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Strategies Organizational Leaders Use to Engage Employees

Latisha Valencia Lewis
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Latisha Valencia Lewis

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Review Committee
Dr. Inez Black, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Denise Land, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Brenda Jack, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
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Abstract

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MBA, Keller Graduate School of Management, 2007

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

For many organizations, employee engagement is a major component that drives a business's productivity, performance, and profitability. Some healthcare leaders lack strategies to engage employees. Grounded in Kahn's employee engagement theory, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies healthcare leaders use to engage employees. The participants were eight healthcare leaders in a greater Atlanta, Georgia, healthcare facility who successfully implemented strategies to engage employees. Data were collected from Press Ganey quarterly engagement scores and semistructured interviews. Data were analyzed using Yin's five-phase process, from which three themes emerged: (a) mentorship, (b) leadership, and (c) teamwork. A key recommendation is for leaders to implement mentorship programs to promote employees and career growth. The implications for positive social change could include providing more quality healthcare through engaged employees resulting in satisfied patients and profitable organizations.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my baby brother, Jeremy Deion Lewis, who was taken from us way too soon. You are truly missed, but I dedicate this to you. I will always and forever love you. I would also like to dedicate this study to my nephew, James Earlington Lewis, III. This is for you. I love you so very much.

Acknowledgments

I would like to first and foremost thank the Lord above for providing me with the patience, strength, and knowledge to successfully achieve this goal. I would like to thank my parents James and Beverly Lewis, Sr., and my brother James Jr., for their endless words of encouragement, love, and support. I would next like to thank all my friends and coworkers who assisted me on this journey. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Diane Dusick and Dr. Inez Black for the many phone calls, the emails, and the words of encouragement they provided to push me through this challenging process. I would like to thank Dr. Denise Land and Dr. Brenda Jack my committee members.

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future". Jeremiah 29:11.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Organizational leaders should comprehend the meaning of executing employee's engagement strategies to build productivity and profitability. One of the many critical components in the world of business is employee engagement, which effects a company's bottom line (Rafiq et al., 2019). The issue of poor employee engagement has grown, and many leaders have been challenged with what strategies to use with employees to ensure that the organization remained productive and profitable (Haque et al., 2021). Leaders should understand factors that cause engaged and disengaged employees and create strategies to address those factors (Joubert & Roodt, 2019). An organization's success derives from the positive involvement of a leader's willingness to motivate and engage employees (Riyanto et al., 2021). Complexity within organizations has grown and leaders should find strategies to manage the forces that drive employee motivation, trust, and high engagement (Lee et al., 2021). Therefore, for organizations to remain successful, leaders should accomplish increased productivity and profitability in a quickly changing business climate.

Background of the Problem

In business, employee engagement and disengagement are issues of concern for organizations worldwide. Employees who experience conflicts that affect their emotional engagement, such as lack of appreciation, intimidation, micromanagement, and high demands will develop elevated levels of stress and are more likely to be emotionally disengaged (Li et al., 2019a). The characteristic of an engaged employee is an individual who is well-balanced and emotionally invested in the mission and vision of the organization (Rasool et al., 2021). Emotional engagement positively impacts job satisfaction, while profound fatigue decreases productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Lebron et al., 2019). According to the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, employee engagement has been low when job demands are high, causing exhaustion, leading to disengagement and job burnout (Falco et al., 2021). However, leaders continue to face challenges when creating strategies to engage employees.

Leaders encounter employee disengagement as a major issue for organizations worldwide. Disengaged employees in all business sectors experience an increase in employee turnover resulting in a reduction in profits, loss of production, and an increase in hiring and training new employees (Skelton et al., 2019). According to Waltz et al. (2020), there were over 70% Americans who were disengaged in their organization. In addition to the inflated cost to organizations, disengagement impacted employees' efficiency, changed their perspective, and created skepticism (Chawla, 2019). Organizations reported that having disengaged employees cost an average of over $3,000 annually per employee in salaries (Schmidt et al., 2019). Companies allotted millions of dollars annually to hire, train, and retain employees, and when they encountered disengaged employees, the costs they lost severely crippled an organization (Hejjas et al., 2019). By contrast, organizations did thrive when their employees outperformed their competition (Kleine et al., 2019). Organizations consistently looked for new innovative ways to boost their productivity and performance in today's competitive market (Przytuła et al., 2020). Therefore, leaders need strategies to increase employee engagement.

Problem Statement

The healthcare work environment has been stressful, and health care employees have suffered health-related exhaustion (Kowalewski & Ruschoff, 2019, p. 384). In the United States, as of December 2021, organizations saw total separation at 4.1% of total employment due to employee turnover (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, researchers conducted studies and discovered that employees do not have a healthy work-life balance (Birimoglu Okuyan & Begen, 2022, p. 173). The general business problem is that employee disengagement negatively affects corporate profit. The specific business problem is that some health care leaders lacked strategies to engage employees.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies health care leaders use to engage employees. This study's targeted population consisted of eight health care leaders in a hospital in the greater Atlanta, Georgia, area who had successfully implemented strategies to engage employees. Health care employee engagement could contribute to social change by improving patient care, reducing medical costs, decreasing medical errors, improving patient experiences, and providing quality health care.

Nature of the Study

Researchers often consider three types of research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method (Yin, 2018). For this study, I used a qualitative method. In qualitative research, researchers conduct their study to explore the lived experiences of the participants (Neuman, 2014). The qualitative approach was appropriate for the study because I explored strategies that health care leaders used to increase employee engagement through the semistructured interview process which used open-ended questions as the primary data source to ask *how* and *why* questions. A quantitative researcher uses numerical data to test hypotheses. In this study, I did not collect numerical data or test hypotheses; therefore, the quantitative method was not suitable. I did not choose a mixed method because a combination of objective (quantitative) and subjective (qualitative) data was not needed to address the research question.

Multiple qualitative designs were considered for this study. I considered phenomenology and ethnography, as well as single and multiple case study designs. Phenomenological researchers ask participants to describe their lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological study was not appropriate because the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences were not relevant to addressing the problem under study. Ethnographers conduct research to observe the cultural experiences and behavioral patterns of participants (Taylor et al., 2021). An ethnographic study was not suitable for this study because I did not explore the language, beliefs, and behaviors of a culture. With a case study design, researchers investigate a concentrated occurrence top to bottom and within a real-life background in a particular setting (Halkias & Neubert, 2020). Individuals whose expertise in certain subject matters may utilize a case study design (Yin, 2018). A single case study is suitable for small groups, and researchers can explore a phenomenon in a unique environment (Yin, 2018). The case study approach can enhance credibility and validity of research results (Yin, 2018). Utilizing the single case study design, I explored the strategies that health care leaders used to engage employees.

Research Question

One central research question guided this study: What strategies do health care leaders use to engage employees?

Interview Questions

1. How did you identify employees who tended to withdraw emotionally from work duties and other employees while at work?
2. How did you identify engaged employees?
3. How did you measure employee engagement?
4. What strategies did you use to help employees become engaged?
5. Which strategies have been most successful for engaging employees?
6. Which strategies have been least successful for engaging employees?
7. What training did you have access to on how to address employee engagement?
8. What strategies did you use to ensure you have the skills to identify and help disengaged employees?
9. What barriers or challenges did you experience in your use of strategies to engage employees?
10. What else could you add to help health care leaders engage employees?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was employee engagement theory (EET). In 1990, Kahn introduced EET, which stated that employees physically, intellectually, and emotionally expressed themselves during job performances (Kahn, 1990). Further development of Kahn's theory by Schaufeli et al. (2002) revealed that the idea of employee engagement highlighted an employee's positive feelings within the work environment. Researchers conducted studies in many business organizations and discovered that there was a positive relationship between employee engagement and employee performance (Siswanto et al., 2021). Business leaders used the positive effects and rewards of employee engagement to become highly competitive against other businesses (Saks, 2021). Therefore, involving the employee engagement theory as the structure for this study may direct leaders who may need strategies to connect with employees.

Employers are consistently looking for ways of understanding how employee engagement adds to employee commitment and grasp the drivers of employee engagement. Scholars often viewed employee engagement as the prerequisite to organizational success (Khalaf et al., 2019). Leaders used EET to illustrate how engaged employees contributed to their organizations by becoming cognitively, physically, and emotionally involved in their assigned tasks; this engagement contributed to increased productivity (Kahn, 1990). Engaged employees achieved workplace sustainability and demonstrated commitment to their leaders and the organization, when they felt the workplace was beneficial (Abid et al., 2019). Disengagement occurred when employees withdrew physically, cognitively, and emotionally from their work (Kahn, 1990). Employee engagement not only encompassed an employee's positive disposition towards their job, but an employee's passion, willingness to perform, and enthusiasm beyond an employer's expectancies (Adisa et al., 2021). Therefore, I used EET to focus my data analysis to establish an understanding of participants' best engagement strategies.

Operational Definitions

Cognitive awareness: Cognitive awareness occurred when employees saw work as meaningful and had the appropriate tools to complete the work (Hamilton Skurak et al., 2021).

Emotional connection: Emotional engagement was an employee's emotional connection toward the workplace (Hamilton Skurak et al., 2021).

Employee disengagement: Employee disengagement was an employee's withdrawal of cognitive, physical, and emotional abilities from work roles to protect oneself from threat (Kahn, 1990).

Employee engagement: Employee engagement was the commitment and perseverance an employee had to flourish within their work environment (Wieneke et al., 2019).

Physical involvement: The social or actual activities an employee performed on a job. Physical engagement includes emotional and cognitive commitment (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are ideas researchers accepted as accurate without further investigation or interrogation (Leuz, 2022). There were three assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that organizational leaders would answer the interview questions honestly and openly. The second assumption was that those organizational leaders would share sufficient details about their companies to address the research question. The third assumption was that the participants would allow sufficient time to provide detailed responses.

Limitations

Researchers denoted limitations to define the boundaries of research and enhanced the vigour of the method and theories relevant to the study (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2019). The first limitation was that the study outcomes would be limited by the patient access leader's awareness and application of adaptive leadership strategies. The second limitation was that the participants would provide supporting documents from the files or data sources to verify the interview data. The results of this study were limited by the openness and honesty of the participants in their responses.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries and parameters of the research (Yin, 2018). In this study, I focused on a health care facility in Atlanta, Georgia, with over 10,000 employees. Participants would include patient access leaders with at least 5 years of experience in management working in the health care facility.

Significance of the Study

Employee engagement continued to be one of the most popular topics in human resources and business literatures in the business sector, explaining the aspects on how organizations could enhance employee engagement in their jobs (Byrd, 2023). Therefore, it is in leaders' best interest to have strategies in place to have engaged employees on the team (Ghazawy et al., 2021; Wagner & Koob, 2022). Conversely, when employees were disengaged, they were less satisfied and lacked loyalty and less interested in the effectiveness and productivity of the organization (Afrahi et al., 2022). Leaders should establish effective strategies to increase employee engagement, which boosted productivity (Khalaf et al., 2019). Furthermore, in many corporate sectors, employee engagement positively affected productivity, profitability, patient satisfaction, and patient safety.

Contribution to Business Practice

The study's findings assisted health care leaders with strategies to engage employees for increased organizational profitability. Health care organizations relied on the high performance of employees to build a compelling reputation and positively affected patient safety and improved patient care (Vaughn et al., 2019). Employee engagement increased patient satisfaction, which drove positive financial operations (Swensen et al., 2013). When an employee felt involved in the organization, there was a presumption that the employee would be more likely to invest one's capacities and competencies to benefit the employee and the organization (Aslam et al., 2022). Connecting with employees is basic to the progress of an organization because business leaders can create advantage in a profoundly competitive climate (Ewing et al., 2019). Therefore, enhancing employee engagement inside the working environment may encourage a more useful outcome and result in a more significant standard goal achievement, improving the local economy.

Implications for Social Change

For health care organizations, employee engagement is crucial to employee productivity and the quality of patient care. The challenges organizational leaders experienced when focused on the effects of employee performance and engagement, began with the implementation of strategies that would have a beneficial impact on an employee’s productivity (Siraj et al., 2022). The quality of care was a prerequisite for: (a) excellent patient-centered care; (b) organization reputation; (c) the workforce of engagement; and (d) financial and organizational fitness, which resulted in a synergistic interrelationship between employees and their patients (Swensen et al., 2013). When employees experienced disengagement or burnout, this included: (a) diminished quality of care, (b) patient safety, (c) professional productivity, (d) patient satisfaction, (e) decreased staff retention, and (f) an increase of healthcare cost (Lown, et al., 2019; Patel et al., 2019). Porter and Lee (2013) stated that the overarching goal for providers and stakeholders improved the value of patient care in healthcare. Therefore, the contribution from social change improved patient care through: (a) the reduction of medical costs, (b) expanding the patient experiences, and (c) providing quality health care. The employees and leaders in this study also impacted: (a) the delivery of outstanding customer service and care, (b) for being a facility known for its patient-centered care, and (c) a health care organization that cared about the well-being of its employees.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies organizational leaders could use to engage employees. One central research question guided this study: What strategies did health care leaders use to engage employees? In this literature review, I discussed employee engagement theory, the conceptual framework of this study. The comparative theories were: (a) Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, which stated that motivation was the key concept in employee engagement; (b) Demerouti et al.'s job demands-resources model, which posited that job demands was the main predictors of negative job strain while job resources was the most important predictors of work engagement; and (c) Graen and Uhl-Bien's leader-member-exchange theory, which stated the quality of the exchange relationship between a leader and a particular member of a work unit, team or organization was the basic unit of analysis (dyad). Conversely, I discussed supporting theories of employee engagement theory: Thibaut and Kelly's social exchange theory, also known as the theory of reciprocity, and Herzberg's motivation theory. Herzberg et al. (1959) stated there were two factors influencing motivation at work: hygiene factors that demotivated when they were inappropriate and motivators that sustained the effort. In this qualitative study, I also discussed the importance of health care leadership and the factors that affected employee engagement in the health care sector. The literature review concluded with a discussion on employee performance and organizational profitability, and the positive effects employee engagement had on an employees' work performance and the success of organizations.

My strategy for searching the literature was Google Scholar, a database connected to Walden University's Library. I used Walden University's Library database to acquire literature through: (a) Business Source Complete/Premier, (b) EBSCO Primary, (c)

Academic Source Complete, (d) ABI/INFORM Global, (e) Psych ARTICLES, (f) Emerald Management, (g) ProQuest Central, (h) Education Source, (i) EBSCO Open Access Journals, (j) Sage Premier Annual Reviews, (k) SciDirect Subject Collections, and (l) ScienceDirect. Keywords included: (a) *cognitive awareness*, (b) *employee disengagement*, (c) *employee engagement*, (d) *employee performance*, (e) *emotional connection*, (f) *leadership*, (g) *organizational profitability*, (h) *personal engagement*, (i) *physical involvement*, and (j) *productivity*. I chose these keywords because they supported identifying critical strategies, knowledge, and techniques patient access leaders used to maintain high levels of employee engagement. This literature review incorporated discussions of the following employee engagement: Kahn’s engagement theory (1990), Vroom’s expectancy theory (1964), job demands-resources model, leader-member exchange theory, social exchange theory, and Herzberg’s motivation theory.

For this doctoral study I visited Ulrich’s Web Global Serials Directory to confirm that the literature was peer-reviewed. I focused on articles published between 2019 and 2023. The 10% of documents referenced are non-peer-reviewed sources, specifically government sources and seminal works that were published no less than 5 years from the date of this study. The remaining percentage of documents referenced was a total of 355 sources or 85% that were peer-reviewed and served as sources for this literature review.

Conceptual Framework: Employee Engagement Theory

Employee engagement theory (EET) was the conceptual framework for this study. Kahn (1990) initially presented the concept of personal engagement as individuals employing and articulating themselves, physically, cognitively, or emotionally during character performances, which became the groundwork for defining what was known as employee engagement. Researchers focused on the impact of employee engagement and business outcomes, and found a positive relationship between employee engagement, customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, employee retention, and employee safety (Book et al., 2019). Employee engagement was an essential instrument to improve an organization's competitive advantage and financial profitability (Saks et al., 2022). Successful leaders strived to engage employees, because they knew when employees were engaged, organizations were productive, efficient, and profitable.

Leaders are liable for applying successful strategies to engage employees to meet business objectives. When the work atmosphere was favorable and valuable, employees were more suitable to exert discretionary effort to implant personal and professional characteristics into the role performance (Kahn, 1992). In the early 21st century, more employers focused on making employees feel like they belonged to the organization (Mani & Mishra, 2021). Moreover, employers who implemented employee engagement initiatives felt empowered and believed their voices mattered to their employees (Yue et al., 2019). The dedicated and engaged employees contributed to the organization's success and remained for long tenures (Li et al., 2019a). Therefore, when engaged employees created sustainability, organizations displayed an increase in their profits.

In any business, employee engagement drove an organizations performance and profitability margins. Bruning and Campion (2019) found a direct correlation between employee engagement and productivity. When employees were effectively committed to the workplace, they were less likely to leave and were more productive (Tarkang Mary &

Ozturen, 2019). Researchers have proven that when employees are highly engaged, they perform better, focused, and committed and wish to improve business performances (Ali, 2019). An organization became highly profitable and performed well when leaders ensured that employees were positively engaged. Therefore, the implementation of employee engagement allowed organizations to achieve profitability over their competitors.

Employee engagement has a positive connection with productivity, employee satisfaction and work performance. Improved organizational performance was also positively associated with employee engagement (Shen & Jiang, 2019). Jeanson and Michinov (2020) shared that engaged employees are involved, dedicated, and enthusiastic about their daily work and displayed a commitment to the organization's goals. Organizational leaders understood that for an employee to become more engaged, their values and the organization's goals had to align (Rabourn et al., 2018). Employee engagement affected the practices in an organization, for example, increased productivity, profitability, and loyalty of employees (Budrienė & Diskienė, 2020). Overall, the implementation of employee engagement allowed organizations to achieve profitability over their competitors.

In an everchanging market locally and globally, companies seek employee engagement strategies to keep employees engaged to stay competitive. Siddiqui and Sahar (2019) declared that employee engagement referred to rigorous regulations that managers used to improve employee engagement, which resulted in increased productivity. For organizational leaders to ensure they had productive employees, there needed to be new methods implemented to engage and empower the employees in a highly demanding workforce (Moon et al., 2020). However, when organizations had engaged employees, they experienced higher profit margins, employee retention, and increased productivity (Ghosh et al., 2019). Organizational leaders who focused on the benefits of developing an engaged workforce, understood the essential aspect of their business and the improved performance to the organization that employees contributed to the bottom-line (Harandi & Abdolvand, 2018). Also, the leader's participation with the employees sets the atmosphere for employee engagement, accordingly, prompting organizational profitability (Feeney et al., 2020). Therefore, to further explore Kahn's employee engagement, I discussed three components (physical involvement, cognitive awareness, and emotional connection) to further understand the attitudes of employees in their work roles.

The introduction of the three components of Kahn's EET allowed leaders the opportunity to understand and develop strategies to engage employees. Kahn (1990) stated that employee engagement plays a role in employees' investment in their work roles through physical involvement, cognitive awareness, and emotional connection. According to Kahn, when individuals were engaged, they brought all parts of their physical, cognitive, and emotional connections to implementing their work role (Kahn, 1990; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Employee engagement promoted employees' physical and emotional experience and connected employees to their jobs (Bailey et al., 2017). The engaged employee showed up for work to improve their performance and the organization did not waste their time on anything else (Jensen, 2017). The success of an organization contributed to the commitment and the passion of an engaged employee (Li et al., 2019b). Moreover, the level of physical involvement or the physical energy an employee contributed to their job or task was based upon the employee's engagement.

The first concept in Kahn's employee engagement theory was physical involvement. *Physical involvement* was the level of enthusiasm and physical energy an employee gave to their job or task. In Kahn's engagement model, physical involvement resulted from positive cognitive and emotional attachment to a work role. Joo et al. (2022) described physical engagement as a behavioral manifestation of a cognitive and emotional interpretation of a work-related environment. In a similar vein, Shuck and Reio (2011) suggested that employees' cognitive and emotional state influenced their decisions regarding the intensity and direction of physical energy towards a work-related task. For example, some managers related work engagement with an employee's physical presence in the workplace. Employee engagement encompassed physical, emotional, and cognitive attitudes towards their work (Joo et al., 2022). Furthermore, for employees to be responsive and aligned with business strategies, this relates to cognitive engagement.

In employee engagement, cognitive awareness was deep involvement in the work role. Employees' work cognition involved developing thought patterns, feelings, and ideas about past and present work experience (Joo et al., 2016). When employees observed the work and organizational resources as fulfilling and satisfying, they might be cognitively engaged. The cognitive dimension of employee engagement related to employees' appraisal of the organization, leadership, and working condition (Liao et al., 2022). Moreover, when employees experienced deep cognitive awareness, they became emotionally engaged and might have difficulty detaching from work at the end of the workday.

To have an employee sincerely attached to their job roles displays elevated levels of employee engagement. Prior research indicated that an employee's emotional connection mediated a causal relationship between supervisor support and organizational outcome (Li et al., 2019b). Lebron et al. (2019) noted that emotional engagement positively influenced job satisfaction, while emotional exhaustion had adverse outcomes. Lebron et al. found that emotional exhaustion could reduce productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Conversely, increased job demands, and low supervisor support could lead to emotional exhaustion and less connection to others and the organization (Lam et al., 2018). Employees who experienced conflicts that affected their emotional engagement, such as lack of appreciation, intimidation, micromanagement, and high demands resulted in high levels of stress, are more likely to be emotionally disengaged and result in turnover (Li et al., 2019a). Therefore, in Kahn's employee engagement, Kahn discussed that an employee could be cognitively engaged, which was how they thought about work. They could be emotionally engaged, how they felt about work, and finally physically engaged, the effort and energy while at work.

The employee engagement theory authors discussed how employees responded to work through cognitive, emotional, and physical connections. However, Kahn (1990) also discussed the psychological relationships an employee would have in the workplace. The three psychological relationships an employee might experience in the workplace was psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability

(Kahn, 1990). In the day-to-day work environment, leaders desired employees to report to work with the attitude and behavior necessary to be productive (Manzoor et al., 2019). Therefore, Kahn explained the three psychological relationships (psychological availability, psychological meaningfulness, and psychological safety) were necessary in the development of employee engagement.

Psychological availability referred to the employees' ability to balance work and life (Kahn, 1990). Psychological availability is referred to as the sense of having physical, emotional, or cognitive resources to engage the self at work (Kahn, 1990). According to Feeney et al. (2020), individuals' beliefs and expectations influenced their levels of work-related behaviors. Work role insecurities, personal resources, and out-of-work activities were just a few elements that could inhibit psychological availability and employee engagement (Schaufeli, 2021). Emotionally engaged employees who experienced psychological availability committed to their work when they believed in the organization's vision and purpose (Feeney et al., 2020). Psychological availability involved subjective expectations and personal convictions (Feeney et al., 2020).

In the current work environment, organizations focused more on employees feeling that they were capable and ready to perform at any moment regardless of the events or situations that might distract them at work or at home. The reason for this concern related to the many issues that employees faced such as covid-19, price inflations on food, gas, and housing, and the loss of jobs. When there was an indication that the availability of resources and co-worker relations affected employee engagement indirectly through psychological availability and proved the existence of a strong correlation between work-role fit and job enrichment with employee engagement (Lamar & Laney, 2017). Furthermore, the next psychological relationship was psychological meaningfulness which stated that when employees have a sense of meaningfulness, they were highly engaged and productive.

Psychological meaningfulness was the relationship between an employee's thoughts and values and the work environment (Kahn, 1990). Employee engagement occurred when an employee had the mindset and freedom to express themselves in the workplace (Lemon, 2019). Engaged employees looked forward to reporting to work and performed challenging duties because this made their work matter to them and the organization (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). Psychological meaningfulness was a precursor to psychological readiness and availability (Chaudhary & Akhouri, 2019). There is a positive relationship between Kahn's emotional connection and psychological meaningfulness. When there was a lack of leader support for an employee, the employee would be less likely to have a connection emotionally to their work outcome; therefore, their psychological meaningfulness, or their feeling of being valued in the organization, decreased. In the end, the organization suffered, because the employee would have reduced productivity. By contrast, when an employee saw and felt that their leader supported them and valued them, they also felt valued and connected to the organization. The employee would then be more engaged and productive, and their psychological meaningfulness or level of feeling worthwhile was heightened.

The more an employee feels valuable and worthy, the more roles' employees might occupy to increase productivity. Meaningfulness positively influenced the relationship between transformational leadership and employee job performance (Han et al., 2020). Employees felt that organizational leaders cared for their development within the business; this, in turn, made the loyalty of the employee meaningful (Ranji Jafroodi & Nasrollahi Moghaddam, 2020). Leaders could gain more from employees when they delegated meaningful roles that gave them the ability to contribute to the profitability and productivity of the business (Kahn, 1990). Even though employees might have a strong passion for the work they do, they could also feel an annoyance with the decisions made by the organization; therefore, this was an example of the positive correlation between employee engagement and psychological meaningfulness (Ugwu & Onyishi, 2018). When employees faced meaningfulness, they found themselves useful, valuable, and worthwhile to the organization and engaged in tasks that led to business productivity (Chaudhary & Akhouri, 2019). Thus, psychological meaningfulness happens when an employee has felt that they were valued and worthwhile, and as a result their level of engagement is elevated. Therefore, Kahn’s final level of employee engagement the psychological safety, illustrated when employees felt comfortable working with each other, they were more open to discuss ways to improve a technique or process to make the work more efficient and effective.

Psychological safety occurred when an employee felt and showed themselves without the fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career (Kahn, 1990). When employees discussed with each other about shared results and departmental techniques, this was known as the final stage of psychological safety (Shrestha, 2019). In the workplace, one of the many factors that organizational leaders relied on for their learning behavior and change is the representation of the cognitive state of psychological safety (Carmeli & Hoffer, 2009; Schein & Bennis, 1965). To elaborate, employees felt psychologically safe when they were able to speak up and express their feelings without fear of retribution. When organizational leaders have created this type of work environment, they were able to improve learning behaviors, which led to change within an organization. Lemon (2019) shared that psychological safety had a reliable connection with employee engagement. When an individual was free to express opinions and made decisions without the threat of negative consequences, the individual tended to feel safe in the work environment (Kahn, 1990). For leaders to gain buy-in from employees, they developed strategies that allowed them to feel comfortable expressing themselves and not worrying about the opinions of others (Kahn, 1990). The foundation of psychological safety came from trusting relationships between employees and their leaders. When the levels of trust were low, the impact on engagement resulted in low levels, too (Feeney et al., 2020). By contrast, Kahn (1990) contended that psychological safety, supported employees' freedom of opinions, was critical. In a positive and engaging work environment, employees were encouraged to express themselves without consequences. As a result of this behavior, employees would be more engaged and available to the organization (Majumdar & Kumar, 2021). Therefore, employees' passion for employee engagement allowed them to be more emotional in the workplace.

Work-related behavior fluctuated day-to-day and usually peaked when job demands were high, because employees looked for a role that included opportunities for challenge, growth, and engagement (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Kahn, 1990).

Organizational leaders helped employees feel safe and increased their levels of engagement and trust, when employees developed, new skills that were allowed to openly communicate their opinions and experiment with different ideas and solutions to improve the productivity of the department. Fischer et al. (2020) reported that leaders could improve the relationship with employees when there was open communication, and as a result an employee's impression of their leader and the information they provided was reliable and trustworthy. These leaders were responsible for making sure that managers and supervisors learned practical strategies and created guidelines that would assist employees in growing professionally and personally, which enhanced employee engagement (Huyghebaert et al., 2018). Additionally, cultivating a psychologically safe atmosphere through trust could help employees progress with new competencies, articulate their opinions openly, and inspired them to experiment with different solutions.

A shift in the workforce in a negative direction could be a contributing factor to disengagement. However, where deficiency in resources existed, individuals tended to withdraw (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). In the many studies regarding employee engagement, the overall labor force reported that employees presented to work daily neither engaged nor actively engaged, which caused leaders to be challenged with how to reach these employees (Motyka, 2018). Managers spearheaded employee engagement, and therefore, when they lacked motivation strategies, they could lead to employee disengagement and underperformance (Afrahi et al., 2022). When employees were cognitively, physically, and emotionally detached from their work environment, leaders began to be exposed to disengagement within the organization (Kahn, 1990). Conversely, knowing the reasons for disengagement could assist organizations with the creation of an answer to overcome it.

Disengagement

Leaders strived to keep employees engaged daily; however, their jobs became challenging when disengaged employees were present. In many sectors of business, disengagement was one of the many factors leaders encountered often in the workforce. One of the challenges organizations experienced with employees, was the lack of employee engagement which negatively affected workplace environment, and thereby weakened the organization's effectiveness in the marketplace (Al-Tkhayneh et al., 2019). On average, disengaged employees made up 70% of the labor force, which caused a strain on an organization’s bottom line (Eldor et al., 2020). Therefore, once a leader found a solution to decrease the disengagement of employees, organizations could become more productive and profitable.

Organizations spent billions in the development and recruiting of employees annually. However, because organizational leaders anticipated disengaged employees, they set aside funding to support employee turnover (Hejjas et al., 2019). The disengagement of employees’ decreased productivity, and organizational leaders were the driving force of employee engagement. In all business sectors, when employees were disengaged, they affected productivity and profit margins negatively (Khodakarami & Dirani, 2020). In addition to the high cost to organizations, disengagement impacted employees’ efficiency, changed their perspective, and created skepticism (Chawla, 2019).

Disengaged employees exhibited some counterproductive behaviors, which included intentionally working slowly, taking breaks beyond their allotted times, and using social media to present a negative public image of their organizations (Eldor et al., 2020). Thus, managers lacked motivation techniques which could lead to employees' disengagement and underperformance (Afrahi et al., 2022). According to Schroeder and Modaff (2018), the lack of employee engagement could lead to the loss of customers and profits due to the absence of an employee's attentive and absorbed performance. Organizations were profitable by the work employees produced and when there were disengaged employees within the team, everyone experienced losses in profits, productivity, and the safety of the employees (Babakus et al., 2017).

When organizations have disengaged employees in their midst, the list was endless of issues that occurred, such as poor productivity, reporting to work late, calling off, and causing conflict with others. Thus, organizations reported that having disengaged employees cost an average of over $3,000 annually per employee in salaries (Schmidt et al., 2019). Companies allotted millions of dollars annually to hire, train and retain employees, and when they encountered disengaged employees, the cost they lost could severely cripple an organization (Hejjas et al., 2019). Zak (2018) discussed the problems organizational leaders encountered with employee engagement and noted that leaders understood that low engagement could result in lost value. On the contrary, organizations thrived when their employees outperformed their competition (Kleine et al., 2019).

Disengaged employees who felt unsafe in their work environment to express their opinions reserved their voice for fear and repercussions and became withdrawn (Jha et al., 2019). The employee presented at work but lost enthusiasm, drive, interest, pessimism, and complaints (Wolff, 2019). Managers looked at the root causes of disengagement, change to the organization's culture, and set a plan of action that included taking a close look at the employee's needs (Wolff, 2019). Wolff (2019) recommended addressing employee's needs by listening to and understanding employee's concerns, align employee's work tasks with the employee's capabilities, create a clear vision, and making employees accountable for their performance. To discourage negativity among employees, managers had the appropriate skills to manage the employees effectively, including internal communications that demonstrated respectful, sociable, responsible, empathetic, and proactive behavior toward employees (Rameshkumar, 2020). In business, understanding that employee disengagement was a negative experience for an organization, leaders took actions by accessing the necessary strategies to ease the influence on an organization's productivity, profitability, and performance. Therefore, leaders found solutions to employee disengagement through grasping the concepts of other theories that supported or contrasted Kahn's employee engagement theory.

Comparative and Supportive Theories

Through employee engagement theory, Kahn (1990) presented the concept of personal engagement when individuals employed and articulated themselves, physically, cognitively, or emotionally during character performances. I considered three other theories for the conceptual framework. Expectancy theory by Vroom (1964) focused on an employee's belief that their ability to perform a job was for an equitable reward. According to the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, employees experienced burnout when job demands were high, causing exhaustion, and job resources were low, leading to disengagement and withdrawal (Demerouti et al., 2001). Lastly, leader-member exchange (LMX) theory centered on the relationship between leader and follower (Dansereau et al., 1975). However, all theories may either support or disagree with Kahn’s EET and first I will discuss the theories that supported EET beginning with Victor Vroom’s expectancy theory.

Expectancy Theory

Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory (ET) focused on an employee's belief that their ability to perform a job was for an equitable reward. Vroom’s ET emphasized how a person’s drive to perform a task was obstructed by how they perceived their ability to perform the task and compensation. In ET, an adequate level of motivation had to be maintained by organizational leaders to improve employee relations and increase performance (Selvarajan et al., 2018). Expectancy theory concerned individuals making choices; those choices depended on potential positive gain employees hoped to achieve in work (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). The theory has three foundational elements: (a) expectancy, (b) instrumentality, and (c) valence (Vroom, 1964). Employees performed in a way that resulted in wanted outcomes known as motivation (Vroom, 1964). Overall, Vroom recommended that employees complete their allotted assignment to work on their performance.

According to Vroom (1964), three factors were a part of the expectancy theory: instrumentality, expectancy, and valence. Instrumentality was an employee's performance that led to the attainment of a certain income. In the workplace, leaders desired to empower their employees to have a say in how rewards were dispersed among themselves; however, when they no longer could direct the rewards, this increased instrumentality (Heisler & Bandow, 2018). Instrumentality referred to the perception of whether a person would get what he or she wanted (Vroom, 1964). Health care leaders comprehended what a patient would like and be able to provide for their wants. Expectancy was an individuals' belief that a certain level of effort would lead to a given performance. Expectancy referred to the expectations a person had (Vroom, 1964). Health care leaders with expectancy would need to focus on what is expected of them from the patients. Valence was the degree to which an individual preferred the outcome of the decision. To clarify, valence was the perception of anticipated satisfaction (Vroom, 1964). Employees appreciated and looked forwarded to leaders rewarding them for their hard work; this was known as valence in the expectancy theory. Valence referred to the emotional orientations that a person had to any outcomes (Vroom, 1964). Health care leaders understood what patients valued the best.

Many organizations evaluated employees based upon their performance, and an increased or no pay resulted from their performance. Therefore, employees determined the amount of effort they would or would not put forth in their work (McGinley et al., 2019; Vroom, 1964). Employees performed in a way that resulted in wanted outcomes known as motivation (Vroom, 1964). Empowering leaders through a shared decision-making process of open communication among leaders could enhance the employees' motivation and performance regarding products, services, and procedures (Hao et al., 2018).

Some of the disadvantages of expectancy theory were that managerial cognitive bias was faulty thinking and rational, which impeded leaders from making sound decisions that would drive productivity and growth within the organization (Roessler et al., 2019). Despite the theory's popularity, scholars criticized the theory, stating Vroom (1964) overlooked cognitive bias, which could influence individual behaviors and choices, which led to job dissatisfaction and high employee turnover (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). I did not select expectancy theory for this study because not all employees had a passion for being motivated and engaged in the workplace (Nimri et al., 2015) and were more concerned with how they would benefit equally through their connection with their leader. I did not select expectancy theory for this study. According to ET, Vroom stated that individuals had different goals and could be motivated by certain expectations. Secondly, the reason for not selecting the expectancy theory was that the theory included the leaders' hopes of an outcome and not the strategies used to improve the outcome. I did not use the expectancy theory because I could not focus on the health care leaders' strategies to improve employee engagement.

Job Demands-Resources Theory

Researchers have utilized the JD-R model to give a comprehension of the connection between job demands and job resources and how employees' workplace stress might be moderated. The job demands-resources (JD-R) model was a heuristic model that specified how two specific sets of working conditions achieved employee engagement and organizational commitment (Bakker et al., 2007). The job resources factor pertained to certain aspects of the job that were integral to achieving work goals, stimulated personal growth and development, and reduced job demands and the associated psychological cost (Schneider et al., 2018). According to Schneider et al., the JD-R model applied to various business settings, regardless of the demands and resources. According to researchers, employee engagement and burnout were working conditions that were best explained by utilizing the JD-R model. Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee engagement were factors that could affect employee burnout. Bakker et al. (2022) noted that work overload and increased emotional and physical job demands could lead to burnout. However, scholars have tested the effect resources have on workplace stress and engagement across businesses and different degrees of management inside the organizations.

By contrast, job resources such as social support, performance feedback, and autonomy could also trigger a motivational process leading to work engagement and organizational commitment. When employees’ perception of the job aligned with job demands and job resources, employees were likely to experience less stress and more engagement (Lee et al., 2017). Researchers showed that JD-R, such as job autonomy, performance feedback, and work engagement, could profoundly impact employee well-being theory (Rai, 2018). Because of its utility, researchers used the JD-R theory to predict and understand employee well-being (e. g., burnout, health, motivation, work engagement) and job performance (Bakker et al., 2022). Researchers used the JD-R framework for understanding the impact of job demands and job resources on the well-being of employees (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2019). Understanding job demands was essential to reduce stress and elevate engagement (Rai, 2018). However, a different aspect of job demands, and job resources sometimes contradicted each other creating problems for employees (Kim & Beehr, 2020). Furthermore, the JD-R theory is only one of the many engagement theories that supported Kahn's EET, however, the leader-member exchange theory was also an alternative theory that supported EET.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

The leader-member exchange theory, also known as LMX is the dyadic interactions between the employee and leader. In 1975, Dansereau et al. introduced the LMX theory and defined leadership as a multistage process between leaders and employees (Lo et al., 2015). Organizational leaders need to foster the proper abilities to design methodologies on the best way to move supporters to improve organizational performance (Hameduddin & Engbers, 2022). Dansereau et al. (1975) observed that many organizational, managerial processes occurred on a dyad basis whereby the subordinate was the dyad member, and the direct supervisor was the dyad leader. While examining the relationship between the dyad leader and the dyad member, Dansereau et al. found that time constraints and limited resources forced leaders to invest in only a limited number of followers, creating differentiated dyads between leaders and followers. The dyadic relationship of the leaders and members of the organization was the central tenant of the LMX framework (Lee et al., 2019). Lee et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between LMX and work performance. LMX was an essential framework for studying organizational leadership and its effects on employee engagement (Herman et al., 2018). Xie et al. (2020) asserted that LMX relations were several contextual factors influencing employees' willingness to engage. LMX scholars argued that the dyadic relationship quality significantly affected organizational outcomes such as in-role performance and enhanced employee engagement (Anand et al., 2018). Therefore, employees who receive quality interactions from the leader experience obtain a better assignment, hear quality correspondence, and feel a part of the team.

Chen et al. (2016) and Dienesch and Liden (1986) divided employees' roles into two basic categories: the in-group (categorized by high trust, interaction, and rewards) and the out-group (categorized by low trust, interaction, and support). Hence, the leader-member relationship is grasped as a vertical dyad, whereby staff either became part of the in-group or out-group, and this was dependent on the level of their performance, and how much they reported immediately to the leader and have directed contact with him or her at work (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In the leader-member relationship, in-group members received more feedback, trust, and information from leaders than out-group members (Mascareño et al., 2020). The in-group employees were those the leader trusted, who took work associated with high risk, but the leader gave opportunities to develop skills and abilities. These employees were also more likely to have additional career opportunities (Huyghebaert et al., 2018). Out-group employees received work of less importance and risk (Estel et al., 2019) because the leader felt they could not trust the employees with complex work. With this limitation, the supervisor did not present out-group employees with supervisor support, diminished the opportunities to develop skills and abilities and provided fewer career opportunities.

The quality of the LMX dyadic exchange contributed to employees' performance and turnover intention; therefore, both leaders and employees should build strong relationships to be beneficial to the leader, employees, and organization (Uhl-Bien et al., 2022). Researchers have factored both leader and employee contributions into the LMX relationship and the reciprocation of contributions (Liao et al., 2019). Supportive and positive leadership-built trust, improved performance, and reduced employee turnover intention (Byun et al., 2017). Negative leadership broke the trust relationship between leaders and employees, damaged the employees' wellbeing and increased employee turnover intention (Chen & Liu, 2019). Therefore, with every theory discussed, the expectancy theory, the JD-R theory, and the LMX theory were not suitable for my study because they did not provide strategies organizational leaders utilize to engage employees.

Social Exchange Theory

The social exchange theory has a positive correlation to Kahn's EET. Thibault and Kelley (1959) developed social exchange theory (SET) to explain how building relationships with employees helped leaders improve employees' organizational commitment, teamwork, cohesion, and engagement (Cooper-Thomas & Morrison, 2018). The relationship between two parties produced appreciation, trust, and personal obligation involved SET (Rather, 2019). The best relationship between managers and employees encouraged the employee to give more to the organization in their time, increased efficiency and enhanced the task, which created a strong bond and mutual reciprocity (Fletcher, 2019). The involvement and sense of power employees felt in the workplace resulted in the growth and development of the employee and increased productivity (Haddon, 2018). Kahn (1990) concluded that employees engaged in work and connect with others when allowed to immerse personal proportions of themselves into their jobs. According to So et al. (2021), successful social exchanges provided a high return in value to participating individuals by increasing loyalty and engagement. Researchers have also used SET as the framework to study the relationship between organizational justice and job engagement (Haynie et al., 2019). Moreover, of the positive leadership strategies utilized by leaders was empowering the employees.

The primary paradigm behind SET states that trust is the prominent attribute in positive social exchanges. Blau (1964) introduced the concept of trust into SET, postulating that trust increased among participants in a social exchange over time as relationships developed, deepening the ability of the participants to influence actions. In the manager-employee relationship, the employees’ trust in their manager increased when they perceived the manager as capable, reliable, knowledgeable, dedicated, and able to access the situation when making decisions that might affect the employee (Morton et al., 2019). Employees’ trust in their managers increased when they felt that the manager was reliable, dedicated, and could make sound decisions for the organization and the employees (Morton et al., 2019). Employees were empowered to make decisions and were energized by the flexibility and ability to contribute to their daily work and the organization’s plans (Morton et al., 2019). A positive relationship between workers and their superiors-built trust and allowed the employees to be productive and contributed to their overall success (Zeidan & Itani, 2020). Social exchange resulted in an obligation to the employees to reciprocate their supervisor’s trust for mutual benefits (Mostafa & Bottomley, 2020). Hence, when involved with social exchange the consideration of their time and effort distributed to an exchange is more significant than the benefit from the exchange, results in party possibly terminating the relationship.

There were benefits to leaders who used SET. Employees displayed loyalty and commitment to the organization when an employee encountered positive interactions with their supervisor. According to SET, the transactional and relational framework enhanced employee engagement and influenced job performance (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Employees who developed positive relationships with their managers were known to build a sense of trust. Employees performed well, leading to better job performance when employees experience trust in a supervisor (Yin, 2018). The perception of a high-quality relationship with the manager encouraged the employee to invest more time at work, find ways to improve the task, and increase efficiency, creating a strong bond and mutual reciprocity (Fletcher, 2019). As a result, trusting their leadership allowed employees to be more productive and contributed to their success.

SET's disadvantage was that the lack of stability in the relationship might cause employees to compare their work situation with other work members, resulting in a lack of engagement and an increased attrition rate (O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2019). The lack of stability in the relationship might cause employees to compare their work situation with other work members, resulted in a lack of engagement and an increased attrition rate (O’Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2019). Though SET supported the exchanges based on mutually beneficial relationships, the theory was not suitable to understand the degree of the reciprocal exchanges amongst individuals within the same organizational context (Yin, 2018).

Herzberg's Motivation Theory

Herzberg's motivation theory originated from Frederick Herzberg et al. in 1959. The two factors of Herzberg's model were (a) hygiene (extrinsic factors) and (b) motivator (intrinsic factors; Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005). The motivational factors led to job satisfaction because individuals sought self-growth and self-actualization (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Ozsoy (2019) stated that there was a positive correlation between motivation factors and employee motivation. Both hygiene and motivator factors promoted employee engagement, leading to increased productivity and corporate profits (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Herzberg's motivational theory shared similarities with Kahn's (1990) engagement theory, and both included assumptions that motivation impacted work engagement.

Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory positively impacted employee job satisfaction, leadership style, and employee turnover (Amiri et al., 2017). Alrawahi et al. (2020) noted that in a work environment, there were components that were likely to influence an employee: achievement, advancement, the work itself, responsibility, and recognition. In Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, there were two distinct factors that was used to describe how employees would respond when they were engaged. These factors were the extrinsic motivation factors and the intrinsic motivation factors.

Extrinsic motivation factors could result in job satisfaction, whereas intrinsic motivational factors improved employees' work-related behavior and well-being (Olafsen et al., 2018). When employees experienced a positive relationship with managers, they engaged in their work and view their managers as motivational leaders (Darvishmotevali et al., 2017). Organizational leaders have learned that salary was one of the many concepts that were likely to motivate employees and increase employee retention (Nasir & Mahmood, 2018). Leaders were successful when they recognized and promoted their employees, because the employees had a sense of belonging to the organization and the department (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Therefore, when leaders utilize Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, the purpose is to understand the tactics to improve employee motivation.

Contrary to the motivational attribute that promoted job satisfaction, there were hygiene factors that were apt to dissatisfy the employee, such as low salaries, negative interpersonal relationships, and disruptive organizational policies and practices. When leaders could comprehend and supervise the hygiene needs of employees, they were able to address deficient performance from dissatisfied employees as well as train leaders to alleviate employee disengagement (Herzberg et al., 1959). Alrawahi et al. (2020) further stated that Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory explained when motivational factors and hygiene factors came together, there was an increase in job satisfaction and a decrease in job dissatisfaction.

The motivator-hygiene theory that Herzberg et al. (1959) promoted explained the factors that resulted in employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction and consequently contributed to employee retention. Because level of satisfaction varied from one employee to another, business managers should learn about the factors that resulted in these behaviors and designed and implemented remediation measures to ensure that employees remained engaged. Herzberg explored employees' attitudes toward their jobs and the impact of their motivation to work by asking questions about their good and bad experiences with their job (Ann & Blum, 2020). Overall, leaders need to recognize motivational factors within the organization and strengthen those variables to keep employees motivated.

Leadership Styles

In business, there are various leadership styles that could assist leaders with the necessary strategies to improve employee engagement. Different leadership styles impacted employees' behaviors and organizational outcomes. Hentrich et al. (2017) contended that leadership responsibilities extended to all aspects of the work, including employee engagement. Leadership style could have positive or negative implications for employee engagement, and managers needed to be aware of which leadership style enhanced or diminished employees' behavior. Culturally diverse workforces needed leadership skills capable of keeping employees engaged in increasing the organizations' profits, performance, and productivity (Brunow & Nijkamp, 2018). Efficient management could focus on enhancing the growth of employees while shifting workers' belief in management and the vision displayed with keen communication for long-term development (Jokisaari & Vuori, 2018). Encouraging positive and ethical behavior helped the employees understand the organization's vision and how managers concentrated on inspiring others while contributing to employee engagement (Bussin & Mouton, 2019). Leadership style had a positive and considerable influence on employee performance (Rifa'l et al., 2019). The following sections presented a discussion of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership and their effects on employee engagement.

Healthcare Leadership

Health care leadership practice was complex, and human behavior was the driving factor of successful leadership. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic threatened health care leadership on a national and international level (Abbara & Ekzayez, 2021). The focus of health care organizations was service provisions aimed at promoting human wellbeing through holistic and patient-centric care. Leaders in the health care sector had notable shifts towards becoming more consumer-centered in their service delivery (Edmunds, 2019). Appropriate levels of resourcing that was both affordable and accessible was necessary to meet the health care needs of patients and consumers. Goldstein et al. (2018) posited that when engaged health care employees felt valued, they translated their efforts into quality patient care by upholding beneficence, no maleficence, justice, and autonomy, which was at the core of quality health care. Employee engagement became an essential facet for health care managers to motivate employees to meet health care standards and consumer expectations and needs. As a result, engaged employees followed policies and procedures, provided quality care, and avoid potential errors that impacted health care organizations' bottom line.

Some undesirable outcomes associated with burnout among health care professionals included insomnia, poor decision making, hostility towards patients, medical errors, poor relationships with coworkers, depression, anxiety, fatigue, alcohol abuse, and cardiovascular disorders (Mikalauskas et al., 2018). Health care facility leaders in this economy faced the reality of having to get more out of their administrators and employees with fewer resources (Leung et al., 2018). It had become the norm throughout health care that burnout, employee disengagement, and high turnover rates increased (Leung et al., 2018). If health care leadership training was not addressed, the trend of decreased employee engagement and thus decreased patient satisfaction could continue (Leung et al., 2018).

Considering that leadership was directly impacted by employee engagement, the development of engaged health care leaders increased employee retention (Saleh et al., 2018). Patient safety needed to remain at the forefront of health care leadership while creating a positive work environment (Alilyyani et al., 2018). The safety of all patients was the utmost importance in health care and to ensure that patient safety was executed health care leaders should ensure they had skilled health care staff to achieve the goal. However, health care leaders provided staff with a healthy working environment designed to prevent human errors (Kim & Park, 2018). Therefore, in many health care organizations, health care leaders were strongly encouraged to have a positive relationship with employees and adopted a transformational leadership style that was one way to complete this task.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership has been utilized in the business world since the close of the 1970s. The transformational leadership concept began when Burns (1978) stated that transforming leaders were energetic, enthusiastic, and enthusiastic about what they believed in or conducted. Transformational leaders created an environment that brought leaders and followers together to solve problems, managed change together, and created new ways of doing work (Asif et al., 2019). Leaders used this style in individual or group settings to implement an effective means of engaging employees and influence organizational change (Ennis et al., 2018). Burns also stated that transforming leaders was involved in the change process themselves, helping others succeed. Burns expressed those transforming leaders inspired followers to align their personal goals with organizational ones through vision and behaviors. From the birth of Burns' transformational leadership concept, Bass developed his transformational leadership theory. Bass (1985) defined four main dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized attention. Hence, the foundational elements of transformational leadership are thought about by business scholars a fundamental present-day practice.

The first characteristic of transformational leadership is *idealized influence*. Idealized influence referred to the emotional appeal to followers when leaders displayed trust and respect (Park & Pierce, 2020). The ideal leader possessed the characteristics of an accurate moral and ethical compass, their principles were positive, and their attitudes set the tone for a progressive work environment (Langat et al., 2019). The optimistic behaviors and confident drive created a dedicated team and any challenges that employees faced ensured they would have the support of their leader (Chang-E et al., 2019). As a leader, discussing and deciding on performance expectations with employees also displayed the idealized influence of an engaged leader (Chang-E et al., 2019). Transformational leaders used idealized influence to create followers' trust, respect, confidence, enthusiasm, and pride (Giddens, 2018). Therefore, in a transformational leadership, leaders may display the behavior of idealized influence by encouraging, trusting, and respecting their employees.

A transformational leader's qualities were to have inspirational motivation. In the workplace, confident and stimulating leaders could influence an employee to have a cheerful outlook about their job and the culture of the organization (Paolucci et al., 2018). Transformational leaders implemented inspirational motivation by challenging and instilling a sense of work purpose in followers (Groves, 2020). Employees who worked with encouraging and supportive leaders was willing to grow and develop professionally and personally and not criticize any mistakes or failures of themselves or others (Megheirkouni et al., 2018). The ideal goal for leaders and organizations was to decrease employee turnover and encourage employees to remain with the organization (Yamin, 2020). Inspirational motivation was manifested in leaders who (a) articulated reasonable visions that inspired their followers in envisioning attractive future states, (b) challenged followers with ambitious standards in enhancing performance, (c) communicated optimism about future goals, and (d) provided meaning to followers' works and aroused team spirit (Banks et al., 2018). Additionally, inspirational leaders expanded the responsibility of team members through support and motivating them to cooperate.

Teams worked better and was successful when their leaders set attainable daily goals (Langat et al., 2019). An organization had a competitive advantage over their competitors when they had leaders that were critical thinkers and were willing to take a risk to promote high levels of employee engagement. Intellectual stimulation occurred when employees were encouraged by transformational leaders to engage in the process of decision-making, which cultivated skill development, critical thinking, and knowledge (Boamah et al., 2018). Therefore, managers who demonstrated intellectual stimulation behavior saw employee engagement levels improve throughout the organization. Intellectual stimulation involved leaders encouraging followers to challenge the status quo and be open to change and innovative ideas (Park & Pierce, 2020). When employees made an error performing a task, an intellectually stimulating leader would not address the employee in public but in private as to not embarrass and disengage the employee (Northouse, 2018). Hence, through intellectual stimulation, leaders could inspire innovation and transformation in the organization.

Leaders promoted individualized consideration when they delegated tasks that aligned with the employees’ existing skills and abilities. In many organizations, a transformational leader developed the ability to engage employees, and as a result, the organization earned a reputation as an effective and efficient operation (Sahu et al., 2018). The individualized consideration behavior gave the leader the chance to delegate, supplying followers with growth opportunities (Bass, 1999). To be influential, leaders with individualized consideration influenced employees to grow professionally (Getachew & Zhou, 2018). Under individual consideration, the leader celebrated, recognized, and appreciated each follower's contributions, giving each follower a sense of value (Giddens, 2018). Moreover, the improvement of employees is fundamental to an employees’ organizational success, and leaders should arrange growth opportunities to their employees.

There was a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee job satisfaction in all service industries, and employees performed better with leaders who use a transformational leadership style (Ohunakin et al., 2019). Transformational leaders created feelings of confidence and an attractive vision of the future among employees, making them engaged in new way of accomplishing their work tasks (Amankwaa et al., 2019). Engaged employees had more to contribute to an organization when they felt supported by their managers (Edelbroek et al., 2019). Transformational leaders exuded an effective influence on followers by acting as role models who displayed ethical behavior and cared more about the organization than self-gain (Moon & Park, 2019).

In some cases, transformational leadership was faced with many challenges from others that was old-fashioned and unproductive in their management methods. Caniëls et al. (2018) examined employees' mindset and proactive personalities towards work engagement and suggested that transformational leadership style might not stimulate engagement or workforce productivity. Transformational leadership was not taught but was inherited in a leader (Warrick, 2018). Moreover, according to Zhang et al. (2020), if organizations had goals set to be better than their competitors, having transformational leadership was more effective than transactional leaders.

In conclusion, transformational leaders motivated people strategically and comprehended what made people thrive, thereby moving organizations forward (Krisnanda & Surya, 2019). Transformational leaders pursued plans to achieve individual and operational objectives (Navia et al., 2019). Therefore, exploring Bass’s (1990) transformational leadership theory helped the leaders to improve the development and efficiency of employees in the organization. Conversely, a transactional leadership style was contingent upon the exchange of benefits and rewards between a leader and an employee.

Transactional Leadership

The interchange of benefits and rewards between leaders and followers was the foundation of the transactional leadership theory (Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership theory was based on leaders who incorporated incentives to drive employee efforts (Saeed & Mughal, 2019; Xu & Wang, 2019). Raj and Srivastava (2017) maintained that transactional leadership provided a vision and a mission and encouraged problem solving and rationality among followers. An employee who collaborated with a transactional leader did not have a sense of self because the leader used rewards to motivate their attempts to complete their task (Zhang et al., 2020). The focus of transactional leadership was also on the self-interest of individuals from the provision of rewards for meeting established objectives (Jensen et al., 2019). Hannah et al. (2020) stated that transactional leadership was based on economic exchanges between leaders and followers in which the leader established the goals and objectives for the follower to achieve. Transactional leadership involved managers using corporate values and organizational control system monitoring and a strict chain of command to manage followers (Kanwal et al., 2019). Thus, the achievement of organizational goals by a transactional leader is different than a transformational leader.

Transactional leaders did not promote personal development and commitment (Jensen et al., 2019). Jiang et al. (2019) stated that a transactional leader had a *give and take* relationship with employees. Saeed and Mughal (2019) stated that the purpose of transactional leadership and contingent rewards was to maintain high performance and control quality. Donkor and Zhou (2020) stated that transactional leaders rewarded employees for completing tasks and maintained or increased organizational performance.

With each leadership style, there was disadvantages and advantages. Under transactional leaders, Pishgooie et al. (2019) found a negative relationship between job stress and staff anticipated turnover and a positive relationship between quality health care and patient health outcomes and quality health care. Transactional leaders exhibited a robotic behavior, and like transformational leaders, impacted productivity and goal achievement through clearly defined rules and goals (Harber & McMaster, 2018). Transactional leadership had disadvantages. These leaders lacked a leader-follower relationship and therefore was unable to help foster organizational cultural change (Saleh et al., 2018). Another disadvantage arose from transactional leaders who were too goal-driven because they did not allow employees to be creative or innovative (Alavi et al., 2021). Overall, transactional leaders were more likely to produce negative outcomes that would adversely affect an organization (Al Khajeh, 2018).

By contrast, the first advantage of a transactional leadership style, would be that the leader is highly motivated, and the leader would motivate the employees to ensure the goal was achieved. Next, the vision and mission of the organization was clearly defined and easy to follow, which allowed the leader to explain to the employees to prevent any errors. Another advantage of transactional leadership was for the leader to communicate a planned deadline to ensure that the assignment would be completed in a timely manner and without any delays (Alavi et al., 2021).

Saeed and Mughal (2019) stated that the purpose of transactional leadership and contingent rewards was to maintain high performance and control quality. Saeed and Mughal indicated that this style was *management by exception*, in which the manager maintained an active role and intervened in any potential problem that arose. Donkor and Zhou (2020) stated that transactional leaders rewarded employees for completing tasks and maintained or increased organizational performance. The manager was shown as applicable when the employee could achieve or exceed the organization's performance. Hannah et al. (2020) stated that transactional leadership was based on economic exchanges between leaders and followers in which the leader established the goals and objectives for the follower to achieve.

In summary, there were no similarities between the transactional leadership theory and the transformational leadership theory. Transactional leadership theory focused on leaders using rewards to encourage employee productivity, while transformational leaders encouraged and motivated followers (Abelha et al., 2018; Bass, 1990; Bian et al., 2019); The attributes of a transactional leader emphasized how an employee performed (Megheirkouni et al., 2018). In a transactional leadership style, employees could lose who they were as a person because of how leaders led with a short-term focus and the tangible rewards to get the job done (Zhang et al., 2020). Diebig and Bormann (2020) indicated that laissez-faire leaders tended to avoid decisions, neglected workplace problems, and did not model the appropriate behaviors. Moreover, transactional leadership style equips leaders with reputable organizational tools to manage the relationship between leaders and employees to accomplish organizational targets.

Laisse-Faire Leadership

Kurt Lewin (Lewin et al., 1939) developed a laissez-faire leadership theory in which a manager delegated the authority to make decisions to the employee without consulting with the manager. Laissez-faire leadership was characterized by an absence of leadership, in which the leader avoided exercising authority and was not easily accessible by employees (Skogstad et al., 2014). In a study conducted by Haque et al. (2019), when under laissez-faire leadership, most of the participants experienced low levels of supervision and oversight. Studies linked the laissez-faire style to various occupational stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity; these stressors led to employee depression, job strain, and reduced performance (Akgunduz, 2015; Skogstad et al., 2014). Therefore, leaders permit the employee to decide the most ideal way to accomplish organizational goals on their own.

In addition, researchers suggested disengagement of employees was not merely the result of ineffective leaders but was promoted by the presence of laissez-faire leadership (Puni et al., 2021). Asrar-ul-Haq and Kuchinke (2016) stated that leaders with a laissez-faire tendency deliberately avoided situations that exposed them to the need to decide. Puni et al. (2021) indicated that laissez-faire leadership was not conducive to high levels of engagement among employees in organizations.

The lack of an attempt to motivate followers was consistent with laissez-faire leaders’ lack of effective communication with employees. Laissez-faire leaders were not effective at leading their employees to success (Ribeiro et al., 2018). Laissez-faire leaders did not attempt to motivate followers (Eken et al., 2014). The laissez-faire leadership style resulted in team conflicts, and the style impeded employees’ health (Parveen & Adeinat, 2019). However, the laissez-faire leadership style was suitable for employees who could be productive with minimal leader guidance (Segun-Adeniran, 2015).

The benefit of an active or inactive leadership style remained contextual, hinging on the followers' perception who determined the level of input from their leader that was necessary to inspire performance. In a laissez-faire leadership style, the leader avoided communication and did not play an active role in encouraging or motivating the employees and was not attached to development (Wong & Giessner, 2018). Robert and Vandenberghe (2021) argued that the laissez-faire leadership style was not a form of leadership but the antithesis and promoted destructive behaviors within organizations. Wong and Giessner (2018) submitted that the laissez-faire leader consciously dismissed the needs of the subordinates when adopting the passive or avoidant approach.

Laissez-faire leadership was an unproductive style of leadership that negatively impacted followers (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019). Samanta and Lamprakis (2018) stated that the laissez-faire leadership style constituted the absence and nonexistence of leadership. Worthy et al. (2020) reported a weak negative correlation or relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and job satisfaction, staff intent to stay, and patient health outcomes. Furthermore, Gemeda and Lee (2020) stated that laissez-faire leaders were characterized by noninvolvement and being absent when needed. Gemeda and Lee (2020) indicated that a laissez-faire leader would overlook the achievements and problems of employees.

Conversely, Zareen et al. (2015) posited that the laissez-faire leadership style, much like the transformational and transactional styles, positively impacted employee motivation. Lee et al. (2018) stated that the laissez-faire style facilitated the development of self-determination, self-control, and greater autonomy among subordinates. The laissez-faire style consisted of leaders giving followers the power to make decisions (Kanwal et al., 2019). Pahi and Hamid (2016) suggested that a laissez-faire leadership style positively related to employee commitment. A laissez-faire leader instilled confidence and motivated employees to meet a goal or objective because of the leader's allowing employees to work independently. Pahi and Hamid (2016) stated that a self-motivated, highly skilled, experienced, and educated employee could thrive and successfully worked for a laissez-faire leader. These employees had the complete freedom to make decisions regarding achieved performance. This type of leadership would enable employees the space to accomplish performance goals. However, the employee would have to specifically ask the manager for guidance and support to achieve performance goals. Otherwise, the manager was entirely hands-off.

Even though laissez-faire or delegating leaders was not known to concern themselves with employee performance or the employees, however, some organizations had laissez-faire leaders who boosted productivity and morale (Khuwaja et al., 2020). Laissez-faire leadership usually resulted in an absent leader who did not guide his employees (Samanta & Lamprakis, 2018). With laissez-faire leadership, the leader did not offer his followers feedback (Zaech & Baldegger, 2017). Therefore, each leadership style, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire, all effected employee performance in a positive or negative way.

Employee Performance

In many organizations, leaders set the tone for employees to achieve high employee performance by encouraging company allegiance, approved long work hours, and thereby increased productivity. In business, managers used organizational performance to predict competitive advantage and employee retention (Yamin, 2020). Employees performed well, leading to better job performance when employees experienced trust in a supervisor (Yin, 2018). Improved organizational performance happened when employees were engaged and continued to outperform and excel in their duties, increasing employee engagement (Borah & Barua, 2018). According to Bianchi et al. (2019), when managers made a concerted effort to improve employee engagement, the results enhanced employee performance. When employees engaged, they performed their roles, assisted coworkers in their tasks, and acclimated new employees to their roles (Pradhan et al., 2018).

The way employees engaged in work tasks determined their overall performance, reduced absenteeism, and influenced turnover intentions (Mackay et al., 2017). When engaged, employees expected diversity in their work tasks; as a result, the leader saw improved performance in the workplace (Sekhar et al., 2018). Additionally, in most cases, engaged employees signed up for long hours and highly intense work assignments without giving a second thought (Gupta & Shukla, 2018). Therefore, when employees were engaged, they continuously strived for excellence in their organization (Seymour & Geldenhuys, 2018).

Zeidan and Itani (2020) posited that when employees were disengaged, there was a significant level of disconnect between the organization's objectives and the performance of employees in their level of involvement and satisfaction. John and Chadha (2018) discovered that 24% of actively disengaged employees was unhappy and unproductive, resulting in 340 million employees actively disengaged worldwide. Anitha (2014) stated that the configuration of organizational goals, failed to meet performance expectations, and discouraged employees who desired to excel within the organization influenced employee disengagement. Dhanpat et al. (2018) analyzed strategies to increase retention and began with compensation as the leading concept. Low compensation usually resulted in job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, and employee turnover (Dhanpat et al., 2018). Moreover, the relationship between disengaged workers and their performance affected organizations in a hostile arena.

Organizations needed to have effective and efficient employee performance to be successful (Rifa'l et al., 2019). The overall growth of a business could be explained by many factors; however, organizational leaders relied on engagement to enhance employee performance (Yadav et al., 2020). Othman et al. (2019) concluded that employee engagement drove individual performance through human resource management. In organizational success and direct reports, employees were not limited to a single field or type of organization. Instead, performance tied leadership behavior where the leader articulated a vision and demonstrated that performance was about more than just individual goals and the greater good (Avolio et al., 1999; Bass, 1998). Thus, employee satisfaction and work performance are extraordinarily influenced by the leadership style utilized in an organization.

Patient Care and Safety

A hospital's performance was driven by leadership. Patient care contributed to hospital performance (Park et al., 2019), and hence, was sought after by leadership. While in the hospital and after discharge, patient safety was related to patient-centered care. A hospital's business performance was influenced by patients' overall safety before, during, and after discharge. Using St. Onge and Parnell's (2015) research as a foundation, the researchers created a patient-centered care model that integrated patient safety, evidence-based practice, teamwork, and informatics.

Dello Russo et al. (2018) reported that human resource capabilities were significantly related to the manager-perceived quality of patient care when employees demonstrated proactive work behaviors such as providing outstanding customer service and obtaining correct patient information to ensure accurate billing practices. The work behavior could negatively influence safety (Zolot, 2017). If more attention was given to each patient, then patient safety and overall care could increase. Health care leaders tracked patient care and safety through various hospital administrative protocols such as wait times.

Patient experiences encompassed multiple interactions with health care professionals and was an integral part of delivering quality healthcare. Bastemeijer et al.

(2019) described the patient experience as the patient's journey when considering the clinical and emotional interactions with the health care service. Understanding patient experiences supported health care objectives to achieve positive health outcomes through a holistic and patient-centered care approach. Castro et al. (2016) highlighted compassionate, respectful, and responsive care as key determinants of how patients assessed the delivery of quality health care based on their expectations.

The more the organization's employees understood those individualistic needs and expectations of the patient, the better employees could tailor their care based on those needs. Campos-García and Zúñiga-Vicente (2019) identified a link between employee engagement and patient satisfaction and posited that satisfied employees provided quality care to patients. Improved patient experience had an inherent value to patients and families and was an important outcome, as it resulted in positive health outcomes.

Organizational managers influenced patient experiences by valuing employee engagement and equipping employees with the right skills and knowledge to improve organizational culture. Bellows et al. (2015) highlighted how engaged physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals were proud of their organization, took time to understand patient needs and provided quality care and services. Committed and competent employees helped the organization improve patient satisfaction scores through the provision of quality service. With the introduction of standardized services in the healthcare industry, the key differentiator among service providers was the quality of patient experience in delivering care. Håkansson Eklund et al. (2019) posited a direct correlation between employee satisfaction and patient satisfaction, as they contributed to the financial performance and viability of the healthcare organization. Therefore, organizations needed to invest in human capital to improve patient experiences and care through their services.

Quality Health care

Factors such as the availability of resources, level of knowledge and skills, and the accessibility of services affected the delivery of holistic quality health care. Appropriate levels of resourcing that were both affordable and accessible were necessary to meet the health care needs of patients and consumers. Employee engagement became an essential facet for health care managers to motivate employees to meet health care standards and consumer expectations and needs. Engaged employees provided high quality patient care when they were held accountable (Becker's Hospital Review, 2016). Employees delivered quality patient care when organizational leaders focused on the following: hiring engaged employees, creating a right work culture, implementing effective leadership, and using efficient systems (Vazquez, 2019). In the health care industries, leaders strived to ensure that employees were providing quality health care, guaranteed patient safety and accountability (Gishu et al., 2019). As a result, engaged employees were willing to follow policies and procedures, provide quality care, and avoid potential errors that would impact health care organizations' bottom line. Therefore, according to Kwame and Petrucka (2021) there was a direct correlation to high patient satisfaction which increased the profitability in hospitals.

Health care managers used key performance measures and indicators to identify priority areas that influenced the organization's performance and outlook. Wang et al.

(2018) identified examples of performance measured and indicators in health care, such as infection rates, injuries while in care, and accepted standards of treatment for specific clinical conditions. Wang et al. emphasized how performance indicators helped organizations monitor and reported on quality care to create acceptable levels of care that coincided with benchmarked standards within the health care industry. The benchmarks were then necessary to standardize care and guided incentivized funding models directly correlated to patient outcomes. Joudaki et al. (2014) highlighted that by standardizing quality care, organizational leaders identified the overuse or misuse of resources, potentially eradicating waste, and ineffective treatment options within the health care organization. Therefore, employees understood, and upheld standards of care set out by their organization to avoid financial penalties that inhibited their growth or performance. Quality service provision stemmed from the delivery of care from engaged employees that facilitated positive patient health outcomes. In health care, when organizations had a positive response to quality service and patient experience and safety, there in return is an increase in organizational profitability and productivity.

In business, employee engagement had a positive relationship with employee performance. Organizational leaders in the health care sector acknowledged that when leaders succeeded and expanded employee engagement levels, they identified strategies to improve error rates and increased employee performance. Leaders and employees strived to achieve organizational goals both contributed to enhanced performance for the organization (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). In health care, when employees experienced positive change and job satisfaction, the reduction of clinical errors and the establishment of a safe working environment is the result of positive employee engagement (Seljemo et al., 2020). When leaders promoted employee engagement and focused on patient care, patient outcomes, patient satisfaction, and organizational profitability all improve.

Transition

In Section 1, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was identified as exploration of strategies organizational leaders used to engage employees. The conceptual framework for this study was employee engagement theory (EET), and the literature was grounded in current, relevant peer-reviewed articles. The business significance to this study might assist healthcare leaders with the necessary strategies to engage employees for organizational profitability. The social change significance of this study might improve patient care through (a) the reduction of medical costs, (b) expanding the patient experiences, and (c) provide quality healthcare.

Most of Section 1 focused on the extant literature related to the study topic. In addition to a thorough discussion of employee engagement theory, I reviewed comparative and supportive theories. I presented the tenets of Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, job demands-resources theory, leader-member exchange theory, social exchange theory, and Herzberg's motivation theory. I concluded the literature review with a discussion of leadership styles, particularly in relationship to health care leadership. I concluded the literature review with a discussion of employee performance, particularly in relationship to patient care and safety.

In Section 2, I provide the research project and method. I will discuss a detailed explanation of the research process and the selection of the participants. Also, there will be a discussion of ethical research including the population, sampling, and data collection sections. The final components involved the data collection, data analysis techniques and the reliability and validity of the data. The discussion included how I ensured participant protections, including storing, and ultimate destruction, of study data.

Within Section 3, I will present the findings, discuss the applications to professional practice, and discuss the implications for social change. Section 3 includes the recommendations for action and for further research. The document is completed with my reflections on my experience with the study process and the summary and study conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

The objective of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies health care leaders used to engage employees. In this section, I included the Purpose Statement, the Role of the Researcher, Participant selection, Research Method and Design, and Population and Sampling. Other topics in Section 2 contained Ethical Research, Data Collection Instrument, Data Organization, Data Analysis, and Reliability, and Validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies health care leaders use to engage employees. This study's targeted population consisted of eight health care leaders in a hospital in the greater Atlanta, Georgia area who had successfully implemented strategies to engage employees. Health care employee engagement could contribute to social change by improving patient care, reducing medical costs, decreasing medical errors, improving patient experiences, and providing quality health care.

Role of the Researcher

I was the primary instrument for the data collection and researcher for this study. In a qualitative research study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument and collected the data (Roller, 2019). My role as the researcher included designing the study and selecting participants, as well as collecting and analyzing data. The researcher’s responsibilities are to recruit participants, then collect, organize, and analyze data (Yin, 2018). As a leader in the workforce, I had 20 years of professional experience with employee engagement. Furthermore, my position required interviewing, observing, and active listening skills that are instrumental to my role as a researcher. I did not have a personal or professional relationship with the participants.

Researchers followed the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report when conducting research with human subjects. The three principles of the Belmont Report were respecting persons, beneficence, and justice (U.S. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). I adhered to the Belmont Report protocol and completed the Protecting Human Research Participants were trained by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (Certification Number: 47391570).

In qualitative studies, researchers introduced bias based on assumptions or perceived expectations to participants through nonverbal expressions during the interview process (Hansen, 2018). To prevent personal biases from interfering with the research and collect data successfully, I kept a reflective journal and took notes of the thoughts and feelings of my participants. The researcher needs to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of data as part of the research process to limit potential biases in the research study (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). To enhance trustworthiness, researchers utilized member checking and triangulation as an evidence-based technique to improve the interview data quality (Yeong et al., 2018). To ensure that bias was mitigated in my study, I selected participants whom I had no personal or professional relationships with.

I followed the interview protocol (Appendix A) and only interviewed participants with whom I did not have a personal or professional relationship. To ensure that the information obtained was free from bias, a researcher’s beliefs, experiences, and interpretations was known as research integrity (Shaw & Satalkar, 2018). I did not project bias from the data I collected and remained open to discoveries contrary to set ideas regarding the research problem following an interview protocol.

As the primary researcher, I adhered to an interview protocol (see Appendix A) as an instrument for: (a) collecting participants' data, (b) asking the same questions to each respondent to mitigate bias, (c) assisting in providing directions in the interview format, and (d) allowing the researcher to pursue developing themes. Using an interview protocol is a technique that researchers follow to ensure the data obtained relates to the research question (Yin, 2018). One of the primary purposes for the interview protocol is to include the interview techniques, a draft of the introduction and the conclusion, and prompted for extending the conversation (Merlo et al., 2020). Lastly, an interview protocol also helps to improve data quality (Cairns-Lee et al., 2022). In this study, I treated participants with respect and made ethical judgments in data analysis.

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of at least eight patient access health care leaders from a hospital located in the greater Atlanta, Georgia, area. The eligibility criteria for the patient access leaders were that they had at least 5 years of leadership experience and used successful strategies to engage employees. According to Yin (2018), developing participant-criteria is helpful for the researcher because it made it easier to validate the study and increased compelling data accumulation. Researchers select and reach out to specific individuals who met eligibility criteria (Hu & Qin, 2018). Yin

(2018) suggested that the participants should be individuals who experienced with the phenomenon and can convey their experience for a case study.

The strategy for gaining access to healthcare leaders was through the National Association Healthcare Access Management (NAHAM), an official health care public group database consisted of patient access leaders. I contacted NAHAM to obtain a list of individuals who were authorized members. Once the first authorized patient access leader responded, I used snowball sampling to ask the leader to recommend other participants. I forwarded the study invitation letter to all existing patient access leaders who met the study criteria. In qualitative research, when researchers invite potential participants interested in the said study, and the participants can refer other participants who match the study criteria, this was known as snowball sampling (Lopez & Torres-Fernandez, 2019). When the invitation letter was emailed, I requested that the participants contact me directly. For the participants who confirmed their intent to participate in this study, I emailed them an informed consent form and scheduled a Zoom meeting with the participant.

Establishing a strong working relationship with participants was essential. As a researcher, collecting accurate data established trust with participants (Nunan, 2020). The foundation of a working relationship with participants was through open and honest communication about the study (Vaswani, 2018; Yin, 2018). When researchers establish a healthy rapport, participants were at ease and willing to participate during the interview (Bell et al., 2018). To build rapport with each participant, I communicated my involvement with the patient access department to allow the study topic conversation to flow naturally.

Research Method and Design

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies patient access health care leaders used to promote employee engagement. In this component, I will provide an explanation of the research method and design, the foundation for selecting the qualitative research method and single case study design. This section contains a summary of why I decided not to select a quantitative or mixed methods research technique. Lastly, I will provide reasoning for why a qualitative method and single case study approach was the appropriate methodology to explore strategies for patient access leaders to engage employees.

Research Method

In qualitative research, the researcher’s objective is to give an audience the ability to explore the contemporary phenomenon in real-life settings (Runfola et al., 2017). In a qualitative methodology, the researcher’s responsibility is to build patterns, themes, and gaps in the literature from the collection of words and observations to investigate and formulate meanings (Ospina et al., 2018). In a qualitative study, researchers utilize open-ended questions to interview the participants who related to the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Therefore, the qualitative method allowed the researcher to explore contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, utilizing how or why questions (Yin, 2018). I chose a qualitative method for this study because I conducted interviews and gathered data to explore the participants' natural experiences.

When conducting a research study, the researcher must be able to know the many distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research methods. The facts and phenomena were provided objectively in a quantitative research method, whereas a qualitative research method used a participant's account of the phenomena (Singh et al., 2021). In a quantitative research method, the researcher asks additional questions as they searched for evidence from the hypotheses generated (Noyes et al., 2019). Singh et al. (2021) stated that the testing theory, guided by a common question helps develop an understanding of the phenomenon in a collected experience between participants and the researcher. A quantitative approach was not suitable for this study because I did not use numerical data to test a hypothesis.

When using a mixed method approach, researchers utilize both qualitative and quantitative techniques, methods, and data within a single study to address the research problem from multiple perspectives (McKim, 2017). The analysis and collection of data from qualitative and quantitative paradigms give researchers implementation challenges and limitations from the complexities of a mixed method approach (Johnson, 2019). A mixed method approach could occur when a researcher’s study required more than one process or worldview (Thiele et al., 2018). When a researcher uses large data sets, mixed methods research integrated both quantitative and qualitative features for research (Smith, 2018). The mixed method approach was not appropriate for this study because I did not combine participants’ experiences and empirical statistical data to expand the understanding of my research problem.

Research Design

In this qualitative research design, I considered three research designs: ethnography, phenomenology, and case study. I chose a single case study design to employ an insightful understanding of the problem. Researchers us case study design to collect data from several different sources, including interviews, and archival documents (Yin, 2018). Researchers used a case study design to explore a studied phenomenon thoroughly in a real-life setting (Halkias & Neubert, 2020). Triangulation was one of the many strategies case study researchers used to cultivate a detailed case description (Halkias & Neubert, 2020). According to Yin (2018), when a case study researcher uses multiple sources of information to reach a point of convergence to strengthen case study findings, this is triangulation. A case study was appropriate for this study because I collected data from multiple sources to explore strategies patient access leaders needed to engage employees.

The ethnographic study design is used by researchers who explored the behaviors of chosen cultural groups (Fetterman, 2019). Wolcott (1987) stated that the purpose of ethnographic research is to describe and interpret social behavior. When researchers apply an ethnographic study design, their goal is to study a culture to get an insight into the research topic (Patton et al., 2018). The ethnographic design was not suitable for this study because immersing myself in culture would not help me to address the research question.

In a phenomenological approach, researchers explore lived experiences to understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives in a general setting (So et al., 2021). Moustakas (1994) asserted that through a phenomenological design, researchers focused on the actual lived experienced instead of the explanation or analysis of experiences. Moreover, to gain knowledge from a participant's lived experience, a researcher seeks the participants' information first-hand (Mohajan, 2018). A phenomenological design was not suitable for this study because the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies healthcare leaders needed to engage employees. Therefore, the focus of the study was on an explanation and analysis of the participants' experiences.

A single case study was the research design I chose to use for my research study. Yin (2018) explained that researchers must decide whether to have a single case or multiple cases in their studies. Case study research consists of exploring complex issues to understand the content within a limited set of conditions (Leão & Santos, 2021; Mishra & Dey, 2021; Yin, 2018). The qualitative case study design promotes the exploration of a phenomenon within its natural setting using data collected from multiple sources, which allows for a detailed description of the event to be captured by the researcher (Mostert, 2018). I used a single case study design because of the rich contextual and in-depth data provided to explore the strategies patient access leaders used to engage employees.

To achieve data saturation, I continued to interview participants until no new data emerged. Data saturation is a key principle that researchers use in a qualitative study in which the researcher collects data based on interviews and achieves saturation when additional interviews do not reveal any new data and produced redundant data (Guest et al., 2020). Hennink et al. (2017) stated that the achievement of data saturation occurred when no new information emerged from participants' responses. The quality of the data rather than the quantity of the data obtained should be the researcher's focus in data saturation (Sim et al., 2018). In qualitative research, a researcher needed to reach data saturation to derive conclusive findings (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Therefore, I continued to interview additional participants until no new information arose and the statements were redundant.

Population and Sampling

The participants for this study consisted of eight patient access leaders from a hospital located in the greater Atlanta, Georgia, area. The eligibility criteria for the patient access leaders were that they had at least 5 years of leadership experience and used successful strategies to engage employees. Purposeful sampling increases the reliability and credibility of the results (Majid & Vanstone, 2018). To ensure that all participants possessed the knowledge, skills, or experience to answer interview questions in a significant way, researchers used purposeful sampling (Sharma, 2017). Purposeful sampling is beneficial because researchers can then adjust the sampling method, if needed, throughout the process (Majid & Vanstone, 2018; Tyrer & Heyman, 2016).

For this study, I used purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to recruit and select study participants. In qualitative research, the process of an initial participant recruiting another participant with the same criteria was known as snowball sampling (Palinkas et al., 2019). The purpose of snowball sampling is to assist the researcher with networking with other potential participants, who possessed the same criteria and to increase the sampling participation (Etikan, 2016). The strategy for gaining access to healthcare leaders was through the National Association Healthcare Access Management (NAHAM), an official healthcare public group database consisted of patient access leaders. I contacted NAHAM to obtain a list of individuals who were authorized members. Once the first authorized patient access leader responded, I asked the leader to recommend other participants.

Data saturation occurs when gathering of materials until redundancy or the information repeated or when the researcher was unable to develop new codes or themes from the data (Hennink et al., 2017). When sample sizes are small, they can be credible, reliable, and transferable, if the researcher obtains data saturation (Fagerholm et al., 2021). Boddy (2016) indicated that in case studies, data saturation can be achieved with a small sample size. I achieved data saturation by interviewing additional participants until there were no new themes or information appeared and the data was repetitive.

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, interviewing guidelines had been updated to ensure the safety of the participants and researchers; therefore, I conducted interviews via Zoom sessions. Companies rely on teleconferencing tools to provide a safe mode of conducting interviews (Archibald et al., 2019). The interview setting may set a calm and friendly environment to ensure the participant fills content enough to share their encounters about the phenomena (Heath et al., 2018). The researcher ensures that the interview accommodation may not present a place of anxiety and that the participant is relaxed during the interviews (Webb et al., 2020). Conducting successful interviews relies on the researcher to ensure that the interviews were planned with the right location, dates, and times, so the participants feel safe and open when interviewing with the researcher (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Therefore, the main goal for the researcher during interviews would be for the interview settings to be convenient, comfortable, and private (see Webb et al., 2020).

Ethical Research

In research studies, the purpose of informed consent is for the researcher to ensure that the participants provided information voluntarily (MacInnis et al., 2020). Participants sign informed consent to indicate that they were participating in the research willingly (Sil & Das, 2017). When researchers enroll participants in their study, they also convey their rights, the research question, the study's methodology, and the potential harms and benefits (Pietrzykowski & Smilowska, 2021). Researchers who adhere to ethical research practices allow potential study participants to confirm their decision to participate by signing an informed consent document before beginning any study activity (Gupta, 2013). Before the interview began, the participants signed an informed consent to acknowledge their participation in the study. Participants were allowed to request a withdrawal from this study at any time prior to CAO approval by sending a request to me using any form of communication (i.e., email, phone call, or text message). Incentives can be considered motives for participants or considered as coercion to participate (Grady, 2019). No incentives were offered for participation.

As a researcher, I strived to protect the rights, privacy, dignity, and well-being of those that participated in my study. Segura Anaya et al. (2018) stated that the researcher treated the personal information of the participants with confidentiality. The name and location of the organization participating in my study remain confidential. The filing of the subject names used pseudonyms and certified privacy. Using pseudonyms to mask participants' identities is common in research (McDermid et al., 2014). The use of unique identifiers is a strategy the investigator used to ensure the confidentiality of the participants (Gibson et al., 2013). I used the unique identifiers: P stood for patient access leader and H stood for the hospital and a number representing the interview's order.

I complied with all the requirements for research per the Walden University's Institution Review Board (IRB). The IRB is liable for guaranteeing that all Walden University research consent to the university's ethical guidelines as well as U.S. federal guidelines (Walden University, 2022). Vanclay (2020) stated that participants 'privacy is a fundamental model to ethical research. All manuscripts, audio recordings, and files was stored on an external hard drive secured in a fireproof filing cabinet, where I had exclusive access for 5 years. After 5 years, all data will be destroyed. After receiving Walden University's IRB approval number 11-29-22-0259706, I conducted this study. To ensure privacy protection, all participant and organizational information remained confidential.

Data Collection Instruments

I served as the primary data collection instrument in this study. As the primary instrument, the researcher used personal and professional skills, training, and knowledge to analyze, interpret, and collect information (Muturi, 2016). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the researcher is the primary instrument in a qualitative case study. The researcher became an infused part of the data collections process in a qualitative study by being the primary instrument (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Further, if the researcher is the data collection instrument, they must have an unbiased and display experience in the study topic. Therefore, as the primary instrument in a qualitative study, I used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions.

The primary types of data collected for qualitative studies included observations, interviews/surveys, documents, and audiovisual materials. When conducting interviews, I asked my participants to share supporting documentation such as their press ganey scores. A combination of member-checking, archived data, semistructured interviews, or focus groups are used by researchers to manage qualitative studies (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Although, in qualitative research, interviewing was the primary data collection method (Gutland, 2018). The data for this study included semistructured interviews with eight participants and organizational Press Ganey engagement scores.

I conducted semistructured interviews. The use of semistructured interviews with open-ended questions is beneficial in exploring phenomena in a health care setting (Riera et al., 2015). The objective of conducting semistructured interviews is to allow a researcher to ask follow-up interview questions, which can lead to interpretive context (Granot et al., 2012; Reuben & Bobat, 2014). When conducting semistructured interviews, in qualitative research, the researcher can utilize information from other sources to acquire additional knowledge on the research topic (see Bleiker et al., 2019). In this study, I will conduct semistructred interviews to obtain knowledge from my participants on strategies leaders can utilize to engage employees. Furthermore, the constitution of in-depth semistructured interview data is the empirical backbone of much qualitative research in the social sciences (Campbell et al., 2013). I completed 8 semistructed interviews as part of the data gathering for this study.

I used an interview protocol to confirm reliability and validity in the research process, (Appendix A). The interview protocol is vital to qualitative research, particularly semistructured interviews (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) explained that an interview protocol helps the researcher follow a line of inquiry and ensured reliability. Cairns-Lee et al. (2022) asserted how researchers who used interview protocols built a framework to explore the phenomena under study while providing guided conversations to achieve a consistent and in-depth understanding of the participants' views and experiences.

As the primary data collector, to validate that the data was correct, I analyzed the data and once I completed this step, I then contacted the participants to verify, and this process was known as member checking to enhance reliability. Member checking is used to ensure the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of information (Brear, 2018). Member checking is also used to identify incorrect interpretations of data and provided authenticity of information (Madill & Sullivan, 2018). Member checking has five unique steps that a researcher completes (Marshall & Rossman, 2016): (a) following completion of the interviews, review each interview transcript and interpret in their own words what the participant said; (b) summarize the data for each interview question into one paragraph; (c) print a copy of the summaries and presented them to each participant; (d) ask each participant to review the summaries to ensure that the data collected was accurate; and (e) conduct the process of member checking until no new information was disclosed. I used audio recordings during each interview and member checking after each interview to increase reliability and validity. I recorded notes and wrote a synopsis of my conclusions in my interview process.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection for this study included semistructured interviews and Press Ganey engagement scores the participants shared during the interview. Researcher data collection is a systematic, detailed process in which the researcher collects adequate information to fulfill the research question (Ahmad et al., 2020). Researchers used interviews as the primary data collection technique researchers used for qualitative research data collection. According to Houghton et al. (2013), various qualitative research interview styles are available. Tavory (2020) stated that interviews are the least biased, and the participant’s experience is documented as a more natural phenomenon. Furthermore, using interviews as a data collection technique allows the researcher to retrieve in-depth information from the participants in their own words (Dehghan-Nayeri et al., 2017). Pascoe Leahy (2022) added that researchers add value and practicality to the interview when developing a relationship and respected what the participant brought to the study. Therefore, the primary data collection technique I will use is semistructured interviews.

As a core technique in qualitative research, semistructured interviews allow participants to provide a descriptive account of their experiences with a social phenomenon by collecting information-rich data (Campbell et al., 2013; Vogl, 2013). Researchers who use semistructured interviews allow participants to be flexible when describing experiences (Rajgopal, 2021). Irvine et al. (2013) suggested that because of the flexibility in semistructured interviews, researchers explore ideas that emerge throughout the interview, which can generate valuable data. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) indicated that researchers use the qualitative research method to conduct semistructured interviews to gather rich data on participants' experiences in a research study.

The semistructured interviews for this study included open-ended questions. The purpose of open-ended questions is not to suggest answers but to allow participants to answer in their way (Popping, 2015). Open-ended questions allow participants the opportunity to explore additional information if it arose (Cairney & St Denny, 2015). Open-ended interview questions minimize researcher bias (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Petty et al., 2012). The use of open-ended questions provides the researcher an insight into the participants' thoughts (Pietsch & Lessmann, 2018). In qualitative research, open-ended questions are often used to take a holistic and comprehensive look at the studied issues. Researchers utilize open-ended questions to acquire further understanding and accumulate detailed information (Vromen, 2018). Therefore, open-ended questions were helpful in my study because the participant was able to relax, be flexible, and readily willing to share information.

Due to the obstacles of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted via Zoom. Interviewing participants via Zoom had advantages and disadvantages. A few advantages were (a) the participant was interviewed in a location where they felt comfortable. A comfortable setting allowed the participants to be relaxed and honest with their answers to the interview questions, (b) there was no travel time for the participant or the data collector, and (c) researchers were able to capture accurate data by listening to the recordings permitted the researcher to hear the participant's true thoughts (see Shawver et al., 2016). Researchers record interviews to have full uninterrupted record of the interviews (Williams, 2020). Disadvantages for conducting interviews online include the (a) participant's personal information exposed because the researcher's computer files were hacked, (b) the wi-fi connection is weak and intermittent causing the call to break (Archibald et al., 2019), and (c) the interviewer and participant losing focus when there was video disruption.

There were advantages and disadvantages when accessing company documentation. Morgan (2022) stated that documentation analysis is less time-consuming and more efficient than other research methods. However, a disadvantage of this research method would be that documentation does not provide the necessary information for the researcher to answer the research question. It can be difficult to obtain company documents because the information was not accessible to the public because of the sensitive nature of the information (Li et al., 2019b; Lin et al., 2018). An advantage of obtaining company documents is to assist the researcher to analyze and compare the data received (Carollo & Solari, 2019). By obtaining company documents, I did have access to background information, and understood the historical background of the research topic. Lastly, obtaining access to company documents allows the researcher to support the data, validate the data, and improve data saturation (Mohajan, 2018; Yin, 2018). Each organization had a department that collected employee engagement surveys quarterly, as well as surveyed from patients to understand how the organization was performed. As the primary researcher, I obtained company documentation by accessing Press Ganey engagement surveys from the Patient Experience department.

Madill and Sullivan (2018) stated that the member checking process is a consultative process whereby the researcher clarifies the participants' interpretations and gained further insights and knowledge of the participant's perspectives. Through the application of member checking, interviewers have an opportunity to confirm the authenticity and accuracy of transcribed data with interviewees (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I achieved member checking by reviewing the interview transcripts, summarizing data analyses for each interview questions, providing a readable copy of the synthesis to the participants and asking the participant to confirm the accuracy of the interpretation. This process continued until no new themes was present.

Data Organization Techniques

For this doctoral study, I used NVivo® 14 qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) to organize the interview transcripts and documentation. I maintained a reflective journal, including regular entries during the research process. Cengiz et al. (2015) found that keeping a research journal helped a researcher constructed essential knowledge, organized thoughts, solved problems, and increased analytical skills. Noble and Smith (2015) suggested that transferring data to an electronic device supported data preservation. I used an EVISTR digital voice recorder for all oral communication. I stored all data on an external drive.

Transcriptions of the data collected from the interviews matched what participants said in their interview. I took notes at each interview. Taking notes assists with data analysis and enriched the interview details (Tabassum et al., 2018). Therefore, I utilized (a) data checking, (b) reflective journaling, (c) transcribing interview responses into a Word document, and (d) entered data into the qualitative software NVivo 14 Plus®.

NVivo was a data analysis software that researchers used to analyze qualitative research by managing data, revealing themes, querying ideas, graphically modeling ideas, and concepts, and reporting the data (Woods et al., 2016). The purpose of the NVivo software in qualitative studies is to allow researchers to accommodate large quantities of data because of their efficiency and transparency (Muliati et al., 2022). Gibson et al. (2014) suggested that scholars utilized software to organize and track respondents' data. Therefore, many researchers use NVivo software to compile, manage, organize, and code raw qualitative data (Munn & Branch, 2018).

When utilized by researchers, reflective journaling inspires and stimulates critical thinking. I took notes at each interview. Taking reflective notes assists with data analysis and enriched the interview details (Tabassum et al., 2018). Muswazi and Nhamo (2013) stated that notetaking during the interview process helped facilitate analysis. In notetaking, the researcher notes phrases or words participants use that add detail to the interview (Tabassum et al., 2018). During the interviews, I took notes to ensure that my thoughts and ideas remained organized and wrote down items that needed further clarification from the participant. Lastly, I utilized a password-protected external hard drive and retained all data in a locked fireproof safe. I have sole access for 5 years. After 5 years, all raw data will be destroyed. For the confidentiality and protection of the participants, researchers assigned unique identifiers (Roberts, 2020). Data classification aided in final interpretation (Brennan & Bakken, 2015). I labeled participants and the hospital as PH1, PH2, etc. for the participants for Hospital 1. I continued to conduct interviews, and add additional participants, if necessary, until data saturation was reached (i.e., no new information is evident from additional interviews).

Data Analysis

I used methodological triangulation as a primary data analysis activity. Lindgren et al. (2020) suggested that methodological triangulation in case studies is appropriate because the use of different sources and the participants' and other sources' descriptions supported the same concept. Triangulation is the use of multiple measures to capture construct (Renz et al., 2018). Noble and Smith (2015) suggested that triangulation of data from two or three resources reduces bias in a study. Denzin (2012) posited triangulation was a multi-method process that researchers used to analyze various data sources to gain a more in-depth understanding of a study topic. Triangulation is an important research aspect for identifying themes in data analogy across multiple sources (Johnson, 2015). Moreover, Yin (2018) suggested that investigators apply data triangulation to corroborate a phenomenon using multiple data sources such as interviews and physical records. I accomplished triangulation by analyzing the Press Ganey engagement scores the participants shared to support the interviews.

According to Yin (2018), using the appropriate form of analysis and multiple sources of data ensured the accuracy of the study results. Marshall and Rossman (2016) also described data analysis as a process of transforming collected data into themes and categories for better understanding. Yin provided researchers a process for data analysis:

(a) compile, (b) disassemble, (c) reassemble, (d) interpret, and conclude. I used Yin's 5-step process. The compiling stage was the first step I performed by collecting the data from the interviews and archival documents.

The next level in the process was to disassemble the data. The disassembling of data consisted of myself dividing the data into portions, shares, or sections and labeled each item. Houghton et al. (2015) found that data disassembly consisted of coding the data as relevant themes and as concepts emerged. Theron (2015) explained that coding was a process of collecting major thematic ideas and labeling sections of ideas with codes that correlated to the research questions. Woods et al. (2016) revealed that coding organized data into themes that related to the topic. As a result, disassembling, also known as coding, was important to the research process when analyzing data.

Reassembling was the third step, and I conducted this process by reorganizing the data into groups and orders using substantive themes. The fourth step was to interpret the data. I interpreted the data using NVivo 14 software to create the narratives from the sequences and groups. During the interpreting phase, the researcher created narratives from the sequencing and grouping of data (Thomas, 2015). The next step in the data analysis process was data conclusion. Bishop and Kuula-Luumi (2017) suggested that the findings from data conclusions included analysis and discussion of relevant details and information related to the research. The last step drew conclusions from the interpreted data. In analytical terms, this was the process of moving data, to codes, to clusters, to meaningful themes. The process of thematic analysis exposes themes that answer the central research question (Yin, 2018). As the researcher, I addressed the research question by interpreting the data using the information I obtained from Yin’s 5-step process.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

In qualitative research, there were four research criteria that researchers use to achieve trustworthiness and accuracy, and they were credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reliability was a tool researchers use to validate trustworthiness (Koch et al., 2014). A study is reliable when another researcher can replicate the findings of the original study by following the documented process (Hadi & José Closs, 2015). Furthermore, reliability is obtained from the accuracy of interview transcripts, theme coding, and remarks (Nandi & Platt, 2017). Detailed and concise documentation helps the researcher establish reliability (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). McIntosh and Morse (2015) stated that reliability in research revealed dependability and corresponded with reliability in a study, which allowed for the same outcome when other researchers explored the same phenomenon.

Anney (2014) described dependability in research as the resilience of the data when imposed on specific conditions and time progression. Researchers use member checking as a reliable and credible means to validate information (Iivari, 2018). When researchers use member checking to increase dependability measurements, they simultaneously improved the reliability of the findings (Harvey, 2015). I enhanced the dependability of my data results by using member checking. To conduct member checking, I achieved member checking by reviewing the interview transcripts, summarizing data analyses for each interview questions, providing a readable copy of the synthesis to the participants, asking the participant to confirm the accuracy of the interpretation and continued this process until no new themes was present.

Member checking of a researcher's interpretations added to the overall reliability of the findings. Member checking is the preferred data validation method for qualitative interviewers (Morse, 2015). Morse (2015) suggested three steps in the member checking process ensured reliability: (a) performing the initial interview, (b) interpreting the data from the participant, and (c) sharing the interpretation with the participant for validation. Therefore, I planned to use member checking to ensure the information given during the interviews was authentic by confirming my interpretations as the researcher.

Validity

To help ensure research validity, I worked to achieve credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation. According to Morse (2015), validity in qualitative research is assessed based on the trustworthiness, rigor, and credibility of the research. Dwork et al. (2015) suggested that qualitative researchers increase their study's quality by ensuring validity. Validity reflected the accuracy of the data collection and analysis process among the participants' perspectives on the research topic (Noble & Smith, 2015). The use of clear and concise language in interviewing increase validity (Yin, 2018). Member checking is the preferred data validation method for qualitative interviewers (Morse, 2015). Moreover, member checking allows participants to confirm, clarify, or augment the accuracy of the interview data (Caretta, 2016). To address validity, I utilized member checking to avoid inconsistencies and to ensure transparency.

Credibility

I achieved credibility by performing member checking of the data interpretation and methodological triangulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that credibility in a study is the confidence that the conclusions are representative of the feedback provided by participants. Credibility in qualitative research is the believability of the study (Elo et al., 2014). Noble and Smith (2015) noted that member checking allowed each study participant to review the collected data from the interview to confirm the interpreted data reaffirmed by the participant.

Researcher member checking helps the researcher establish the credibility of research findings (Petty et al., 2012). Member checking is a process in which participants verify the meaning of researchers' interpretations and elaborate on any details that was unclear (Loh, 2015). Harvey (2015) asserted that researchers who conduct member checking verify the participants' perspectives with the participants, which strengthens credibility. Therefore, to perform member checking, I emailed the participants' individual interpretation summaries to each participant to authenticate and guarantee data accuracy.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research is the ability to allocate the findings from one study to another setting, people, and situations (Harvey, 2015). Transferability occurs by providing enough details about the research so that other scholars determined the applicability of the findings to a related research problem (Matamonasa-Bennett, 2015). Researchers achieve transferability by using an interview protocol and probing for detailed, thick descriptions of a phenomenon during semistructured interviews (Yin, 2018). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), by providing a detailed description of the research context, researchers achieved transferability. When researchers give fluent descriptions, they position readers with the necessary tools to determine whether the study was transferable (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The depth and level of the detail in the background and the context of the findings assists the reader in making decisions on transferability (Yin, 2018). I incorporated significant, rich descriptions in my findings to allow readers the ability to assess the potential transferability appropriateness.

Confirmability

Confirmability was only present after credibility, transferability, and dependability was established, and the evidence and results of a study was reproducible by another researcher (Cope, 2014). Confirmability within a research study involves a degree of neutrality regarding the range to which the respondents shaped the conclusions of a study and not researcher bias (Whittemore et al., 2001). To achieve confirmability, researchers demonstrate precise results that connected to the conclusions in a manner that followed through a process and eventually replicated (Moon et al., 2016). However, I established confirmability by clearly explaining to the participants the purpose of the research study, asking probing questions to ensure their responses were detailed, recording, and transcribing interviews, and administering member checking to give the contributors the ability to authenticate my insight of their interview responses.

Data Saturation

I ensured data saturation through interviews and methodological triangulation. I accomplished triangulation by analyzing the documentation the participants provided and determined whether and how the documentation supported what the participants described. There is a higher probability of accomplishing data saturation if the data collection was focused (Van der Merwe, 2015). Data saturation is the point in data collection in which no new or relevant information was possible (Dworkin, 2012). Etikan (2016) revealed that data saturation is attained when the participant’s responses was repetitive to the researcher. Researchers who reevaluate the data ensures the collection of rich data that supported credible research findings (Leung et al., 2018). To achieve data saturation, I continued to interview patient access leaders in the healthcare industry until no new data emerged, and no additional coding was attainable.

Transition and Summary

As described in Section 2, I was the primary researcher who explored strategies patient access leaders used to engage employees by using a qualitative single case study. I collected data from 8 health care leaders via Zoom in the greater Atlanta, Georgia area. Data collection included semistructured interviews and the use of Press Ganey engagement scores. My goal was to achieve member checking by reviewing and summarizing the interviews, providing the participants with a copy for them to review and confirm the accuracy of the data. I accomplished data saturation after interviewing 8 health care leaders until there were no new themes, and I used Yin’s 5 step process to analyze my data.

Within Section 3, I will present the findings, discuss the applications to professional practice, and discuss the implications for social change. Section 3 includes the recommendations for action and for further research. The document is completed with my reflections on my experience with the study process and the summary and study conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies health care leaders use to engage employees. As the primary researcher, I collected data from eight patient access leaders from a health care facility in the greater Atlanta, George area via Zoom. The semistructured interviews that were conducted consisted of 10 interview questions in which the organizational leaders discussed strategies, they used to increase employee engagement. During the interview process, I utilized eight semistructured interviews and the shared Press Ganey engagement scores. In this study, the data collection process consisted of methodological triangulation of the data assembled via member checking. As measures of reliability and validity. Three themes developed from the data analysis: (a) mentorship, (b) leadership, and (c) teamwork. Therefore, the results of this study provided strategies patient access leaders used to increase employee engagement where engaged employees felt empowered, respected, and passionate about the vision of the department and organization. The findings of this study were grounded in Kahn's employee engagement theory (1990) that was verified and consistent with the literature review.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this doctoral study was: What strategies did health care leaders use to engage employees? I conducted semistructured interviews and reviewed Press Ganey engagement scores shared by the participants. I conducted and transcribed 8 interviews using NVivo to code and organize the interview transcripts to discover themes. Participants were labeled as PH1, PH2, PH3…and PH8 for their identity to remain anonymous. I used an interview protocol to ensure stability of the questions asked of all participants. Each interview was recorded using a recorder and downloaded into NVivo. Once downloaded, NVivo transcribed and coded all interviews. After the interview transcription was completed, I shared a summary of my interpretation of the data for member checking with each participant to confirm the accuracy of their responses to each interview question.

My conceptual framework was EET. Kahn stated that with EET employees physically, intellectually, and emotionally expressed themselves during job performances (Kahn, 1990). From the findings of the interviews there were strategies the participants mentioned that were used by patient access leaders to increase employee engagement. The first theme that the leaders mentioned was that having the necessary skills as a leader is an important strategy necessary to increase employee engagement. The reason being was because the skills would allow the leaders to recognize employees that were engaged and employees that were not engaged. Mentoring their employees was another important strategy that participants used to implement strategies to increase employee engagement. When leaders mentor employees, the employee has a sense of belonging and in turn, the leader will be able to ensure that the departmental and organizational visions and goals are successfully met. Lastly, promoting positive teamwork was an effective strategy patient access leaders utilized to increase employee engagement. Leaders are able to produce a highly productive team when they build relationships, meaning they sincerely take time to learn, encourage, and empower employees. As a result, a positive work environment is created and employees are less stressed, they are focused, they work well with others, and they produce more, this then will increase profitability and provide the organization with a competitive advantage. An assessment of data from the interviews produced the three primary emerging themes listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes

Themes	Number of Participants	Mentions
Mentorship	8	19
Leadership	8	15
Teamwork	8	12

Theme 1: Mentorship

The first theme that appeared from the data analysis was mentorship. Throughout the interviews with the various participants, each leader stressed how important mentorship is when engaging employees. PH1 said, “I’m one that likes to mentor employees and other people, and when you are able to sit down and show concern as an engaged leader, that energy transcends to the employees.” PH3 said, “One on one conversations are an effective way to identify engaged and disengaged employees. As the leader, I can do or make comments to help my employees to become engaged or even more engaged.” Other participants echoed each other under the belief that when leaders take the time and interest of the employee’s needs, ideas, and goals to create or encourage their paths, mentorship and employee engagement are achieved. Another way leaders can mentor engaged employees would be to get to learn the employees and their goals to promote them within the department and possibly through the organization. In many organizations, engaged employees are searching for ways to grow within their departments therefore, leaders can assist employees by providing career preparation through mentorship programs, which in turn indorses resiliency and team support (Colon et al., 2020). As a result of mentorship, leaders are also able to create a positive work environment, as Ree and Wiig (2020) identified similar findings as Montano et al. (2017) discussed how transformational leadership significantly impacts work engagement and patient safety culture. The conceptual framework for this study is EET. Employees are engaged when they feel an emotional and mental connection to their work (Turner, 2020). One of the strategies leaders can utilize to engage employees would be to develop a mentorship program. The mentorship program will allow employees the ability to learn what their true strengths and weaknesses are and exhibit them in various assignments assigned by their leader. Through this mentorship program, the employee will work closely with their leader and other employees while developing relationships. The purpose of the mentorship will also provide opportunities for the employee to grow within the organization. Through the mentorship program the employee will be engaged and show loyalty and commitment to their work, their leader, and the organization. Therefore, when employees are empowered, they are motivated to achieve outstanding performance levels and leaders are successful with reaching their organizational goals through a positive work environment which is conducive to employee engagement (Vu, 2020). The use of mentorship as an employee engagement strategy, leaders can encourage, arouse, and boost their team.

Furthermore, leaders can use mentorship to empower employees and instill the organization's goals and visions to ensure that others will carry out the plans of the department. In the health care setting, mentoring programs focus on all employees to orient them to the industry expectations besides instilling specific organizational values (Diehn & Tomey-Welsh, 2018). Mentoring could also build self-confidence and career development while supporting effective role modeling (Roberts et al., 2019). PH2 said:

> Oh, I love telling them about career opportunities and roles within health care. That's one of the things that's been asked about. I get asked on almost every interview, so they always want to know if being a Patient Access Rep is the last stop? I am like, No. With you, you could move around to go to different, hospitals, clinics, whatever you like.

Zhenyuan et al. (2018) showed the importance of establishing a mentoring process, especially for employees new to the organization. PH1 said:

> Suggesting to the employee like hey, you have thoughts and ideas about workflow changes that you're not speaking up about and you are only bringing up suggestions behind closed doors. The employee will share with me what they think, but in front of other people and being open with other people, they are just deathly quiet. And so, I think giving them a goal does work and helps them to become more engaged.

Through mentoring, the mentee could gain self-awareness in understanding what they are capable of and where growth opportunities exist (Ghosh et al., 2019). Overall, mentoring employees tenured or new, is a positive business strategy leaders could utilize to engage employees.

Mentorship positively correlates with employee engagement and leaders can see an increase in productivity. Organizations create mentoring programs to encourage employees to develop self-confidence and learn more about themselves, and as a result employees will be able to advance in their careers. Engagement can affect an employee's frame of mind, and organizations should work hard to grow and encourage engagement in the connection linking the employee and employer (Ghosh et al., 2019). When leaders recognize employees that are eager to advance and grow within the organization, they must show them the way and in return the employee and the organization benefits from mentorship. Therefore, mentorship is one of the many strategies organizational leaders can apply to increase employee engagement.

Alignment to Company Documents

For this study, I utilized the organization's Press Ganey engagement scores. The Press Ganey engagement scores are given to employees via email every quarter, and when the results are calculated, each department is now able to see physically how they are doing in the eyes of their employees. The Press Ganey scores are also a good way for leaders to see how many engaged versus disengaged employees are in the department. In the group of questions that are asked, there was only one question that supported mentorship. The question states, "This organization provides career development opportunities." From this question, leaders can learn and know how employees feel about opportunities of growth within the department and organization. The participants that were able to share this information during the interview showed that more employees in the department felt that the organization did provide opportunities of growth. Therefore, leaders are doing their part with encouraging, motivating, and inspiring employees as well as developing a connection with employees to take risk or develop specific skills. Mentoring depicts itself as a relationship in which a more accomplished individual helps the less experienced one (Foster & Hill, 2019). Moreover, in EET, engaged employees thrive on the connection between them and their leader making mentorship a leader strategy that may increase employee engagement.

Theme 2: Leadership

The second theme I recognized in this study was leadership. When, managers provide a positive work environment and a supportive workplace this encourages employee engagement (Madan, 2017). Research has also found a significant relationship between leadership and the level of employee engagement (Mulievi & Tsuma, 2021). Implementing employee engagement measures in a leadership style directly impacts employee engagement and employee productivity (Williams et al., 2019). Organizational leaders who promote employee engagement increase motivation and morale (Turner & Turner, 2020). The participants for this study shared that there are many characteristics that a leader should possess to engage employees. Ismail et al. (2021) defined leadership as the personal qualities of a person who can set direction and influence followers by their skills and character in a positive manner that contributes to achieving the goals of an organization. PH4 said,

Being open-minded, fair, and transparent are all traits that a leader should have to

> engage employees. Employees trust and respect you as a leader when you take time out of your day and come in dressed like them and work side by side.

Having an inclusive leadership style positively promotes employee engagement in the workplace (Mansoor et al., 2021). PH3 said,

> I rely heavily on a one on one with my team individually, not only at their evaluations, but also amid evaluation. Sometimes we try to throw in a quarterly impact meeting with the team. When they come, we ask the staff to come with goals in mind.

Employees who felt valued, empowered, and supported by the leader regarding their personal well-being were highly engaged and better performers than those who did not feel that same relationship (Obuobisa-Darko, 2020). PH5 said, “When employees are self-aware, and they see leaders being transparent, treating everyone equally, feeling like they belong and are contributing to a successful team, engagement instantly increases”. Therefore, leadership strategies that increase employee engagement include gaining employee trust by implementing self-awareness, transparency, and incorporating honesty, fairness, and accountability (Yue et al., 2019). Furthermore, from EET, a positive relationship developed by a leader is one of the many factors that drives an engaged employee.

When discussing Kahn’s EET, the effects of leadership will either increase engagement or decrease engagement. Leaders are the key factor organizations utilize when engaging employees. Leadership is a critical driver of effective leaders, as leaders shape employee attitudes and behaviors and engage employees, which is an asset that leads to increased organizational competitiveness and performance (Oh et al., 2018). The relationship between the leader and the employee will make or break an organization. When leaders encourage, empower, and motivate employees, engagement is increased, however, if leaders are negative, condescending and show no concern, then employees are disengaged. Leaders interacting with employees effectively and providing sufficient support are more effective in engaging employees (Parr et al., 2021). Furthermore, leadership is vital to employee engagement because they help to create a work environment that will engage employees and as a result organizations are highly productive and profitable.

In contrast to Kahn’s EET, Thibault and Kelley (1959) stated SET is a reciprocity or an exchange of goods between a leader and an employee, also known as a transactional relationship. The basis of SET would be a cost-benefit relationship, meaning the benefit weighs more than the cost. The difference between EET and SET would be that employee engagement happens when meaningfulness, safety, and available resources are present (Kahn, 1990), whereas SET states that an employee may show disengagement when a leader or the organization disappoints an employee’s expectations (Lin et al., 2019). Additionally, with SET, leaders will show interest in employees in exchange for the employee to produce and perform, which may not always be an equal transaction. Therefore, in EET, the leader encourages, motivates, and develops positive relationships with an employee, where with SET, the leader and employee go into a relationship to satisfy their own interests.

Alignment to Company Documents

During the interview process, many leaders were able to share with me the results of their Press Ganey engagement scores, and under the category of leadership there were several questions. The questions were; “The person I report to treats me with respect”, "There is a climate of trust within my work unit”, “I am satisfied with the recognition I receive for doing a good job”, “I feel well supported by the check-ins my supervisor has with me (1-on-1, rounding/huddles/work meetings)”, and “My work gives me a feeling of accomplishment”. As a leader, supporting your employees is important and from Kahn’s EET, these questions relate to the meaningful condition, which states that employees need to feel wanted and that their jobs matter to the department and organization. Shahid (2019) stated that when leaders are supportive, employees show better engagement in their work and the organization. The results overall showed that leaders in the patient access department were being supportive and encouraging to their employees, however, there was one question that leaders were able to see needs work. Creating a climate of trust is necessary to have engaged employees. Leaders can accomplish this goal when they openly communicate, provide feedback, and trust their employees. Yue et al. (2019) identified that when leaders are creating a positive work environment they must communicate and show transparency to achieve high levels of employee engagement. Additionally, leaders who make strides towards the improvement of their employees will see levels of engagement rise.

Theme 3: Teamwork

The third theme that emerged from this study was teamwork. In business, teamwork is very fundamental to organizations and consists of working together, but also includes the relationships that are developed while working together. Therefore, being a supportive leader assists in building and maintaining effective interpersonal relationships (Elsaied, 2019). Teamwork is a prevalent employee engagement strategy because it promotes a positive work environment, and employees are highly productive in a positive work environment. PH2 said, “Leaders are responsible for making the team more cohesive and providing a pleasant work environment.” Employee engagement defines how committed employees are to the business and its success (Turner & Turner, 2020). PH2 also said,

> You must feel engaged in what it is that you do and have an overall commitment to your team, the department, the environment that you work in. When leaders are developing an engaged team, one of the many goals they should achieve would be getting to know their employees and building a relationship.

PH5 said:

> I always like to work with my employees and build those relationships. You want to come in the office and say good morning. You want to know about their likes and dislikes. Then when they withdraw emotionally you can recognize the change in their behavior. I feel like I'm able to spot the change if I know them as a person. One concept, leaders also must possess to build a successful team would be trust.

Therefore, the relationship you establish with your employees is a critical tactic to achieve when creating an engaged staff and team.

When leaders want a successful team, they must let the employees know they are there to help, encourage, and can be trusted. In McAuliffe et al. (2019) debated that when leaders have employees that perceive them as trustworthy, they will have an engaged workforce. Buil et al. (2019) argued that engaged employees exhibit higher trust in their organizations and better relationships with organizational leaders. PH8 stated that, "when you really get to know your employees such as their favorite movies or shows, similarities you have with them, and that you are leading them and not dictating to them, they are more engaged and perform not in quantity but quality." When leaders create an environment where employees feel supported, their engagement is positively impacted (Maximo et al., 2019). Overall, teamwork is the result of leaders building positive relationships and gaining their employees trust, therefore, teamwork is a positive leadership strategy that organizational leaders can utilize to engage employees.

With any group, working together as a team is the common goal for an organization. When employees work together, more work is accomplished, and the department is more productive. Developing a highly successful team happens when employees have a high sense of belonging and engagement. Transformational leaders, one of the many leadership styles is best known to promote team unity within the organization. Han et al. (2018) advised that transformational leaders can inspire team members to work toward shared goals which generally results in high team performance. Overall, to effectively achieve high productivity from a successful team, leaders must ensure that employees, have a sense of trust, a strong relationship with the leader and their coworkers, and empowerment to achieve employee engagement.

When leaders are creating a team and utilizing Kahn’s EET, they must sincerely take the time to learn their employees, and how they think and operate. The leader must truly have commitment and loyalty from the employee, but they themselves must give the same if not more into the relationship. Teamwork is all about collaborating to produce a good or service, and when you have engaged employees, including the leaders, you have success. Other strategies, leaders can do to ensure that employees are engaged, and work together would be to have ice breakers so employees can get to know each other, communicate openly, listen to suggestions, and provide feedback. These strategies will let the employees know that there leader is supportive and cares about them. Providing feedback to employees through open, honest, and continuous communication may increase engagement (Beer, 2020). In EET, Kahn (1990) stated that when employees feel they are meaningful to the leader and the organization, they in turn are engaged and give all of themselves to their work. Therefore, when leaders provide a positive work environment and show concern for the employee, employees are invested and work as a team to satisfy the organization’s vision and goals.

Alignment to Company Documents

The Press Ganey engagement scores for the selected health care facility addressed teamwork with the following questions: “My coworkers’ value individuals with different or diverse background” and “The person I report to treats all employees equitably regardless of their background.” In a team setting, employees look to leaders to treat everyone is a fair and just manner. As a leader creating a positive work environment also sets the tone for employees to feel team oriented and invested in their work. Leaders who promote an environment and culture of cooperation feel they also have a safe place to be innovative and a chance to be creative (Mansoor et al., 2021). The results from the engagement surveys illustrated that patient access leaders were performing well by creating a positive work environment. With EET, to ensure employees are engaged, leaders should consistently work towards the goal of creating a successful team by treating others fairly and equally.

Application to Professional Practice

This study provided strategies organizational leaders utilized to increase employee engagement. Based on the study's findings, organizational leaders used strategies such as mentorship, leadership, and teamwork to increase employee engagement. Transformational leadership is a leadership style, by which leaders build successful organizations by influencing positive changes within the employees and the organization (Warrick, 2018). There are various leadership styles, and, in this study, I discussed transformational leadership which is different from transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles as it combines and uses the style best suited for the individual and not focusing on one individual approach.

From the findings of this study, one of the tactics organizational leaders can employ to increase employee engagement is by creating an environment of trust and developing relationships. An employee will recognize the leader's strategies when they show concern about the well-being of their employees. In recent studies, many employers are promoting that their employees focus on their mental health and encourages self-care. On average, employees are spending a substantial amount of time and effort at work

(Bartels et al., 2019), therefore, it is essential for organizational leaders to ensure that their team remains alert and safe. As a result of a positive work environment, transformational leaders can offer a clear and concise vision, inspiration, present intellectual challenges, and show a genuine interest in employees' needs (Chin et al., 2019; Northouse, 2018). Therefore, when leaders show their employees that they care and they have a sense of belonging, organizational goals are achieved, and productivity is increased by employees that are more invested and engaged in their work.

In contrast, employee productivity loss in the United States costs businesses approximately $300 million a year, causing businesses to underperform (Bialowolski et al., 2020). The cost of disengaged employees can be overwhelming to a business's productivity and profit margins. Disengaged employees cause an adverse effect on organizational performance and negatively affect competitive advantage through the loss of productivity (Moletsane et al., 2019). The consequences of disengaged individuals can cause undesirable effects, such as productivity losses, decreased performance, and can negatively impact society (Nienaber & Martins, 2020).

The transformational leadership approach allows a leader to make the most of an employees' strengths and mentor them on their weaknesses. Furthermore, managers who adopt this leadership approach can facilitate the rewarding of employees for the achievement of organizational goals and provide corrective measures when faced with failures (Li et al., 2018). Researchers argued that leaders pursue transformational leadership to create a vision of change, provide resources, give individual support, and monitor improvement in the organization (Al Khajeh, 2018). Transformational leaders use innovation, empowerment, staff development through training, and positive organizational culture (Chammas & Hernandez, 2019). Furthermore, in a transformational leadership, Kahn's EET is the foundation leaders use to assist them when creating strategies to engage employees.

In conclusion, successful employee engagement strategies help business leaders connect employees to the organization, improve their performance, and increase job satisfaction (Kahn, 1990). In EET, Kahn discussed the relationship between engagement and productivity and how leaders can have an influence on employees to be engaged. On the contrary, researchers also will use Kahn's EET to understand why employees become disengaged in the workplace (Rameshkumar, 2020). Kahn's EET continues to be a critical component for various business organizations, and when leaders can engage employees and keep them engaged, organizations can respond to social problems, and this can lead to positive social change.

Implications for Social Change

The implication for positive social change helps organizational leaders promote an employees' professional growth and a progressive work environment. Businesses associate social change by the performance of employees as well as the organization's bottom line. Engaged employees lead to increased productivity and improved organizational performance (Othman et al., 2019). Research has shown there is a positive correlation between employee engagement and productivity (Choudhury et al., 2021). A solid workplace and great relational associations with colleagues are essential for representatives to be positively engaged (Majeed & Jamshed, 2021). The results from this study might affect social change by providing an understanding of improved patient care through (a) providing quality health care, (b) providing outstanding customer service, and (c) reducing medical costs.

The importance of promoting the value and advancement of employees, leaders, and businesses influences positive social change. The insinuations for positive social change include the potential to improve patient care and social conditions within communities. Organizational leaders can support positive social change by steering employees in the direction of accomplishing the department's visions and goals, as well as improve patient care within the community.

Recommendations for Action

Organizational leaders should consider the necessary strategies to increase employee engagement. Employee engagement is an employees' obligation to the progression of their positions and the organization in which they work (Saks et al., 2022). How business leaders motivate, support, and appreciate their employees should vary daily to ensure employees are engaged. Businesses are beginning to comprehend the effects of carrying out employee engagement strategies on positive outcomes, including productivity, profitability, and customer satisfaction (Orgambídez & Almeida, 2020). I would make three recommendations following strategies which are based on the results of this study. The three recommendations are: (a) leaders should incorporate mentorship programs to promote employee and career growth, (b) leaders should encourage and promote positive work environments to ensure increased productivity and the achievement of organizational goals, and (c) leaders should support the development of relationships to recognize the needs of diverse groups through teamwork. The suggested way organizations might distribute these strategies would be through literature, trainings, and interactive simulation.

The findings from this study will initially be distributed through the ProQuest/UMI dissertation database, which may benefit current and future researchers. I will seek additional chances to disseminate this study's findings through distributing articles in scholarly journals and other business-related publications. The emphasis on utilizing a wide assortment of communication channels to disseminate the outcomes is to help organizational leaders in grasping the significance of employee engagement to individual and organizational productivity.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement in the healthcare industry in the greater Atlanta area. The study's targeted population consisted of eight health care leaders in a hospital in the greater Atlanta, Georgia area who had successfully implemented strategies to engage employees.

Future researchers can increase the strategies to engage employees by the awareness and application of adaptive leadership strategies. Future researchers may study the provision of supporting documents from the files or data sources to verify the interview data. The extension of research to a more extensive scope of organizations can assist with summing up the outcome findings (Jena et al., 2018). I would also recommend a study that would expand past the healthcare industry into other businesses and expand the geographic location beyond the greater Atlanta, Georgia area to cover a larger population.

Reflections

Reflecting on my doctoral journey, the DBA program has been challenging. Because I have multiple specializations (leadership and health care management) the process was long but gratifying. There were many days I wanted to quit and walk away from it all. I faced challenges with financial aid, working through a pandemic that heavily affected many, and as an essential worker, I felt an extra amount of grief and stress. By conducting this study, I was able to explore employee engagement strategies that organizational leaders use in the healthcare industry, when I conducted 8 interviews with patient access leaders and the review of Press Ganey engagement scores the participants shared during the interviews.

Personal bias was mitigated in this study because I did not have a personal relationship with the organizational leaders. During the research process, I kept an open mind and gained a newfound understanding of the various strategies, patient access leaders utilize to engage employees. While conducting this study, I learned more about strategies organizational leaders used to engage employees.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies organizational leader use to increase employee engagement. Employee engagement promotes employees’ positive work behaviors, which in turn produces higher organizational effectiveness and productivity (Mulievi & Tsuma, 2021). Semistructured interviews via Zoom, Press Ganey engagement scores, and member checking were used to collect data and ensure my interpretation of the data was accurate. Data was collected from 8 patient access leaders in the healthcare field who are using various strategies to increase employee engagement. To encourage and increase employee engagement, healthcare leaders must focus on empowering and including employees, as well as improve methods on how to show value of their employees and recognize their needs. Overall, from this study, three themes emerged: mentorship, leadership, and teamwork.

The established literature on employee engagement can affect aspects of productivity, however, researchers also suggest that organizations suffer from employees that are disengaged. When leaders strive to increase employee engagement, there must be an understanding and implementation of the effective strategies utilized to engage employees. The findings of this study illustrated that employees are engaged when leaders implement a mentorship program, encourage, and motivate employees through positive relationships, and develops a positive work environment to promote teamwork. Furthermore, when patient access leaders apply these strategies, employees are productive, empowered, and organizations are profitable.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Introduce and provide participant(s) with a brief overview about myself.
2. Provide participant(s) with a consent form.
3. Give an overview of the consent form and respond to any questions.
4. Ask for consent to record the interview.
5. Turn on audio device to start session recording.
6. Provide each participate (s) with their coding identifier: Note the date and time of the interview.
7. Start interview beginning with question #1 continuing to final question.
8. Conclude the interview by thanking participants and indicate appreciation for their time.
9. Schedule an appointment for member checking.
10. Provide my contact information for additional questions or concerns.
11. Thank the participate (s) for their valued input in the study.

End Interview Protocol