a phenomenon based on the lived experiences of individuals (Mohajan, 2018). Conducting qualitative research allows the researcher to view a phenomenon within a real-life context. Qualitative analysis is an appropriate method to use to understand trust-building strategies leaders used to cultivate the engagement of analytical chemists.

There are a few reasons why I decided that a quantitative methodology was not appropriate for my study. Mohajan (2018) argued that a quantitative methodology is objective in nature, used to test theories and/or hypotheses, investigate relationships between two or more variables, and eliminates participants perspective on phenomena. I did not select a quantitative methodology because I was looking to study a phenomenon based on the perspective of participants. Quantitative analysis is a useful method when looking to determine the relationship between two or more variables. Current studies on the topic of trust in leadership and its impact on employee engagement suggest that a positive relationship exists between the two variables. For this study, my goal was to identify successful trust-building strategies leaders use to cultivate engagement among

laboratory employees. The use of quantitative analysis would mostly have been unproductive for identifying trust-building strategies.

Mixed method research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies (DeCuir–Gunby, 2008). Because a mixed methodology involves elements of quantitative research, this method was not appropriate for my study. Some researchers argued that using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allows the researcher to gain insight from the perspective of both methods that they would not have gained if selecting one over the other. Also, the use of both methods may aid in overcoming the weaknesses associated with the use of both methods individually (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Research Design

Selecting a research design that best compliments a study is an essential task during the planning process. The researcher must consider which design is best for answering the research question (Mohajan, 2018). For this study, I considered narrative inquiry, ethnography, and case study designs. After gaining an understanding of each design, I decided that a case study design was the most appropriate choice.

In narrative research, participants provide narratives of themselves or an event (Mohajan, 2018). The focus is on the participants' story instead of emerging themes from a given account. Like other qualitative research designs, narrative inquiry centers on human lived experiences, but the main difference is that with narrative inquiry, participants share life stories so researchers can understand their lived experiences (Ford, 2020). To find meaningful patterns, the researcher must study the stories of their

participants regarding the phenomenon, then follow the order of events (Chang et al., 2017). I did not select a narrative inquiry design because the information disclosed from the participants' narratives, within their societal and cultural context, may not provide information necessary for answering the research question.

Ethnography involves an extensive investigation of an entire cultural groups' collective beliefs, practices, and behavior patterns (Mohajan, 2018). Ethnography is extremely time consuming and require researchers to spend a great deal of time in the field (Mohajan, 2018). I did not select ethnography as the design of choice due to it being an extremely time consuming, and I am not looking to understand the culture of an entire group of people.

A case study involves an in-depth investigation of an individual(s) or social unit (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Frey (2018) argued that the information and knowledge obtained from a case study apply to similar contexts and situations despite the myths of the lack of generalizability of case study findings. I chose a case study design for this study because the information obtained from a case study may aid in providing direct answers to my research question, compared to the other designs that may disclose additional unnecessary information. I selected a multiple case study design which allows for analysis within and across cases (Heale, & Twycross, 2018). Heale and Twycross (2018) argued that multiple case studies allows for a more comprehensive exploration of research questions and produces stronger, reliable evidence compared to single case studies.

Population and Sampling

Because the study design is a multiple case study, the participant population came from five different organizations that have laboratories. The target population was five laboratory managers who manage laboratory employees. The laboratory managers selected for this study must have successfully implemented trust-building strategies to build the engagement of their employees. I reached my target population by posting a flyer to social media sites (i.e., Facebook and LinkedIn). Of those who expressed interest in my study, I went through a screening process in which they were asked if they were laboratory managers and had experience with building engagement through trust-building strategies. To confirm if the organizations had laboratories, I searched their company web pages.

Purposeful sampling was the best sampling method of choice for this study. Purposeful sampling is a nonprobability sampling method in which a researcher uses their judgment to identify and select information-rich cases based on the phenomenon of interest (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The sample size for this study was determined based on reaching data saturation, which I reached at five participants. In qualitative research, data saturation is a significant indicator of a study's validity (Saunders et al., 2018). A researcher has reached data saturation when new collected data result in redundant information (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The number of participants needed to reach data saturation differs between studies and depends on things such as the study design, data richness, and the research question (Saunders & Townsend, 2018).

Ethical Research

As the researcher, it was my responsibility to ensure to design and conduct research in a way that is in the best interest of the participants (Tromp & van de Vathorst, 2018). According to Clark (2019), conducting ethical research means that the researcher must protect participants through the avoidance of harm, the procurement of informed consent, and preserving confidentiality and privacy. Walden University's IRB is responsible for ensuring that any research conducted at Walden University complies with the university's ethical guidelines as well as the United States federal regulations. Student researchers must obtain approval by the Walden University IRB before data collection of any kind can commence. Once the researcher acquires approval, the Walden University IRB will issue an approval number. The Walden University IRB issued approval number is 12-01-20-0666130.

Once I obtained the approval of Walden University IRB, I provided a copy of the informed consent form to each participant who agreed to participate in the study to complete. The informed consent form provides a brief description of the study's background and tells the participants what they can expect during the interviewing process. An explanation on the form is that participation in the study is strictly voluntary and that the participants can decline the invitation to participate at any time. Participants received information on the risks and benefits of participating in this study, as well as steps taken to mitigate those risks. Also listed are any incentives that the participant may receive for their involvement. For this study, I issued \$10 Visa e-gift cards to those how

completed an interview. Participants reserved the right to withdraw from participating in this study through either a verbal or written request without facing any penalty.

Another precaution to preserve confidentiality is to assign pseudonyms to each participant as well as the organization involved. More specifically, avoiding the use of pseudonyms that include any details about the participant or organization (Surmiak, 2018). I stored all hard copy documentation obtained during the data collection process in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years to protect the rights of the participants. After 5 years, I will shred the documents. I stored any electronic data on a separate flash drive and will delete it after 5 years.

Data Collection Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Hordge-Freeman, 2018). Clark and Vealé (2018) maintained that the researcher's role in qualitative research is participatory in nature and are revered as the primary instrument in the data collection and analysis process. Researchers are a useful instrument because they are physically present during the interview and engage using their senses. For this study, I was the primary data collection instrument.

A semistructured interview is an interactive data collection method that yields an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon from the participant's perspective (Iyamu, 2018). According to Gill and Baillie (2018), researchers that conduct semistructured interviews ask participants a predetermined set of questions while also giving participants the freedom to discuss additional information if desired. Similarly, Brown and Danaher (2017) argue that semistructured interviews involve open-ended questions that may

reveal valuable information the researcher had not anticipated when planning the interview. Therefore, I used virtual semistructured interviews to explore trust-building strategies laboratory managers use to cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees. According to Farooq and Villiers (2017), conducting face-to-face interviews allow researchers to pick up on participants' body language and cues, which may enhance the researcher's understanding. Due to obstacles faced with Covid-19, interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom.

Researchers utilize interview protocols to help facilitate the interview process and allow the researcher to obtain rich qualitative data that can result in a deeper understanding of the participants and experiences and a better understanding of the phenomenon (Yeong et al., 2018). Likewise, Moser & Korstjens (2018) argued that a suitable interview protocol aids the researcher in obtaining rich data and ensure consistency with each interview. Krugua et al. (2017), for example, utilized a semistructured interview protocol to guide their interview process of understanding the experiences of pregnant women in Ghana. To help facilitate the semistructured interview process, I used an interview protocol.

The tertiary data collection instrument for this study will be archival documents. Researchers often pair interviews with archival documents during their data collection process (Carter et al., 2019; Hysmith, 2017). Archival data (i.e., personnel files, census data, survey responses) are often used in combination with other qualitative research techniques such as observations and semistructured interviews (Flick, 2018). Iyamu

(2018) argued that using archival data is advantageous when used to complement other data collection instruments.

Member checking is a process that researchers use to ensure the reliability and validity of a study's findings (Caretta & Pe' rez, 2019). Brear (2019) argued that the use of member checking might lead to an in-depth understanding of data, as well as reveal unrealized researcher biases and errors. Researchers establish credibility by presenting their interpretation of the participant responses to the participants to confirm the accuracy of their interpretation (Varpio et al., 2017). Therefore, I ensured the validity and reliability of data collection instruments through member checking.

Data Collection Technique

Qualitative data collection techniques include documentary analysis, focus groups, interviews, observations, participant diaries, photography, and videography (Gill & Baillie, 2018). According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), data collection techniques in qualitative research are flexible and unstructured. When selecting a data collection method, researchers must choose wisely (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The primary data collection technique selected for this study was semistructured interviews. Before conducting interviews, I emailed consent forms to each participant outlining the purpose of the study, background information of the research topic, highlight that participation is strictly voluntary, and reiterate that they can opt-out of participating at any time. Once I obtained consent, I scheduled virtual interviews for participants' convenience, comfort, and safety.

I used an interview protocol as a guidance tool throughout the interview process. The same interview protocol was used with each participant to ensure consistency with each interview. Interviews averaged between 15 to 30 minutes in length. During the interview process, the participants responded to a preset of open-ended questions regarding their experiences with implementing trust-building strategies to build the engagement of the laboratory employees that they manage. I conducted interviews virtually using Zoom, and participants had the option on whether they wanted to show their faces. I recorded the interviews using an electronic audio recording device so that I could later transcribe the conversation. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2018), the use of a sound recorder is the most common method of recording interviews. After the interviews, I thanked participants for giving their time to participate in the study.

According to Roulston and Choi (2018), researchers transcribe their audio recordings post interview. I used TranscribeMe, a transcription software, to transcribe the recorded interviews. Following data transcription and analysis, I emailed participants my interpretations of their responses to verify the accuracy of my interpretations. This member-checking process ensured that my interpretations of their responses coincided with what they were trying to relay. Participants were asked to review my interpretations to determine if I adequately portrayed what they intended. If they did not respond to the email, they were made aware that no response indicated that they agreed with my interpretations. Of the five participants, one responded to the email agreeing that I adequately portrayed what they intended.

Data Organization Technique

I used MAXQDA, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, to organize, code, and analyze my data. Qualitative analysis software such as MAXQDA is often used by researchers to organize and analyze data (Marjaei, Yazdi, & Chandrashekara, 2019) more efficiently. To organize sources, I used Zotero. Zotero is a reference management software used to organize and collect references. Participants engaging in research are vulnerable to risks and harm, and it is, therefore, crucial that researchers maintain the confidentiality of their participants to mitigate any harm (Surmiak, 2018). To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, I assigned identifiers to each (i.e., Participant A, Participant B, Participant C). Any hard copy data collected during the data collection process that consists of any participants' information are securely stored in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years. Digital data is password protected. At the end of the 5 years, all documentation associated with the participants will be shredded.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is vital to research and is necessary for extracting useful information from collected data. Budiyanto et al. (2019) argued that with a case study design, data analysis is useful for describing, explaining, and understanding the phenomena under study within the context of the selected case. There are four identified types of triangulation: (a) data triangulation, (b) theoretical triangulation, (c) researcher triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation. For this qualitative case study, I selected methodological triangulation as the data analysis process (Abdalla et al., 2018).

Methodological triangulation is the use of at minimum two data sources (i.e., interviews, observations, and archival documents), which allows researchers to view a phenomenon from an array of perspectives (Ashour, 2018; Umar et al., 2019). Abdalla et al. (2018) argued that methodological triangulation is a powerful tool useful for enhancing study validity, increasing reproducibility of findings, and reducing researcher and methodological biases. Applying methodological triangulation, I retrieved data from multiple data sources such as semi-structured interviews and organizational archival documents on employee engagement.

There are several qualitative data analysis software that researchers can use for their data analysis process. Some of the top software currently used include MAXQDA, ATLAS.ti, Dedoose, Qiqqa, Quirkos, Provalis Research Text Analytics Software, and NVivo. After researching the various software, I selected MAXQDA to organize and conduct my data analysis. Utilizing MAXQDA software has several benefits: (a) researchers can transcribe interview data directly in the software or readily upload previously transcribed interview data, (b) researcher can conduct thematic analysis, (c) saves time and energy through automation of the data organization and analysis process, and (d) MAXQDA can process multiple types of data (text-based documents, images, multimedia files, and more (Marjaei, Yazdi, & Chandrashekara, 2019). Researchers utilize MAXQDA to reveal relevant codes and themes (Biçera, & Batdı, 2019). I verified the generated themes by correlating them with my research question, conceptual framework, and previous research. To stay up-to-date on current and future literature on

my research topic, I signed up to receive search alerts based on past articles searched using various databases.

Reliability and Validity

Establishing research quality is a must for researchers. Some researchers argue that the concept of reliability and validity, as applied in quantitative research, is not applicable for establishing quality in qualitative research (Abdalla et al., 2018). In response, researchers established the following four foundational criteria to establish quality in qualitative research: confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability (Samul, 2017). In the following subsections, I will discuss my strategy for addressing these four foundational criteria to establish research quality.

Reliability

In qualitative research, researchers focus on dependability to ensure the reliability of their findings. Dependability, like reliability, refers to the consistency of research findings (Cypress, 2017; Samul, 2017). To ensure dependability, I utilized member checking. According to Brear (2019), member checking is a process in which researchers present their transcribed data and interpretation of interview responses of participants to determine if they are accurately portraying what the participant intended to relay. The researcher may conduct an additional interview with participants to address any misconceptions and resubmit their updated interpretations to the participants to review again (Caretta & Pe´rez, 2019). This process continues until the participant believes that the researcher accurately captured their perspective of the phenomenon under study (Candela, 2019).

Validity

Qualitative researchers use credibility, transferability, and confirmability for judging the validity of qualitative research (Forero et al., 2018; Trochim, 2020).

Credibility, comparable to internal validity, refers to the accurate depiction of a participant's lived experience (Cypress, 2017; Samul, 2017). I ensured credibility through member checking. The process of member checking ensured that my interpretation of participants' responses to interview questions accurately depicts their lived experiences. I also utilized triangulation to increase the credibility of my study. Triangulation enhances credibility by using multiple data sources to create a robust picture and understanding of the phenomenon under study (Varpio et al., 2017). For this study, I utilized semistructured interviews and public organizational archival documents on employee engagement as my triangulation strategy.

Similar to external validity, transferability refers to the generalizability of study findings (Samul, 2017). According to Cypress (2017), a researcher may enhance transferability through the use of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves the selection of participants based on their knowledge of the phenomenon of study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Confirmability, parallel to objectivity, refers to the degree of which study findings can be confirmed or corroborated by others (Samul, 2017; Trochim, 2020). To address confirmability, I utilized reflexivity to counter researcher bias. The use of reflexivity will ensure that my background and personal thoughts or beliefs do not influence the research process. I maintained a reflexive journal to reflect on why I made individual decisions throughout the research process.

Data saturation is another method researchers can use to ensure validity. Some researchers consider data saturation as the “gold standard” in achieving qualitative rigor (Saunders et al., 2018). In order to achieve data saturation, no new information or theme occurrences should arise from conducted interviews (Hesso et al., 2019).

Transition and Summary

In section two, I discussed the purpose of this qualitative single case study, my role as a researcher, and my strategy for selecting participants. I also, in greater detail, discuss and justify my reasoning for selecting my chosen research method and design. Also, I describe my target population and my plans for gaining access to them. I also discuss the importance of conducting ethical research, my data collection instruments, my data collection process and organization, my data analysis process, and how I plan to ensure research validity and reliability. In section three, I will present my findings, the applicability of my findings to professional practice, and the implications of my findings to social change. I will also provide my recommendations for action and further research on my topic. Lastly, I will reflect on my experience as a researcher throughout this DBA study process.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies laboratory managers use to build trusting relationships that cultivate analytical chemists' engagement. I conducted semistructured interviews with five laboratory managers from various organizations across various industries throughout the United States. Managers found that their employees exhibited engaged behaviors when they implement trust-building strategies related to effective communication and effective leadership behaviors. Section 3 consists of presentation of findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections on my experience throughout this process, and a conclusion.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was "What strategies do laboratory managers use to build trusting relationships that cultivate engagement of laboratory employees?" To discover answers to the research question, I conducted semistructured interviews with five laboratory managers in which they shared trust-building strategies that they are currently using to cultivate employee engagement. I used an interview protocol to ensure consistency with each interview. To ensure confidentiality of participants, I assigned a moniker to each (Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Participant D, and Participant E). After completing data analysis of data collected from each of the five organizations, I generated the following themes: effective communication and effective leadership behaviors. While each participant agreed that

their trust-building strategies effectively influenced active engagement, most agreed that it took some time for employees to adjust. Based on information from annual reports from 2018 to 2020, Company A maintained its employee engagement scores of ~75%. Also, leadership from Company A, Company C, and Company E are required to exhibit effective leadership behaviors and effective communication practices before being considered for those roles, as per listed job requirements. Effective leadership behaviors and effective communication practices are drivers of employee engagement and are therefore necessary (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019; Moletsane et al., 2019).

Theme 1: Effective Communication

The first theme generated during data analysis was effective communication. Khalid and Ali (2017) defined communication as the exchange of communication between partners. Laboratory managers found that when communication between them and their employees were effective, they exhibited behaviors associated with employee engagement. This finding aligns with SET and existing literature. Based on SET, communication is an antecedent of trust, which is the basic foundation of the social exchange that takes place between two parties (Khalid & Ali, 2017). Managers found that trust within their relationships with employees were strengthened when communication is honest, open, transparent, strong, and continuous. Harden et al. (2018) urged managers to strive for strong, concise communication, which will positively impact productivity. Participant C expressed that their trust-building strategies foster open and frequent communication with employees, and leads to employee self-accountability and transparency.

The social exchanges that take place between manager and their subordinates centers around the idea of reciprocity. Interestingly, when the laboratory managers use their communication strategies, employees mirror those same behaviors in response. For example, Participant D reported being honest and open with their employees as a trust-building strategy, and in response, employees themselves began being open and honest in their communication. The employees' communication behaviors signified to management that their trust-building strategies effectively influenced active engagement in employees. Through further analysis, I identified two subthemes: transparency and open work dialogue.

Transparency

The first subtheme identified during data analysis was transparency. Transparency is defined as the degree to which leadership openly divulges information, presents themselves as honest and true, and allows space for others to be comfortable expressing their challenges, ideas, and opinions (McAuliffe et al., 2019). Employees associated with transparent communication are being open, truthful, honest, and ensure a downward flow of communication. Open and honest communication drives employee engagement and is necessary for leadership to possess (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019; Maximo et al., 2019). Participant B and Participant C identified leadership transparency as a communication strategy used to build trusting relationships with their employees. Conversely, Participant A, Participant D, and Participant E identified employees' transparency as a behavior that resulted in response to trust-building strategies. When asked how they determine if trust exists in the manager-subordinate relationship, Participant C stated that they observe how

their employees communicate. Some participants used transparency as a strategy to build trusting relationships with their employees, while others viewed transparency of employees as a determinant of the effectiveness of their trust-building strategies. Participant D stated, “And if there is also trust, you will definitely see that they are very transparent in terms of being engaged in the decisionmaking.” As discussed, transparency is integral in building trust and is a major indicator of the effectiveness of trust-building strategies in cultivating employee engagement.

Open Workplace Dialogue

The second subtheme I found centered around management facilitating open, continuous dialogue with employees. An open dialogue includes frequent communication, management active listening to employees, and receiving and encouraging feedback from employees. Establishing an environment where communication is frequent and continuous is necessary for employees and aids in cultivating trust between managers and subordinates (Basit, 2017; Maximo et al., 2019). In addition to communication being open, clear, and transparent, communication must flow nondiscriminately throughout the organization. Deepika (2019) suggested that an organization operates more effectively when information is free-flowing throughout the organization. When employees perceive organizational communication as subpar, the levels of engagement will decrease (Jeske et al., 2017). Participant B expressed,

I can get to keenly observe the flow of information or the communication pattern in my organization. Usually, when the trust levels are very high, organization communication is very efficient. The flow of information is perfect. There is no

discrimination in the flow of or giving out of information. If there is any information that really needed to be passed to the members, and the information has not reached other people at the same time, then I understand that the trust level at this particular day is not really good. When the trust levels are very high, there will be no disparity, or there will be no discrimination in passing out the information. That is how I usually get to understand or measure the level of trust in my organization.

When there dialogue is open and continuous, trust is established. As demonstrated by Participant B, communication is a significant indicator of whether trust is present in the work environment.

A significant aspect of ensuring an open work dialogue within the workplace is receiving and providing feedback. Creating a safe space for employees to provide feedback on leadership, the work environment, and decisions and actions that impact them is necessary. Cenkci and Otken (2019) offered that feedback from employees may serve as corrective feedback for the organization and be pivotal in developing strategies for improvement. Osborne and Hammoud (2017) found that when employees were able to critique leadership, leadership was able to develop and implement strategies that increased employee engagement and ultimately increased profits. Conversely, feedback from leadership to employees is equally necessary and beneficial. When managers provide feedback to employees, they must execute it in a way that is positive and supportive. Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) found that employees were satisfied when management provided feedback back to them and encouraged them to offer feedback

themselves. This exchange in feedback strengthens the relationship between manager and subordinate and cultivates engaged employees (Cenkci & Otken, 2019; Moletsane et al., 2019; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Participant E stated,

At the end of the meeting, people could write how they feel, what is the feedback from that meeting. Just something very brief so that you know if you are at par, and it is very anonymous so there is no fear of victimization. So that way, you will be able to gauge the level of trust, how they feel, is their work really satisfactory to them, they do love you, and do they appreciate whatever is done for them.

As confirmed by Participant E, feedback is integral in establishing a culture of trust. An example of the importance of feedback is the information obtained from Company E's media page revealed that they received an award for being one of the best places to work from a business ranking website. The award is based on employee feedback of their organization in the following areas: career opportunities, culture and values, compensation and benefits, overall company rating, senior management, work-life balance, the likelihood to recommend to a friend, and 6-month business outlook. When trust is present in the workplace, employees are more likely to display engaged behavior.

Theme 2: Effective Leadership Behaviors

The second theme generated during the data analysis process was effective leadership behaviors. Leadership behavior significantly impacts building trust and, ultimately, employee engagement (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019). Basit (2017) emphasized the importance of developing leadership behaviors that will aid in forming employees'

perception of trust towards leadership. Laboratory managers revealed that when they display positive leadership behaviors, employees respond with engaged behaviors. Following SET, I found that when laboratory managers displayed positive behaviors, employees reciprocated with positive behaviors. Ancarani et al. (2018) found that when leaders display behaviors such as offering support and acknowledging employees' work contributions, employees will reciprocate by exhibiting engaged behaviors. Employees perceive leadership's trustworthiness as a desired behavior from the organization and feel obligated to reciprocate through engaged behaviors and actions (Basit, 2017). During the data analysis process, I further grouped codes into subthemes: lead by example, provide support, and leadership characteristics.

Lead by Example

A shared leadership behavior mentioned by participants for building trusting relationships with employees was leading by example. Leading by example means that leadership must first exhibit behaviors they want to see in their employees. More importantly, leaders lead by example by living out their values and striving for authentic relationships with their employees (Maximo et al., 2019). I found that managers use leading by example as a strategy to build trusting relationships with their employees. Some of those strategies include being self-accountable, extending trust first to employees, commitment to their work, and displaying trustworthy behaviors. Participant A and Participant B both stated that as a trust-building strategy, they first extend trust to their employees in order for their employees to trust them. Participant B stated, "At the same time, the, the best of it all, I always extend my trust to others." However,

Participant C said,

It helps to be the first example. So, what I do, is I lead the way. I convince them or make them believe me, or trust me, or be able to be open to me for whatever happens, that is the best way. That is number one and it is always my first strategy.

As shown by Participant C, leading by example is an effective strategy for building trust. More specifically, employees tend to mirror the behaviors displayed by their managers.

During leadership-employee interactions, employees observe the behaviors of leaders and notice their engagement and become role models, ultimately shaping the engagement of their employees (Gutermann et al., 2017). Maximo et al. (2019) argued that when leaders lead by example, they demonstrate work commitment and provide guidance to employees, leading to them exhibit commitment and stay connected to their work. Participant D stated that leadership must actively show that they trust their employees and be committed to their work in order to see that same behavior from their employees and garnish trust in their relationship. As a result of managers leading by example, employees' behaviors reflecting the same, such as holding themselves accountable, increased work commitment, increased work engagement, and increased camaraderie.

Provide Support. Participants emphasized the importance of providing support to employees as a means of building trust. When leaders create an environment where employees feel supported, their engagement is positively impacted (Maximo et al., 2019). Support from supervisors drives employee engagement (Hawkes et al., 2017; Saks,

2017)0. Participant C stressed the importance of laboratory managers supporting their employees both within the workplace and outside of the work environment. For instance, support should be given to employees when they are working on major work projects and if something arises in their personal lives. Participant E suggested that laboratory managers support their employees by encouraging them to get involved in community engagement activities and professional development opportunities. Harden et al. (2018) argued that promoting professional development and growth opportunities yield positive behaviors such as decrease employee turnover rates, increased organizational commitment, and higher performance. Conversely, Basit (2017) and Moletsane et al. (2019) posited that trainings and career development contribute to employees' active work engagement.

An additional strategy used by participants centers on providing support to employees is to celebrate, acknowledge, and congratulate employees on accomplishments and work contributions. Bhana and Suknunan (2019) found in their study that leadership's acknowledgment of employees' contributions drive engagement. Additionally, Deepika (2019) found that employees exhibited increased engagement when recognized and praised by leadership. Another strategy participants use to offer support to their employees is by including them in decision-making processes that directly impact them. Participant D stated, "As a leader, you have to actively show that you trust the employees and just engaging them in different levels of decision-making." Conversely, Participant E mentioned, "Just giving them a way of developing a task in their work so that they can be also successful and involving them in decision making. For

them to have that growth mindset so that they feel involved”. Employee contribution in decision-making encourages work engagement (Maximo et al., 2019; Saks, 2017). Encouraging employee autonomy and independence is another strategy used by participants to build a trusting relationship with employees. Participant D mentioned the importance of giving employees work autonomy. However, Participant B expressed that they determined that trust exists in their relationship with their employees when their employees exhibit work autonomy. When leadership encourages autonomy or freedom in how they approach their work, their work engagement increases (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019; Hawkes et al., 2017; Jeske et al., 2017). As discussed, when leadership show support to their employees, they build trusting relationships with their employees. More specifically, support from manager will ultimately result in engaged behaviors from employees.

Leadership Characteristics. I found that some of the strategies used by laboratory managers centered on their approach to leadership. Maximo et al. (2019) argued that leadership characteristics are necessary for trust to exist in the manager-subordinate relationship. Participant E stated that they exhibit a caring leadership style in that they actively listen to their employees, make them comfortable with being vulnerable while also showing their vulnerabilities as a leader. Conversely, Participant B reported that one of their trust-building strategies is not to approach leadership in a strict, controlling, domineering, or commanding way. As a result, management noticed enhanced interactions between themselves and their employees, and employees exhibit behaviors that reflect active engagement, such as increased motivation. Supervisors who

approach employees in a supportive manner instead of controlling allows employees experience higher levels of comfort in their interactions with leadership (Maximo et al., 2019). Participant B stated that their approach to leadership is not coming across as a strict or controlling manager. In response, employee motivation strengthen, as well as the relationship and interactions between management and employees were stronger.

Employee testimonials from Company B and Company D revealed that employees love their work environment, enjoy their work environment, and are engaged in their work. Additionally, annual reports from Company F revealed an increase in revenue and services rendered from 2018 to 2020. Additional strategies shared by participants centered around leadership characteristics are being accessible, being approachable, and being present and engaging in employees' daily activities. Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) stated that a successful leadership characteristic that leaders must have to enhance employee engagement is to be available to their employees. Jeske et al. (2017) argue that for leadership to foster engagement, their approach to leadership must be engaging a participative in nature. As discussed, leadership characteristics are necessary in building trust. Consequently, the trust established from leadership displaying certain characteristics results in employees displaying engaged behaviors.

Applications to Professional Practice

The purpose of the qualitative multiple case study was to identify trust-building strategies used by laboratory managers to cultivate the engagement of laboratory personnel. Through data analysis, I found that employees display engaged behaviors when leadership exhibit behaviors related to effective communication and effective

leadership behaviors. Such behaviors can be used by leadership to build trusting relationships with employees, which aids in cultivating engagement. Employee engagement is a continuous challenge faced by organizational leaders and has outcomes that impact organizational success. When an organization has an engaged workforce, they influence positive outcomes at the individual and organizational level such as gaining competitive advantage, increased profitability, decrease in absenteeism, decreased turnover intentions, higher productivity, increased motivation, and higher work satisfaction, for example (Gutermann et al., 2017; Moletsane et al., 2019; Zak, 2018). When an organization lacks engaged employees, the outcomes are negative and jeopardize organizational success (Jeske, 2017; Saks, 2017; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017).

Laboratory managers revealed that when they display trustworthy behaviors and communication styles, trust is evident in their relationships with their employees, and the employees respond by exhibiting engaged behaviors. Organizational leaders can use the study's findings to develop leadership training strategies and policies that center on fostering effective communication skills and effective leadership behaviors. Additionally, organizational leaders can focus on hiring leaders that exhibit these behaviors. Laboratory managers may use the findings of this study to understand the significant role they play in cultivating the work engagement of their employees. Additionally, they may use the findings to understand the importance of building trusting relationships with their employees to, in turn, cultivate employee engagement. Laboratory managers may also use the findings of this study to develop their trust-building strategies related to effective

communication skills and leadership behaviors to impact the engagement of their employees positively.

Implications for Social Change

The purpose of this multiple case study was to identify trust-building strategies laboratory managers use to increase employee engagement. The findings of this study may have implications for positive social change. When organizational leaders excel in establishing and maintaining employee engagement, they are more likely to experience positive outcomes at both an individual and organizational level. For example, organizations may experience outcomes such as higher financial performance, increased profitability, higher revenue growth, and competitive advantage (Cenkci & Otken, 2019; Saks, 2017). A profitable organization will not only have the ability to maintain its current workforce but are also able to create new job opportunities. New job opportunities may result in lower unemployment rates within surrounding communities and positively impact the economic well-being of the community in which the organization operates. Profitable organizations may provide a level of financial security for their employees, allowing them to take care of their basic needs and pour their finances back into the economy, creating financial stability for their community. At an individual level, engaged employees are more likely to experience the benefits of better health and well-being, such as a decrease in stress, anxiety, and depression, for example (Hawkes et al., 2017; Saks, 2017; Tesi et al., 2018). Additionally, engaged employees are more likely to involve themselves in community engagement initiatives, such as volunteering.

Recommendations for Action

Laboratory managers and supervisors can use the study findings to build trusting relationships with their laboratory employees, cultivating employee engagement. Based on the findings of this study, effective communication and leadership behaviors will cultivate engagement among laboratory employees. There are three recommendations for action that I identified. First, I recommend that organizational leaders incorporate trust-building strategies that center on effective leadership behaviors and effective communication with leadership training, development strategies, and policies. Incorporating these strategies may ensure that laboratory managers have the tools necessary to build trusting relationships with their employees and cultivate engagement. Second, I recommend that laboratory managers attended regular leadership training to refresh and reinforce effective leadership communication and behavior trust-building strategies to cultivate and maintain engagement among laboratory employees. Third, I recommend that laboratory managers and supervisors seek ongoing feedback from their employees on the effectiveness of their behaviors and communication styles and suggestions for improvement. Receiving feedback from employees will contribute to higher trusting manager-subordinate relationships and allow laboratory managers to modify their trust-building strategies to be more effective. The study's findings will be distributed to each participant and published to ProQuest for public access.

Recommendations for Further Research

I used a qualitative multiple case study to explore trust-building strategies laboratory managers use to cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees. A limitation of this study was that the target population was limited to laboratory managers solely. Future research on this study's topic could expand to include other management types. Additionally, comparing effective trust-building amongst various types of managers may prove beneficial and add to the generalizability of the findings. A second limitation of this study is that the phenomenon under study was explored from the perspective of management and excluded employees. To get a complete picture of effective trust-building strategies, future research should include the employee's perspective. In this study, I sought to understand from leadership's point of view what trust-building strategies are effective in influencing engagement. However, to truly understand what trust-building strategies effectively cultivate employee engagement, the employees' perspective would prove to be significant.

Reflections

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify trust-building strategies laboratory managers use to cultivate the engagement of laboratory employees. When deciding on my research topic, I reflected on my nine-plus years of working as a laboratory employee to determine a recurring issue that I have observed in the different laboratory environments in which I have worked. I determined that engagement was an issue for myself and my coworkers, and the major reason for this is that I did not trust my managers. For most of my time in this program, I was an employee researching

leadership's role in impacting employee engagement. I ironically concluded the program operating in a supervisory role in a laboratory environment, giving me insight from both perspectives. As a researcher, it is my responsibility to mitigate any researcher biases throughout my study's data collection, analysis, and interpretation phases.

My time throughout this DBA program was very much stressful and overwhelming. At times, I did not know if I would be able to continue. This entire process helped me to discover my pessimistic outlook when it comes to myself. I realized that I carry around a self-defeating mindset and rarely see myself in a positive. This mindset has negatively impacted my progress throughout the program. I had a hard time congratulating myself when I reached certain milestones but instead focused on what I have yet to accomplish. My time in this program has first helped me recognize this self-defeating mindset and actively work on changing. My understanding of employee engagement has increased significantly through my literature review and my research on the topic.

Conclusion

Although the known benefits engaged employees have on a personal and organizational level, organizations struggle with building and maintaining an engaged workforce. Based on current literature, trust is known to have the most significant impact on employee engagement. More specifically, when employees perceive their manager's actions and behaviors as trustworthy, they will more likely respond by exhibiting engaged actions and behaviors. The focus of this study was to explore effective trust-building strategies laboratory managers use to cultivate the engagement of laboratory

employees. Interviewed five laboratory managers who have successfully implemented trust-building strategies that cultivated the engagement of their employees. Through data collection and analysis, I found that trust-building strategies related to effective communication and leadership behaviors effectively cultivated the engagement of laboratory employees. Laboratory managers may find these strategies practical within their laboratories in building a trusting relationship with their employees, which may lead to a highly engaged workforce.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What I(researcher) will do	What I (researcher) will say—script
I will thank the participant for their participation and state the purpose of the interview.	Hello and thank you for taking the time to participant in this interview. Today we will be discussing trust-building strategies used to cultivate employee engagement. I have a few questions to ask you, so please relax, and know there is no right or wrong response. See this as a conversation between professionals. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to make you feel more comfortable.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will restate and rephrase questions if needed • I will ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What strategies are you currently using to build trusting relationships with the employees in your laboratory? 2. How do you determine if trust exists in the manager-subordinate relationship? 3. How do you measure trust in the manager-subordinate relationship? 4. Based upon your experiences, how effective are those trust-building strategies in positively influencing active engagement among the laboratory employees? 5. How did your employees respond to your different trust-building strategies? 6. What changes did you notice after implementing trust-building strategies to build active engagement among the laboratory employees? 7. How do you assess the effectiveness of your engagement strategies to achieve trusting relationships with your employees? 8. What other information would you like to provide regarding increasing the active engagement of laboratory

	<p>employees through the cultivation of a foundation of trust within the manager-subordinate relationship?</p>
<p>Wrap up interview thanking participant</p>	<p>I would like to thank you for your time and participation in my research study. I truly appreciate you sharing your time, effort, and expertise.</p>
<p>Discuss follow-up member checking interview</p>	<p>In the near future I will explore the collected data to identify themes and will provide you with a summary of the results and interpretation of interview responses. Once you have had time to review my findings, I will reach out to you and schedule a follow up interview to discuss my findings and make certain that my interpretation of your interview responses adequately portrays what you intended.</p>