

2023

## Employee Engagement Strategies in Manufacturing Organizations in Nigeria

Mofoluwaso Ilevbare  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Mofoluwaso Afolakemi Ilevbare

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Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Employee Engagement Strategies in Manufacturing Organizations in Nigeria

by

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MBA, Lead City University, 2010

B. Pharm, University of Ibadan, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

April 2023

## Abstract

Employee engagement is a major concern for business leaders in the manufacturing sector due to the constantly shifting labor market and the demanding nature of the manufacturing work environment. Manufacturing leaders who lack effective strategies to improve employee engagement risk losing valuable employees, which can pose significant threats to productivity and business profitability. Grounded in Kahn's engagement and disengagement theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies manufacturing leaders in Nigeria use to increase employee engagement. Using semi-structured interviews, company business reports, and employee survey action plans and reports, data were collected from eight manufacturing leaders in Southwest Nigeria with at least five years of leadership experience who successfully initiated and implemented employee engagement strategies. Five key themes emerged after using Yin's five-step data analysis process: a safe and inclusive work culture, supportive leadership, setting clear expectations, meaningful rewards and recognition, and frequent and effective communication practices. A key recommendation for manufacturing leaders is to engage employees in a way that encourages psychological safety, commitment and increases employee satisfaction at work. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase employee engagement and performance as a major contributor to local communities' sustainability and development, which may lead to increased employment, higher business tax remittance, and local production of products and services that meet community needs.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to our sons, David Oise-Ilevbare and Ethan Oise-Ilevbare. Your unwavering understanding, commitment, and support made it possible for me to fulfill my lifelong dream of completing my doctoral degree. Thank you for the many times you cooked and cleaned so I could focus and complete this doctoral journey.

To busy working moms with ambitious dreams, remember this - it always seems impossible until someone becomes unstoppable. Let that someone be you.

## Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank God, my Lord and Savior, for He is the one who made this all possible. This road was not easy, but I completed this doctoral journey through his love and mercy. I would also like to thank Dr. Michael Campo (Chair), Dr. Inez Black (Second Committee Member), and Dr. Peter Anthony (URR) for their valuable support and professional guidance throughout this journey. I will forever be grateful for your contribution to my doctoral success.

I want to specially appreciate my husband and fellow Walden DBA graduate, Joshua Ilevbare. Thank you for your abundance of support, love, confidence, and patience throughout my doctoral journey. You made sure I did not quit in the challenging moments and did everything you could to help me find the strength to balance it all. To my amazing mom, Adebisi Adeneye, and my sisters, Opeyemi, Oluwatomisola, Olubunmi, thank you for constantly holding me up in prayers.

To the resilient DBA students and fellow doctors in my Walden WhatsApp Study Group, thank you for your support. We did it!

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

With increased globalization, manufacturing leaders continue to experience a lot of pressure to find innovative strategies to tackle labour shortage and create dynamic capabilities. The manufacturing sector in Nigeria is no exception. Nigeria's manufacturing output for 2020 was \$54.76B, a 6% increase from 2019 levels and putting it on course towards becoming one of the world's top ten economies in terms of manufactured goods by 2025 (World Bank, 2022). The high cost of imported products, shortage of skilled labor, and poor management continue to cripple profitability in the manufacturing sector. The negative impact of the tough business operating environment in Nigeria has led to absenteeism, attrition, and poor customer service, which impacts business profitability (Uma et al., 2019). For businesses to thrive, the quality of employees and levels of engagement can be a competitive advantage (Govender & Bussin, 2020; Nelson, 2021). Highly engaged employees tend to demonstrate positive emotions at work which can lead to improved performance and retention (Garg & Singh, 2020; Kotera et al., 2021). Engaged employees can generate up to a 21% increase in profits (Hultman, 2020; Moletsane et al., 2019), which makes business leaders keen to find strategies to increase employee engagement (Sharma, 2021; Yuan et al., 2021). The focus of this case study research was to explore strategies manufacturing leaders in Nigeria use to improve employee engagement. The aim of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore organizational challenges leaders face and identify effective strategies to improve both employee engagement and business competitiveness.

## **Background of the Problem**

Employee engagement has a significant impact on innovation (Bahri et al., 2020), customer service quality (Sharma, 2021), and business performance (Nelson, 2021). Gallup (2022) State of the Workplace report stated that 60% of employees are emotionally detached at work and 19% are actively disengaged. In Sub-Saharan Africa, only 21% of employees are actively engaged, 46% may consider changing jobs, and 23% experience daily sadness at work (Gallup, 2022). With increased globalization pressures and forced hybrid working arrangements, leaders need to find new ways to improve employee engagement and performance levels, to stay competitive and deliver better profit margins. Highly engaged employees tend to feel proud of the work they do, have strong ties with work colleagues, and potentially less likely to quit (Bahri et al., 2020). Engaged employees are also more likely to be invested in achieving company goals (Siswanto & Lestari, 2019) and can help increase business profitability by twice the annual net income (Rao, 2017). Despite the extensive research on employee engagement and its antecedents, engagement scores globally have not drastically improved in the past two decades (Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2019). Employee engagement can impact employee levels of creativity, business performance, and customer satisfaction (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Nelson, 2021). Kotera et al. (2021) ascertained that disengaged employees tend to disconnect from the company's vision and have a higher tendency to be unproductive in delivering business outcomes while Nelson (2021) concluded that organizations with low employee engagement cannot produce high-performing results.

### **Problem and Purpose**

The specific business problem is that some manufacturing leaders lack strategies to improve employee engagement. Therefore, the purpose of this proposed qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies Nigerian manufacturing leaders use to improve employee engagement. The implication for positive social change can include more job opportunities, reduced unemployment rates, and overall wellness. Increased employee engagement can lead to increased business performance and more tax revenue remittance to the Nigerian government authorities, which can be used to increase local manufacturing partnerships and boost economic empowerment in underserved communities.

### **Population and Sampling**

Data was collected from eight purposefully sampled manufacturing leaders located in Southwest Nigeria who have at least five years' manufacturing experience and have successfully implemented strategies to improve employee engagement. I used a semistructured interview process to explore successful strategies they have used in these businesses to improve employee engagement. I leveraged company websites, LinkedIn, and Manufacturing Association of Nigeria (M.A.N.) database to gain access to the participants. Throughout this study, I also reviewed multiple data sources such as company archival documents, company public records, company website, World Bank reports, and other organizational documents, for relevant information.

### **Nature of the Study**

The three major research methodologies are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Saunders et al., 2019). I chose the qualitative research methodology for this study because Mohajan (2018) ascertained that qualitative researchers examine real-life phenomena and therefore qualitative methodology is the best method for acquiring data from personal experiences and perceptions. Using inductive analysis, qualitative researchers collect open-ended and emerging data based on various insights and experiences within a social construct, drawing themes from them (Mohajan, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). In quantitative methodology, the researcher takes a positivist approach to examine the relationships between variables by using descriptive statistical analysis, large samples, and measurements, adhering to a strict method with no interference of human bias (Saunders et al., 2019). I intend to examine the strategies used by private-sector managers in a natural organizational setting, not to predict human behavior, relationships between variables, or prevalence rates. This makes the quantitative methodology inappropriate for this study.

In a mixed-method methodology, the researcher uses a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to conduct interviews and examines relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2019). I rejected the mixed-methods methodology because there is no hypothesis testing nor variables to be examined. Qualitative researchers can adopt case study, ethnography, phenomenological, or narrative inquiry research designs to examine business problems (Mohajan, 2018). Researchers choose a case study research design for

methodically examining social constructs using what, why, and how questions (Yin, 2018). In a single case study design, the researcher attempts to describe an event or understand a single phenomenon while in a multiple case study, the researcher has more flexibility to compare individual constructs in multiple settings (Mohajan, 2018). I chose the multiple case study design over the single case study design because it allowed me to gain a thorough understanding and compare my findings, thus strengthening my research. Yin (2018) and Mohajan (2018) posited that in ethnography, the researcher examines the culture of a group over an extended period while Moustakas (1994) described a phenomenological design as a hybrid of philosophy and psychology where the researcher conducts interviews and documents the lived experiences of a social construct from the participants' perspective. Saunders et al. (2019) described that the narrative inquiry research design is best for examining whole personal experiences instead of pieces of data. I rejected the ethnographic and phenomenological research designs because the purpose of this study was not to examine cultural influences through direct observation (ethnography) nor to describe the common meanings of a phenomenon through the experiences of the participants (phenomenology). The narrative inquiry approach was not ideal because I would be collecting pieces of data via interview questions. I selected the multiple case study design as the preferred approach to deeply examine strategies private sector leaders use to increase employee engagement.



### **Research Question**

What strategies do successful manufacturing leaders use to improve employee engagement?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies do you use to maximize employee engagement?
2. Which employee engagement strategies were most effective?
3. Which employee engagement strategies were least effective?
4. What strategies do you use to enhance employee job satisfaction?
5. What strategies do you use to maximize employee motivation?
6. How, if at all, does your organizational culture impact employee engagement?
7. What leadership style do you use to keep engaged employees from becoming disengaged?
8. In what ways, if at all, have your employee engagement strategies impacted your firm's competitiveness?
9. What additional factors, that we did not discuss, would you like to share regarding strategies to improve employee engagement?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was the employee engagement theory by developed by Kahn (1990), on the premise that employees demonstrated varying levels of physical, cognitive, and emotional behaviors and attachment, in response to their work and environment. Highly engaged employees have an abundance of resources to devote

to work and support team members to achieve business objectives (Nelson, 2021).

Kahn's (1990) engagement theory is based on three psychological constructs related to employee engagement or disengagement at work – meaningfulness (perception of worth an employee places on the organization and the job), psychological safety (perception of trust and support employee places on the work environment, colleagues, and processes), and psychological availability (the extent of self-awareness and confidence individuals are willing to express on the job). Kahn (1990) ascertained that employees demonstrate engagement on the job to the level that they are physically, emotionally, and cognitively inclined to do so.

Recent workplace surveys state that over 70% of employees are still neither engaged nor actively disengaged at work, leading to significant financial loss and poor performance metrics (Nelson, 2021). An engaged workforce is a competitive advantage for business survival in tough economic business environments (Ahmed et al., 2020; Burlacu & Mura, 2019). An engaged employee is committed and enthusiastic about the organization and the job while disengaged employees are physically, cognitively, or emotionally disconnected from the job, and displays undesirable behaviors (Kahn, 1990; Nelson, 2021). I chose Kahn's (1990) engagement theory as appropriate for this study to explore whether manufacturing leaders use employee engagement strategies such as psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability in the workplace, to improve profitability. Secondly, the findings of this study may add to the

body of knowledge on employee engagement strategies, especially in developing countries like Nigeria.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Disengaged employee:* An employee who demonstrates a lack of commitment, loyalty, or connection towards work or workplace (Sudjiwanati & Pinastikasari, 2020; Yanchus et al., 2020)

*Employee Disengagement:* the act of disconnecting physically, emotionally, or mentally withdrawing from work (Afrahi et al., 2022; Allam, 2017).

*Employee Engagement:* the physical, cognitive, and emotional attachment an employee demonstrates on the job towards achieving organization's goals (Kahn, 1990).

*Firm's competitiveness:* The potential of an organization to outperform competition, enter new markets, and expand business growth (Falciola et al., 2020).

*Job satisfaction:* The happy emotions and enthusiasm that result from one's work experiences (Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021; Putri et al., 2021).

*Motivation:* Motivation is the force or intensity that propels an individual to consciously or persistently push beyond their limits to achieve a goal (Kotera et al., 2021; Niati et al., 2022).

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

Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are underlining issues and boundaries that frame the results and findings of a study. Assumptions are preconceptions a researcher has about the phenomenon being observed, without concrete proof

(Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Limitations are potential constraints either within the research design, analytical model, funding, or other factors, that may impact the outcome of the study (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). Delimitations are constraints deliberately set by the researcher to ensure that the objectives of the study are achievable (Ross & Zaidi, 2019; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). I outlined the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study below.

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are ideas or perspectives the researcher views as widely acceptable but cannot be confirmed (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The first assumption in this study was that three or more manufacturing leaders who have successfully implemented employee engagement strategies would be available. The second assumption was that all participants will provide correct answers during interviews. The third assumption was that the research methodology, type of sampling and design was most appropriate to answer the research question. The fourth assumption was that the responses from the participants will yield positive recommendations on successful engagement strategies.

### **Limitations**

Limitations refer to possible weaknesses of the study which are not in the researcher's control. The first limitation was the geographical confinement of this study to southwest Nigeria only. The second limitation was the use of interviews and company documentation as sources of evidence in which the researcher's bias and interpretation of these discussions may influence the credibility of the findings. A third limitation was the

small sample size which may limit the generalization and application of the conclusions to other sectors.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations refer to the defined boundaries of the study imposed by the researcher (Preston & Claypool, 2021; Yin, 2018). The first delimitation was the use of a purposeful sampling method to select manufacturing leaders with successful employee engagement strategies. The second delimitation was the exclusion of manufacturing leaders in southwest Nigeria, with less than five years' experience, to help increase the chances of achieving the objectives of the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies successful manufacturing leaders use to improve employee engagement as employee engagement is still a major concern in many businesses (Ibiwoye et al., 2020; Na-Nan et al., 2020). Borst et al. (2020) rated work engagement as a better predictor of performance than job satisfaction. There are several factors that affect the level of engagement in the workplace, and leadership style plays a big role. Govender and Bussin (2020) opined leaders who motivate and support employees to perform well on the job can cultivate a culture of high engagement and productivity. In a recent 2020 survey, approximately 67% of public service employees indicated job satisfaction, 42% find fulfillment in their jobs, and only 39% of respondents are inspired by their job (OECD, 2021). Highly engaged employees are more productive, good advocates, and positively influence

organizational performance and corporate reputation (Osam & Shuck, 2020; Shen & Jiang, 2019). Disengaged employees are not committed to the business vision and goals leading to poor organizational outcomes (Sudjiwanati & Pinastikasari, 2020). Therefore, in a constantly changing external environment, leaders must engage and empower the workforce in a way that improves job performance and business growth (Ibiwoye et al., 2020; Na-Nan et al., 2020). This study can add to the existing body of knowledge on strategies to improve employee engagement.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Manufacturing leaders work in highly competitive and complex environments that may affect organizational outcomes (Santhanam & Srinivas, 2020). Chanana and Sangeeta (2020) opined that employee engagement is critical for any organization to retain its highly valued and experienced employees. Employee engagement is a competitive advantage in any organization (Yan et al., 2021) and fosters wellbeing, employee commitment, educational learning, and business sustainability (Kashyap & Chaudhary, 2019; Kim et al., 2020). Ibiwoye et al. (2020) expressed that business leaders have a critical role to play and are best positioned to remove barriers to employee engagement. Managers who implement employee engagement strategies experienced higher employee productivity and commitment (Boikanyo & Heyns, 2019; Ibiwoye et al., 2020). Implications of this study could help reduce undesired work behaviours and poor performance often associated with a lack of employee engagement, thereby supporting organizational growth. Managers may find immediate resources to enhance human

resource policies and boost engagement in the workplace while academic scholars may be able to use the findings as the basis for further research on strategies to improve employee engagement.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Highly engaged employees who believe they are making a difference at work feel energized and are willing to contribute to goodwill projects that sustain their communities (Lavigna & Basso, 2020). The results of this study may create positive social change because engaged employees take pride in the work they do, are deeply connected to the organization, families, and communities around them, and can help to manufacture products and services that meet specific community needs. Business leaders can create social change by reinvesting profits into the economy, increasing customer satisfaction, providing more jobs, and strengthening local partnerships. Better business performance can result in more tax revenue remittance to the Nigerian government authorities which can boost economic empowerment in underserved communities.

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

The focus of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies manufacturing sector leaders use to improve employee engagement. I conducted a thorough search within the multiple databases to find peer-reviewed journals, articles, and approved doctoral dissertations on the topic of employee engagement. These databases included Walden Library, ProQuest, Emerald Management Journals, EBSCOhost, and other relevant public/government websites. I explored Google scholar

and cross-referenced articles using the Walden Library Centre and Ulrich's Periodicals Directory to confirm credibility. Using keywords such as *employee engagement*, *employee disengagement*, *work engagement*, *job performance*, *job satisfaction*, *employee engagement in manufacturing industries*, and *employee engagement theory*, I also researched each of the tenets of employee engagement, *meaningfulness*, *psychological safety*, *psychological availability*.

Table 1 shows details of literature reviewed by year of publication. I reviewed several peer-reviewed articles, books, and reports, analyzed, and synthesized my findings in line with my research question and the purpose of the study. I used the Ulrich's Periodicals Directory to verify journal articles were peer-reviewed. The literature review contains 265 scholarly sources which includes 250 (94%) peer-reviewed journal articles, ten books and five reports. The publication dates of 227 (86%) sources are within 5 years of expected approval of my doctoral research, while 38 (14%) sources are seminal publications before 2019.

**Table 1**

*Details of Literature Reviewed by Year of Publication*

	Before 2019	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Books	5	2	2	1			10
Peer-reviewed journal articles	30	49	67	67	35	2	250
Magazines/Reports	3				2		5
Total	38	51	69	68	37	2	265

*Note.* Table created by author.



I organized this literature review to focus on relevant themes related to the development of strategies that improve employee engagement. In the first segment, I explained Kahn's (1990) engagement theory as the conceptual framework for this study, outlining the three psychological constructs namely psychological meaningfulness, availability, and safety. Then I outlined alternative theories that expand or contrast Kahn's work. In the third segment, I explained the concept of employee engagement, employee disengagement, antecedents of employee engagement, measurement of employee engagement, and provided extensive literature review on the impact of leadership, job satisfaction, motivation, organizational culture, and a firm's competitiveness on employee engagement.

### **Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the employee engagement theory (EET) developed by William Kahn (1990). Kahn (1990) based his study on the extent of physical, cognitive, and emotional constructs individuals express in response to their work and environment. From the earlier research of Goffman (1961) who ascertained that people demonstrated varying degrees of attachment or detachment to tasks, Kahn's (1990) reasoning was that people give varying degrees of attention and presence to the roles they perform and who they are. Kahn's (1990) concept of engagement and disengagement has been integral to our understanding of how people interact with their work environments. Kahn defined engagement as a state in which "people are physically, cognitively, and emotionally involved in their work" (p. 664).

Conversely, disengagement is described as a state in which "people are physically present but not psychologically involved in their work" (p. 664). To illustrate the concept of engagement and disengagement, Kahn (1990) carried out two studies. In the first study, Kahn (1990) sampled 16 counsellors at a summer camp in West Indies, collecting data through observation, self-reflection, interviews, and documentation review, over a 6-week period. In the second study, Kahn (1990) sampled 16 participants at an architectural company but this time, he collected data based on the participants' experiences in four specific situations. With both results, Kahn (1990) ascertained that there are three main types of engagement: emotional, behavioural, and cognitive.

Emotional engagement is characterized by positive emotions such as happiness and interest. Behavioural engagement is characterized by active participation in activities. Cognitive engagement is characterized by high levels of concentration and deep thought. Kahn's (1990) findings suggest that engagement is associated with greater satisfaction and motivation, which can impact workers' well-being and performance, while disengagement is associated with poorer work quality and lower levels of productivity. Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement brought the needs-satisfaction framework to light (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). Kahn (1990) described the three psychological conditions linked to personal engagement or disengagement as psychological meaningfulness, psychological availability, and psychological safety. When these needs are met, individuals are more likely to engage. When these needs are not adequately catered for in the organization, individuals are more likely to disconnect and defend

themselves (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). Kahn (1990) explained that engagement happens when individuals willingly give time, resources, and commitment to their roles and work responsibilities.

Schaufeli et al. (2002, p. 74) described Kahn's concept of work engagement as a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption", but expanded the concept as a cognitive state not specific to a particular person, situation, or object. Kahn (1990) ascertained that engaged employees are workers who commit themselves passionately within the organization, deploying their skills and roles effectively, and sometimes going beyond what is required on the job, disengaged employees give less time, display less passion, and are less attentive on the job, while non-engaged employees are present at work but completely devoid of passion or commitment. Engaged employees can improve both organizational and financial competitiveness in an organization (Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2020). Engagement is not the same as job satisfaction or job involvement (Donovan, 2022). It is opposed to burnout, which happens when someone has been on the job for too long without any enjoyment or motivation whatsoever, which may lead to disengagement.

Highly engaged employees help to promote a supportive work culture (Donovan, 2022). Kahn (1990) opined that employees would invest themselves entirely in their roles based off working experiences if there was a physical, cognitive, and emotional connection to the work or the organization. Riyanto et al. (2021) defined employee engagement as the process of ensuring employees are motivated, committed to the

organization's objectives and values, and passionate about their work and wellbeing. Govender and Bussin (2020) stated employees who buy into a company's vision, goals, strategies, and culture tend to do more than is required on the job thereby increasing overall business performance. Kahn's (1990) employee engagement theory has been studied for over 25 years and while existing body of research agree that employee engagement is critical for both business growth and positive social change, there is no consensus on a single definition for engagement, the prerequisites to engagement, nor the drivers of engagement, giving more room for improvement in research.

Using Kahn's model as a foundation, Kim et al. (2020) selected person-job fit (P-J fit), self-efficacy, and psychological contract fulfillment as antecedents of job engagement, explored how these factors affect job engagement, and the impact on employees' voice behavior and concluded that all three antecedents (person-job fit (P-J fit), self-efficacy, and psychological contract fulfillment) have a positive relationship with job engagement, job engagement is positively associated with employees' voice behavior, and job engagement has a mediating effect on the antecedents and voice behavior. Beltran-Martin et al. (2022) sampled over 146 HR managers and 500 employees in some Spanish companies and concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between high performance work systems and the tenets of Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement – psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability.

Talent attraction, selection, and retention strategies also impact the level of engagement of the workforce (Byrne & Manning, 2021). Riyanto et al. (2021) and

Harunavamwe et al. (2020) opined that business leaders can attract and retain highly engaged employees when the employees' role expectations align with the work environment. Harunavamwe et al. (2020) concluded that employees who feel aligned and have meaningful connections at work increase their psychological and personal leadership in the organization which in turn improves engagement and performance. Moyo (2020) tested the hypotheses that employers who protect employees from poor working conditions and unsafe working environment can boost employee engagement while failure to do so could lead to disengagement.

Neglecting the health and safety needs of employees negatively impacted the engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior of employees (Moyo, 2020). In addition, shortage of safety equipment, long working hours, and increasing workload can lead to employee disengagement. Engaged employees are more productive, innovative, and perform better on the job, creating higher efficiency and customer satisfaction (OECD, 2021).

**Psychological meaningfulness:** Kahn (1990) defined this as an employee's perception of value received in exchange for the physical, cognitive, or emotional investment displayed within the organization. Huang and Fei (2020) described psychological meaningfulness as the alignment between personal values and those of the organization. Sudjiwanati and Pinastikasari (2020) opined employees usually consider their job as meaningful work when the perceived value and return on investment is acceptable. Kahn's (1990) study showed that personal engagement is linked to higher

levels of psychological meaningfulness than disengagement. Afrahi et al. (2022) and Kahn (1990) ascertained that psychological meaningfulness can be influenced by the characteristics of tasks (the level of ownership, autonomy, and challenge of responsibilities), roles (perception of the level of influence and importance attached to job positions), and work interactions (rewarding interpersonal bonds with colleagues and clients that promoted respect, a sense of worth, and self-love). Another antecedent of psychological meaningfulness is perceived transformational leadership. Huang and Fei (2020) observed a positively significant relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement. Transformational leaders are known to use inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, influence, and personalized consideration to transform employee's perception of themselves and the organization (Tung, 2019), which tends to lead to better engagement. Engaged workers tend to be more proactive, have a shared sense of belonging in the workplace, and want nothing but success for their team or company (Zahari & Kaliannan, 2022).

**Psychological availability:** Kahn (1990) defined this as the state in which employees believe they have adequate physical, cognitive, and emotional resources to perform their responsibilities at work. Psychological availability correlates with higher levels of engagement than disengagement and can be influenced by physical energy (the amount of physical energy expended on the job), emotional energy (emotional ability to engage on the job), insecurity (feelings of safety, anxiety, lack of confidence, or increased self-consciousness on the job), and external life (off-the-job influence and

quality of life outside of work can play a big role in the level of energy, engagement, and presence an employee demonstrates on the job). Mitonga-Monga (2019) opined that job satisfaction, and an enabling work environment can influence the psychological attachment an employee has to the company and the job. Organizations with highly engaged employees experience less absenteeism or sick leaves (OECD, 2021).

**Psychological safety:** Kahn (1990) described psychological safety as an employee's ability to deploy their whole self at work without any fear of negative consequences that may affect self-esteem, career progression, or status. Liu and Ge (2020) ascertained that psychological safety can predict attitudes such as employee commitment and engagement. Leaders who create a safe work environment where employees can interact freely and do meaningful work have highly engaged employees and better job satisfaction (Harunavamwe et al., 2020). Psychological safety can also be influenced by interpersonal relationships with peers (Riyanto et al., 2021), group and intergroup dynamics, leadership style and process, and organizational culture and behavior (Mitonga-Monga, 2019). Donovan (2022) described psychological safety as the perception that an organization's social structure and culture supports employees at work. In China, Liu and Ge (2020) examined the relationship between psychological safety and employee creativity and confirmed that there is a significant relationship between psychological safety and attitudes such as employee commitment and creativity. Edmondson and Bransby (2023) ascertained that organizations can transform and succeed in challenging times by optimizing their psychological safety. This involves mastering

four key strategies: achieving results, developing learning behaviors, enhancing the work experience, and empowering leadership, to foster a supportive environment.

## **Engagement Theories**

### ***Alternative Theories***

Theories provide the canvas to draw meanings and connections when examining phenomena (Levitt et al., 2021). Although the foundation of the tenets of employee engagement can be traced back to Kahn (1990), due to the lack of consensus on the definition, antecedents, and measurement of employee engagement, several researchers have established alternative theories to bridge knowledge gaps about employee engagement and the influence on business competitiveness. Some of the other theories similar to my selected conceptual framework are the social exchange theory, job demand-resources theory, and job embeddedness theory. I chose Kahn's (1990) engagement theory as none of the alternative theories sufficiently addressed the research question and essence of this study.

### ***Social Exchange Theory***

The social exchange theory (SET) is commonly associated with employee engagement. The SET was developed by Homans (1958) to explain the reciprocal cost-benefit relationship between two parties based on perceived value, risks, and benefits. If the cost of the relationship outweighs the benefits, the relationship may be terminated. Nimon and Shuck (2020) described the fundamentals of SET as a positive state of mind expressed as vigour (high energy), dedication (emotional commitment to work), and



absorption (full work engagement) and managers can use this framework to develop reciprocal interdependency and mutual trust that leads to higher engagement. Using the SET, Othemeng et al. (2020) opined that those leaders who exchange value with employees through fairness, respect, communication, and credibility can improve employee engagement and increase performance. Mohanty and P (2021) emphasized that human beings value relationships and the degree of contribution an employee gives back to the organization is dependent on the perceived value of benefits received in exchange. If coercion is minimized and value is mutually reciprocated, managers can harness the exchange of positive relationships and resources that can give rise to better engagement and trust. Siswanto et al. (2021) pointed out that employees who appreciate and value the cash and non-cash rewards received in exchange for tasks done tend to be more committed to the organization.

### ***Job Demands-Resources Theory***

Xanthopoulou et al. (2015) developed the job demands-resources (JD-R) model to explain that the presence of certain job resources can influence employee engagement. These resources include (a) job security, (b) role conflict and autonomy, and (c) supervisory support. Cooke et al. (2019) expressed that job demands can arise from the physical, social, organizational, or psychological elements of a job in form of time constraints, strenuous work, or heavy responsibilities. Joubert and Roodt (2019) described the job demands-resources (JD-R) model as one of the best efforts to construct work engagement on a personal level. Santhanam and Srinivas (2020) supported the

notion that job demand is a stressor, but researchers can use the JD-R model to examine the factors that affect employee health and wellbeing, such as job burnout, and predict engagement outcomes. Using the JD-R theory, Bakker and Van Wingerden (2021) ascertained that personal and workplace resources affect employees' level of engagement on the job and that transformational leadership styles (a) support employee work engagement on days the job demands are high and (b) protect work engagement levels on days there is a high hindrance to job demands. Wang et al. (2020) stated that leaders who provide autonomous support to employees with high levels of physical or emotional job insecurity can increase employee engagement and boost work performance.

Harunavamwe et al. (2020) used the Job Demand-Resource model (JD-R) to examine the relationship between psychological capital, self-leadership, and job embeddedness factors on work engagement on the premise that many organizational leaders still struggle to implement effective engagement strategies. The authors concluded that business leaders who foster self-leadership strategies, provide psychological safety, and encourage closer links and fit among employees, improve employee engagement. Ngwenya and Pelsler (2020) opined businesses that manage psychological capital well experience higher levels of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and sustainability. This theory complements Kahn's (1990) theory about the psychological conditions of engagement in the workplace.

### ***Job Embeddedness Theory***

Another theory connected with employee engagement is the job embeddedness theory developed by Mitchell et al. (2001). The authors identified the concept of job embeddedness as the degree to which an employee is tied to an organization or community through on-the-job and off-the-job conditions and declared the fundamental tenets of job embeddedness as (a) fit or compatibility with the organization and community, (b) links or connection with others in the organization and community, and (c) sacrifice or perceived cost of leaving the organization and community. Rafiq et al. (2019) expressed that turnover was caused by job attitudes such as job dissatisfaction, organizational commitment, and pay inequality. Mitchell et al. (2001) focused on why employees voluntarily remain in an organization and how those behaviours are shaped by on-the-job factors (job embeddedness) and off-the-job factors (community embeddedness). Bahri et al. (2020) and Safavi and Karatepe (2019) opined that engaged employees are more embedded on the job, produce better work outcomes, demonstrate desired citizenship behavior, and are less likely to quit.

Bahri et al. (2020) recommended that hospitality leaders should improve the work environment to improve job embeddedness and engagement among employees. Coetzer et al. (2019) added that the closer the links and fit between an employee's values, career goals, and aspirations within the organization or within the community, the higher the embeddedness. Andrews and Mohammed (2020) showed that organization leaders that provide career opportunities, training and development programs, effective

communication, and good compensation for employees can improve employee embeddedness and reduce employee turnover. Increased job satisfaction and employee engagement can lead to better job performance (Riyanto et al., 2021).

### **Employee Engagement**

Yadav (2020) expressed that many existing researchers defined employee engagement from the perspective of a multifaceted construct (cognitive, behaviours, and emotions) or a single-focus construct (individual willingness, dedication, and opposite of burnout). Donovan (2022) ascertained that regardless of engagement models used in the past 20 years of research, there is proof that antecedents of employee engagement can have an impact on individual, group, and organizational performance and influence business outcomes such as customer loyalty, job satisfaction, profitability, and productivity. Ongoing employee engagement is critical for business continuity and survival. Despite extensive literature, journals, and research on employee engagement, there is still a knowledge gap which may be attributed to the complexity of understanding individual and organizational behaviours (Lee et al., 2020). Many researchers use different terms such as job engagement, work engagement, or employee engagement interchangeably to describe engagement. Kahn (1990) described employee engagement as “the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles” (p. 694).

Work engagement is popularly defined as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Kahn (1990) described employees as “engaged” when they are physically,

cognitively, and emotionally invested at work. Cognitively engaged employees consider work to be meaningful, and physically engaged employees demonstrate high levels of productivity (Boikanyo & Heyns, 2019; Reissova & Papay, 2021). The most productive organizations are those where workers apply their full energy on the job (Huang & Fei, 2020), engage physically, cognitively, and emotionally in their work, and do not demonstrate counterproductive work behaviours (Huang & Fei, 2020). Highly engaged employees extend themselves on the job psychologically, cognitively, and emotionally, which then leads to increased contextual and task performance (Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021).

Employee engagement involves influencing the hands, hearts, and heads of followers towards a leader's vision and organizational goals (Akob et al., 2020; Kahn, 1990). Using the JD-R theory, Garg et al. (2021) found that reverse mentoring at interpersonal levels and job crafting (also known as employee-driven resourcing) both play a significant role in influencing an employee's attitude to work and overall engagement. Employees that practiced job crafting improved their physiological and psychological attachments to work creating a feeling a meaningful work and better business performance (Dasgupta & Dey, 2021). Homann et al. (2021) explored management practices that promote or hinder engagement on the basis that while manufacturing leaders understand that employee engagement enhances performance, many do not proactively create a trusting and enabling environment that drives increased engagement.

Homann et al. (2021) concluded that focus on safety, quality employee communication, and a trusting work environment are drivers of employee engagement. Leadership behaviors significantly impact workers' health and safety behaviors, employee engagement and disengagement, and overall performance (Homann et al., 2021). Where there is distrust and directive styles of leadership, employees can lose the feeling of meaningfulness and psychological safety. Bandi et al. (2021) and Alam et al. (2022) opined business leaders can improve employee engagement using strategies such as effective communication around rewards, empowerment of teams, leadership capability to implement the strategies, clear understanding of the relationship between employee engagement and profitability, and regular monitoring of internal and external engagement metrics. Kaaviyapriya and Xavier (2020) indicated performance management systems such as goal setting, feedback, rewards, and recognition, learning and development, appraisal process, and work culture, also impact the level of engagement in an organization. Organizations that have adequate performance management, general management, and rewards process in place are more likely to have engaged employees (Alam et al., 2022).

Engaged employees usually experience positive emotions and transfer their creativity and enthusiasm to other colleagues. Employee engagement can have a significant impact on employee productivity (Kaaviyapriya & Xavier, 2020). Moyo (2020) ascertained that managers must continue to show care, empathy, and put adequate health and safety measures in place for all employees. The work domain and personal

domain are interlinked, and the activities employees engage in outside of work can impact their emotional and psychological engagement in the workplace (Ferreira et al., 2020). Engaged employees are a strategic competitive advantage in organizations and any form of disconnection in attitude to work or performance of duties can hurt business profitability and survival (Moyo, 2020).

**Physical engagement:** When employees are engaged, certain physical traits are visible. Engaged employees show commitment to achieving business objectives and extend themselves discretionally despite high work demands (Reissova & Papay, 2021). Engaged employees recover quickly from physical exhaustion, take ownership for their deliverables, are less likely to withdraw from a challenge, and show up at work when it matters most.

**Cognitive engagement:** This develops when employees feel safe at work, assess their job roles as meaningful, and have available resources to complete assigned tasks and deliver business goals (Kahn, 1990). Employees who are cognitively engaged have a psychological connection with the work environment, the tasks to perform, and express a high level of enthusiasm and interest at work (Kahn, 1990; Satata, 2021). Ogueyungbo et al. (2022) expressed cognitive engagement means employees show more commitment in what they do, generate new ideas, and exert themselves in challenging situations to accomplish both personal and business goals. Scharp et al. (2022) developed a process model that introduced the concept of playful work design into work environments to test autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Employees that design their work in a more

playful manner experienced higher engagement, job satisfaction, and performed better on the job, mainly due to the autonomy and personalized approach to creativity (Scharp et al., 2022). This established that employees could use playful work design to cope in challenging stressful conditions in and outside of work (Scharp et al., 2022). Employees approach work in relation to the purpose and meaning they attach to it and when they feel in control, they can evoke positive emotions as a coping mechanism, becoming more resilient and optimistic even in difficult circumstances (Vermooten et al., 2021). The cognitive, emotional, and behavioral condition of employees towards work and the company's goals impact the level of engagement on the job (Satata, 2021).

**Emotional engagement:** Employees who are emotionally engaged feel proud of their work, the company, their colleagues, and are invested in the objectives and values of the company (Kaaviyapriya & Xavier, 2020). These employees display proactive initiative, express their voice, and demonstrate organizational citizenship behavior. Employees with an emotional connection to the company display behaviors beyond just a contractual relationship (Ali et al., 2019). Meaningful interpersonal relationships play a significant role in the level of emotional attachment (Firoz & Chaudhary, 2021) and loyalty employees feel to the job and the workplace (Liu & Liu, 2022). When company values are congruent with personal values, the emotional connection can make employees blend organizational goals with personal goals (Huang & Fei, 2020).



## **Employee Disengagement**

Demerouti et al. (2001) described disengagement as the act of “distancing oneself from one’s work, and experiencing negative attitudes toward the work object, work content, or one’s work in general” (p. 501). Allam (2017) defined disengagement as personal disengagement (a physical, cognitive, or emotional disconnection from expected roles and responsibilities) or in the context of work and the workplace, it is the consistent withdrawal of loyalty and a negative attitude towards a place of work or task. While employee engagement describes the positive emotional attachment that drives employees to achieve organizational objectives (Ali et al., 2019), disengaged employees show poor performance and may be seen as a general problem in many organizations (Sudjiwanati & Pinastikasari, 2020). Kahn (1990) opined disengaged employees detach cognitively, emotionally, and physically from work even though they may continue to perform those tasks. Kahn (1990) posited that a disengaged employee may display higher levels of physical exhaustion or absenteeism that affect personal and overall organizational productivity.

Gallup's (2022) research suggests that poor employee engagement costs a loss of \$7.8 trillion in the global economy, representing 11% of global GDP. Only 33% of workforce in the U.S., are considered as actively engaged (Gallup, 2022). Osborne and Hammoud (2017) estimated the annual cost of disengaged employees in the U.S. as one-third of a billion dollars, which implied that employee disengagement is detrimental to any business venture and could result in a spike in costs, attrition, and customer

dissatisfaction. Given that disengagement is detrimental to productivity, business leaders must consciously take action to mitigate against it. However, not all leaders are able to solve employee disengagement because they do not understand the root cause or strategies to implement. Kahn (1990) described disengagement as a context variable which means the condition can change depending on the circumstances influencing the employee's behavior. Common counterproductive behaviors of disengaged employees include absenteeism (Aslam et al., 2018), poor work performance, taking more breaks than usual, use of social media for negative rantings. Some consequences of employee disengagement are neglect of superiors or lack of empowerment, low incentives for career advancement (Hultman, 2020), and toxic work environments. The quality of engagement, communication, and leadership support across different levels in the organization impact employee engagement (Govender & Bussin, 2020).

Stranzl et al. (2021) reinforced those employees working in remote areas may be more disengaged in the absence of transparent communication and trust. In fast-paced working environments, conflicts are bound to happen within teams (Lee & Huang, 2019). Lee and Huang (2019) conducted a six-month longitudinal study using data collected from over 1,600 research and development employees to explore if open discussions of conflicts within workgroups can result in increased job engagement and better product performance. Using Kahn's engagement theory as a framework, the authors concluded that perceived transformational leadership, perceived corporate social responsibility, and perceived self-esteem at work are antecedents of job engagement and that engaged

employees demonstrated higher shared values, capability, and creativity, through positive interpersonal relationships at work, which influence performance.

Employee disengagement may lead to lack of desired citizenship behaviour, lack of teamwork, defiance, low morale, poor skill development, negative impact on company investment and returns, job dissatisfaction, workplace bullying, health problems, and low retention (Govender & Bussin, 2020; Tian & Zhang, 2020). Employees who feel like their work helps to achieve company goals and have high motivation for improvement in performance may be more engaged than those without these feelings, which can lead them down the path towards improving not just themselves but also others around them. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many companies to shut down their physical offices and employees worked from home (Donovan, 2022). This change in ways of working has triggered new discussions about the definition of disengagement. Disengagement can be triggered by the work environment, non-flexible policies, lack of resources or capabilities, excessive work demands, and employees' level of resilience to stress and exhaustion, but also by non-work-related factors such as external threats beyond the control of the organization (Afrahi et al., 2022). Business leaders and human resources practitioners must continue to identify the root causes of disengagement, role model a culture of care, and cultivate a positive work environment where all employees can thrive.

## **Measuring Employee Engagement**

Promoting employee engagement and motivating employees to stay at work is increasingly still a challenge (Rafiq et al., 2019). Kahn's theory of employee engagement (the cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement of employees) is the basis for many of the existing tools which have been developed in line with newer theories of social exchange, motivation, job satisfaction, performance, and burnout. Despite extensive data available, there is still a longstanding debate on a common definition of engagement and measuring tool (Joubert & Roodt, 2019; Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2019). This situation probably exists because although Kahn (1990) developed the engagement theory, he did not provide a standardized tool for measurement. This has given rise to several tools of measurement in the quest to further understand the meaning, implications, and impact of engagement and its antecedents. Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019) conducted a structured literature review by comparing the validity, reliability and psychometric properties of common measuring tools and emphasized the challenges researchers and human resources (HR) practitioners face in measuring the construct of employment engagement.

The findings showed several gaps such as differences in the conceptual meaning of engagement and how best to measure it, the appropriateness of the measuring tools in cross-cultural context, and the lack of rigorous testing of the reliability and validity of the measuring instruments. Examples of tools used to measure employee engagement are:

- (a) Gallup Workplace Audit (Harter et al., 2002) is used to measure the relationship between engagement and various work outcomes like turnover.

(b) the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-17 (UWES), a nine-item self-rating widely recognized and applied tool developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002) for measuring the relationship between burnout and engagement. The tool measures engagement with respect to vigour, dedication, and absorption and each item is scored on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 =never to 6 = every day (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

(c) Psychological Engagement Measure developed by May et al. (2004) to measure the cognitive, physical, and emotional aspect of the engagement.

Bandi et al. (2021) opined that business leaders can use employee engagement indices as a key performance indicator to identify the factors that inspire employees beyond cupcakes and freebies. Burnett and Lisk (2019) ascertained that many companies still use the traditional methods and paper surveys to measure engagement and leaders view engagement metrics as a lagging indicator, making it cumbersome to track its effectiveness and impact in turning business results around. Burnett and Lisk (2019) challenged managers and organizations to embrace the use of modern real-time digital tools and applications such as big data, machine learning, black box algorithms, HR analytics, and other contemporary applications of technology to create large scale improvements in employee engagement and satisfaction that impact key business metrics such as revenue, financial results, competitiveness, and customer service.

### **Antecedents of Employee Engagement**

Many researchers have studied the impact of several variables on employee engagement. Most of these antecedents have been linked to the workplace (Osam & Shuck, 2020). Among them are leadership, rewards and recognition, employee development, meaningful work, supervisory leadership, culture, work life balance, individual and team-level organizational support. Strengthening corporate purpose can drive higher work engagement, higher employee attraction and retention, and increased organizational performance (Van Tuin et al., 2020). Alam et al. (2022) and Presslee et al. (2023) expressed that rewards and recognitions, good workplace practices, and positive manager relationships equally enhance engagement. Siswanto et al. (2021) examined how rewards influenced employee performance through the lenses of engagement and motivation by observing manufacturing employees at Sukorejo, Indonesia. The findings of the study showed that employee engagement played a mediating role in the relationship between rewards and employee performance i.e., rewards can motivate employees to be more engaged at work which indirectly impacts performance.

Alam et al. (2022) examined the relationship between employee engagement and four antecedents of engagement – performance, rewards, transformational leadership, and general management. Rewards had the most impact on engagement followed by performance management, general management, and transformational leadership respectively. The findings of the study support existing research that intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and style of leadership significantly impact employee engagement.

Choudhury et al. (2021) identified work culture, compensation and benefits, communication, and organizational care as drivers of employee engagement that can impact the Indian manufacturing sector as it expands to 100 million jobs by 2022 and 25% of the country's GDP. Sharma (2021) described trust as a critical antecedent to work engagement, stating that when employees work in a trustworthy environment, they develop a deeper connection with managers and colleagues. Effective trust and communication between managers and employees can create a strong foundation for employee engagement resulting in improved organizational performance.

Highly engaged employees have good positive relationships and interact effectively with their colleagues at work (Safavi & Karatepe, 2019). Noercahyo et al. (2021) noted employees in a company are a great asset that cannot be directly replicated by competition. To Sudjiwanati and Pinastikasari (2020), engaged employees have higher performance and a sense of pride in company that impacts retention, business growth, and sustainability. A highly engaged workforce increases productivity and stability. Lavigna and Basso (2020) opined that HR leaders of organizations that value employee engagement can attract the best talents in the market. Turner (2019) established that motivated employees positively influence business innovation and market competitiveness. Kwon and Kim (2020) opined highly engaged employees display innovative behaviors at work which translates to better problem-solving. Lemon (2019) used zones of meaning as drivers of engagement and confirmed that understanding employee perception and engagement can enhance internal communication and public

relations. Kim et al. (2020) established that increased job engagement can influence organizational effectiveness and well-being of employees and that organizational leaders can sustain competitive advantage and retain employees through high engagement.

Themes that emerged from Kim et al.'s (2020) study were that employee engagement is (a) feeling of freedom at work, (b) going beyond the job scope, (c) creating value, (d) building connections, and (e) employee engagement occurs more from non-work-related interactions. There are three types of engagement in the workplace – personal, work, and job engagement and each one is measured differently from the other (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). However, of all three, personal engagement was observed to be more directly linked with work performance. Andrews and Mohammed (2020) opined that highly engaged employees have a lower risk of turnover intention. Lavigna and Basso (2020) correlated high engagement at work with higher innovation, lower expenditure on recruiting and retraining, and emphasized that a supportive work culture impacts organizational and job engagement within an organization.

Katili et al. (2021) analyzed leadership, communication, and work-life balance as three key drivers of engagement. Nienaber and Martins (2020) explored leadership behaviors, organizational commitment, and interpersonal relationships as key enablers of employee engagement. In both studies, Katili et al. (2021) and Nienaber and Martins (2020) established leadership communication, work-life balance, leadership behaviors, and interpersonal relationships as antecedents associated with levels of employee engagement. Using Kahn's theory of engagement and the three dimensions of



engagement (meaningfulness, safety, and availability), Ali et al. (2019) examined the impact of employee engagement on employee performance and the influence of internal factors such as work-life balance, reward, and recognition, and internal communication. The authors established that internal communication and reward-recognition had a positive relationship with employee engagement while work-life balance did not, also confirming that employee engagement has a significant impact on employee performance.

Using a sample size of 73 employees working in a sugar manufacturing company in South Africa, Moletsane et al. (2019) explored the factors that affect employee engagement and its relationship to organizational productivity and proposed a moderately significant relationship between employee engagement and productivity. The authors concluded that employees' personal feelings, working environment, leadership style, communication, and commitment are antecedents of employee engagement. Business leaders who prioritize employees' feelings about their work can improve engagement and business performance. Lee and Huang (2019) used engagement theory to explore how conflicts at work can lead to more engagement and creative improvements in new product development and performance.

Building on internal and external communication, Lemon (2019) sought to understand how employee engagement can enable public relations and organizational communication especially in an organizational context where internal communications are perceived as pro-management versus co-creation with employees. Lemon (2019)

found a better alignment with Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement in the aspects of psychological meaningfulness and safety than most other public relations models. Yuan et al. (2021) examined the role of job reattachment as an antecedent of job engagement for employees returning to work and the mediating effect of leader safety commitment in strengthening job reattachment and improving engagement. The authors expanded Kahn's (1990) engagement model by introducing physical health and safety as a necessity for driving improvement in engagement and found a positive relationship between employee job reattachment and employee engagement, while leader safety commitment strengthened the effectiveness of job reattachment in enhancing engagement.

Ngwenya and Pelser (2020) examined the effect psychological capital plays on employee engagement, job satisfaction, and employees' performance in the manufacturing sector of a developing market and opined psychological capital has a positive effect on employee engagement, job satisfaction, and employee performance, and that employee engagement significantly impacted employee performance. Other predictors of work engagement are organizational commitment and team commitment (Nienaber & Martins, 2020). Most existing research on employee engagement has been focused on developed countries, large organizations, and western culture. Ismail et al. (2019) called for more research to continue to identify the antecedents of work engagement and the mediating factors that influence the association between work engagement and performance. Sampling several white- and blue-collar employees

working at a multinational chemicals company in Indonesia, Noercahyo et al. (2021) concluded that job and organizational engagement had an impact on job satisfaction but not necessarily over organizational performance.

### **Employee Engagement and Leadership**

Managers who empower and trust their employees can influence the level of engagement (Donovan, 2022). Moletsane et al. (2019) opined that manufacturing leaders can drive productivity improvements by utilizing employee engagement strategies that enhance loyalty, job satisfaction, and pride in company. Sharma (2021) indicated leaders can encourage higher levels of work engagement by giving constructive performance feedback, autonomy, and building trust. Monje Amor et al. (2020) concluded that transformational leadership promotes feelings of empowerment, which can lead to increased work engagement. Tian and Zhang (2020) established that work engagement played a mediating role in the positive relationship between empowering leadership and employee innovative behavior. Amah (2018) examined how value-based leadership styles such as transactional, autocratic, transformational, and servant leadership influence employee engagement, and the mediating roles of employee voice and perceived organizational support in improving productivity in tough business environments.

Baran and Sypniewska (2020) sampled employees from service, trade, and manufacturing sectors to examine the relationship between people-oriented management, non-people-oriented management, direct participation (active and passive), and engagement at work. They concluded that people-oriented management styles with high

trust and respect for employees increased employee creativity, dedication, and engagement at work, and such employees are more resilient, enthusiastic, and proud of the company they work for. Engaged employees are more likely to exceed tasks given them by the organization because they have a sense of ownership and motivation (Aruldoss et al., 2021). Transformational style of leadership can motivate employees to perform better at work (Alam et al., 2022; Mon et al., 2021). Positive leadership influences employees' state of mind which directly impacts engagement (Yan et al., 2021). Using Kahn's (1990) engagement theory as a framework and a cross sectional survey design, Amah (2018) sampled 300 employees from organizations across Nigeria on the premise that leadership styles significantly impact employee engagement. The findings of the study revealed that none of the leadership styles had a significant direct relationship with employee engagement, but servant leadership and transactional styles indirectly impact employee engagement.

Employee voice and perceived organizational support influence the relationship between leadership styles and employee engagement. Busse and Regenber (2019) examined the relationship between leadership inclusiveness and employee engagement. Incorporating Kahn's (1990) engagement model, the authors collected data from 277 participants in the financial services sector in Europe and North America. Results revealed that engagement levels initially increased with high levels of leadership inclusiveness and gradually decreased over time. In Malaysia, Othman et al. (2021) described the manufacturing sector as a big contributor to Malaysia's GDP and therefore,

employee engagement is a major concern for manufacturing leaders. Companies cannot survive long term without high levels of engagement from the workforces (Othman et al., 2021).

Meskelis and Whittington (2020) and Busse and Regenber (2019) opined psychological safety, meaningfulness, and psychological availability played a mediating role between leadership inclusiveness and employee engagement. Leaders can have a direct impact on the daily levels of employee engagement in the organization (Kirana et al., 2022). Lee (2021) ascertained that the more managerial support, care, and autonomy employees' experience, the more psychologically safe they feel. Employee engagement can have a significant impact on employee productivity (Kaaviyapriya & Xavier, 2020). Moyo (2020) ascertained that managers must continue to show care, empathy, and put adequate health and safety measures in place for all employees. Ngwenya and Pels (2020) ascertained that local production in Zimbabwe failed to compete on a global scale due to high trade costs and low production capacity fueled by low employee engagement and performance. Harunavamwe et al. (2020) expressed that many organizational leaders do not know what to do and struggle to design and execute effective engagement strategies at work.

Choudhury et al. (2021) ascertained that leaders can promote employee engagement by encouraging trust and teamwork mentality among colleagues. Morton et al. (2019) posited leaders who confront disengaged behavior can develop engaged employees who are committed to the vision and goals of the organization. Leaders who

practice ethical leadership can influence employee engagement and increase productivity (McKenna & Jeske, 2021). Using a questionnaire built on employee engagement framework, Jindal et al. (2017) examined manufacturing employees at a Hyderabad pharma company to observe the relationship between key demographics (company-related, job-related, and relationship with manager) and employee engagement and concluded that having the right leadership behaviors, effective 2-way communication channels, a clear mission statement, and an open environment where employees feel safe and heard, all contribute to employee engagement. Othman et al. (2021) established that business leaders and managers who care and provide ongoing support to their employees will experience more loyalty and productivity and such employees end up collaborating with others to deliver business goals. Meskelis and Whittington (2020) concluded that authentic leaders that display integrity, transparency, and an enabling trust environment, encourage psychological safety which impacts employee engagement.

Kahn (1990) opined that authenticity is an important element of psychological safety which is an important antecedent of employee engagement. Business leaders should establish gender-friendly human resource management policies to increase employee engagement and improve retention. HR managers should look out for servant-leadership characteristics during management recruitment and include a leader's ability to influence employee voice and engagement as a measure for performance and promotion (Amah, 2018). Othman et al. (2021) and Kumar and Kapoor (2019) outlined strategies that can improve employee engagement include positive interpersonal relationships in the

workplace, a safe and good quality working environment, and provision of learning opportunities for employees. For businesses to thrive and outsmart competitors, leaders must change their leadership style approach to digital transformation while employees must adapt to changes and upskill digitally.

Kumar and Kapoor (2019) indicated the quality of engagement, communication, and leadership support across different levels in the organization impact employee engagement. Bakker and Albrecht (2018) explored current and future trends in work engagement at organizational levels and posited that managers can increase newcomers' work engagement levels during the first year by improving supervisory support and feedback, creating psychological safety through group interactions, and introducing reward and recognition systems that make newcomers feel attached. Darvishmotevali and Ali (2020) observed that employees with strong internal belief, positive personality, and psychological capital can increase their level of work engagement and job performance when managers role model transformational leadership styles. Purba (2021) examined the impact of leadership style, e-learning, and e-task on employee engagement in the manufacturing industry in Indonesia on the basis that business leaders need motivated and engaged employees to drive business productivity and adapt to tough competition.

Purba (2021) confirmed that there is a significant positive relationship between e-learning, e-task, leadership styles, and employee engagement, with leadership styles having the most impact. Leaders who act as positive change agents, give meaningful satisfying tasks, and create an enabling work environment, make employees feel less

threatened by digital change, causing a positive attachment to work and enhanced productivity. Meskelis and Whittington's (2020) research supported the notion that an employee's honesty-humility trait influences the level of engagement at work, attitude, and workplace behavior, regardless of the leadership behavior. This means that some employees would demonstrate a higher level of engagement even when there are no external stimuli.

### **Employee Engagement and Job Satisfaction**

Several existing research show that there is a significant relationship between job satisfaction and employee engagement. Job satisfaction stimulates better engagement (Sudjiwanati, & Pinastikasari, 2020). Leaders can increase business performance by implementing employee engagement strategies that enhance employee motivation and job satisfaction (Riyanto et al., 2021). Using a quantitative research methodology, Ali and Anwar (2021) sampled over 100 employees working in Erbil's private companies in Kurdistan and confirmed that work engagement played a positive significant mediating role between the nature of career, ethics and integrity, employee recognition, job empowerment, and level of job satisfaction. Ali and Anwar (2021) reported that of all the variables, workplace challenge had the highest impact on employee engagement and most employees are engaged to their work due to time management, work overload, and communication.

A highly engaged workforce is more likely to exhibit higher career adaptability to workplace challenges which can enhance job satisfaction and commitment (Sahoo et al.,



2022). Tauetsile (2021) examined employee engagement in non-Western organizations and concluded that when employees work in a safe and supportive environment, they are more likely to be committed and stay with the organization. Reissova and Papay (2021) examined the level of engagement in a stressful work environment and if there was a relationship between employee engagement, job satisfaction, and turnover, and confirmed the strong positive relationship between job satisfaction and engagement. Supriyanto et al. (2021) ascertained that employee engagement has direct impact on employee performance and job satisfaction played a significant mediating role. Supriyanto et al. (2021) recommended that managers should focus on increasing job satisfaction if they want to improve overall performance and maintain a competitive advantage. Managers could improve job satisfaction and engagement at work by giving employees challenging assignments and communicating effectively with them (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Improving employee engagement can lead to better job satisfaction, higher productivity (Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021; Reissova & Papay, 2021). Baran and Sypniewska (2020) proposed that managers should not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to employee engagement but instead try to understand what resources and rewards employees place enough value on to improve their engagement levels. When employees feel valued, inclusive, and prioritized, they demonstrate higher levels of engagement which results in better team effectiveness and higher organizational performance (Govender & Bussin, 2020).

## **Employee Engagement and Motivation**

Herzberg et al. (1959) described the two-factor motivation-hygiene theory on intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can motivate employees in the workplace, leading to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954) model is popularly used to describe personal motivation based on five key categories which are ranked in order of importance from lowest to highest. These are physiological needs, safety and security, sense of belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. McGregor's (1960) theory X and Y phenomenon projected theory X assumption that employees are lazy and avoid work, and a theory Y assumption where employees are motivated to work and like the autonomy and accountability that comes with work. Researchers have studied work motivation to understand what drives people to work (Kotera et al., 2021) and concluded that there is a significant relationship between work engagement, work motivation, and employee performance. An increase in work motivation can result in increased productivity (Kim & Kim, 2020), higher employee engagement (Siswanto & Lestari, 2019), and better performance (Wang & Chen, 2020).

One of the strategies business leaders use to counter the fierce competitive business environment is active employee engagement (Yan et al., 2021). Engaged employees can help deliver better business performance if they are highly motivated on the job but according to Riyanto et al. (2021), Organizations with highly engaged employees can generate 23% higher profit than companies with disengaged employees (Gallup, 2022). There is a significant relationship between employee motivation and

employee engagement, and employee motivation and performance respectively. While engagement is displayed as a discretionary effort and willingness on the job, Kotera et al. (2021) described motivation as the driving force or impulse behind any activity or action.

Understanding drivers of motivation in the workplace and what motivators are most effective is a challenge. Employees' expectations of the employer and extent to which they are drawn to work can impact levels of engagement. Motivation can be driven by intrinsic (internal satisfaction) or extrinsic (external to the work) factors. Intrinsic motivation is a personal discretion to satisfy an internal need for autonomy, connection, and competence (Slemp et al., 2021). Extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors such as salary, and the value placed on them. Nelson (2021) conducted a correlational quantitative study sampling supervisors from 3 manufacturing plants in Indonesia and ascertained that employee motivation impacts engagement and plays a significant mediating role between work teams and employee engagement. Prasilowati et al. (2021) sampled almost 290 employees working at PT Haeng Nam Sejahtera in Indonesia to understand factors that influence employees to contribute progressively to company goals. Using a quantitative research methodology and survey questionnaire, Prasilowati et al. (2021) concluded that improvements in employee motivation resulted in similar improvements in employee engagement which is associated with high employee contribution.

Employee motivation played a significant mediating role in the relationship between organizational culture, work environment, job characteristics, and employee

engagement (Virgiawan et al., 2021). Riyanto et al. (2021) explained that employee engagement played a mediating role between motivation and job satisfaction which directly impacts job performance and recommended leaders should implement engagement strategies like regular feedback, performance improvement processes, and skill development, and encourage active involvement within the organization to achieve desired business objectives. Choudhury et al. (2021) emphasized that engaged employees are passionate and devoted to making significant contributions to the company goals and objectives. Van Tuin et al. (2020) expressed those employees who feel connected to the purpose of the company they work for experience higher levels of engagement and feel motivated to contribute to making the world a better place.

Increased work motivation can increase excitement at work and reduce the likelihood to quit. Naeem et al. (2020), Nelson (2021), and Prasilowati et al. (2021) agreed that manufacturing leaders who apply motivation techniques that improve the physical and non-physical elements of the working environment can increase employee self-efficacy and engagement levels. Majeed et al. (2019) examined the impact of transformational leadership style (idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation) on intrinsic motivation and provided evidence that transformational leadership impacts influences work motivation which directly impacts work engagement. Individual motivation can be influenced by personal preferences, situation, and engagement (Riyanto et al., 2021). Employees' use of voice behavior is a great way engaged employees can share opinions at work and

contribute to positive changes (Kim et al., 2020). Employees displayed a higher level of engagement when supported by visionary leaders, positive and caring managers, and an enabling work environment. Lee (2021) ascertained that when people feel psychologically safe, they feel more accepted, are inclined to take on challenges, and can make decisions without fear.

### **Employee Engagement and Organization Culture**

The manufacturing sector is a major contributor to economic growth and source of youth employment in many developed countries (Akpan et al., 2021). As workplace demographics change with globalization, culture will continue to play a big role. Effective manufacturing of quality products is not only determined by technology, but also by the employees, facilities, and good leadership (Boikanyo & Heyns, 2019; Othman et al., 2021). Putri et al. (2021) showed evidence that a conducive work culture can lead to increased engagement and an environment where employees are confident, creative, and play an active role. A diverse workforce will display different skills, behaviours, and needs based on the composition (Hurtienne et al., 2022). Companies that want to stay creative, effective, and outperform competition must attract and retain a diverse workforce (Schultz & Schultz, 2020). Benefits of a diverse workforce include better innovation, increased productivity, stronger alliances across borders and economic environments, and an inclusive work environment, where employees are engaged and can deliver best performance (Su et al., 2022).

Employees' level of engagement is lower in a non-people-oriented management organization because employees are merely seen as tools for profit and ignored (Baran & Sypniewska, 2020). Bhardwaj and Kalia (2021) examined the impact of attributes of culture and employee engagement on the contextual and task performance of employees working in the hospitality industry and ascertained that the variables of organizational culture (experimentation, autonomy, and trust) are drivers of performance. Business managers that want to sustain employee engagement across cultural borders must understand how culture impacts their teams and implement systems that enable and energize their engagement strategies (Zheng & Tian, 2019). Good leadership and positive working culture can enhance employee engagement (Othman et al., 2021). Employees in organizations with a high-power distance work culture may feel empowered but not necessarily higher engagement (Zheng & Tian, 2019). Tortorella et al. (2021) examined the relationship between organizational culture and leadership styles in lean manufacturing companies and established that organizations with strong continuous improvement culture where leaders role modelled appropriate leadership behaviours, had higher levels of employee engagement.

Akhigbe and Osita-Ejikeme (2021) ascertained that supportive culture and involvement culture have a significant impact on employee engagement (vigour and dedication). Bhardwaj and Kalia (2021) recommended that business leaders should engage employees in open forums to crowdfund new initiatives, listen, and proactively address problems to improve commitment and culture. The culture of firms influences

workers' psychological wellbeing, interpersonal relationships, sense of belonging, how people are controlled and rewarded, which impact individual levels of engagement (Akhigbe & Osita-Ejikeme, 2021; Virgiawan et al., 2021). Looking beyond salary and benefits, organizational culture plays a critical role in fostering employee engagement. Factors such as leadership behaviour, team dynamics, rewards systems and open communication are essential for creating an environment where employees can thrive. Leaders who encourage an enabling environment where employees feel free to share new ideas and take up new challenges are called culture catalysts (Dasgupta & Dey, 2021).

### **Employee Engagement and Firm's Competitiveness**

Despite being a vital contributor to Nigeria's economy, the manufacturing industry has seen its potential decline over recent decades due to various issues such as high foreign exchange rates, lagging socioeconomic infrastructure, outdated technology, scarcity of labor, and recent mass migration of employees to developed countries. Companies cannot survive long term and in a sustainable manner without high levels of engagement of the workforce (Othman et al., 2021). India is also one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia, and by 2030 it could add more than \$500 billion annually to global GDP (Choudhury et al., 2021; Sahoo et al., 2022). This growth continues to be driven by manufacturing, which contributes 25% towards the country's GDP and 100 million jobs in 2022 (Choudhury et al., 2021). Market growth results in increased competitiveness. With the unpredictable competitive business environment, manufacturers are under a lot of pressure to produce high-quality products and achieve

business goals through total quality management (TQM) processes and systems (Boikanyo & Heyns, 2019). Despite the advancement of technology, big, data, and globalization, one major factor that will set companies apart is the quality of employees (Govender & Bussin, 2020). Competitors can mimic technology or business tactics, but the relationship between an employer and their employees can be a competitive strategy.

The more engaged employees are, both physically and psychologically in their work, the probability of higher productivity is high. Boikanyo and Heyns (2019) examined the relationship between work engagement and TQM practices using a manufacturing facility in the petrochemical industry in South Africa on the basis that highly engaged employees deliver better results yielding more productivity, financial returns, and lower attrition. Using the descriptive research design, purposive sampling of participants, a survey questionnaire, Boikanyo and Heyns (2019) sampled over 160 professional and skilled workers across different levels of the petrochemical manufacturing facility and concluded that work engagement begins from engaged leadership from the top, thrives on total organization involvement, and when delivered with quality TQM systems yields positive business results.

A firm's competitiveness comes from maximizing human and non-human resources. Vogel et al. (2022) examined the important role of speed of engagement in job performance and productivity as a follow up to Kahn's engagement theory of the level and depth of an individual's engagement at work. The findings showed that the level and speed of engagement of employees and the use of smartphone interventions impacted



productivity. One of the key responsibilities of managers and organizations is to help employees boost their productivity and effectiveness (Vogel et al., 2022). Satata (2021) conducted a literature review of journals written over 2013-2020 to determine the impact of employee engagement in improving work performance to achieve business goals. After reviewing databases such as Emerald, Proquest, SAGE journals, using keywords such as employee engagement, work engagement, employee engagement, and work performance, Satata (2021) concluded that an increase in work engagement increased the individual's commitment to work and leads to customer satisfaction and business performance.

Highly engaged employees are willing to go beyond their job scope and their collective effort can help an organization achieve its objectives and remain competitive (Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2020; Turner, 2019). An engaged workforce can be fuelled by affective commitment, transformational leadership, and psychological empowerment to improve a firm's competitive advantage (Monje Amor et al., 2020). Leaders that cultivate an inclusive and trusting work environment can drive better performance (Govender & Bussin, 2020). Vogel et al. (2022) posited that the more detached employees were from non-work-related matters, the better prepared they were psychologically, and the higher the level of engagement at the start of the day. Business leaders who stimulate employee motivation and job satisfaction can improve engagement and sustainable business growth. The more engaged workers are, the richer the talent pool and the possibility of

placing talents with the right skills and competencies into critical roles that directly influence the firm's competitive advantage (Byrne & Manning, 2021).

### **Summary**

The manufacturing sector is a highly complex and competitive business environment. For any business to survive, it must balance quality, quantity, productivity, and cost which can all be impacted by the internal framework of the company or external threats from the environment (Falciola et al., 2020). Morton et al. (2019) recommended that manufacturing leaders must understand and maximize the drivers of employee engagement to create optimum performance and sustainable businesses. Enhanced work engagement can increase a firm's chances of survival in the face of tough globalization challenges and stiff competition (Harunavamwe et al., 2020). Good leadership and a positive work environment will result in high human resource performance (Kenny et al., 2020). Implementing successful strategies to improve employee engagement must continue to be a critical business priority. Leaders and organizations should not apply a one-size-fit-all engagement strategy but instead, cultivate an inclusive and trusting work environment that drives better performance.

### **Transition**

In Section 1, I laid the foundation for this study by presenting the business problem, purpose statement, the research question, interview questions, and implications for business practice and positive social change. I discussed different research methodologies, the research method and research design. I described the conceptual

framework, assumptions, limitations, and opportunities for ongoing research. Next, I synthesized several literary sources and provided a robust literature review of employee engagement, antecedents of employee engagement, measuring instruments, the impact of leadership, job satisfaction, motivation, and firm competitiveness on employee engagement. In Section 2, I will focus on the purpose of the study, research method and design, role of the researcher, population and sampling, research participants, data collection, organization, and analysis techniques, ethical research, and explain the reliability and validity of the data. Section 3 will include findings from the interviews, conclusion of the study, application to professional practice, implications for social change, my recommendations, and reflections from the study.

## **Section 2: The Project**

Section 2 begins with a restatement of the purpose, my role as a researcher, and details of my chosen research methodology and design. I also include details of the participants in scope, sampling method and size, and data collection instrument. I address the importance of adhering to ethical guidelines as stated by the Belmont Report and Walden University's IRB. Section 2 also includes data collection, data organization, and data analysis. I conclude this section discussing strategies to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. I close the section with a summary and transition to Section 3.

### **Purpose Statement**

The specific business problem was that some manufacturing leaders lack strategies to improve employee engagement. Therefore, the purpose of this proposed qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies successful Nigerian manufacturing leaders use to improve employee engagement. The implication for positive social change may include more job opportunities, reduced unemployment rates, and overall wellness. Increased employee engagement can lead to increased business performance and more tax revenue remittance to the Nigerian government authorities, which can be used to increase local manufacturing partnerships and boost economic empowerment in underserved communities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher plays multiple complex roles (Collins & Stockton, 2022). Such roles include being a participant protector, reflective practitioner,

data collector, interviewer, and data technician (Chen et al., 2020; Cumyn et al., 2019). In qualitative case study, the researcher is the main vehicle for collecting information and thus analyses data through personal interaction with the sample population or through interpretation of secondary data (Chen et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2019). The role of the researcher is to pre-assess, identify, and minimize risks of bias that may interfere with the data collection and interpretation (Nogueira de Tommaso et al., 2021) so that the conclusions are credible and can withstand the scrutiny and critique of other scholars (Saunders et al., 2019). The researcher plays an important role in shaping the data that is collected, the way it is collected, and how the knowledge is shared. Through open dialogue with participants, the researcher introduces the topic and helps to generate rich and detailed data (Nogueira de Tommaso et al., 2021). The researcher plays a key role in data analysis, working to identify patterns and themes within the data (Collins & Stockton, 2022). As such, the researcher plays a vital role in ensuring that qualitative studies are rigorous and produce meaningful results.

Before recruiting participants, collecting, or analyzing any data, I obtained all necessary approvals from the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB). I adhered to the principles of the Belmont Report, a detailed report that clarifies research and practice, ethical guidelines and application of those key principles about (a) respect for persons (participants' protection and freedom), (b) beneficence (ethical compliance and wellbeing), and (c) justice, complete fairness and transparency during the entire process (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and

Behavioral Research, 1979). A researcher must comply with the requirements of informed consent, information disclosure, and freedom of participation in any research study. As part of my ethical obligations, I respected the confidentiality of my participants and treated all data collected in line with data privacy laws and research guidelines stipulated by the Research Ethics Committee. As a qualitative researcher, it is important to be aware of personal biases and how they might influence the research. The best information a researcher can obtain is one that is unfiltered, informative, and less pre-meditated (Collins & Stockton, 2022).

As a reflective scholar, the researcher must monitor personal assumptions and interference to produce reliable findings. The researcher must ensure that the research process is thorough, and the results truly represent the phenomenon under observation (Chen et al., 2020). The researcher can use the interview protocol to create more room for reflexivity (Perera, 2020). Researcher bias is one of the greatest challenges of achieving rigor in qualitative research. Yin (2018) identified some possible sources of bias as (a) inadequate ability or preparation to conduct qualitative research, (b) past experiences that influence researcher values, assumptions, attitudes, and feelings, and (c) affinity for or closeness to research participants or research phenomenon. With the multiple case study design, the researcher can use multiple sources of data, which improves the quality of the research compared to using only one source of data (Yin, 2018). I used strategies that reduce researcher and participant bias and error to achieve a high level of research rigor that promotes positive social change. These strategies included sampling the appropriate

population, involving successful cases that can provide information that facilitated better understanding of the phenomenon, following all protocols for interviews and data collection, and the use of an appropriate coding system to facilitate data analysis.

Yin (2018) stated that avoiding bias is a critical facet of research ethics and compliance. Buetow (2019) expressed that bias affects the judgement of the researcher and could jeopardise the credibility of the research findings. As a Human Resources practitioner and employee engagement champion for over two decades, I was conscious of my familiarity with my potential topic of study and my limitations as a qualitative researcher. My vast experience in the manufacturing sector in multiple countries including Nigeria and working with diverse manufacturing leaders allowed me to gain better understanding about employee engagement in the manufacturing sector. My 10-year work experience in manufacturing companies within the southwest region of Nigeria gave me access to the directory of the national Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (M.A.N) and other company directories so I could find and select the right participants that provided rich sufficient information that answered my overarching research question.

As the main research instrument, I was responsible for all phases of the study which included participant selection, data collection and analyses, interview transcription, theme coding, and conclusions. Qualitative researchers should gain awareness of their biases through reflexivity and be transparent about mitigating such bias to achieve research rigor and credibility (Buetow, 2019). I used techniques that minimized bias such as interview protocol (Braaten et al., 2020), triangulation to ensure data saturation (Fusch

& Ness, 2015; Yin, 2018), and member checking (Fusch & Ness, 2015) to increase confidence in the credibility and validity of my research. The Walden University IRB approval number for this study is 09-30-22-0289582.

### **Participants**

For this qualitative multiple case study, the eligibility criteria were (a) manufacturing leaders working in the manufacturing sector, (b) not less than 5 years seniority, (c) located in the southwest Nigeria area, and (d) have successfully implemented strategies to improve employee engagement in the organization. The managers in this target group were suitable for this research study because they are accountable for delivering business strategies and driving employee engagement in tough economic environments and therefore aligned with the research question. In qualitative research, the participants must have in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2018). These individuals have tight schedules and protect competitive information; therefore, it was a little difficult at first to gain access to them, but this was resolved. It can be challenging gaining access to research participants in parts of Africa due to data insecurity controls, cultural bias to research, language barriers, cumbersome administrative policies, and lack of respect for scheduled appointments (Abebe et al., 2021; Hamilton, 2020).

The relationship between the researcher and participants is crucial for conducting effective interviews (Burns et al., 2020). Researchers establish trust with participants by building rapport using a two-way communication approach that is non-threatening to the



participant. Participants' availability and willingness to participate can have a massive impact on the success and outcome of a research study (Burns et al., 2020). For this study, I leveraged my professional networks and existing relationships to find suitable and willing participants, I have no ties with, that met the criteria. Researchers can reduce bias by not selecting participants they have had a past or current personal or professional relationship with (Romano et al., 2021; Yin, 2018). I searched manufacturing directories, brochures, reports, business listings at the Chamber of Commerce, M.A.N., and business leadership forums, and shortlisted potential participants. Recruiting participants involves identification, gaining access, and securing commitment (Burns et al., 2020). I used email and phone calls to share adequate information about my study to gain their trust and willingness to participate. I explained the ethical guidelines and safeguards to protect confidentiality and answered any other concerns they had. This approach was successful. The company records of the manufacturing organizations provided additional information about age, employee size, employee engagement strategies, and business information that helped address my research question.

### **Research Method and Design**

The research method is the strategic process used to obtain and analyze phenomena while the research design is the framework for the data collection and analysis in the most effective way that answers the research question (Saunders et al., 2019). A good researcher must use the appropriate methodology for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the right type of data from the right target population to provide answers

to the right set of questions about a phenomenon. Both the research method and design are critical to produce an effective outcome of a research study.

### **Research Method**

The three major research methodologies adopted by researchers are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method (Draper et al., 2021; Saunders et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Qualitative research methodology allows the researcher to observe the participant's mood, exact words, thought patterns, and behaviors which can provide more insights into the phenomenon (Busetto et al., 2020; Roulston & Halpin, 2021). Qualitative researchers collect nonnumerical data that represent the views, experiences, and beliefs of people (Draper et al., 2021) and observe how participants act and behave in their natural setting (Lanka et al., 2021). I chose the qualitative research methodology for this study because it is most appropriate for in-depth behavioral analysis which would otherwise be difficult to quantify.

In contrast, Gunasekara and Zheng (2019) expressed that quantitative researchers examine cause and effect relationships between several variables, test theories, and focus on quantifiable data, and therefore is not appropriate for this study. Quantitative researchers rely on proving hypotheses and use statistical techniques to examine relationships between variables (Yin, 2018) and therefore not appropriate for this study. The mixed method, which is a quasi-simultaneous qualitative and quantitative approach, was also not appropriate for this study. Researchers who use a mixed-method study combine quantitative and qualitative methods to generate both inductive and deductive

perspectives about a phenomenon (Stoecker & Avila, 2021), which I did not need for this study.

### **Research Design**

I chose a qualitative multiple case study design for this study to explore successful strategies manufacturing leaders use to improve employee engagement. A case study is an in-depth inquiry into a phenomenon regarding a person, group, organization, process, or event within its real-life setting in which context is a vital element to understanding the phenomenon (Mohajan, 2018; Yin, 2018). The case study design is also appropriate for conducting exploratory research into a phenomenon for which the researcher may not have a clear conceptual framework and needs to develop one from the research findings (Mishra & Dey, 2021; Yin, 2018). The case study design is appropriate for business and organizational research (Le & Needham, 2019) and most appropriate to understand the unique antecedents that impact employee engagement in the Nigerian manufacturing sector. A case study design is also an appropriate framework to tackle the when, how, and why research questions (Alsharari & AlShboul, 2019). Researchers use a multiple case study design to generate more robust, reliable, and in-depth analysis of a phenomenon from different settings that are far greater than the single case study design which uses a homogenous sample (Yin, 2018). I chose the multiple case study over the single case to generate more reliable data and insights by comparing different cases with similar characteristics.

Other research designs are phenomenological, narrative inquiry, and ethnographic (Pathiranage et al., 2020). Researchers use ethnographic research design to study group culture, practices, and socio-cultural interactions within a group over a duration of time and the researcher can maintain a professional distance during the process (Pathiranage et al., 2020). I ruled out ethnographic design because I did not plan to study a group cultural phenomenon and it is also time consuming. Phenomenological design is used to explore deep meanings within the psychological mind, perceptions, and lived experiences of participants and their interpretation of such events (Halling et al., 2020; Mohajan, 2018). I rejected the phenomenological design because I was interested in exploring strategies business leaders use to improve employee engagement, not the business leaders' lived experiences. Researchers use the narrative inquiry design to retell experiences and events through people's life stories, usually in a chronological manner (Saunders et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). I did not choose the narrative inquiry design because it was not the most effective framework for answering the research question in this study.

Using the right data collection methods is critical for a good research. In qualitative research, data triangulation increases the reliability and validity of the study (Varela et al., 2021). Data saturation is reached when interviews or research no longer yield any new information or themes (Alam, 2020). To attain data saturation, I kept an open mind as I conducted my doctoral research and used triangulation during the data collection and analysis.

## **Population and Sampling**

Researchers can boost the validity of a study when they use the most appropriate sampling technique (Yin, 2018). Farrugia (2019) stated the approach to sampling is guided by the conceptual framework and research question, and the population and sampling technique must match the research question and methodology. Qualitative researchers can use either probability sampling or nonprobability sampling methods (Lohr, 2019), but Renjith et al. (2021) ascertained that the commonly used non-probability sampling methods are convenience sampling (sampling based on easy access, lower budget, or location proximity), purposive sampling (sampling guided by already established criteria), snowball sampling (chain referral sampling), and intensity sampling (sampling guided by information-rich subjects). Nonprobability sampling is more appropriate when participation is voluntary and there is no equal chance of being selected (Saunders et al., 2019). Many researchers choose to use a non-probability sampling technique like purposeful sampling to identify participants who are most knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied and can provide sufficient data for analysis (Crick, 2021; Fernandes et al., 2021; Mwita, 2022).

My research question was focused on strategies manufacturing leaders use to improve employee engagement; therefore, the appropriate target population were business leaders and managers of manufacturing companies with at least five years' experience who could share experiences relevant to my research question. Purposeful sampling allowed me to recruit appropriate participants who met the eligibility criteria

and had the information to answer the research question. To use purposive sampling, researchers must understand the phenomenon being studied to select participants appropriately (Berndt, 2020; Langley & Klag, 2019). My background in manufacturing enabled me to use purposeful sampling technique effectively, and since I had no knowledge on who would volunteer to participate in this study, purposeful sampling method was the most appropriate for my study.

Researchers are obligated to select participants in an ethical and non-discriminatory manner in line with the Belmont Report principles (Gill, 2020; Rasmussen, 2019). After I obtained IRB approval, I contacted potential participants that met the selection criteria using email. I then appropriately sought each participant's consent on the mode of interview and addressed any concerns prior to the scheduled session. Researchers should ask open-ended, probing, and follow-up questions that address the research question and gather sufficient data until there is no new information (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I conducted the virtual interviews in the most suitable way and format that made the participants most comfortable and free to speak, using audio interviews or video conferencing via WhatsApp and Zoom. I offered participants the chance to choose their preferred safe and convenient time and location for conducting the interviews distraction-free for at least 60 to 90 minutes, obtained voluntary consent, built a good rapport, created trust, and used appropriate open-ended questions. When participants understand the importance of their role and feel safe, they are more likely to give voluntary consent, access, and information to the researcher.

Another factor that negatively affects research quality is lack of data saturation (Fusch et al., 2018). Obtaining a thick and rich set of data from participants, in terms of quantity and quality of data respectively, reduces researcher and participant bias, and improves data saturation and research quality (Fusch et al., 2018). When carrying out qualitative studies, researchers can adjust the sample size during the study until data saturation is reached (Farrugia, 2019). Researchers who use the appropriate population and sample size are more likely to reach data saturation than those who do not (Mwita, 2022). There is no one-size-fits-all method to reach data saturation because there is no standard universal way of conducting studies (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Four approaches to choosing sample size are rule of thumb, use of conceptual models, statistical formulae, and guidelines from empirical studies (Crick, 2021).

To achieve data saturation in qualitative studies, Yin (2018) recommended four to five experienced participants, Gentles et al. (2015) recommended 10 to 30 participants, Bucic et al. (2010) utilized 12 participants, Guest et al. (2020) ascertained that major themes usually arise within the first five rounds of interviews, Young and Casey (2019) used 9 interviews to reach saturation, while Hennink and Kaiser (2021) suggested that a range of 9-17 interviews or 4-8 focus groups led to data saturation. To ensure data saturation and considering the sample size variance from different studies, a sample size of between three to five cases, and between five and 12 participants was appropriate for this study. To reach data saturation, I collected data from my participants until no new information could possibly be collected. I stopped collecting data after interviewing eight

participants from five cases due to data saturation. I carried out thorough data interpretation and triangulation by using a robust thematic coding process (NVivo) and conducted member checking.

### **Ethical Research**

Before embarking on a study, researchers must seek approval for data collection from ethics committees such as the IRB (Pan, 2020). A critical step in case study design is participant consent (Choi et al., 2019). Ethical researchers must prioritize participants' confidentiality and privacy. I understood the importance of first obtaining permission and approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before contacting participants or conducting any form of interviews. I adhered to the Belmont Report (Belmont Report, 1979), a set of guidelines for protecting human participants in research studies in terms of respect for the participants, beneficence, and justice. To ensure I conducted an ethical study, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) online course, a mandatory requirement for all Walden University students. I applied for and received IRB approval for this study and was issued the number 09-30-22-0289582.

### **Informed Consent Form**

Obtaining consent prior to carrying out the study ensures full disclosure of information related to the study and can protect participants from exposure to unethical practices (Bloemraad & Menjivar, 2022). Before the interviews, I sent an email to each potential participant using the pre-approved consent email script from IRB (see Appendix



B) introducing myself and provided information about the background of the research study, research procedures, role of the researcher and participants, the benefits and risks of the study, and importance of data privacy. The last section of the consent form stated the participants' rights to voluntarily participate and to withdraw from the study at any time. Hope (2019) recommended that researchers must clarify to participants that there are no penalties for participation or withdrawal from the study. To withdraw from the study, participants were informed to notify me either verbally by phone or by writing an email using my Walden email address. The eight manufacturing leaders who decided to participate in the research study responded by email with the words "I consent". King (2019) opined participants can also ask questions to fully understand the expectations, risks, and benefits of participation, enough to make an informed decision. To minimize the number of withdrawals, I gave adequate time and attention and answered queries and concerns prior to commencement of the study and data collection. No participant withdrew during the study.

### **Participant Protection, Compensation, and Data Storage**

As a researcher, I must declare my intent and values, and disclose any affiliations with participants or partnering organizations prior to commencement of the study (Cumyn et al., 2019), and resolve any ethical dilemmas that may occur during the research process. The manufacturing leaders I had access to have high risk jobs and protect company reputation; therefore, I ensured full ethical compliance, good research quality, built trust between myself and the participants, and protected the researcher from

any form of litigation, harm, or undue risk. Qualitative researchers rely a lot on transcriptions of audio-recorded interviews and supplement with secondary data. Cumyn et al. (2019) specified that the data researchers collect must be an accurate representation of information provided and the method of sharing results must be appropriate for the companies involved. I carefully considered my sample population and strategies for collecting data. It is often common for researchers to motivate participants by offering some form of financial or performance-based incentives (Bloemraad & Menjivar, 2022; Voslinsky & Azar, 2021) but Voslinsky and Azar (2021) equally raised concerns that offering incentives may also influence the integrity of data provided or the credibility of the study.

I did not offer any financial incentive to the participants. In exchange for participation in my study, I plan to provide each participant with a copy of the summary of my findings after publication either via email or postal services. All information collected during the study will be kept confidentially and the identity of the participants protected. I ensured the confidentiality of participants' data by issuing each participant an alphanumeric code P1, P2, up to P8 and replaced the company names with alphanumeric codes C1, C2, up to C5. I committed to store both electronic and hard copies of the data collected in a passworded folder on my computer and lockbox for a period of five years to protect the rights of all participants, after which the data will be destroyed in line with IRB guidelines. Hard copy documents will be shredded while electronic data will be deleted. My adherence to access and ethics guidelines will also facilitate the approval of

my research and doctoral study by the supervisory committee and Institutional Review Board.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the main data collection instrument (Pathiranage et al., 2020; Yin, 2018) and an active co-creator in the data collection process (McGrath et al., 2019). For this study, I was the primary data collection instrument. I recruited the appropriate participants, formulated the relevant open-ended questions to address my research question, scheduled the interviews, recorded the sessions, transcribed the information provided, and analysed the data. In case study design, qualitative researchers must gather data from a minimum of two sources to improve reliability and validity. Yin (2018) identified six sources of data collection which are documentation, interviews, archival records, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts. My secondary sources of data collection were through semistructured interviews with the participants and company documents either provided by the Human Resources department or available via the company websites, public magazines, and journals. Interviews are highly effective in collecting data in qualitative research and especially useful when direct observation is not feasible. For effective data collection, using an interview protocol can provide clarity about the interview process, risks and conditions, background of the study, and interview questions (Merlo et al., 2020).

I conducted in-depth semistructured interviews with the participants using an interview protocol with nine open-ended questions (see Appendix B) and I followed up with probing questions where necessary. I made audio recordings of interviews with the permission of participants to ensure that I captured all important information relevant to the study. I transcribed the data collected through the interviews and conducted appropriate member checking of interview transcripts with the participants to ensure I captured their points correctly. At the end of each interview, I also gave the participants the opportunity to share additional thoughts that may not have been covered via the interview guide.

A good researcher must have a high level of self-awareness when conducting quality research (McGrath et al., 2019). Identifying my personal lens and biases, based on my experiences, helped me ensure I interpreted the information received appropriately throughout the research study. I collected secondary data using a documentary evidence protocol (see Appendix C), read through the company documents provided, and extracted relevant information from other public channels. To enhance the validity and reliability of results, I kept a comprehensive reflective diary, and conducted member checking with participants to validate data collected, triangulating information provided using primary and secondary data sources.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Qualitative researchers can leverage unstructured or semistructured interviews to explore participants' unique experiences (McGrath et al., 2019) and gain more insights

about the phenomenon under study, through focus groups, telephone, mail, or document analysis (Kyzym & Doronina, 2019). Yin (2018) identified four principles that facilitate the collection of high-quality data during qualitative research. These include (a) using multiple sources of evidence, (b) creating a case study database, (c) maintaining a chain of evidence, and (d) exercising care when using data from social media sources. For my research, I used (a) semistructured interviews to collect data from participants within a virtual and safe environment at a convenient time, and (b) collected more data on employee engagement strategies from company documents, journals, and publicly available information.

Semistructured interviews are effective when undertaking in-depth conversations either face-to-face, online video conferencing, or written interviews. The researcher has the flexibility to expand on responses and gather information from verbal and non-verbal cues. With semistructured interviews, researchers can ask several participants the same set of questions to reach data saturation much faster (Fusch et al., 2018), ask clarifying questions (Brown & Danaher, 2019), and use probing or rephrasing techniques to gain more insights. Good probing questions include asking the participant what they mean about a statement they made, asking for more information about a statement/experience, or asking how an experience relates to the subject of study. Semistructured interviews are ideal in one-to-one conversations (in contrast to group interviews) to allow the interviewer focus on the individual contributions of the participants. Therefore, developing and using an interview protocol helps researchers focus on relevant concepts,

maintain a sense of control, and move the interview/dialogue forward when there are distractions. For this study, the interview protocol, open-ended questions, and documentary evidence protocols are provided in Appendix B and C respectively.

Some disadvantages of semistructured interviews that can impact research are the impact of poor technology, loss of data in its original form, poor quality of responses from respondents, or lack of focus (when the interviewer loses track of the conversation or extrapolates meanings that did not emerge from the conversations). Other disadvantages include time, inadequate sample size, and lack of enough documentation to strengthen the credibility of the research (Yin, 2018). Although, the researcher does not have the opportunity to observe the body language and non-verbal cues of participants, telephone interviews can be effective when the subject of discussion is not difficult or distressing to the participant, and it sometimes gives participants a sense of anonymity when discussing sensitive issues (Saunders et al., 2019). When using interviews, researchers must plan, familiarise with the data recording equipment, choice of venue, and practice.

As part of my Walden education, I already conducted a pilot study on a separate topic that enabled me to understand the research process for data collection and interpretation process. After IRB approval, I reached out to potential participants that matched my selection criteria to obtain their consent to participate in the study. Once I received their agreed consent forms, I reached out again to schedule interview sessions using the already prepared interview and documentary evidence protocol guides and plan

in line with the timing of the participants. I kept an audio trail of the interviews with the permission of the participants to ensure accurate transcription of the responses. Obtaining a thick and rich set of data from participants reduces researcher and participant bias, and improves data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To increase the validity of my study, I asked probing questions and requested a follow up interview session in some cases. I also used member checking to clarify data collected until I reached data saturation. Member checking is the quality control process of verifying participants' contribution and improving the credibility of the study. I provided participants with my transcripts for the opportunity to confirm my interpretation of their answers and the accuracy of my representation of their ideas. I also reviewed company records, public journals, and other available documentation for data triangulation which can help to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

### **Data Organization Technique**

To ensure participant confidentiality and privacy, I coded each participant response using a unique identifier such as P1, P2, up to P8. Coding techniques can protect the identity of the participant or company (Audette et al., 2020) while a computer assisted software can help increase the speed, transparency, and validity of the data. Researchers can create a case study database by organizing and documenting the data collected during the case study (Yin, 2018). This facilitates retrieval and analysis of information by the researcher or any interested scholar in the future. For data organization, I paid for the most updated NVivo software application due to its proven use for managing and storing

research data. Keeping an accurate record of the research evidence and process in a reflexive diary and research report makes it easy for the researcher and critiques to link the evidence to the findings and vice-versa (Bergeron & Gaboury, 2020; Yin, 2018). As a researcher, I protected participants' data in a confidential manner by anonymizing data files and using secure data storage devices. Researchers can ensure successful coding by using the right research design, research question, and interview questions (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). I stored all electronic data collected during my study in a secure folder on my laptop and keep a backup on an external drive, both protected by a unique password. I also plan to keep all hard copy documentation, including signed consent forms, questionnaires, company records, or raw data collected in a locked fireproof combination safe for five years following my anticipated year of completion. On expiration of the mandatory 5 five-year period, I will shred all the hard copy documents and erase all electronic data in line with IRB guidelines.

### **Data Analysis**

Convergence of multiple sources such as interviews and documentation, or research methods increases the validity/credibility and reliability of the research (Saunders et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Triangulation involves comparing information from multiple sources or findings from multiple methods to determine if they corroborate each other or not. Triangulation is also used to validate, examine credibility, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and verify the legitimacy of many data sources (Saunders et al., 2019). Researchers can also use triangulation to minimize bias, add depth to data



collected, and possibly reach data saturation (Fusch et al., 2018) There are four types of triangulation; data, which involves using multiple sources of evidence; investigator, which involves using multiple researchers or evaluators during the research process; theory, which involves analyzing the same set of data using multiple theoretical perspectives; and methodological, which involves using multiple research methods (Fusch & Ness, 2015). For this study, the applicable types of triangulation are data and theory triangulation.

Peterson (2019) recommended that researchers use triangulation of multiple sources, evaluators, and methods to identify or rule out alternative explanations for qualitative research findings. There are several practical steps that researchers can take to mitigate researcher bias, such as achieving data saturation and triangulation (Peterson, 2019; Yin, 2018). Other ways of mitigating researcher bias include using an interview protocol, conducting member checking, and bracketing, which involves putting aside one's own assumptions and preconceptions about the research topic to be as open-minded as possible when analyzing the data (Bucic et al., 2010). While researcher bias cannot be eliminated completely, taking these steps can help to minimize its impact on qualitative research.

Analyzing qualitative data usually entails sequential stages of coding, categorizing, and analyzing data to find common themes. In the first stage of coding, researchers identify and label key themes and patterns in the data. In the second stage of categorizing, these themes and patterns are organized into broader categories. Finally, in

the third stage of analyzing, researchers interpret the data and draw conclusions about the research question. Although this process may seem straightforward, it is often challenging to identify which themes and patterns are most important in the data. As a result, analysts must often return to earlier stages of the analysis to refine their coding and categorizing. Researchers can ensure successful coding by starting with the right research design, research question, and interview questions (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Many qualitative researchers use data analysis software like NVivo 11 for proper organization, data analysis, and correlation of findings (Hastings & Pennington, 2019).

Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed a six-step approach to data analysis which involve (a) data familiarization, (b) generation of initial codes, (c) thematic analysis, (d) renew themes, (e) define and name themes, and (f) generate the report. For my data analysis, I plan to use Yin's (2018) five-step approach which are (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpretation of meaning, and (e) concluding the data. In the compiling stage, I gathered and sorted the participants' interview notes, audio recordings, and company documentation, and carefully reviewed the responses and transcripts. Then, in the disassembling stage, I organized the data into smaller sections and assigned initial codes to the data.

In the reassembling stage, I used the NVivo software to organize the data, identify patterns, sort the data into predominant themes, organize and transcribe participant coding, interpret the data from the semistructured interviews and company documents, and identify relationships. Researchers can use coding and theme analysis to analyse

research data, draw out key themes, and identify new categories that answer the research question (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Thematic analysis involves identifying, sorting, and interpreting common themes while content analysis uses a more flexible approach to analyse a wider scope of data. Then, I exported the data from NVivo into Microsoft Excel, organized the themes correctly, and reviewed the data interpretation to ensure meaningful representation in a fair and accurate manner. Bergeron and Gaboury (2020) ascertained that NVivo is an effective tool that facilitates data organization from unstructured data, thematic coding and analysis, and the emergence of new codes. I will retain all electronic and hard copy data confidentially for a period of 5 years to protect participants' privacy after which I will dispose of the data in line with IRB guidelines for record keeping.

In the concluding stage, I made conclusions based on the thematic data analysis and correlated the themes with the conceptual framework and research question to better understand and identify strategies manufacturing leaders use to improve employee engagement. Furthermore, I explored if there were any relationships between emerging themes from this study and key themes from existing research/relevant academic publications from my literature review on strategies manufacturing leaders use to improve employee engagement. I updated the literature review section with newly published articles on my proposed conceptual framework and research question until the end of this study.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative researchers like Morse et al. (2002) have stressed the importance of rigor and interchanged terms like reliability for consistency and trustworthiness which determine the transferability, confirmability, dependability, and credibility of the research. Many researchers have suggested the terms' reliability and validity should not be used in qualitative studies (Hayashi et al., 2021). Qualitative studies can fit the criteria for reliability by applying Brink (1993) strategies which include (a) congruence in the research methodology, framework and purpose of the study, (b) rigor in purposive sampling and a clear declaration of the context, settings, and methods used throughout the research period, (c) the effective use of triangulation (from two or more sources) especially in the case of a single case study, (d) repetition of measurement over a period of time or at different points in time or settings, (e) rigor in obtaining independent expert validation such as from research colleagues, chair and committee members at different stages during the research process, (f) recycling the findings back to the participants to verify accuracy, (g) and documenting any limitations or assumptions. Saunders et al. (2019) identified four threats to the reliability or dependability of research, which include participant error and bias, and researcher error and bias. Participant error occurs when the participant's performance during data collection is negatively affected by factors such as poor language translation, environmental influence, or participant bias. Researcher error can also occur when the researcher wrongly records or interprets the information provided by the participant.

**Reliability**

Reliability confirms the soundness of the study in relation to the research methodology and design, sampling method, and the ways data analysis techniques were applied in the research (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Due to the philosophical and methodological differences between quantitative and qualitative research, the more applicable criteria for qualitative research are credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Coleman, 2021; Langtree et al., 2019). Strategies for improving dependability or reliability of qualitative research include (a) identifying our values and biases, (b) reporting preconceived assumptions in selecting research topics, (c) participants and methods, and (d) accurately reporting information participants provide (Rose & Johnson, 2020; Vu, 2021). I ensured reliability in this research study by using NVivo for data analysis and appropriate member checking.

***Dependability***

Dependability is a method of establishing rigor and trustworthiness by using protocols for data collection and analysis (Langtree et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Dependability is analogous to reliability and refers to the likelihood of replicating the research findings if the researcher repeats the study (Saunders et al., 2019; Welch & Piekkari, 2017). For my study, I ensured dependability by developing and using standard protocols for conducting interviews and collecting secondary data. I kept a reflexive journal, maintained a record of my research process, utilized member checking of interview transcripts, and validated my data interpretation with respective participants.

Some threats to dependability are participant error, participant bias, researcher error, and researcher bias (Saunders et al., 2019). To minimize biases and errors, I kept a reflection of my field notes and utilized member checking by allowing participants to review transcript notes to check for errors, omissions, and confirmed my interpretations and depth of data, thus enhancing data reliability and credibility.

### **Validity**

Researchers can achieve construct validity or credibility by using multiple sources of evidence and establishing a chain of evidence. Hayashi et al. (2021) ascertained qualitative researchers can improve validity by through data triangulation and data saturation. I achieved external validity and transferability by using replication logic within multiple case studies and compare my findings with existing literature. Past or recent occurrences, testing, instrumentation, mortality, maturation, and ambiguity about casual direction are all threats to validity (Rose & Johnson, 2020; Saunders et al., 2019). I conducted member checking after translating the transcripts to verify that I accurately represented the data collected from participants before analyzing the data. I read the participants' transcripts carefully and did my best to translate in the natural form in which the data was collected. Coleman (2021) and Jones and Donmoyer (2021) recommended member checking techniques such as repetition, paraphrasing, or seeking clarification to give room for correction or clarity. Rutakumwa et al. (2019) advised interviewers to pay attention to tone and emphasis while actively listening to the participants. I spent

adequate time with the participants gathering sufficient data and used triangulation techniques to achieve data saturation.

### ***Credibility***

Credibility is analogous to validity, especially construct and internal validity, which refers to how valuable and believable a research is (Coleman, 2021; Saunders et al., 2019). Credibility refers to the level of confidence in the conclusions of the research study. To ensure credibility, I reviewed multiple data sources, combining both the interview findings and documentary evidence from the company records, archival data, and public documents, ensuring adequate engagement with the subjects enough to obtain thick rich data, and ensure data saturation. I also kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process and leveraged member checking for accuracy of information and findings.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability is analogous to external validity and refers to the generalizability of the research findings to cases with similar situations or individuals (Saunders et al., 2019). Transferability is the extent to which future researchers and readers can reapply the results of the research beyond the boundaries of the initial study (Pathiranage et al., 2020). In contrast to quantitative research, the burden of transferability of findings in qualitative research rests with the next researcher (Coleman, 2021; Pathiranage et al., 2020). It is not the responsibility of the researcher to justify transferability but to ensure adequate information is provided for the reader to make their own conclusions (Saunders

et al., 2019). Therefore, to address transferability, I used structured protocols for interviews and for direct observation of participants, I accurately documented my data collection and data analysis methods in the literature review, provided a detailed description of the research question, case study, participants, findings, and any additional context surrounding the research that may be useful to the reader, and ensured data saturation.

### ***Confirmability***

Fusch and Ness (2015) described confirmability as evidence that research findings are replicable and consistent. Confirmability can be achievable through triangulation and member checking. To achieve confirmability in my study, I used an interview protocol for the semistructured interviews, asked probing questions to clarify participants' views where necessary, accurately documented the interview transcripts, performed member checking to verify the data collected and its interpretation, and used triangulation to reach data saturation. To minimize bias, I used bracketing to mitigate the effects of personal preconceptions and increase the rigor and credibility of my research. I also compared my findings with existing literature to assess the confirmability of my results.

Data saturation is critical to qualitative research. Data saturation is said to occur when there is enough information to understand the phenomenon being studied, both primary and secondary data are exhaustive, and no new information or thematic coding emerges (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To achieve data saturation, I interviewed as many manufacturing leaders as possible by asking questions about strategies they used to



improve employee engagement until no new data or coding emerged. I used multiple data sources and different cases to gather as much information until data saturation was achieved. I carefully reviewed all transcripts, audio recordings, and company documents repeatedly and accurately transcribed the information in its original form. I performed member checking of transcribed data before data analysis to ensure no errors or bias in judgement. I utilized the appropriate software for thematic and coding analysis and compared my findings with existing research related to the conceptual framework and research question.

### **Transition and Summary**

I started Section 2 with a restatement of the purpose of the study, my role as a researcher, participant selection criteria, and the research methodology and design. I also identified the population and sampling technique, principles for ethical research, data collection, data analysis, reliability, and validity. In Section 3, I presented my findings, applications for professional practice, and recommendations for future research. I also summarized personal reflections from my reflexive journal during the study.

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

In Section 3, I present the findings of this study which includes a presentation of the major themes and subthemes emerging from the cases, the relevance to the conceptual framework and the research question, a discussion on the applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for action and future research, which manufacturing leaders, HR leaders, and researchers may find useful. I also summarized my personal reflections about the study and conclusions.

#### **Introduction**

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies successful Nigerian manufacturing leaders use to improve employee engagement. I purposefully selected nine manufacturing leaders working across five manufacturing organizations in southwest Nigeria, who could share their experiences and perspectives. Before each interview, I ensured all participants had familiarized themselves with and agreed to the research consent forms. Additionally, I reminded all participants that the conversations would be audio recorded and documented for accuracy while also always guaranteeing confidentiality of shared information. I conducted semistructured interviews using nine open-ended questions, after which I transcribed each interview and provided the participants with a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy and make corrections. Nowell and Albrecht (2018) ascertained that researchers can ensure research rigor by using appropriate sampling techniques, triangulation, member checking, appropriate

thematic and coding analysis, peer reviewing, and established protocols. After data verification, I uploaded the data into NVivo, coded, categorized, triangulated, interpreted the results, and conducted member checking to validate the information collected.

I also reviewed relevant company documentation such as company websites, employee surveys, engagement and wellness action plans, and annual reports to buttress the data provided, which helped me achieve methodological data triangulation. Using the semistructured interviews, transcripts, and documentary evidence as my data sources, I was able to reach data saturation by my eighth interview. Data saturation occurs when information is repeated and there is no new evidence or knowledge arising from research data (Fusch et al., 2018). The key findings were that a deliberate leadership focus on employee engagement strategies can create a work environment where employees feel safe, do meaningful work, and contribute to the overall success of the organization, amidst the unique challenges of the Nigerian economy. The participants confirmed that manufacturing leaders can improve employee engagement and impact firm's competitiveness, which was consistent with the conceptual framework and my review of existing literature.

### **Presentation of Findings**

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do successful manufacturing leaders use to improve employee engagement? I carried out a qualitative multiple case study of five manufacturing organizations in southwest Nigeria using Kahn's (1990) engagement theory as a conceptual framework and Yin's (2018)

five-step process (which includes methodological triangulation and member checking).

The data sources used for this study are shown in Table 2. To protect the confidentiality of participants and cases, I created unique alphanumeric codes where letter *C* represents cases and letter *P* represents participants. For example, *CIP1* indicates *Case 1*

*Participant 1*. Five major themes about strategies manufacturing leaders use to improve employee engagement emerged from the data. These themes were **(a) safe and inclusive work culture, (b) supportive leadership, (c) setting clear expectations, (d) meaningful rewards and recognition, and (e) frequent and effective communication.**

Across the five cases, 69 initial codes emerged from the first round of coding from which 14 categories emerged after the second round of coding. The emerged themes and associated subthemes aligned with my conceptual framework and literature review are highlighted below (see Table 3).

**Table 2**

*Data Sources*

Data sources	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5
Virtual semistructured interviews	X	X	X	X	X
Company reports including employee survey action plan / reports	X	X	X	X	
Company website		X	X	X	X
Newspaper/magazine articles	X	X	X	X	X

**Table 3**

*Emerged Themes and Subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes
Safe and inclusive work culture	Shared values Psychological safety Inclusion
Supportive leadership	Participatory leadership Joint decision making
Setting clear expectations	Goal setting Job description Daily management systems Onboarding
Meaningful rewards and recognition	Monetary and non-monetary rewards Training and development Recognition and appreciation
Frequent and effective communication	Feedback systems Performance reviews

### **Theme 1: Safe and Inclusive Work Culture**

The first theme that emerged is safe and inclusive culture and the subthemes were (a) shared values, (b) psychological safety, and (c) inclusion. Employees can actively engage and interact when there is an enabling work environment (Hurtienne et al., 2022). All the participants stressed the importance of ensuring the work environment is conducive for employees to perform well.

#### ***Shared values***

When personal values are aligned with company values, employees can find more meaning in their work and be more engaged. *C4P2* stated “we have our shared values”. *C2P2* corroborated stating that the same culture thread extends through the organization whether from the international headquarters in Europe or in Nigeria. *C3P1* added “our

culture is embedded into everything we are doing that relates to engagement, and it is quite impactful”. Participants shared that when a company's values are in sync with their employees' personal goals, it can lead to improved engagement and business growth. Examples of shared values include happiness, trust, integrity, joy, execute, ownership mindset, leads, authenticity, and respect. *C3P2* ascertained that “when we talk to our team members in a harsh tone or rudely, they cannot give their best” while *C5P1* explained how their business is intentional about incorporating joy and happiness into everything they do as it would be difficult to run a business without good culture and a good working environment where people feel they have a future and are happy. *C5P1* stated “If you come to our factory, things are well organized and well set out, you will feel happy that you are here. If there is anything worrying you, we want to hear about it”.

### ***Psychological safety***

When employees feel a strong sense of psychological safety, they are more engaged at work (Liu & Ge, 2020; Mao & Tian, 2022). *C1P1* and *C3P1* stated that creating a safe space for employees empowers them. According to *C2P2*, “I have created an atmosphere of psychological safety, where people are free to express their view”. Similarly, *C4P2* stated “we want people to feel very safe in the work environment”. *C3P1* emphasized the importance of empathy, compassion, and care in the workplace stating that “when an employee is happy giving their best, they do a whole lot”. *C4P2* added that “what we try to do is to create a friendly work environment where people are able to speak out and speak their mind without fear”. *C5P2* stated “when you go to the

floor, they rally round you and tell you exactly what they are facing on the floor before it results into quality, safety, or fatality issue”. *C1P1* added that “when I reach out, people say things like - you have inspired me to keep going with this work”.

### ***Inclusion***

*C5P2* emphasized that “our culture is actually based on our core values. For us, joy and inclusiveness are huge. It does not matter whether you are an operator personnel in our facility, all of us are one big family and all our functions are very significant. No role is bigger, no role is smaller.” *C4P2* added that “at the workplace, the way I look at it, employee engagement is everything”. *C2P2* stated “if they fail, we fail, because their KPI is an integral part of our own”. *C3P1* further advised that allowing employees to bring their ideas brings about creativity and stated that “because you're giving them that kind of opportunity to be creative, they will be motivated and continue to give in their best”. *C2P2* added “we do not care whether you are from Europe, Nigeria, or America. What matters is that we embrace our differences and collaborate with every kind of people from any part of the world to be able to get results”. *C4P1* gave an example of a situation where cliques among the workers and specific managers made it very difficult to implement new changes but implementing some engagement initiatives enabled the leaders to break through the siloed culture and improve the business. *C3P1* emphasized that a culture of fairness, equity, and operating principles with zero tolerance for discrimination has enabled higher engagement and improved results.

### ***Correlating Theme 1 to the Conceptual Framework***

Kahn (1990) described employee engagement as the extent to which employees choose to make meaningful contributions at work or pull back, drawing from their own psychological motivations. Engagement is a state of mind that can be achieved when an employee feels happy and fulfilled at work (Zahari & Kaliannan, 2022), which can ultimately lead to greater productivity and satisfaction. Work engagement plays a mediating role between psychological safety and employee creativity (Liu & Ge, 2020). Shared values can only be created when employees feel connected to the company's vision (Wu et al., 2020). Being present is psychological (Kahn, 1992). Highly engaged employees who have a clear understanding of the company's overall vision and purpose can influence their own actions to align with the company objectives. The findings of this study support Kahn's (1990) argument that employees who feel safe in the workplace are more likely to be physically, cognitively, and emotionally engaged in the completion of tasks.

With the complex industry 4.0 business environment, business performance and competitive edge rely heavily on the level of existing resources and capabilities (Felsberger et al., 2022). A motivated staff of workers is essential for any organization's success. Kahn and Fellows (2013) posited that when employees candidly express individual thoughts and feelings with the goal of delivering high-quality work, authenticity shines through. Employees can find purpose and be motivated on the job when they feel connected with others heading towards similar goals (Kahn, 1990). Vaitkevicius and Vidreviciene (2022) described enthusiastic engagement as a situation



when employees are highly engaged, experience minimal work stress or desperation, and are highly productive at work. Employees who feel motivated and connected to a workplace tend to be more aware, creative, and productive, in a measurable way (Mao & Tian, 2022). Therefore, Mao and Tian (2022) support Kahn's (1990) theory that psychological safety has a positive impact on employee engagement.

### ***Correlating Theme 1 to Existing Literature***

Trust is the building block of successful cultures and high-performing organizations. When trust exists, innovation flourishes and competitive advantages emerge, creating a winning formula for businesses. Findings from this study support findings of Akob et al. (2020) that engaged organizations with a genuine connection to shared strengths and values stand out for being trustworthy, fair, and understanding of the promises between companies and employees. To foster an environment of trust and high engagement, manufacturing leaders and HR professionals should design culture enhancing initiatives that span the entire employee journey (Mohanty & P, 2021). Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement suggests that employees who are engaged at work experience a sense of psychological safety, meaning that they feel safe to be themselves, express their ideas, and take risks without fear of negative consequences, which can create a sense of belonging, where employees feel connected and valued. There is a significant relationship between a conducive workplace, employee engagement, and improved performance (Kirana et al., 2022). Companies that invest in inclusive leadership are presented with the unique opportunity to create an environment of

psychological safety, which can act as a powerful driver for increased employee work engagement. Such relationships foster a two-way street where leaders make honest promises to employees and then strive to follow through. Highly engaged employees may display more positive emotions in the workplace and demonstrate more commitment to meeting business expectations than less engaged colleagues (Wu et al., 2020).

### **Theme 2: Supportive Leadership**

The second theme that emerged is supportive leadership and there were two subthemes namely (a) participatory leadership and (b) joint decision making. *C2P2* expressed that “the aim of managers is to make sure that we support our people to deliver the KPIs and the targets that we have given to them”. Leaders should encourage community spirit and common focus to drive high engagement and collaboration among co-workers and between managers and direct reports.

#### ***Participatory leadership***

All participants unanimously mentioned that despite the hierarchical culture in Nigeria and in the manufacturing sector, leaders who are more collaborative in their leadership style get the best engagement from teams. *C3P2* explained that “Nigerians tend to respect their bosses to the extent that there's a kind of wide gap and hierarchy between managers and employees”. *C5P2* stated “I've worked with different bosses and really, with different leadership styles, but the participatory style is always very good where I can call my group for discussion”. *C2P2* added that “embracing an adult-adult relationship approach brings out the best in people and delivers what you want in the

business”. *C4P2* stated “I listen a lot and I listen very well” while *C2P2* added that leaders who prioritize people first, is good for business. *C1P1* emphasized that people bring their personal challenges to the workplace and a good leader must notice behavioral changes such as countenance, attitude to work, or level of engagement, and offer help. *C5P1* stated that “when employees are thoroughly engaged, they should be able to recommend that particular manager or the company to another person”. *C4P2* added “as a leader, if you don't have that trust at the heart of leadership, that means you don't have integrity”. *C3P1* emphasized that “my leadership style is more like participatory, we operate like a family – sometimes I direct or delegate where needed, and we move on” and noted that a key driver of engagement is when leaders build trust by sticking to promises and agreements made.

### ***Joint Decision Making***

*C2P2* confirmed that “for our people to be engaged, they need to see themselves as part of whatever you are doing. They need to be included in decisions that you are making”. *C1P1* added “I tend to allow people to be involved in the decision-making process because I want everyone’s contributions and make them feel part of the process”. As a heavily unionised site, *C3P2* shared several examples of how engaging the union representatives in regular decision making has made them reputable change ambassadors in implementing changes in the organization. Organizing regular forums where ideas can be shared and discussed freely can reduce ambiguity and mitigate rumours among teams. *C4P2* ascertained that when employees feel like they have been part of the decision-

making process, they have a certain level of attachment and drive the actions from the forefront. *C5P1* commented that “we let our teams gather the data for us, so they own it. If the business is progressing, if we are doing well, they see it. They don’t need to be worried or confused as to whether the business is doing well or not. This way, we get them to belong and stay committed”. *C2P2* advised that “at the end of everything, they will be the ones to implement them, so if they are not carried along at the inception of that idea, it will be very difficult for them to implement it”. *C3P1* commented that getting employees involved in the decision-making process can also help filter out employees that are more engaged than others.

### ***Correlating Theme 2 to the Conceptual Framework***

In a tight job market with limited skilled talents and high recruiting costs, leaders cannot afford not to engage employees. Kahn (1990) expressed that when leaders create an environment conducive to success, employees can have high expectations of themselves and display higher levels of meaningfulness at work. Posadzinska et al. (2020) described participative leaders as collaborative, cooperative, and supportive of employee participation in problem-solving, decision-making, and group engagement, to achieve strategic and operational goals. Collaborative leaders are more likely to succeed in delivering business results while keeping employees energized and engaged. A leader's ability to influence subordinates' self-concepts can foster an environment that cultivates organization values (Huang et al., 2022). Kahn's (1990) findings indicated that employees

who had more control over the job responsibilities felt safer to speak up and displayed a higher level of motivation and engagement.

In Nigeria, Olomi and Ikegwuru (2021) examined the relationship between participative leadership style and supply chain performance of some retail SMEs and concluded that a participative leadership style encourages employee information sharing among employees which directly boosts supply chain performance. Leaders who know how to inject positive employee experiences that translate to happier employees can improve work engagement (Harunavamwe et al., 2020) while leaders who display negative emotional expressions can trigger reduced levels of work engagement leading to poor performance (Li et al., 2020). Baran and Sypniewska (2020) argued that the presence of both people-oriented management and active participatory culture can positively influence all the dimensions of work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) whereas non-people-oriented management style may only impact vigor and dedication, but not absorption.

### ***Correlating Theme 2 to Existing Literature***

Leadership styles can influence employee engagement and performance. Leadership effectiveness can be measured by the level of employee engagement and involvement in the decision-making process (Drewniak et al., 2020). Sutia et al. (2022) sampled about 250 manufacturing employees at the PT. NeoPangan Selaras facility in Indonesia and ascertained that leadership style impacts employee performance at every level of the organization. While transactional leadership involves incentivizing compliant

behavior in employees using rewards and punishments (Puni et al., 2021), participative management style is proving to be highly beneficial for companies, with sustainable cost reductions and increased efficiency (Erdal & Budak, 2021). Participative leaders can strive to empower employees with the necessary support, attention, and decision-making capabilities to solve problems (Erdal & Budak, 2021; Putra & Indayani, 2022). Leaders can better utilize the team members' perspectives on how best to operate more productively by allowing individuals the chance to contribute to decision-making processes, which may lead to better results. Kahle-Piaseck and Hyslop (2022) explored strategies for building a culture of employee engagement and ascertained that leaders who commit to creating an environment of collaboration, trust, and respect, can instill confidence in their employees, which leads to higher engagement. Abusive or toxic leadership can profoundly impair job satisfaction, employee performance capability, and engagement (Pandzic & Hadziahmetovic, 2022)

Participative leaders can drive positive change by encouraging employees to take part in the decision-making process, learn new skills, or build upon existing knowledge. Wang et al. (2022) identified that participatory leadership includes (a) maintaining team engagement, (b) embracing differences, (c) utilizing diverse skills, and (d) allowing creativity in decision making. Leveraging employees in decision-making processes, information sharing, and rewarding initiatives, can result in heightened engagement. Managers who are invested in employee engagement and wellbeing can readily recognize a decline in performance and intervene as needed (Meskelis & Whittington, 2020). Joint

consultation between management and employees can create a positive, collaborative atmosphere which helps to foster trust amongst all parties. By displaying respect for team members' ideas and opinions, managers demonstrate fairness – building confidence in the reliability of any messages transmitted from leadership.

### **Theme 3: Setting Clear Expectations**

The third theme that emerged was about setting clear expectations and the subthemes were (a) goal setting, (b) job description, (c) daily management systems, and (d) onboarding.

#### ***Goal setting***

The participants acknowledged that goal setting and planning is key to improving employee engagement. *CIP1* emphasized the importance of planning and setting goals and objectives at the beginning of the year or month and further breaking them down into weekly targets and activities so that everybody is clear on what they need to achieve. *C3P2* stated “at the beginning of the year when we build the action plan and set the KPIs, we cascade it down to the last person; that helps us to be able to improve the situation and people are rewarded accordingly”. *C2P2* stated “it is only an inspired and engaged workforce that can give you all that you have asked from them in terms of volume, energy, efficiency, and cost”. *CIP1* added that when tasks are very clear and people understand what they need to be achieve, they are fully engaged. *C3P2* added that having inter-functional KPIs that are not solely in your department also encourages interdependency and togetherness. Once goals are defined, they must be cascaded down

to teams and units, so everyone has ownership. *C3P2* stated “inter-function KPI collaboration helps people to be intertwined as everyone has a KPI deliverable cross functionally so that you can find a way to work together. At the long run, it is like a win-win situation”. *C3P1* stated “any person who is part and parcel of the company knows that their own contribution is part of the input that gives overall outcome of the company performance”. *C4P1* noted that every section of the organization has their own KPIs, and I quote “and we always talk about it”.

### ***Job description***

Some of the participants shared that employees deliver excellent results and derive job satisfaction when the job is well understood. *C5P1* explained that “the first thing we do is there is a job description for everybody - for every worker, every packer, every supervisor, and the job description describes what we are supposed to do”. *C3P2* ascertained that people take ownership and pride in what they do when the tasks are clear. According to *C1P1*, “the first thing is ensuring that employees’ roles are clear to them - because I know people become tired when it seems they are just following a crowd and are not clear on their roles”. *C5P1* explained that “defining roles and objectives makes the workers come to work and feel happy” while *C5P2* shared “when I started my career, you had to check almost what everybody was doing, but now, roles are clear, people are taking responsibility, being resourceful, and doing their jobs very well”. *C2P2* added that “basically, it is planning and ensuring that tasks are very clear such that people understand what they need to be achieved, so that everybody is fully engaged”. *C4P1*



corroborated the importance of job description as a process that helps every team member understands the impact of their roles.

### ***Daily management systems***

*C3P2* stated “every day, we have meetings on the production floor; we go through all the major process control areas”. Similarly, *C5P2* ascertained that “using the visual operational scorecard has really helped; everyone is clear on what they should deliver, are tracking their performance, their progress, their development, and then they are confident”. *C2P2* called it *short interval control* stating that “an hourly check is done by a supervisor on the shop floor, to check how his people are doing in terms of all the KPIs that have been given to them”. *C4P1* added that “you should always be carried along to know the status of your plant, what you are doing, and what you want to end up with”. *C3P2* and *C4P2* shared that improving employee engagement affects employee experience and simplified or automated processes help the employee experience and builds trust. All the participants emphasized that visual operational dashboards and automated management systems help faster decision making and delivery of results. *C1P1* stated that “we ensure that performance targets are tied to metrics that will be evaluated at the month so that you can see your progress” and confirmed that engagement strategies have been very effective and reflective on the company’s financial performance.

### ***Onboarding***

Working in the manufacturing industry can be very tasking and operational. To give employees a good start and keep them engaged, there must be a proper onboarding program in place. Several participants confirmed that getting new hires onboarded properly can help leaders keep the best people and get them committed to business goals. *C5P1* stated that “onboarding within the first 2 weeks of joining the organization is a new way of life that is very refreshing, especially in manufacturing where you have a lot of equipment going around and a lot of human beings”. *C2P2* expressed that leaders should not be exempted from onboarding as well. *C1P1* said “when our leaders were trained on how to lead their teams, then the leaders started taking responsibilities in having focus group discussions every week, which facilitates effectiveness in terms of production”. Some of the participants also explained the importance of assigning a guide or mentor who helps facilitate learning, processes, and how to navigate through the department so there is no confusion.

### ***Correlating Theme 3 to the Conceptual Framework***

Kahn (1990) posited that when employees are preoccupied with impressing others and second-guessing how they will be judged, they become more self-conscious, leading to distractions and possible loss of physical, emotional, or cognitive ability to do the assigned tasks. Meaningfulness is an important factor for employee engagement (Kahn, 1990). Kahn and Fellows (2013) ascertained that when people find meaning in their work, they can go beyond mere task completion and connect to something greater that can boost employee engagement and drive deeper significance. Meaningfulness in a job

position includes the tasks and other considerations such as work-related interactions and specific job features (Boccoli et al., 2022). To maximize effectiveness, business leaders must ensure that employee roles are carefully delineated and understood by everyone (Byrne & Manning, 2021). Leaders can engage in regular feedback and communication with employees to minimize this pressure and influence employees' psychological availability in the workplace. Employees who have a strong dedication to their work can produce maximum individual and team performance (Tao et al., 2022). Through clear roles and responsibilities, goal setting, and well-planned operating management system, leaders can have an opportunity to foster these connections that allow workers connect to a higher purpose so it may be recognized and embraced.

### ***Correlating Theme 3 to Existing Literature***

Businesses can thrive when employees understand role expectations and link to organizational goals (Tao et al., 2022). Alagarsamy et al. (2020) ascertained that employees that are given clear expectations and allowed to exercise autonomy can yield higher productivity levels. In recent times, some researchers have linked employee engagement with workers' enthusiasm on the job (Pandzic & Hadziahmetovic, 2022). Employees are more likely to engage at work if they feel confident and empowered to do so (Beltran-Martin et al., 2022). Johari et al. (2022) concluded that task importance, individual authority, and constructive feedback are all key factors to achieving a higher level of work engagement. The findings of this research study revealed that employees may feel a greater sense of job satisfaction when they can work on meaningful tasks with

tangible outcomes and gain valuable feedback from superiors. Casteleiro and Mendes (2020) indicated there is a strong positive connection between employee engagement and achieving sustainable total quality management (TQM) processes. Kahn (1990) ascertained that highly engaged employees not only understand what is expected of them and build strong relationships with colleagues, but also deliver better results through improved performance, effective organization processes and well-structured systems. Leaders who work in TQM-enabled work environments can actively engage their employees, empowering them to be part of problem-solving and decision-making processes, which can promote a deeper sense of commitment within the workplace (Liu & Liu, 2022). The absence of communication between leaders and employees may cause businesses to fail. Therefore, leaders and employees must continue to boundaries and explore collective contribution and creativity to improve employee engagement.

#### **Theme 4: Meaningful Rewards and Recognition**

The fourth theme or employee engagement strategy that emerged was meaningful rewards and recognition. Subthemes were (a) monetary and non-monetary rewards, (b) training and development, and (c) recognition and appreciation.

##### ***Monetary and non-monetary rewards***

*C3P1* stated “because we have productivity bonuses, when we make more, there is more money, more profits, and we are able to meet the strategies and the company's purpose”. *C3P2* expressed that “the economy we cannot control, the insecurity we cannot face it alone, but we can control what we can control which are our KPIs and a quarterly

bonus is paid out when we achieve our goals”. *C5P1* emphasized that monetary rewards such as salary should not be the only strategy in driving engagement. *C5P1* further explained it this way “I repeat – it is not just about money, because the same worker you give the same amount of money, he takes the money home and enjoys, and then, you will not get anything afterwards, but if you add other elements (the engagement part), that includes defining roles, joy, proximity, this culture we have put in place, the business is getting the best out of them, even with all the meltdown that is happening around”.

*C3P1* added that leaders should also consider changing traditional shift systems that do not allow employees the opportunity of having enough time for themselves, to avoid employee burnout. The participants shared examples of monetary and non-monetary rewards such as paying agreed salaries on time, paying overtime and bonuses on time, stock options, short term incentives (STI) and housing incentives, additional leave days, different types of leave benefits (including parental, compassionate, study, jury, death), life insurance benefits, holistic health and wellbeing packages for employees and their families (such as access to gym memberships, in-house sports and relaxation facilities), embassy support, special additional benefits for senior leaders, celebrating service milestones and personal birthdays, other production awards, and most recently, flexible work benefits that support work life balance.

### ***Training and development***

Focusing on employee growth from a personal and professional perspective can enhance employee engagement. *C3P2* explained that the organization has defined career

paths, mentorship program, and detail job opportunities publicly so employees can grow. *C4P2* stated that “when people see that their colleagues are given opportunity to grow on the job, it gets people excited. It makes them feel hopeful, that there is a future and when such happens, you see some level of commitment”. *C5P1* added that “we train people to get the best results and to ensure that these guys are happy, we give them the right training, the right guidance, and the training could be basic things, and sometimes sending an employee overseas - the positive impact affects the site.” *C1P1* explained that in the process of managing the operations, leaders can identify competence gaps and can organize trainings (such as on-the-job, shadowing, online, or expatriate training outside the country) so employees can quickly acquire the skills. *C1P1* added that “especially if it is an external overseas trip, employees are very grateful that the company can invest in them, and engagement is high”. *C2P2* also stressed the importance of workplace flexibility and care in supporting personal development stating that “there are some few people, especially those that are running a program for their personal growth, we support their shift structure so they can juggle both work and their studies, which makes many of them grateful”. *C4P2* added that “when you give people opportunities to move to higher positions or charge people with additional responsibilities, they see the benefit coming to them”. “The excitement and pride in them when they return from such training shocked me” *C5P1* exclaimed. Similarly, *C3P1* gave examples of performance-driven talent development programs where high potential talents are given special training programs,

deliberate exposure to senior leadership, and prepared as succession pipeline for future leadership roles.

### ***Recognition and appreciation***

In addition to monetary and non-monetary rewards, employees want to feel appreciated when they put in effort into their work. *C4P2* expressed that recognition and appreciation brings out enthusiasm in others who want to be recognized as well and motivates them to put in more effort. *C2P2* explained that “you always think it is only money that can motivate them, but little things like thank you, like recognizing them and appreciating them on a job well done goes a long way in also motivating people and inspiring them as well”. The participants shared recognition and appreciation examples such as employee of the month, unsung heroes award, giving a high-five, issuing gift cards, creating healthy team competitions with free cash vouchers or free team building events, a special lunch or dinner with the manufacturing director or site manager, publicly framed pictures of star employees on the company communication channels (apps, intranet, notice boards). *C1P1* explained that “when we give out recognition awards to people who have demonstrated commitment to our values or exemplified them, it motivates people to want to make contribution to what’s going on and to take initiatives”. *C5P1* added that “the average factory worker wants to come to the factory happy, safe, and wants to be motivated. If you engage him, and you have this dashboard where you put their results, he wants people to come and see how well he is performing and to be recognized for it. It is more important to him on a day-to-day basis. Then, the

monetary part comes at the end of the month”. *C5P2* emphasized “we celebrate our wins, every single win; and we celebrate one another”.

#### ***Correlating Theme 4 to the Conceptual Framework***

Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement builds on Herzberg's Two Factor theory by focusing on the psychological states and experiences that contribute to employee engagement (Hur, 2017). Kahn (1990) explained that employees' lifestyles can influence the physical, cognitive, and emotional availability at work. Employees who are satisfied with the company's welfare and benefits package tend to be more engaged at work (Sahoo et al., 2022). There is a strong correlation between an employee's sense of purpose and appreciation in the workplace and the rewards for business accomplishments (Alam et al., 2022). Employees who have autonomy, the intrinsic reward of satisfaction, and can influence decision making demonstrate higher levels of passion, enthusiasm, and concentration, all directed towards achieving organizational objectives (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Employees can be motivated not just by extrinsic rewards such as money or promotions, but also intrinsic factors such as feeling good about what you do, being recognized for it by others, and seeing a tangible impact from your efforts (Bandi et al., 2021). Kahn (1990) also ascertained that employees' engagement levels don't always stay the same, as several factors can cause changes in an employee's dedication at different times. Offering meaningful incentives is an effective way to encourage higher levels of productivity and performance (Kirana et al., 2022) as intrinsically motivated employees are more likely to be creative and take on challenging tasks (Nelson, 2021).



### *Correlating Theme 4 to Existing Literature*

With the prolonged impact of COVID-19 on the economy, business leaders are navigating unfamiliar working conditions while grappling with psychological and financial wellbeing of employees due to workload pressure and a rise in inflation (Boccoli et al., 2022). Both hygiene factors and growth factors must be present if leaders want employees to feel engaged and motivated to contribute to the organization. According to Herzberg et al. (1959) theory, hygiene factors include things like salary, working conditions, and job security, while growth factors (also known as motivators) are the elements that lead to personal growth, accomplishment, and a sense of meaning and purpose at work, such as recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for advancement. Meaningful feedback and recognition can be powerful drivers of employee engagement (Tate et al., 2021). By focusing on both hygiene factors and growth factors, manufacturing leaders can create a work environment that fosters engagement and motivation among employees.

Akpan et al. (2021) recommended that managers of manufacturing firms in Nigeria and other developing countries must proactively seek new knowledge, build capabilities, understand industry trends, and prepare for changes in the environment, to remain competitive. Leaders who care about employees are more likely to invest in appropriate training and development to build competence, improve quality of output, and gain competitive advantage (Mon et al., 2021). Employees can achieve their highest potential with the right combination of expertise and experience. Khalid et al. (2021)

opined that employee engagement enhances career development and plays a critical role in organizational development. All the participants confirmed that poorly trained employees are less likely to remain engaged or produce results of the same quality as well-trained employees.

### **Theme 5: Frequent and Effective Communication**

The fifth theme that emerged as an effective strategy in improving employee engagement is frequent and effective communication with subthemes (a) feedback, and (b) performance reviews. All the participants identified the need for leaders to frequently meet with their teams to share information, assess performance, communicate company direction or vision, understand grievances, check employee pulse, give feedback and updates on issues raised, and to listen to ideas.

#### ***Feedback***

*C3P2* confirmed “the firsthand information keeps people engaged”. *C4P1* further explained that letting employees know how the business is faring and getting them involved in the profit and loss (P&L) data gathering. *C5P1* stated that “if the business is progressing; if we are doing well, they see it. They don’t need to be worried about whether the business is doing well or not. In this way, we get them to belong and get committed”. *C4P2* stated that “it is important to give feedback, but feedback needs to be constructive”. All participants described a variety of channels for giving and receiving feedback such as daily floor walks, dashboards and noticeboard reviews, daily / weekly

one: ones with direct reports, shift team meetings and handovers, monthly townhalls, special councils, road shows, webcasts, recorded videos, using 360 feedback and leadership assessment tools, rotational breakfast or lunch meetings with the senior leaders. *C2P2* stated “we give instant feedback, and we also receive such feedback from them; you know, because it is a 2-way conversation”. *C3P2* stated “we have the joint union consultation forum, canteen committee, half yearly road shows, and regular pulse surveys to keep people informed and collect inputs. All participants interviewed unanimously agreed that of taking employees' thoughts and opinions into account is a key step in driving successful employee engagement strategies.

In addition, *C3P2* explained that team meetings are organized on daily / weekly basis to discuss with the team members, ask questions about what the challenges of the previous shift or week, what can we do better, and the feedback is incorporated into their plans. When asked a follow-up question of how to engage, *C4P1* said “to bring the team together and engage them, we have different levels of meetings – one on one with your manager, shift meetings, departmental meetings, “while *C4P2* stated “we do daily walks on the shop floor to address issues before they become escalated”. Regarding employee pulse surveys, *C2P2* said “we have seen very good participation from my people and the last one that was done, the engagement index rose to like 89% if not 90%”. *C3P1* gave an example of an online app where managers connect on a weekly or monthly basis with each employee to seek after their personal and professional wellbeing with questions

related to personal health, family wellbeing, personal projects, need for team assistance, and managers can provide direct solutions or refer to other experts”.

### ***Performance reviews***

*C1P1* stated that “month in month out as we do performance evaluation, people are always aspiring to say I know my performance is better because they have been used to reviewing with their manager”. *C3P2* explained that a bonus calculator is used to determine individual and team rewards and paid out in line with annual performance ratings. *C3P2* added that “people are rewarded according to their contribution – we measure both what you deliver and how it is delivered”. Participants mentioned ratings can be classified based on expectations (exceeding expectation, partially met / fully met expectations) or impact of results on the business (satisfactory, beyond satisfactory, outstanding). *C5P1* explained that the leaders do regular performance reviews and not wait till the end of the year so that employees who are underperforming get a chance to correct their behaviour or results in real time. *C5P1* went further and said, “when an operator sees his set targets and results, he demonstrates a certain kind of excitement; but if he sees that performance is low, you will see him sad”. *C4P1* explained that when there is no feedback to the team, team members may not know the requirement of the business, while *C4P2* ascertained that regular reviews impact communication in the organization, training, coaching, allowing people to work, make mistakes, learn, until they get to the level of competence. *C3P1* shared that “with this focus, every employee does the best they can to ensure that we remain competitive, and we make more profits” and added that

“we all make efforts to ensure that we chase competition away, so we remain competitive, as well as save costs for the company to make more profit”.

***Correlating Theme 5 to the Conceptual Framework***

Unlike previous studies that discouraged work conflicts, Lee and Huang (2019) confirmed that, based on Kahn’s (1990) three psychological constructs, higher work-level open discussions and conflicts drive more engagement and psychological safety on the job that can enhance innovation and quality of new product performance. Kahn (1990) ascertained that employees are more likely to feel engaged on the job if they perceive psychological safety and authenticity in the workplace. Performance reviews are essential to business success, offering the opportunity for greater growth and development - from promotion or compensation rises, through to improved communication (Ulantini et al., 2022). Regular performance assessments also provide a way to measure progress against goals and objectives. Leaders who focus on quality employee communication and build a trusting work environment can improve employee engagement (Homann et al., 2021). Tate et al. (2021) examined the relationship between employee engagement and performance goals and development, and the findings revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between performance goals and development and employee engagement. Introducing initiatives to support employees' performance and professional development, such as offering frequent feedback or providing resources for goal setting, can have a profound effect on employees' engagement and willingness to work (Tate et al., 2021).

### *Correlating Theme 5 to Existing Literature*

Managers who provide thoughtful and supportive guidance to employees may be able to create an atmosphere of mutual respect that enables teams to reach the fullest potential. Riyanto et al. (2021) posited that effective leadership revolves around fostering two-way communication and providing consistent, regular feedback opportunities. The deep understanding of expectations from both leaders and employees can foster better engagement (Nelson, 2021). Performance encompasses an individual's overall capabilities, talents, and quality of their efforts to achieve success within a given timeframe in accordance with organizational requirements (Ulantini et al., 2022). Performance management can be greatly enhanced by prioritizing employee engagement, which directly affects job performance. Leaders can use a variety of communication tools to ensure employees receive clear, prompt messages (Tao et al., 2022). Examples are email correspondence, virtual meetings, phone chats and internal social media platforms, providing direct opportunities for dialogue with staff. The work domain and personal domain are interlinked, and the activities employees engage in outside of work can impact their emotional and psychological engagement in the workplace (Ferreira et al., 2020). Employees who willingly give their best at work can influence organizational effectiveness (Kahle-Piaseck & Hyslop, 2022). Leaders who provide both personal and professional support to their workers can enhance commitment and meaningful work (Fremaux & Pavageau, 2022). Supportive leaders give time and attention to team members in their positive and difficult moments (Tao et al., 2022). By understanding how

to build a motivating work environment, manufacturing leaders can positively enhance the physical and psychological elements of their workplace (Nelson, 2021; Riyanto et al., 2021).

### **Application to Professional Practice**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies manufacturing leaders use to increase employee engagement in manufacturing organizations in Southwest Nigeria. All the participants provided detailed information about their experiences with employee engagement strategies. Based on my data analysis, I identified five themes: (a) safe and inclusive work culture, (b) supportive leadership, (c) setting clear expectations, (d) meaningful rewards and recognition programs, and (e) frequent and effective communication. The results of this study in combination of the conceptual framework and literature review assists in providing manufacturing leaders with strategies to further understand and improve employee engagement. Manufacturing leaders and HR Managers can potentially use the findings of this study to modify or improve existing programs and policies within the organization which directly impact employee engagement for long term success. My recommendations for actions are based on the emerging themes of the findings of this study.

Theme 1, safe and inclusive work culture, revealed that creating an enabling, inclusive, and safe environment where diverse employees feel safe to express themselves freely and work on shared goals and values, has resulted in increased employee engagement. All participants mentioned that leaders set the tone for organizational

culture and when employees' personal values and company objectives are in harmony, employees can find deeper meaning within their work which leads to increased engagement. Organizational culture is a dynamic system of shared values and norms that provide direction for employees to follow within an organization (Hemme et al., 2021). Although employees are motivated by different interests including monetary gain, strong people-oriented culture can be the foundation for organizational growth, creating a sense of collective purpose between employees and leaders. Manufacturing leaders can better define business objectives and craft unique solutions tailored to specific goals by creating the right culture. Leaders who create a meaningful and inclusive work environment can enhance productivity while also providing a sense of satisfaction for all stakeholders involved (Tyagi, 2021). Leaders who prioritize organizational culture can influence increased productivity and healthier work environments for their employees.

Theme 2, supportive leadership, emerged as a common thread throughout the study. Since many of the manufacturing organizations in Nigeria have unionized workforces with an employee representative council, all the respondents explained that leadership by fear or intimidation may not deliver sustainable results and recommended more employee involvement in decision making, daily operations management planning and troubleshooting, as well as employee ownership and accountability in delivering organizational objectives. The respondents provided a detailed description of skills leaders should demonstrate at work such as listening well, empathy, ability to recognize changes in employee behaviour, and transformational coaching. Participative



management style can stimulate employee creativity, innovation, and foster positive intra-organisational relationships (Posadzinska et al., 2020). Based on these findings, manufacturing leaders may be able to increase employee engagement through participatory and transformational leadership styles, promoting faster decision-making and overall achievement of business goals.

Theme 3, setting clear expectations through goal setting, job descriptions, daily management systems, and an effective onboarding program, can enhance employee engagement. Kahn (1990) described employee engagement as the degree of enthusiasm and dedication employees exert on the job. The respondents explained that setting clear individual and team goals gave autonomy to employees to deliver focused results. In addition, clear job descriptions and a structured onboarding set new employees up for success and seamless integration into the manufacturing environment. Manufacturing leaders may be able to increase employee engagement by investing time and resources in adequate onboarding, goal setting, clear job descriptions, and establishing simplified / automated daily management systems.

Theme 4, through meaningful rewards and recognition, the respondents confirmed increased employee engagement and dedication to work. By taking time to appreciate good work and creating several layers and varieties of rewards, leaders may be able to provide meaningful value to employees in exchange for better performance. Leaders can run regular pulse surveys to understand what employees value and are motivated by and then create competitive compensation packages and recognition budgets to reward

worthy employees. Training and developing employees can increase engagement that leads to deliver better performance, improved morale, and a more productive workplace.

Theme 5, frequent and effective communication, emerged as critical for building employee engagement. A leader's style can have an enormous impact on the team's levels of engagement and commitment (Othman et al., 2021). Manufacturing leaders who communicate regularly, using effective and appropriate channels, can help employees feel more capable on the job and foster higher levels of engagement with other colleagues and managers. Manager influence can account for up to 70% of the variance in team engagement at work (Gallup, 2022). Companies must strive to identify the leadership style most conducive to creating a productive work environment for employees.

Kahn's (1990) emphasized the power of meaningfulness, safety, and availability to drive highly engaged workforces. The results of this study confirm that the tenets of Kahn's (1990) employee engagement theory can influence engagement in organizations. By taking the findings of this study into consideration, manufacturing leaders and HR Managers can invest in more effective strategies that can directly promote employee engagement for long term success. Employee engagement should be embedded into the culture of the organization and all HR processes, not treated as a one-time event (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020). The findings in this study contribute to the understanding of effective employee engagement strategies within manufacturing organizations in Nigeria. In addition, the results of this study contribute to the gap in the literature on

employee engagement outside of developed countries like the Westernized or European economies.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change that emerged from this research includes providing a positive and safe environment that can improve employee engagement and lead to better profitability, reduced turnover, and economic empowerment in the community. The grim socio-economic landscape in Nigeria has posed a major challenge to investors, leading to a pull out of investments and causing many businesses to shut down. Consequently, the Nigerian economy has suffered from decreased output levels, rising unemployment rates, increasing inflationary pressures, and deteriorating living standards (Uma et al., 2019). Manufacturing leaders who use the findings of this study for improving employee engagement over the long-term can contribute to positive social change. Through employee engagement, manufacturing leaders can create a cycle of success in the workplace by empowering employees through shared goals, an inclusive and safe work environment, setting achievable goals, providing flexibility and a sense of ownership of accomplishments. Manufacturing leaders and HR can cultivate happiness at work which is likely to spread into other areas of life - both within an employee's home as well as the larger communities. Highly engaged employees can make a powerful impact on their community by championing causes and rallying fellow colleagues to join in corporate-sponsored community initiatives that create positive change in the community. Inattention to employee engagement can have serious

consequences, including a lack of determination and enthusiasm. Improved employee engagement can lead to reduced turnover and increased employment, which translates into more economic stability within the community and nation.

### **Recommendation for Action**

Despite the widespread discussion and research about employee engagement, many leaders lack strategies and actionable plans to engage the organization. The purpose of this study was to address the problem by exploring strategies manufacturing leaders in Nigeria use to improve employee engagement. In Nigeria, the focus on the oil sector as the main source of income (Manasseh et al., 2022) has impacted the development and competitiveness of sectors like manufacturing. The manufacturing sector is a major contributor to economic growth and prosperity and is often used as a benchmark to distinguish developed countries and emerging economies (Kanini, 2022). Highly engaged employees translate to lower absenteeism, turnover, and safety accidents at work, leading to overall business success and customer satisfaction (Gallup, 2022). Creating and implementing strategies that cultivate employee engagement can be a key factor aiding manufacturing businesses in maintaining their competitive edge. This research was conducted using semistructured interviews and company documentation.

Based on the findings of this study, my specific recommendations for current manufacturing leaders and HR managers are (a) safe and inclusive work culture, (b) supportive leadership, (c) setting clear expectations, (d) meaningful rewards and recognition, and (e) frequent and effective communication.

1. Manufacturing leaders in manufacturing industries must implement cultural strategies to create a safe, collaborative, and inclusive work environment that brings leaders and employees together to drive common objectives and shared values. Managers must consider the impact of organizational culture to create strong business relationships and optimize financial performance (Smit, 2021). Manufacturing leaders may be able to increase employee engagement by role modelling desired values, involving employees in the development of company values, purpose, mission, and policies, and demonstrating a culture of inclusion where employees feel safe to participate and deliver better performance.
2. Despite the hierarchical culture in many developing countries, manufacturing leaders who embrace more collaborative and participatory leadership styles are more likely to build an environment of collaboration, trust, and voluntary commitment, where employees are physically, cognitively, and emotionally engaged to deliver their target objectives. Prince and Mihalicz (2019) recommended that managerial effectiveness training is essential to developing the skills necessary for successful leadership and management, ultimately leading to higher engagement from employees. Agarwal (2020) opined that democratic and transformational styles of leadership can create collaborative work environments where employees and managers are empowered to interact together through open communication and free flow of information in

achieving organizational objectives. On the other hand, abusive supervision can lead to decreased engagement and job satisfaction, which directly impacts employee turnover (Humayon, 2022).

3. Setting clear expectations, providing meaningful rewards and recognition, and engaging in frequent and effective communication practices, can significantly influence employee engagement and lead to retention and business growth. Badru et al. (2022) recommended that managers who keep employees up to date on everything from a company's operational performance to future business plans, can create positive feelings in employees who then become more engaged in decision making and can help an organisation adapt effectively as needs change over time. Raza and Nadeem (2018) confirmed that three drivers that contribute to employee engagement in high-involvement work practices (HIWP) environments are (a) performance rewards, (b) communication, and (c) decision making. Employee engagement can have long-term benefits, increasing employee performance, creativity, and focus, over time (Choudhury et al., 2021). All participants agreed that there is no one-size-fits-all approach and leaders must understand their teams and what motivates them before implementing any engagement initiatives. Highly engaged and motivated employees can have more financial and socio-economic standing, better work-life balance, and can make meaningful contributions at work and in the community.

I recommend manufacturing leaders to use the insights of this study as an invaluable resource for developing strong relationships, utilizing effective communication styles, and implementing performance management practices that could help improve employees reach organizational objectives more efficiently. The results of this research could be useful to HR professionals, managers, trainers, and employees who want to improve employee engagement in the manufacturing industry. HR professionals could use the findings of this study to develop robust onboarding programs, clear job descriptions, meaningful rewards and recognition systems, and leadership development trainings that enhance employee engagement. Regardless of the industry, leaders can use the findings of this study to improve employee engagement and business performance.

I will provide an executive summary of this study to participating manufacturing companies, explaining major findings, implications for social change, and recommendations. I will provide other manufacturing leaders, HR leaders within the manufacturing sector, and the public, the downloadable link to the published article through the Walden University scholarly works publication platform, to educate and offer effective strategies that can improve employee engagement and enhance business competitiveness. Also, I intend to share these findings with professional audiences by publishing in academic journals and presenting at conferences and training workshops geared toward manufacturing leaders. The results of this study could help manufacturing leaders adopt new employee engagement strategies so they can grow their businesses and

contribute to the economic development of the manufacturing sector, the local communities, and the national economy.

### **Recommendation for Further Research**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies manufacturing leaders in Nigeria use to improve employee engagement. This research was conducted using semistructured interviews and company documentation. In this study, I conducted virtual semistructured interviews with eight manufacturing leaders across five manufacturing companies located in southwest Nigeria using nine open ended questions and a structured interview guide. Three limitations of this study were the type of research method, geographic limitations of the target population, and the small sample size. In future research, I recommend researchers to explore a larger population across different geographical areas or countries.

To address geographical and demographic limitations of this study, I recommend that future researchers explore other manufacturing companies and a larger population across different geographical areas or countries. I used the qualitative multiple case study design with a small sample size for this study. Future researchers should consider using quantitative or mix research methods with a larger sample size to enhance the generalizability of findings or consider either modifying existing research instruments or introducing new instruments for the purpose of research. In addition, researchers should explore other industries outside of the manufacturing sector and compare findings across geographical locations in Nigeria or wider Africa, to enhance the validity of results. This



study provides a good foundation for further studies examining other effective strategies manufacturing leaders use to improve employee engagement in Nigerian manufacturing organizations.

### **Reflections**

My DBA journey was both challenging and rewarding. I am grateful to have completed my doctoral studies focused on employee engagement in the complex manufacturing sector in developing countries such as Nigeria. Studying remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic while homeschooling and working a fulltime job was not easy but my resilience paid off. I was drawn to this research topic because of its relevance in improving employee engagement and business competitiveness and my curiosity in adding more information from developing countries to an already existing body of knowledge. Through critical research and data evaluation, this process allowed me to gain an enriched understanding of how manufacturing leaders in Nigeria use different strategies to engage their employees and stay competitive in a volatile business environment. Despite the prolonged effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and time zone challenges, I was still able to secure nine participants who met the criteria of this research study, but eventually interviewed only eight, due to data saturation. All the participants provided invaluable insight by sharing unique experiences with me during interviews, which gave me greater appreciation for differing approaches used in engaging the workforce. This has been a truly meaningful experience that will shape my future endeavors.

## **Conclusion**

Employee engagement is a key factor in creating an organization's competitive advantage. Globally, the alarming low rate of employee engagement is stunting enormous growth potential (Gallup, 2022). Akhigbe and Osita-Ejikeme (2021) ascertained that the increase in skilled labor migration to developed countries is causing a talent drain in many developing countries like Nigeria and therefore, the urgency for employers to improve employee engagement has never been higher. Mwangagangi and Nahashon (2018) identified some essential components for creating a positive work environment, which are (a) career progression opportunities, (b) healthy interpersonal relationships, (c) job stability assurance, (d) equitable pay scales and compensation packages. Evidence from this qualitative multiple case study shows that manufacturing leaders who use effective strategies such as a safe and inclusive culture, supportive leadership, setting clear expectations, meaningful rewards and recognition, and frequent and effective communication, can improve employee engagement which directly influences the firm's competitiveness.

When employees feel safe and connected, they are more likely to experience positive emotional states and to be motivated to contribute to the organization (Kahn, 1990). Managers who want to improve employee engagement and productivity may uncover innovative ideas by reading the valuable insights offered in this study. Kahn (1990) ascertained that meaningfulness, safety, and availability are key contributors to strong employee engagement. Manufacturing leaders must understand what employees

value before implementing employee engagement strategies. Organizations can waste resources if their employee engagement strategies are not well aligned to strategic business objectives (Kahle-Piaseck & Hyslop, 2022). Manufacturing leaders can foster higher levels of engagement by investing in initiatives designed to promote psychological safety, meaningful work, a sense of security within their roles, and systems that support employee development, job satisfaction, and motivation to work. This study confirmed that Kahn's engagement theory is a viable conceptual framework for improving employee engagement in manufacturing organizations. I strongly recommend this study's results for the consideration of manufacturing leaders interested in improving employee engagement in their respective organizations.

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## Appendix A: Partner Organization Agreement for DBA Case Study

Partner Organization Name  
 Partner Organization Email Address  
 Partner Organization Phone Number

The doctoral student, Mofoluwaso Ilevbare, is conducting a case study involving our organization and is therefore approved to collect interview data from one or more of our organization's leaders (managers, directors, or decision-makers whom I will identify to the student).

### INTERNAL RECORDS (OPTIONAL):

The signer of this agreement should indicate which internal documents, if any, can be shared with the researcher.

- Our organization cannot allow access to internal records.
- Our organization will allow this student to analyze the following internal records that I deem appropriate (*and shall be de-identified or redacted, as needed*):
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>training materials</i>  | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>meeting minutes</i>                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>protocols</i>           | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>digital/audio/video documents</i>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>manuals</i>             | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>other internal documents: _____</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>reports</i>             |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>agreements</i>          |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>operational records</i> |   |

### STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

I understand that, as per the student doctoral program requirements, the student will publish a scholarly report of this case study project in Proquest as a doctoral capstone (withholding the names of the organization and participating individuals), as per the following ethical standards:

- a. In all reports (including drafts shared with peers and faculty members), the student is required to maintain confidentiality by removing names and key pieces of evidence/data that might disclose an organization's/individual's identity or inappropriately divulge proprietary details. If the organization itself wishes to publicize the findings of this project, that is the organization's judgment call.
- b. The student will be responsible for complying with the organization's policies and requirements regarding data collection (including the need for the partner organization's internal ethics/regulatory approval, if applicable).

- c. Via an Interview Consent Form, the student will describe to interviewees how the data will be used in the doctoral project and how all interviewees' privacy will be protected.
- d. The doctoral student will not use these data for any purpose other than the doctoral study outlined in this agreement.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research activities in this setting.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Partner Organization Leader's Name and Title \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Participant Form

*Edits not permitted.*

*To be sent to invited interviewee in the body of an email (not as an attachment).*

### **Business Leader Interview Consent Form for DBA Case Study**

You are invited to take part in a leader interview for a business case study that I am conducting as part of my Doctorate of Business Administration research at your organization.

#### **Interview Procedures:**

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be invited to take part in audio-recorded interviews about the organization's operations and problem-solving. Opportunities for clarifying statements will be available (via a process called member checking). Transcriptions of business leader interviews will be analyzed as part of the case study, along with any archival data, reports, and documents that the organization's leadership deems fit to share.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this study would not pose any risks beyond those of typical daily life. This case study's aim is to provide data and insights that could be valuable to other leaders and organizations.

#### **Privacy:**

Interview recordings and full transcripts will be shared with each interviewee, upon request. Redacted transcripts with names or sensitive information removed may be shared with my university faculty and my peer advisors. Any reports, presentations, or publications related to this study will share general patterns from the data, without sharing the identities of individual participants or partner organizations. The interview transcripts will be kept for at least 5 years, as required by my university.

#### **Contacts and Questions:**

If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Gjellstad. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's ethics approval number for this study is 09-30-22-0289582.

Please share any questions or concerns you might have at this time. If you agree to be interviewed as described above, please reply to this email with the words, "I consent."