

2023

## Manufacturing Business Managers' Strategies to Increase Employee Engagement

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Jennifer Morgan-Petgrave

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Manufacturing Business Managers' Strategies to Increase Employee Engagement

by

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MBA, University of the West Indies, 1997

BSc, University of the West Indies, 1991

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

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## Abstract

Employee engagement is critical for manufacturing businesses to achieve higher productivity, competitive advantage, and sustainability. Manufacturing business managers who implement effective strategies can potentially enhance employee job satisfaction to increase employee engagement. Grounded in Kahn's personal engagement theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies manufacturing business managers use to increase employee engagement. The participants were four manufacturing business managers from two manufacturing businesses in the southeastern region of Jamaica who successfully implemented strategies to increase employee engagement. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and company documents. Yin's five-phase process was used to analyze data. Three themes emerged: use effective communication techniques to increase employee engagement, develop quality training and development programs, and create attractive rewards and recognition programs. A key recommendation is that manufacturing business managers prioritize training and development programs for all employees to increase employee engagement. Doing so may promote a sustainable workforce. The implications for positive social change include the potential for manufacturing business managers to provide employment opportunities and thereby raise the standard of living and social well-being of local community residents.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my late husband, Philip Everest Petgrave, who was the wind beneath my sail throughout this journey. We did it, Phil! Thanks for believing in me and for always being my biggest cheerleader. Thanks to my parents, the late Herman and Olive Morgan, for instilling in me the value of education and the drive and determination to succeed and never quit. Finally; thanks to my sisters, brothers, and special friends, who are like family; thanks for your love, support, prayers, and encouragement throughout my entire doctoral journey.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The manufacturing sector is crucial in many national economies and critical to sustainable economic growth (Herman, 2020). When manufacturing companies engage employees, the organizations could have more satisfied and loyal customers, increased profits, better-quality products, and greater growth potential (Jilani & Juma, 2015). According to Delaney and Royal (2017), employee engagement is an integral component of human capital strategies, and leaders in high-performing organizations use various methods to attract and retain their best talent. Engaged employees have lower turnover rates, higher retention, and lower recruitment costs (Monica & Krishnaveni, 2018). They are energetic, enthusiastic, absorbed, dedicated, and fulfilled in their job (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Organizations that attract, engage, develop, and build loyalty among their employees might achieve sustainable results and competitive advantage (Taneja et al., 2015). Managers of manufacturing businesses can use their knowledge of employee engagement issues to develop effective strategies to drive employee engagement, which is critical for sustainable growth and long-term business survival.

### **Background of the Problem**

Many manufacturing business managers understand that increasing employee engagement tends to improve productivity and profitability. Motyka (2018) suggested that low employee engagement negatively affects business success. Disengaged employees contribute to absenteeism and high employee turnover, for instance (Shaukat et al., 2017). Conversely, in manufacturing companies, the impact of employee engagement is evident in reduced turnover, increased productivity, improved product quality, reduced training costs, and increased profits (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Although

numerous research exists on employee engagement, my focus in this study was exploring strategies to increase employee engagement in manufacturing organizations.

Identifying and implementation of these strategies may be challenging because of the number of factors that underpin employee engagement. As researchers have noted, employee engagement is influenced by personal and organizational factors (Dhir & Shukla, 2019), such as employees' psychological experiences and perceptions of leadership and organizational support (Kahn, 1990). Meaningfulness, safety, and availability of resources are critical indicators of employee engagement, per Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory. An essential strategy to increase employee engagement for business success may be for managers to create an employee engagement culture. This strategy will require business leaders to use rational decision-making processes based on the organizational mission and goals (Papagiannakis et al., 2014). In this study, I focused on strategies used by manufacturing business managers to improve employee engagement.

### **Problem and Purpose**

Employee engagement is critical for businesses to achieve higher productivity and competitive advantage (Z. Ali et al., 2019). According to Osborne and Hammoud (2017), U.S. businesses incur losses of \$350 billion annually because of disengaged employees. The general business problem was that low employee engagement adversely affects productivity and the sustainable growth of manufacturing businesses. The specific business problem was that some manufacturing business managers lack strategies to increase employee engagement.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies some manufacturing business managers use to increase employee engagement. The targeted population for this study included four manufacturing business managers from two manufacturing businesses in the southeastern region of Jamaica who have successfully implemented strategies to increase employee engagement. The implications for positive social change include the potential for Jamaican manufacturing business managers to increase employee engagement, enhance the sustainability of manufacturing businesses, and contribute to socioeconomic development and economic stability. Manufacturing leaders could reinvest profits into business expansion, job opportunities, and community projects to improve the socioeconomic well-being of community residents.

### **Population and Sampling**

Data were collected from four purposefully sampled manufacturing business managers of two companies in southeastern Jamaica who have experience with the business problem. Participants were interviewed using a semistructured interview process designed to elicit their live experience for addressing the phenomenon. I also review organizational documents including reports, employee handbooks, tracking sheets, and information from publicly accessible websites for relevant information.

### **Nature of the Study**

I chose the qualitative research methodology for this study. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring and interpreting individual experiences, thoughts, and feelings regarding a problem or an issue (Opsal et al., 2016). The qualitative researcher seeks to gain answers to *what*, *how*, or *why* questions about the study phenomenon (Gergen et al.,

2015). The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because it allowed for the gathering of rich data and an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon under study.

Researchers use the quantitative method to test hypotheses and statistically analyze variables' relationships or differences (Larson-Hall & Plonsky, 2015; Zyphur & Pierides, 2017). The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because hypothesis testing and analysis of variables' relationships or differences were unnecessary to address the research question. Mixed-methods researchers use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in the same study to obtain breadth and depth of understanding when the use of a single method may be inadequate to address the research problem (Ahuja et al., 2018; Venkatesh et al., 2016). I did not consider the mixed-methods approach for this study, as the quantitative component would not have helped to address the research question.

I chose a multiple-case research design for this study. In a case study, the researcher seeks to understand issues related to a phenomenon by exploring in-depth single or multiple cases bounded by time and place (Yin, 2018). The multiple-case study design allows for a more comprehensive exploration of what, how, or why of the phenomenon being studied. By analyzing and comparing similarities and differences among cases, the researcher is better able to develop a theoretical understanding of the study phenomenon (Ridder, 2017). I chose the multiple-case research design for this study because I wanted to explore potential similarities among the participants to substantiate findings. Other qualitative designs considered for this study were phenomenological and ethnography. Researchers use the phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences and recollections of a concept or a phenomenon among a

group of individuals (Yin, 2018). The phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study, as I was not seeking to study a group's lived experiences. Ethnographic researchers study groups in a natural setting and explore how group members establish and maintain their culture (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I did not consider the ethnographic design, as I was not seeking to study participants' cultures or beliefs.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do manufacturing business managers use to increase employee engagement?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies have you used to increase employee engagement in your manufacturing business?
2. What were the challenges you encountered in implementing strategies to increase employee engagement?
3. How did you address the key challenges you encountered in implementing strategies to increase employee engagement?
4. What strategy did you find worked best to increase operational efficiency in your manufacturing business?
5. How did the strategies influence employee engagement to increase productivity in your manufacturing business?
6. How did you measure the effectiveness of strategies to increase employee engagement?

7. What additional information or comments would you like to share regarding the strategies necessary to increase employee engagement in your manufacturing business?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory was the conceptual framework for this study. The theory provided a lens to explore the strategies manufacturing business managers use to increase employee engagement. Kahn developed the personal engagement theory in 1990 to provide an understanding of the different levels of engagement individuals exhibited during role performance. Kahn suggested that varying levels of personal engagement occur in moments in which people have immersed or removed themselves from certain task behaviors. Kahn identified the main concepts of the personal engagement theory as (a) psychological meaningfulness, (b) psychological safety, and (c) psychological availability, suggesting that these psychological conditions should be present to explain moments of personal engagement or disengagement.

A key proposition of Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory is that, when fully engaged, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance when they believe the tasks are meaningful and safe with resources available to complete the tasks. For employees to engage fully in their work roles, they should have access to optimal working conditions. Psychologically present employees are committed and attentive to assigned tasks and establish positive connections with other employees, fostering positive outcomes (Ramsey et al., 2015). By using the personal engagement theory, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of how some manufacturing business managers use strategies to increase employee engagement.



## **Operational Definitions**

*Cognitive engagement:* Mental absorption in role activities attentiveness and vigilance for opportunities to enhance role performance (Newton & LePine, 2018).

*Employee performance:* The degree of accomplishments and achievement of organizational goals by employees at work (Ameer, 2017).

*Meaningfulness:* An individual's perception that they are valued and receiving a positive return on their investment in their roles (Allam, 2017).

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

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are beliefs the researcher assumes to be true without verification (Wolgemuth et al., 2017). According to Greener (2018), it is essential for a researcher to outline the research assumptions to withstand rigor and avoid misleading readers into accepting research data without verification. I made three assumptions at the beginning of this study (a) that the study participants would understand the interview questions and provide honest and accurate answers, (b) that the qualitative research method was the most appropriate for exploring strategies that manufacturing business managers use to increase employee engagement, and (c) that the study's findings might support successful implementation of strategies to increase employee engagement.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are potential weaknesses in a study beyond the researcher's control (Rimando et al., 2015). I identified two limitations of this study. First, employee engagement in the manufacturing sector and region may differ from other industries and regions. As such, the results of the study may not be transferable to other sectors. In

addition, participants' biases and inability to recall events accurately may have influenced their responses to the interview questions.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are boundaries that researchers impose to narrow a study's scope (Qiu & Gullett, 2017). A delimitation of the study is that it was conducted solely in the manufacturing industry. There may be value in evaluating strategies to increase employee engagement in other sectors, but I did not consider other sectors in this study because of time constraints. Another delimitation was the geographic location of the companies in the southeastern region of Jamaica. Therefore, the information may not align with other demographic areas. Future researchers could explore conducting similar studies in other regions of Jamaica. The third delimitation was the data collection techniques selected for the study. I used semistructured interviews and a review of company documents to collect data.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The research findings may contribute to business practices by providing manufacturing business managers with new insight regarding effective strategies to increase employee engagement. Business leaders who apply these strategies may contribute to their firms' competitiveness and success through improved performance from a motivated and engaged workforce. The study findings may also be significant to effective business practices by providing strategies for business leaders to lower operational costs, improve operational efficiency, increase productivity, and increase profit margins.

## **Implications for Social Change**

Social change involves creating positive outcomes for society (Sharma & Monteiro, 2016). The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by increasing manufacturing business managers' understanding of strategies to increase employee engagement. With this knowledge, managers may be able to increase productivity leading to the sustainability of manufacturing businesses and positive economic growth for Jamaica. Leaders can potentially redistribute profits from successful manufacturing into business expansion and the funding of projects to improve the social well-being of local community residents, such as after-school programs, community centers for training and skills development, parks and recreational areas, and affordable housing. With a strong manufacturing sector, local communities may benefit from an increase in employment opportunities and income stability for residences and stable economic support for the local community. An increase in employment, higher wages, and availability of manufacturing goods at a reduced price can lead to a rise in consumer spending and satisfied and happy employees and their families, thus enhancing the human and social well-being of community residents and society as a whole.

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

A top priority for organizational leaders is understanding the benefits of employee engagement to organizational success (Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017). Employee engagement is associated with an array of positive outcomes at the individual and organizational levels (Choudhury & Mohanty, 2018), whereas employee disengagement can cause losses in productivity (Meiyani & Putra, 2019). These findings are part of a body of research on employee engagement's impact on employee motivation and

organizational success (Hao et al., 2018; Saks & Gruman, 2014). However, there is limited research on strategies that might increase employee engagement in manufacturing organizations. MacLeod and Clarke (2011) suggested that employee engagement provides a competitive advantage critical to an organization's productivity.

Govender and Bussin (2020) offered that leaders should develop and maintain a culture that fosters and sustain employee engagement to drive performance to be competitive. Recognizing employee engagement's ability to generate desired organizational outcomes, Al Mehrzi and Sing (2016) argued that it should be in a company's interest for leaders to promote strategies that increase employee engagement intellectually and emotionally. When organizational leaders adopt strategies that result in a supportive workplace environment, they may realize improved employee performance because of employees' emotional connection to the organization (Arici, 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to gain an understanding of the strategies used by manufacturing business managers to increase employee engagement. A literature review was integral to the research and served as a comprehensive review to answer the research question. Conducting a thorough review of the literature is vital to the research's success (Dieter et al., 2017). Onwuegbuzie and Weinbaum (2017) recommended that the reviewer critically analyze and synthesize the literature and summarize the information extracted.

I organized the literature into three sections based on key themes from the literature. In the first section, I present an overview of employee engagement and provide a critical analysis and synthesis of the literature related to Kahn's (1990) theory of personal engagement theory, the conceptual framework for this study. I follow with a

discussion of cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement and the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability that are the foundation for an understanding of personal engagement at work. In the second section, I explore alternative theories of employee engagement, such as the social exchange theory and the job demands-resource theory. The final section includes an in-depth discussion and synthesis of antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement, such as perceived organizational support, organization citizenship behavior, person-organization fit, leadership, performance, and productivity.

Academic databases that I used to search for articles related to the study included ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest Central, EBSCO Primary, and SAGE Premier. Academic journals used for this study included *Journal of Operations Management*, *Emerald Management Journals*, *International Journal of Production Research*, *International Journal of Management*, *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness*, *Business Process Management Journal*, *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, *Journal of Engineering Education*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, and *International Journal of Human Resource Management*. In my database searches, I used keywords that included *employee engagement*, *work engagement*, *employee disengagement*, *operational efficiency*, *motivation*, *organizational commitment*, *performance*, *productivity*, *competitive advantage*, *organizational outcome*, *cognitive*, *psychological meaningfulness*, *safety*, *availability*, and *organizational citizenship behavior*. The literature review includes 106 references. Of these sources, 99, representing 94.0%, were scholarly peer-reviewed articles, and 91, representing 85.5%, were published within 5 years of my target

completion date of 2022 (i.e., 2017 to 2021). The literature review begins with an overview of employee engagement to support the conceptual framework for this study.

### **Overview of Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement has gained increased attention from scholars and practitioners over the last 25 years (Albrecht et al., 2015). According to Osborne and Hammoud (2017), employee engagement affects productivity levels and enhances employees' commitment and willingness to extend themselves to the organization's benefit (Karanges et al., 2015). Despite numerous studies on engagement, there remains confusion and a lack of consistency in employee engagement definitions, measures, antecedents, and outcomes (Bailey et al., 2017). This confusion about employee engagement has resulted in numerous definitions and explanations (Allam, 2017). "Employee engagement" is interchangeable with "work engagement," "personal engagement," "role engagement," and "job engagement" (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015).

Although Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of employee engagement has informed research, Kahn's personal engagement theory has been seldom used to assess employee engagement (Drake, 2012). Researchers continue to present explanations for antecedents and outcomes of engagement (Anitha, 2014). Wollard and Shuck (2011) recommended, however, more validation studies and suggested the need for quantitative testing of antecedents to employee engagement across various organizational sectors and settings.

### ***Definitions of Employee Engagement***

Kahn (1990) was the first to introduce employee engagement theory, labeling the term *personal engagement* and describing the construct as individuals' ability to harness themselves to their work roles cognitively, emotionally, and physically. Kahn further

stated that employees harness themselves in their work roles when the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability are present. May et al. (2004) examined the determinants and mediating effects of the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability on employees' engagement at work and found that the three psychological conditions influenced engagement. Maslach et al. (2001) defined employee engagement as the opposite of burnout. Researchers have also related work, task, or job engagement to the principle of engagement, which is the opposite of burnout (Bailey et al., 2017).

Schaufeli et al. (2002) extended the definition of employee engagement and identified vigor, absorption, and dedication as three factors central to employee engagement. Similarities exist between Schaufeli et al. (2002) and Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement. According to Khalaf et al. (2019), vigor refers to high levels of energy and psychological resilience while working and compares to physical engagement, dedication denotes enthusiasm, inspiration, and pride and compares to emotional engagement, and absorption describes a pervasive and persistent state of mind similar to cognitive engagement. Christian et al. (2011) suggested that the employee's state of mind and the investment of their energies were involved in engagement and argued that Schaufeli et al.'s description reflects job satisfaction and employee commitment to the organization and burnout rather than a definition of employee engagement.

Harter et al. (2002) argued that engaged employees are more involved, more satisfied, and show increased enthusiasm for work. Saks (2006) advanced that engagement consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components associated with

individual role performance, distinguishing between job engagement and organizational engagement. Shuck and Wollard (2010), in support of Kahn's (1990) theory, defined employee engagement as the employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes. Chhetri (2017) also supported Kahn's definition of personal engagement as employees' emotional, physical, and cognitive attachment to their work.

Macey and Schneider (2008) examined various definitions and described employee engagement as (a) trait engagement (i.e., individual personality traits), (b) work involvement (i.e., satisfaction, involvement, and empowerment), and (c) organizational citizenship (i.e., extra-role behavior, proactivity, and role expansion). Additionally, Maslach and Leiter (2016) suggested that engaged employees are positive, motivated, and exhibit a state of fulfillment that results in high activation and pleasure levels. Employee engagement levels result from the individual's relationship and behavior with and at work (Lin, 2016). Macey and Schneider (2008) further argued that behavior and attitude drive the employee's level of involvement, commitment, enthusiasm, passion, focused effort, and energy. An employee might experience different engagement levels, ranging from engaged to disengaged (Chandani et al., 2016). Whereas engaged employees are passionate, enthusiastic, and actively involved in attaining the organization's goals (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019), disengaged employees lack interest, are unresponsive, and are detached emotionally (Allam, 2017).

### ***Employee Disengagement***

Employees' disengagement from their job and organization leads to increased absenteeism, low productivity, and employee burnout, research shows (Jofreh et al.,



2014). Francis and Keegan (2018) argued that employee disengagement occurs when managers and leaders of organizations fail to meet the psychological conditions necessary to satisfy basic human needs. Kahn (1990) suggested that the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability are associated with higher employee engagement and business success. Organizational leaders who experience low productivity attributed to employee disengagement might fail to meet the business's contractual obligations.

According to Bailey et al. (2017), employee disengagement is destructive to the success of businesses. Popli and Rizvi (2016) discussed the negative influence of employee disengagement on organizational growth, where there is an emotional disconnection from work as the employee work to fulfill personal needs. The disengaged employee focuses more on tasks, demotivates other employees, and has no interest in organizational goals (Anitha, 2014). Employee emotional disconnection from their work role might lead to low individual and organizational performance.

When disengaged, employees shun their responsibilities; exhibit poor performance and low morale; and often fail to take advantage of available work resources such as training, equipment, and social support from colleagues (Offord et al., 2016). Disengaged employees effortlessly, automatically, and robotically perform their roles (Knight et al., 2017). Glavas (2016) asserted that a shift in organizations' values and goals could result in employees losing trust in the company and disengaging. Kahn (1990) theorized that conditions at work might determine individuals' decision to engage and express themselves or disengage and withdraw and defend themselves.

## **Personal Engagement Theory**

Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Kahn developed the first empirical study on personal engagement, focusing on employees' psychological experiences of presenting and absenting themselves during role performances. The extent to which employees will present or absent themselves denote the level of engagement or disengagement (Kahn, 1990). Employee engagement is associated with the depth of the mental and emotional connection that employees feel toward their work (Turner, 2020). Leadership and organizational factors might affect employee satisfaction and their level of engagement and commitment to the organization.

Employees disengage at work for personal and professional reasons such as (a) lack of passion, (b) work responsibilities, or (c) ineffective leadership (Howell, 2017). Kahn (1990) argued that people employ and express different levels of themselves physically, emotionally, and cognitively when performing their roles and proposed a perspective of employee engagement grounded on their experience while at work. Kahn also sought to explore the conditions at work in which people personally engage and fully immerse themselves or disengage and withdraw. Psychologists, group theorists, and sociologists of the mid to late 1960s influenced Kahn's research (Shuck et al., 2017).

Kahn identified three psychological conditions that enable engagement and shape how people perform their roles: (a) meaningfulness, (b) safety, and (c) availability. Psychological meaningfulness refers to the individual's perception of being recognized or valued for their investment of themselves in the performance of their roles (Turner, 2020). Psychological safety is the security individuals feel to take the initiative without fearing negative consequences (Kahn, 1990). Finally, psychological availability is the feeling of

having the physical, emotional, and cognitive resources necessary to complete work tasks (Roberts & David, 2017).

When employees harness or fully immerse themselves in their job roles, they likely will be more committed and loyal to the organization. Rothmann and Welsh (2013) found that psychological meaningfulness and availability were essential mediators between work role adjustment, work enrichment, resources and relationships with workers, and employees' commitment. Allam (2017) found that psychological conditions generate positive outcomes at the individual level of personal growth, organizational performance, and work quality.

Psychological conditions at work often shape employee behavior. In engagement, employee behavior differs from behavior with other employee role constructs such as job involvement, commitment, or intrinsic motivation (Kahn, 1990). According to Kahn (1990), engagement is a motivational process with fluctuations according to how employees express themselves during moments of role performances. Moments of engagement occur when employees invest their physical, emotional, and intellectual energies, shaped by the extent to which they feel a sense of meaningfulness, safety, and availability of resources to engage in work-related tasks (Francis & Keegan, 2018).

Bailey et al. (2017) asserted that in engagement, the authenticity of an employee's expression of self in role performance is the opposite of disengagement, whereby the individual uncouples their true self and suppresses their involvement in-role performance. The employee's complete cognitive, emotional, and physical immersion in their work is the peak of positive employee attitudes (Thompson et al., 2015). Conversely, the disengaged employee exhibits negative work behavior that might adversely affect

performance. The more employees cognitively engage in their job, the greater the overall perception of psychological well-being (Joo et al., 2017).

### ***Cognitive Engagement***

Cognitive engagement occurs when employees are mentally absorbed in their role activities, attentive, and vigilant regarding enhancing role performance (Newton & LePine, 2018). Cognitively engaged employees tend to be more concerned about their organization, leaders, and working conditions (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Grounded conceptually in Kahn's (1990) understanding of engagement's psychological phenomenon, the employee level of cognitive engagement is influenced by meaningfulness, safety, and resource availability. Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) suggested that cognitive availability results in emotional investment and positive physical behavior. Conversely, employees will disengage when they are cognitively unavailable and fail to experience a positive state of mind, and their needs are unmet. May et al. (2004) stated that employee engagement includes cognition and flexible emotions and behaviors.

### ***Emotional Engagement***

Emotional engagement reflects the level of emotional energy and resources that employees are willing to commit to their work roles (Newton & LePine, 2018). Emotionally engaged employees often display a profound, positive emotional connection to their roles and are more likely to show attentiveness and mental absorption in their work (Knight et al., 2017). Engaged individuals are energetic and enthusiastic about their work, proud of their work accomplishments, and interested in and optimistic about the tasks they perform (Newton & LePine, 2018). Employees who emotionally engage are committed and care more about their job and the organization's goals. Simultaneous use

of cognitive, emotional, and physical resources is necessary to achieve full engagement in-role performance (Chhajer et al., 2018). Kahn (1990) suggested that cognitive and emotive forces precede physical engagement.

### ***Physical Engagement***

Turner (2020) described the physical aspects of engagement as employees' willingness to allocate effort, behaviors, and actions to role-related activities, which involve extra energy and vigor. Some researchers have argued that physical and cognitive resources are precursors to personal engagement (Rich et al., 2010). The connection between physical and cognitive resources is consistent with Kahn's (1990) theory that physical exertion, cognition, and emotion be present for people to employ or express themselves.

Allam (2017) asserted that engaged employees put considerable effort into their work because they identify with their work role. The extent to which employees fully engage and identify with their work relates to the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability (Kahn, 1990). Depending on the level of psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability of job resources required to perform roles, people will differ in their level of personal engagement (Chaudhary, 2019).

### **Kahn's Psychological Conditions**

Allam (2017) defined psychological presence as feeling connected, attentive, integrated, and focused on their role performance. People vary in their level of personal engagement according to how they perceive the benefits or meaningfulness and the guarantees or safety they will experience in situations (Newton & LePine, 2018).

Likewise, engagement varies according to the resources employees perceive to have available. When present, the psychological conditions influence employees to engage personally and, when absent, influence them to (Anand, 2017) personally. These conditions determine how individuals will simultaneously apply their energies and self-expression in their role performance (Kahn, 1990, 1992).

### ***Psychological Meaningfulness***

How employees engage or disengage in their jobs depends on how they value their experience on the job. Employees experience psychological meaningfulness at work when they experience a sense of return on their self-investment in the performance of their roles (Allam, 2017). Kahn (1990) argued that employees would consciously or unconsciously question how meaningful it is for them to engage in a role, how safe to engage in the role, and how available they are to engage in a role. Meaningfulness is the sense that one's performance and accomplishments at work are valued and worthwhile (Cai et al., 2018).

Maslow (1943) argued that individuals who do not believe their work is valued, meaningful, and purposeful would not perform up to their professional potential. Increased performance results from a feeling of satisfaction from expressing oneself physically, cognitively, and emotionally; one is treated fairly and makes a genuine difference in the organization (Albrecht et al., 2015). Hager (2018) posited that the experience of meaningfulness ascends if employees perceive an authentic link between their daily work and a broader transcendent life purpose beyond the self. Psychological meaningfulness is present when work elements create incentives or disincentives to

engage personally (Chaudhary & Panda, 2018). In manufacturing organizations, incentives might lead to increased production and operator efficiency.

In addition to incentives, Kahn (1990) found that task characteristics, role characteristics, and work interactions influence psychological meaningfulness. Kahn asserted that when the task is challenging, clear, varied, and creative, and there is the freedom to exercise some autonomy level, employees will more than likely experience psychological meaningfulness. Kahn further stated that when employees perceive that their job tasks have a substantial influence on others' life or work, they experience a sense of meaningfulness. Employees are willing to invest their complete selves into their work roles when they experience meaningfulness at their jobs (Kahn, 1990). Roles are associated with status and influence and might contribute to meaningfulness. Individuals often identify with their work role regardless of their like or dislike for the role. The psychological condition of meaningfulness leads to rewarding interactions. Work interactions include interpersonal relationships between employees and enable knowledge sharing, allowing meaning and relatedness (Albrecht et al., 2015; Kahn, 1990).

Meaningfulness was consistent with value congruence. Value congruence refers to how organizational values match employees' behaviors and values (Albrecht et al., 2015). Saxena and Srivastava (2015) found that employee engagement was associated with the employee's level of involvement towards the organization and its values. Deci and Ryan (2000) defined relatedness as the employees' innate need to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness with other individuals and workgroups. Relatedness drives behavioral outcomes. When employees experience relatedness, their authenticity and commitment reflect their intrinsic motivation; they feel comfortable expressing

themselves to others, fostering positive team spirit (Rahmadani et al., 2019). Kahn (1990) emphasized that employees are motivated to engage or disengage according to how psychologically safe it is to express themselves in-role performance.

### ***Psychological Safety***

Employee engagement will flourish in an organizational culture that fosters psychological safety. Psychological safety is the security individuals feel to take the initiative to express themselves without the fear of negative consequences to their self-image, status, or career (Kahn, 1990; Newton & LePine, 2018). Openness and supportiveness encourage a feeling of safety. Employees who perceive a trusting and supportive work environment feel more psychologically secure and are more willing to invest their true selves in their work roles without fear of negative consequences (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990) argued that people would feel unsafe when they feel disconnected from others.

Kahn (1990) identified four factors that influence psychological safety (a) interpersonal relationships, (b) group and intergroup dynamics, (c) management styles, (d) processes, and (e) organizational norms. Allied to the psychological condition of meaningfulness, which utilizes interpersonal relationships as an organizational factor related to role performance, safety includes interpersonal relationships, which lead to developing and retaining relationships between parties (Byrne, 2015). Kahn suggested that interpersonal relationships promote safety when they are supportive and trusting.

O'Donovan and McAuliffe (2020) found that positive interpersonal relationships improve psychological safety within work teams. A healthy interpersonal relationship allows for trial-and-error and flexibility and encourages employees to fail without fear.



While supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships might foster psychological safety, a feeling of safety does not imply the absence of conflict or problems (Edmonson, 2003). Interpersonal relationships and the relatedness among parties are critical factors for employees to feel safe from their environment's endorsement (Gagné & Howard, 2016). While interpersonal relationships are related to relatedness (Kahn, 1990), safety is the perception of an organizational social system that supports employees and the relationships cultivated between parties (Byrne, 2015). Rich et al. (2010) added that safety describes a sense of belongingness between an organization and people that shape the culture's social reality. Leaders who foster a psychologically safe environment might encourage employees to take on new roles and share more.

Group and intergroup dynamics indicate roles employees assume that characterize a group's functioning (Kahn, 1990). Members might play specific roles within groups based on expectations, authority, and competition that create successful group functioning (Kahn, 1990). For example, one employee might assume a leadership role while another might take the strategic planner's role. Members allow themselves to move safely into in-role performance depending on the level of respect and authority received from other group members (Kahn, 1990).

Management styles and processes encourage employees' potential by developing their capabilities. As leaders loosen their hold over employee behaviors, they encourage personal engagement because employees do not fear the negative consequences of expressing themselves (Kahn, 1990). By reducing control over employees' positive work behaviors, they exude a sense of trust towards the employee and increase personal growth (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Supportive and resilient management will heighten psychological

safety (Abbas et al., 2014). Management styles that are inconsistent or unpredictable might be detrimental to employee engagement.

Openness and supportiveness encourage a feeling of safety. Kahn suggested that people did not feel safe when disconnected from others (Kahn, 1990). Newton and LePine (2018) argued that individuals should feel safe to take the initiative without fearing negative consequences. May et al. (2004) stated that positive supervisory relations influence psychological safety. These supportive environments allow employees to feel comfortable innovating and trying new things without the fear of reprisal from management (Kahn, 1990).

The final factor influencing psychological safety is organizational norms. Kahn (1990) described organizational norms as expected behaviors within the boundaries of organizational and cultural standards. Organizational norms guide employee behavior at work. Conducting oneself within these norms reduces anxiety, frustration, and negative consequences (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004). This behavioral context suggests that individuals, groups, and organizations internally regulate positive social behaviors to provide a system of normative processes and self-regulation that support, rather than deter, positive in-role performance (May et al., 2004; Schaufeli, 2012). Kahn found that the employee level of psychological availability at work leads to positive in-role performance.

### ***Psychological Availability***

Psychological availability is the feeling of possessing the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary to complete work tasks (Cai et al., 2018). Employees are psychologically available when there is confidence in their abilities, status, and self-

awareness (Kahn, 1990; Rich et al., 2010). Employee engagement is more about trust in one's working environment and allowing the authentic self to emerge (Kahn, 1990). Newton and LePine (2018) suggested that to be psychologically available, employees should possess the knowledge and skills to do their work or have the resources necessary to engage in roles. Without the essential resources, employees cannot contribute to organizational goals and engage in their work roles.

Harter et al. (2002) suggested that available tangible resources are resources for task completion, supplies, and financial resources. Intangible availability resources include job fit, learning and skill development opportunities, and organizational commitment (Mackay et al., 2017). Being psychologically available at work is significant for task completion and handling work-related pressures (Singh & Singh, 2018). LaMar (2017) examined the impact of the availability of resources and coworker relations on employee engagement and found a strong correlation between work-role fit and job enrichment with employee engagement. Psychological availability refers to individual distractions that preoccupied people to various degrees and left them with adequate or inadequate resources to engage in role performances (Kahn, 1990). Kahn found four distractions that influence availability: (a) depletion of physical energy, (b) depletion of emotional energy, (c) individual insecurity, and (d) outside life. These distractions may limit employees' ability to fully engage in their work roles.

Physical energy refers to the lack of physical energy, strength, and readiness necessary to engage (Kahn, 1990). As with emotional energy, insecurity, and outside life, employees disengage from depletion or total lack of physical energy (Kahn, 1990; Thurgood & Barrick, 2015). Kahn (1990) contended that employees experience a

depletion of emotional energy from exhaustion and frustration with one's jobs or workplace events. Distraction from a lack of emotional energy is the unavailability of resources needed to appraise one's self-worth and emotional stability (Rich et al., 2010). This depletion of emotional energy might eventually lead employees to become unavailable and disengaged from their tasks.

People are psychologically available when they feel secure about their work and status. Kahn (1990) suggested that employees might experience insecurity based on how they feel about their work and status. Competence in one's job may play a role in how available an employee is to perform work-related tasks; competence results from experience, knowledge, and confidence in one's abilities (Spell et al., 2014). Employees who perceive themselves as possessing higher competence levels are more confident and motivated to engage and increase their performance (Simbula et al., 2011). Additionally, employees with high competence skills feel secure in their abilities when presented with new tasks or organizational opportunities. Conversely, Kahn surmised that employees who perceive themselves to have low competence levels might feel insecure, focus on how others might judge them, become distracted in their roles, and disengage.

Kahn (1990) concluded that if employees are involved in activities outside of work, they might divide their efforts between work and activities outside, which might take employees psychologically away from role performances. May et al. (2004) added that employee activities outside the workplace, such as membership in other organizations, might detract from the employee's role performance. When Employees divide their energy between work and outside life, they are less likely to be psychologically available to fulfill their work roles (Rothmann & Baumann, 2014).

### **Researchers View of Kahn's Personal Engagement Theory**

Research regarding employee engagement has gained tremendous attention from researchers for the past 30 years (Leon, 2021; Macey & Schneider (2008). Kahn (1990) published his seminal research on personal engagement and disengagement in 1990, focusing on employees' psychological experiences of presenting and absenting themselves during role performances. Since then, engagement in its many forms such as, work, job, employee, and/or organizational has received unprecedented attention (Fletcher et al., 2020). Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as people employ themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically in their roles when the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability of resources are met. To strengthen Kahn's theory of engagement, May et al.(2004) tested Kahn's theory and found that psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability of resources contributed to employee engagement.

Kahn's theory also gained support from Saad et al. (2018) who clarified Kahn's definition by suggesting that engagement characteristics include an individuals' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed towards the organizational outcomes. Bakker and Albrecht (2018) added that vigor, dedication, cognitive engagement, and absorption are factors that are vital for employee engagement. Post 1990, employee engagement research has yielded multiple operationalization and conceptualizations, exposing putting at risk the engagement concept to misinterpretations and confusion (Shuck et al., 2021). One of the first challenges presented by the literature is the lack of a universal definition of employee engagement.

Support for Kahn's definition came from Truss et al. (2006) who define employee engagement simply as 'passion for work', a psychological state which is seen to encompass the three dimensions of engagement discussed by Kahn (1990). Robertson-Smith and Markwick (2009) explained that engagement is an important yet complex challenge, with a great deal of scope for discussing the various approaches. Conversely, Ismail et al. (2021) argued that there could not be a universal definition of engagement because engagement hinges on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Despite the differences in the definition of engagement, recent literature on engagement indicates a link between engagement and positive organizational outcomes (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). However, new strategies and new philosophies have emerged in the last years to help organizations to succeed with fewer resources (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Beyond definition and measurement, there remains more to know and understand about employee engagement (Shuck et al., 2021). According to Harter et al. (2002), employee engagement connections with business results (Harter et al., 2002) make it very vital research topic for scholars and practitioners.

### **Studies With Kahn's Personal Engagement Theory as a Conceptual Framework**

Additional studies using the personal engagement theory focused on the relationship between leadership and employee engagement. Walters and Diab (2016) incorporated the personal engagement theory to explore how leadership humility (humble leadership) influences psychological safety and employee engagement. The authors identified employee engagement and followers' psychological safety as two critical variables to leadership success (Walters & Diab, 2016). A psychologically safe environment often provides a basis for interpersonal trust and followers' engagement

(Wang et al., 2018). The findings revealed that psychological safety mediates the relationship between humble leadership and employee engagement (Walters & Diab, 2016). In support of Walters and Diab, Ren et al. (2020) added that a leader's psychological traits, such as humility, overconfident personality, and optimism, directly or indirectly affect decision-making. Similarly, Herminingsih (2017) posited that leadership dynamics, trust, and communication determine leadership performance and effectiveness.

Compared with other psychological attributes, humble leaders are honest about their limitations and errors, are good at recognizing the advantages and contributions of subordinates, and are teachable (Jiang et al., 2019). By acknowledging their limitations, recognizing followers' strengths, and being teachable, humble leaders can create a safe environment where followers can act without fear of negative consequences and fully engage in their work (Walters & Diab, 2016). Walters and Diab (2016) also found that businesses with greater leadership humility were associated with higher employee engagement. Lu et al. (2018) posited that leadership behaviors could shape the employee's perception of the work environment and determine their response behaviors to engage or disengage. However, Owens and Hekman (2012) argued that humility could hinder leaders' success when a leader is incompetent or insincere. Bhatia and Bhatia (2020) added that despite playing a central role in employee motivation, humble leadership effectiveness on employee engagement still lacks rigorous empirical study.

Ismail et al. (2019) used the personal engagement theory to examine the relationship between employee engagement and job performance and tested if creativity mediated engagement and performance. Employee engagement leads to performance

outcomes at the organizational and individual levels (Kahn, 1992). Organizational performance describes employees' efforts influenced by internal factors, which the company can control, and external factors beyond the company's influence (Sendawula et al., 2018). The findings indicated a positive effect of employee engagement on job performance and that creativity mediated the relationship between engagement and performance (Ismail et al., 2019). Anitha (2014) and Carter et al. (2018) also found a significant positive relationship between employee engagement and job performance. Ismail et al. (2019) stated that employees who are highly engaged in their jobs focus their energies on constructive ideas, improving job performance and organizational success.

Despite numerous studies on performance, Schaufeli (2012) argued that research about engagement and performance is underdeveloped and calls for more research to understand the relationship between engagement and performance. Leaders are often confused in understanding employee engagement roles in the relationship between employee engagement and performance. For example, Chen (2019) identified employee engagement as a mediator between psychological capital and employee performance, while Rubel and Kee (2013) noted the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between organizational and supervisory support and employee in-role performance. Eldor (2017) recommended that leaders identify factors that impede or promote the relationship between employee engagement and performance. In identifying these factors, leaders might be better able to plan and implement strategies to increase employee engagement and performance outcomes.

Fletcher (2016) used the personal engagement theory to compare work engagement, personal role engagement, training perceptions, and work role performance



behaviors. The findings indicated that work engagement and personal role engagement mediated the relationship between training perceptions and task proactivity to the same degree (Fletcher, 2016). According to Organ (1994), training develops employee capabilities and motivates employees to engage in their work to achieve higher in-role (task) and extra-role (organizational citizenship behavior [OCB]) performance. Fletcher also reported that the employee perception of training positively impacts job satisfaction and commitment and reduces job-related anxiety, motivating employees to engage in their work. Dysvik and Kuvaas (2008) supported this view but argued that training influences employee engagement indirectly as engagement follows the activation of a motivational process that channels energy and effort toward tasks.

According to Elnaga and Imran (2013), businesses invest annually in employee training activities to build up employees' skills and competency levels to perform the assigned roles and responsibilities effectively. Employees perceive the investment in training as evidence of the organization's commitment to their career advancement (Fletcher, 2016) and might be motivated to engage and improve their performance for the organization's benefit.

## **Alternative Theories**

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

The central premise of the social exchange theory (SET) is that of reciprocity (Eisenberger et al., 1986), which is a mutual exchange of resources or a transactional relationship between two parties (Gilliam & Rayburn, 2016). Homans (1958) conceived SET to study the relationship or interactions between individuals exchanging resources. The exchange is contingent on a cost-benefit relationship in which each party assesses

whether the exchange's benefits are more significant than the exchange's costs (Nunkoo, 2016). The employee's decision to engage or disengage is determined by the level of benefits received from the organization.

The main features of SET are trust and a sense of obligation or dependence between leaders and followers (Oparaocha, 2016). Relationships develop into mutual, loyal, and fulfilling commitments when involved parties operate within the agreed norms (Blau, 1964). This feeling of obligation stems from the assumption that employees feel a sense of perceived organizational support, which might influence the quality of social exchanges between employers and employees (Oparaocha, 2016).

There is much confusion and theoretical debate about SET. Homans (1958) contended that employee engagement is associated with the quality of resources and reciprocity. Conversely, Kahn (1990) argued that employee engagement occurs with the presence of meaningfulness, safety, and available resources. Deichmann and Stam (2015) asserted that the transactional nature of SET suggested that employees might disengage if the organization or leadership fails to satisfy employee expectations.

Saks (2006) highlighted the positive aspects of SET concerning positive employee organization relationships suggesting that the principle of reciprocity in the social exchange relationship might lead to positive employee behavior in the form of employee engagement. However, critics of the social exchange theory have argued that the exchange process's nature is based on cost and rewards, which may differ in value between different parties over time, or when compared with other people or rewards (Reissing & VanZuylen, 2015). While the central premise is based on an exchange process and cost-benefit relationship, SET is a supporting theory to the personal

engagement theory. Kahn (1990) and Homans (1958) suggested that by meeting employees' expectations, there are trust, supervisor, and organizational support, healthy relationships, and available resources, leaders might influence employees toward increased engagement.

### ***Job Demands-Resource Theory***

In contrast to Kahn's (1990) theory, researchers use the job demands-resources theory (JD-R) to explain job burnout and work engagement outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Job demands and resources include an energetic and motivational process (De Beer et al., 2013). Chronic job demands that lead to burnout and ill health constitute the energetic or health impairment process. In contrast, the motivational process indicates job resources that lead to work engagement and organizational commitment (Bailey et al., 2017). Employees might be motivated to engage when resources are available. Conversely, a lack of job resources might lead to disengagement. Bakker and Albrecht (2018) proposed that job characteristics combined with personal resources predict job performance through employee engagement.

Job demands are the physical, social, psychological, or organizational features of a job that include job security, work overload, role conflict, role ambiguity, and time pressure and require the employee's sustained mental, physical, and psychological effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The availability of job-related and personal job resources fulfills the employee's work goals, reduces job demands, and stimulates personal growth, learning, and development (Bailey et al., 2017). Job resources might include autonomy, skill variety, performance feedback, and growth opportunities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

The JD-R theory contrasts with Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory. While there are some similarities, the theories have very different scientific backgrounds. Researchers use the JD-R theory to focus on how resources energize employees who enhance engagement resulting in positive organizational outcomes (Bailey et al., 2017). With the JD-R theory, one of the resources is physical resources. Kahn discussed physical resources as one of the characteristics of psychological availability but suggested that the psychological conditions of meaningfulness and safety should also be present for full engagement. The more resources an employee has, the higher the level of engagement.

Despite its wide use in research, Saks and Gruman (2014) argued that the JD-R theory is less theoretical and not a wide enough lens to examine employee engagement. The personal engagement theory is more appropriate for this study as Kahn (1990) specifies the psychological conditions that lead to engagement and the factors that influence each of the psychological conditions. Saks and Gruman (2014) proposed that the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability, combined with job demands and job resources, provide a better engagement framework than the JD-R theory.

### **Antecedents of Employee Engagement**

Various antecedents influence employee engagement. Understanding the relationships between employee engagement and its antecedents might give leaders the tools to develop strategies to increase employee engagement. Job resources, job design, positive psychological states, leadership, and positive perceptions of leaders and organizations are associated with higher engagement (Bailey et al., 2017). Kahn (1990)

suggested that the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability foster employee engagement levels. May et al. (2004) researched Kahn's personal engagement theory and found meaningfulness, safety, and availability significantly related to engagement. Based on Kahn's engagement theory, perceived organizational support and person-organization fit are critical antecedents of employee engagement.

### ***Perceived Organizational and Supervisor Support***

Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to the degree to which employees believe that the organization cares about their well-being and that their contributions are valued (Krishnan & Wesley, 2018; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). When employees perceive that their organization cares about their welfare, they are more likely to respond by immersing themselves more into their job roles to fulfill their obligations to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Park et al. (2019) found that organizational, supervisor, and coworker support were key predictors of employee engagement in their study of work engagement antecedents.

POS is a crucial determinant of psychological safety that fosters engagement (Frazier et al., 2017). Psychological safety stems from the care and support the organization and supervisor provide to the employee. The more supportive the environment, the more confident employees might feel to try new things without fear. Employees might experience care and support when provided with favorable job conditions, including training, job design, autonomy, job security, and rewards and recognition (Krishnan & Wesley, 2018). A study by Nazir and Islam (2017) revealed a positive relationship between POS and employee performance.

Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2011) proposed that POS positively influences work engagement by reinforcing employees' intrinsic interest in their tasks. Work environments that are open and supportive might provide a safe place for employee engagement. Kahn (1990) found that trusting and supportive interpersonal relationships and supportive management influenced psychological safety. Kahn described psychological safety as the sense of security employees feel to express themselves without fearing negative consequences. May et al.'s (2004) empirical study of Kahn's theory of engagement highlighted a positive relationship between supportive supervisor relations and psychological safety.

Perceived supervisory support is the degree to which employees form impressions that their superiors care about their well-being, value their contributions, and are supportive (Eisenberger et al., 1986). According to Bhanthumnavian (2003), supervisory support includes emotional support, such as showing empathy, acceptance, and care; informative support, such as giving feedback or guidance and material support, such as resources and tangible assistance to improve the employee's motivation, performance, and effectiveness. Employees who have a high perception of supervisory support can perform according to the organization's expectations and perform beyond job execution (Hochwarter et al., 2003).

Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found that higher POS levels result in higher employee engagement and commitment to the organization. Employees who experience high POS might feel obliged to reciprocate and help the organization reach its objectives. Neihoff and Moorman (1993) asserted that when employees go beyond their job duties and support their coworkers to accomplish their tasks and the organization's goals, they

are citizens of the organization and exhibit organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). POS facilitates employee engagement and organizational citizenship behavior. Fan et al. (2019) found that supportive supervision positively influences organizational citizenship behavior.

**Organizational Citizenship Behavior.** Employees' OCB is an essential driver of organizational effectiveness (Heimann et al., 2021). Organ (1988) defined OCB as attitudes beyond formal job requirements. Askari et al. (2020) asserted that employees with an OCB perform beyond their regular duty and channel their efforts, energy, and insight into activities for the organization's benefit. For example, employees might prioritize their responsibilities in the interests of others over their interests. Kahn (1990) suggested that employees highly engaged in their work roles concentrate on physical effort for role-related goals and are cognitively and emotionally immersed in their endeavors. OCB can benefit the organization's success by improving organizational efficiency and effectiveness through innovativeness and resource transformation (Al Ahad & Khan, 2020).

POS positively predicts well-being and engagement (Caesens et al., 2016; Kurtessis et al., 2017), while employee engagement leads to increased organizational citizenship behavior (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Reynolds et al. (2015) found that OCB contributes to individual performance, team performance, and team commitment. When employees feel valued by the organization and leaders, their commitment level improves, and OCB is enhanced, leading to higher engagement (Wu & Lee, 2017). Given the positive implications of OCB, leaders should recognize the predictors of these behaviors as vital to organizational success.

### ***Person-Organization Fit***

Krishnan and Wesley (2018) described the person-organization fit (PO-fit) as the compatibility between employees and organizations. According to Afsar and Badir (2017), if employees hold values incongruent with the organization, it might lead to stress, absenteeism, and negative attitudes. Compatibility between employees and organizations might be higher when employers consider employee engagement and PO-fit at the recruitment and selection stage. Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) argued that PO-fit occurs when at least one party delivers what the other requires or shares similar fundamental characteristics.

Judge and Ferris (1992) proposed that organizations seek to recruit employees whose abilities fit the job requirements to achieve a PO-fit. When employees perceive they fit with their organization, they perform their job effectively and efficiently by fully engaging in their roles (Hamid & Yahy, 2011). Conversely, employees with low P-O fit are less likely to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviors (Afsar & Badir, 2017). Cable and DeRue (2002) and Greguras and Diefendorff (2009) found that PO-fit is more concerned with organizational outcomes than job-focused outcomes.

PO-fit is an antecedent in Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement and enhances psychological safety among employees (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Rich et al., 2010). As safety is one of the conditions of employee engagement, PO-fit is positively associated with employee engagement. Kahn's theory proposed that PO-fit is the fit between behaviors expected by an organization and behaviors that employees value (Kristof, 1996). Employees with a high PO-fit reciprocate the organization's support and fairness in positive work behaviors (Afsar & Badir, 2017). Edwards (1991) contended



that PO-fit research focuses on the fit between the employee's personal needs and abilities and supplies and demands at the job. Edwards further described needs as employees' desires, goals, values, interests, preferences, aptitudes, experience, and education as abilities.

Employees with a positive perception of their organization are more likely to display positive behaviors beyond their regular job responsibility (Memon et al., 2015). Organizations function within a dynamic and changing environment that might require employees to change tasks and transfer quickly between tasks or teams; hence, employees' personalities should align with the overall culture rather than the characteristics of any specific job (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013). According to Krishnan and Wesley (2018), the higher the PO-fit level, the higher the level of employee engagement.

### **Outcomes of Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement leads to positive performance outcomes at the individual and organizational levels (Kahn, 1990), including job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational commitment (Saks, 2006). Hermawan et al. (2020) suggested that engaged employees develop positive feelings toward their company, resulting in improved performance. Leaders who engage their employees might receive, in return, increased performance and productivity (Kumar & Pansari, 2016).

### ***Performance***

Employee engagement influences organizational performance and is critical to organizational success (Jauhari et al., 2017). According to Ellinger et al. (2008), Job performance refers to the behaviors relevant to the organizational goals and under the

individual employee's control. Ameer (2017) described employee performance as the degree of achievement of organizational goals by an employee. Engaged employees develop positive connections to their job and organization and are motivated to fully engage and increase their performance (Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

According to Nasurdin et al. (2018), engaged employees possess a high level of energy, and they are eager to carry out their job responsibilities, which will lead to positive work outcomes and increased performance. Rich et al. (2010) argued that, despite the various research on employee engagement, investments of cognitive, emotional, and physical energy as embodied in Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory provides a more holistic and comprehensive explanation for job engagement. Kahn described engagement as an essential construct that refers to harnessing an employee's whole self in terms of physical, cognitive, and emotional energies to work role performance.

Bailey et al. (2017) found that employee engagement positively correlates with in-role and extra-role performance, employee morale, and organizational performance. An engaged workforce is energetic, enthusiastic, absorbed, dedicated, and fulfilled in their job (Eldor, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017) and exhibits a solid commitment to the organization and a desire to remain with the organization (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). van der Walt (2018) contended that firms that sustain high performance should achieve a competitive advantage.

Employee engagement relates to the outcomes and accomplishments employees achieve at work, while performance refers to the extent to which employees keep up with plans while aiming for results (Anitha, 2014). The engaged employee expresses a high

commitment to their job, resulting in increased performance (Sarangi & Nayak, 2016). To study the relationship between employee engagement and performance, Harter et al. (2002) examined performance outcomes, including productivity, customer loyalty, engagement, profitability, employee turnover, quality, and safety incidents. The findings revealed that employee engagement positively impacts each performance outcome studied.

Bailey et al. (2017) investigated the meaning, antecedents, and consequences of engagement and found that engagement is related positively to individual morale, task performance, organizational performance, and extra-role performance. In the manufacturing sector, employee engagement positively affects businesses' sustainability, leading to increased performance (Mokaya & Kipyegon, 2014), and is key to maintaining the organization's survival and vitality (Albrecht et al., 2015; Farndale & Murrer, 2015). Manufacturing businesses' survival depends on a team of dedicated stakeholders working to ensure the efficient production of goods and services.

Rezaei et al. (2018) recommended that business leaders increase their performance levels to survive in the global marketplace. According to Lai et al. (2020), transformational leaders provide holistic and collective goals for followers and convince them that these goals are meaningful. Leaders who communicate effectively and provide support can increase employee engagement, leading to enhanced performance at work (García-Carbonell et al., 2018). Furthermore, providing tangible and intangible resources enhances members' desire to be psychologically present at work (Lai et al., 2020). An engaged employee attains personal and organizational goals and stays committed to the

organization. Sekhar et al. (2017) found that individuals engaged with their work also have a higher sense of involvement in their organizational activities.

The competitiveness of firms is associated with the level of employee engagement in the organization. Guaspari (2015) noted a strong positive correlation between high employee engagement levels and better business performance. Anitha (2014) researched the critical determinants of employee engagement and the impact on performance. The findings indicated a strong relationship between employee engagement and employee performance, a significant predictor of productivity.

### ***Productivity***

Productivity is an outcome of employee engagement and an essential indicator for measuring the growth and efficiency of production processes in manufacturing organizations (Jung et al., 2020). Agarwal (2017) described employee engagement as an engine that drives employees to achieve productivity at an optimized level. Increased employee engagement leads to organizational outcomes that include productivity, profitability, customer satisfaction, and reduced turnover (Rana, 2019). Successful leaders should approach their business with a productivity mindset and focus on removing all obstacles that might affect employees' engagement, commitment, and performance.

In manufacturing organizations, employee commitment translates into increased efficiency and productivity. Business leaders often view efficiency and productivity as synonyms, but there are differences relating to strategies. For example, productivity refers to employees' continuous efforts to convert inputs into outputs to produce goods and services using minimum inputs (Moletsane et al., 2019). Likewise, Syverson (2017)

defines productivity as the output of goods and services produced with production inputs. Leaders can measure productivity by subtracting expenses from revenues and dividing that number by employees (Oliver, 2018). Suhartanto and Brien (2018) found that productivity increases when employees engage psychologically and immerse themselves fully in their jobs.

Productivity and efficiency are critical indicators of the organization and a country's financial health and describe the state or level at which a manufacturing firm produces the most significant number of units while utilizing the least resources (Parvez, 2020). Productivity aligns with a country's living standards and is associated with business performance (Orzes et al., 2020). Countries realize economic growth as productivity levels increase. Engaged employees work efficiently, thereby reducing personnel costs to the firm, such as recruitment and training costs. These cost reductions can increase the firm's performance measures (Kumar & Pansari, 2016).

Harter et al. (2002) found a significant relationship between employee engagement and productivity, customer satisfaction, profit, and employee turnover. These factors, when present, may lead to higher efficiency levels in organizations. Efficiency is total labor costs divided by gross revenue, and employees can increase efficiency by producing more with the same or fewer resources (Langemeier, 2018). Leadership is essential to how well organizational leaders achieve productivity goals.

Leaders should aim to increase efficiency in the manufacturing industry by implementing systems to reduce labor hours required to produce the same output level. Since engagement and productivity are necessary for organizational growth, leaders should continually seek ways to motivate and engage their employees to remain with the

organization. Hartmann and Rutherford (2015) suggested that organizations with a reputation for high employee turnover might have difficulty recruiting high-quality talent. Leadership is vital in building employee engagement (Mo & Shi, 2017).

Jauhari et al. (2017) explored leadership's influence on employee customer service behavior and found that employee attitude at work was related to work performance and productivity. Kahn (1990) suggested that employees' attitude toward work improves when they perceive the task as meaningful and safe and resources are available to complete the tasks. Leaders' ability to motivate employees to be productive is critical to the success and competitiveness of firms.

Clearly defined production goals, quality standards, training, and follow-up might motivate employees to meet and exceed role requirements. Leaders compete to retain talent and continuously explore improving employees' attachment to their organization (Gupta & Shaheen, 2017). Leadership attitudes influence employees' level of attachment to the organization. Wang et al. (2017) examined the linkage between transformational leadership and work outcomes and found that transformational leaders influence employee productivity. Megha (2016) contended that leaders should create an organizational climate where employees might feel encouraged to engage and connect emotionally with the organization.

Researchers recommended a productive workplace that promotes a healthy relationship between employees and leaders (Choudhury & Mohanty, 2019). A healthy environment where leaders communicate, listen, and provide support might motivate employees and create positive feelings toward the organization, contributing to higher productivity. Mone et al. (2018) posited that the engaged employee is involved,

committed, passionate, and empowered and will demonstrate those feelings in work behavior.

A positive organizational culture and values enhance employee commitment and engagement (F. H. Ali et al., 2018). Thakur (2014) suggested that employees with the highest loyalty and commitment levels perform 20% better and are 87% less likely to leave the organization. Employees are more likely to be productive when they perceive valued and rewarded with growth and development opportunities (Rana, 2019). A feeling of value might increase employee loyalty to the organization and reduce absenteeism and turnover. A stable workforce allows organizational leaders to better plan, schedule, and manage production processes.

Internal and external factors drive productivity in a manufacturing business. According to Charles (2017), internal factors include leadership, management of manufacturing processes, physical capital, and technology, whereas external factors include competitiveness and government involvement. Leaders might improve productivity through effective recruitment and training, motivating, and inspiring leadership, and implementing lean principles (Hassanain, 2017).

Attracting and retaining employees who are compatible with the organization is an essential leadership function critical to business success (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2016). Hamid and Yahy (2011) opined that when employees perceive that they fit with the organization, their engagement and productivity will increase, remaining loyal to the organization. A stable workforce is a powerful competitive strategy for organizations as employees achieve efficiency and effectiveness by nurturing long-lasting organizational relationships and forming a level of attachment to the organization (Gupta & Shaheen,

2017). Andrew and Sofian (2012) recommended that leaders create an environment that fosters employee engagement to achieve or maintain competitive advantage and organizational success. An organization's survival depends on a balance between cost, quality, and delivery (Lee et al., 2017). Manufacturing leaders should use planning to balance production processes effectively and meet contractual deadlines.

**Production Planning.** Gao (2019) postulated that high efficiency and productivity are critical determinants of organizational success. Production planning and control are integral to the production process and include coordinating suppliers, production managers, and quality managers to achieve manufacturing goals (Szármes, 2015). According to Wang et al. (2021), production planning economically and efficiently uses resources required for production, such as labor, materials, and equipment. Efficient production planning might help a leader respond quickly to production uncertainties caused by machine downtime and absenteeism that can create instability in the production process (He et al., 2015). Leaders who know and understand production line and workflow issues might be better able to provide effective improvement solutions.

In addition to strategic decisions, production planning and scheduling are some of the biggest drivers to increase efficiency (Lohmer & Lasch, 2021). Leaders use operational performance to predict manufacturing companies' effectiveness and efficiency, manage resources and achieve production, quality, and cost goals (Al-Sa'di et al., 2017). Leaders can evaluate efficiency by assessing each phase of the production process, from the acquisition of raw materials to the consumption, assembly, or production of materials into new products. Schutz et al. (2013) proposed that proper



production planning that includes efficiently utilizing resources might improve the manufacturing process.

The complex nature of manufacturing processes requires strategic planning involving the efficient utilization of human resources, equipment, and technology in production scheduling, inventory management, workflow balancing, quality control, and meeting shipping deadlines (Bagshaw, 2020). Kang and Sung (2019) found that standard work procedures in workstation task assignments provide better work line balance and significantly positively affect product output and lead time reduction. Planning and implementing systems for capacity utilization and work line balance is integral to realizing productivity, quality, and cost goals.

### **Transition**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies some manufacturing business managers use to increase employee engagement. In Section 1, I discussed the background of the problem. Key subsections were devoted to the (a) problem statement; (b) purpose statement; (c) nature of the study; (d) research question; (e) interview questions; (f) conceptual framework; (g) assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; (h) significance of the study; and (i) a review of the professional and academic literature.

In Section 2, I restated the purpose statement for the study. I then discussed the (a) role of the researcher, (b) participants, (c) research method and research design, (d) population and sampling, (e) ethical research, (f) data collection instruments, (g) data collection technique, (h) data organization technique, (i) data analysis, and (j) reliability and validity of the study. Section 2 will also include a discussion on ethical research, data

analysis, reliability, and validity of the instruments proposed for this qualitative study.

Section 3 consisted of (a) presentation of the findings from the research, (b) application to professional practice, (c) implications for social change, (d) recommendations for action, (e) recommendations for further study, (f) reflections and (g) conclusion.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 begins with the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study. In this section, I detail the role of the researcher, participant selection process, research method and research design of this study. I also discuss the population sampling, ethical considerations in qualitative multiple-case study, data collection instruments and techniques, and provide an understanding of the organization of data collected. Finally, I discuss data analysis, and definitions and processes for determining dependability, credibility, and transferability. I close section 2 with a transition to section 3.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies some manufacturing business managers use to increase employee engagement. The targeted population for this study included four manufacturing business managers from two manufacturing businesses in the southeastern region of Jamaica who have successfully implemented strategies to increase employee engagement. The implications for positive social change include the potential for Jamaican manufacturing business managers to increase employee engagement, enhance the sustainability of manufacturing businesses, and contribute to socioeconomic development and economic stability. Manufacturing leaders could reinvest profits into business expansion, job opportunities, and community projects to improve the socioeconomic well-being of community residents.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher was critical to the success of this study. The qualitative researcher's role as the primary instrument for data collection is to gather in-depth information by exploring the thoughts and feelings of research participants and

understanding the meaning they attribute to their experiences (Clark & Vealé, 2018). Yin (2018) noted that the researcher's role in data collection involves selecting the most appropriate research method and research design; recruiting participants for the study; collecting, organizing, analyzing data; and presenting the research findings. As the researcher, I assumed responsibility for collecting research data by conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing company documents such as employee engagement reports, engagement strategy documents, production reports, employee handbooks, and news articles related to the research. I analyzed and interpreted the collected data and prepared the report of findings.

My relationship with the research topic includes over 25 years of experience in various management roles within the manufacturing industry. My job functions have allowed me to interact with manufacturing business managers and production employees and have exposed me to employers' challenges to increase employee engagement. Although I have experience working in the manufacturing industry, I selected participants with whom I had no prior relationship and firms that I have had no prior direct or indirect association. I also selected participants based on who could best answer the research question to avoid excluding any group.

The researcher's responsibility is to maintain ethical standards to respect and protect the participant's privacy when conducting the study. To ensure participants' protection, I adhered to the established protocols and guidelines to ensure ethical conduct in research, as detailed in the *Belmont Report*. According to the *Belmont Report*, the researcher should seek to mitigate ethical issues and abide by principles that include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services, 1979). Respect for persons requires protecting participants' autonomy while fully disclosing all information about the study so potential participants can make provide informed consent (Miracle, 2016). Beneficence refers to consideration for participants' well-being and protection from harm, discomfort, and exploitation by assessing risks and benefits when selecting data collection participants (Boddy, 2016). The principle of justice refers to fair procedures and the equal distribution of risks and benefits (Geldenhuys, 2019). Researchers need to protect participants' rights to fair treatment and privacy protection by implementing procedures to ensure anonymity and confidentiality (Miracle, 2016). By planning and adhering to an interview protocol, researchers have a better chance of getting quality data and protecting the research participants (Yin, 2018).

Therefore, I conducted semistructured interviews to collect data from research participants. Qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews to collect primary data and gather in-depth accounts of the participant's experiences (Evans & Lewis, 2018). Semistructured interviews are useful for open-ended questions that allow the participant to share their experience within the boundaries of the research topic (Mitchell, 2015). Amankwaa (2016) suggested conducting semistructured interviews to increase the rigor and trustworthiness of research. Both Castillo-Montoya (2016) and Yin (2018) asserted that researchers should use an interview protocol to enhance the quality and objectivity of research data collected during the interview process. Accordingly, I followed an interview protocol (see Appendix) to increase the study's reliability and to minimize inconsistencies in the questions asked and the research data collected. In addition, I used a reflective journal to document my thoughts, assumptions, and reflections about my interactions with each participant during the interview process and avoid viewing data

through a personal lens. Researchers may also use reflexivity to guard against personal bias by maintaining a record of reflections supporting documentation to protect claims against bias (Poos et al., 2017).

Du-Babcock and Tanaka (2016) proposed the use of member checking, triangulation of data sources, and data saturation to mitigate researcher bias. Member checking is a validation technique used to increase the research credibility that involves asking research participants to verify the researcher's interpretation of the participant's responses to the interview questions (Birt et al., 2016). I implemented member checking by providing each participant a summary of my interpretation of their interview responses to verify accuracy. Data saturation is the stage in the data collection process when no new data or themes appear from further data collection (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Jentoft and Olsen (2019) suggested that researchers should triangulate data through more than one source of evidence.

### **Participants**

Selecting appropriate participants was a primary focus of mine when conducting the study. According to Yap and Webber (2015), identifying and selecting appropriate study participants is a key responsibility of the researcher. Yin (2018) proposed that for researchers to obtain meaningful data, select participants based on their experience, knowledge, and understanding of the phenomenon. The target participants for this study included four manufacturing business managers from two manufacturing companies in the southeastern region of Jamaica. The eligibility criteria for participants were that they had (a) experience successfully developing and implementing employee strategies to

increase employee engagement, (b) experience supervising subordinates, and (c) at least 2 years of experience working in a manufacturing company in a managerial capacity.

My strategies for accessing study participants included accessing the resources at Jamaica Manufacturers and Exporters Association (<https://jmea.org>) and Jamaica Promotions (<https://dobusinessjamaica.com/>). After identifying businesses for the research, I made initial contact via email and set up telephone appointments with the human resources manager and manufacturing business managers to discuss the research details and request permission to conduct the research at their business. I solicited their assistance to recommend eligible participants for the study. Study participants should have comparable backgrounds, qualifications, and experiences (Alase, 2017). I emailed each participant a letter of invitation to participate in the study.

Selecting suitable participants and obtaining their consent to participate in the study was one of the first steps to establishing a good working relationship. Alase (2017) proposed that the researcher should establish a good rapport with participants early in the research process to gain their trust and confidence. Building a relationship with participants involved creating a sense of trust through honesty and respect, expressing empathy, listening, and offering flexibility with scheduling the interviews (see Morgan et al., 2017). I established a trusting relationship with participants by (a) thanking them for their participation and acknowledging their contribution to research, (b) providing full disclosure regarding the voluntary nature of participation and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time, and (c) listening to participant responses and answering all questions asked.

Researchers may also build trust by using an interview protocol (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). I followed an interview protocol (see Appendix) to increase reliability and consistency in data collection; following the protocol, I posed the seven interview questions in the same sequential order to each participant. Lee (2014) noted that use of an interview protocol allows for consistency in conducting interviews with each research participant and enables the mitigation of bias. Before starting their interview, I met with each participant via Zoom and gave an overview of the data collection process, discussed the consent form, and answered any participant questions. I informed the research participants of my appreciation for their willingness to participate and thanked them for their contribution to the study. I provided full disclosure of all procedures, including (a) the voluntary nature of study participation, (b) the absence of any form of compensation for participation, (c) the ability of participants to withdraw from the study at any time and without repercussions, and (d) the steps taken to ensure privacy and confidentiality. I conducted interviews virtually via Zoom due to COVID-19 regulations. I followed all ethical guidelines as set forth in the Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979), such as issues regarding confidentiality and privacy.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

I selected a qualitative research method for this study based on the research question. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring and interpreting individual experiences, thoughts, and feelings regarding a problem or an issue (Opsal et al., 2016). The researcher seeks answer what, how, or why questions about the study phenomenon (Gergen et al., 2015). According to Yates and Leggett (2016), use of the qualitative



research method allows for the gathering of rich data and an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon under study. The qualitative research method is also applicable as researchers can use a small sample of participants with knowledge related to the research question (Asiamah et al., 2017). Kaur (2016) asserted that the qualitative research method provides more profound insights into persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviors, and emotions than quantitative and mixed-methods.

Researchers use the quantitative method to test hypotheses, analyze, and measure relationships or differences between variables using statistical equations (Larson-Hall & Plonsky, 2015; Zyphur & Pierides, 2017). The quantitative method was inappropriate for this study as I was not focusing on testing hypotheses or examining relationships between variables. Mixed method research is appropriate when the researcher combines quantitative and qualitative methods in the same study to obtain breadth and depth of understanding when a single method is inadequate to address the research problem (Ahuja et al., 2018; Venkatesh et al., 2016). I did not choose the mixed method research design, as no quantitative component was used in this study.

### **Research Design**

In selecting the research design, the researcher considers the research question, the research method, and the time and resources available for the study (Yin, 2015). I selected a multiple-case study research design to explore strategies used by manufacturing business managers to increase employee engagement. The case study design is appropriate when answering how and what questions about the phenomenon (Yates & Leggett, 2016). In a case study, the researcher seeks to understand a phenomenon by exploring in depth single or multiple cases bounded by time and place

(Yin, 2018). I chose the multiple-case study design for this study as I expected to find similarities among the participants that might substantiate the findings. By using the multiple-case study design, a researcher is able to develop theories by analyzing and comparing similarities and differences among cases (Ridder, 2017). Use of the multiple-case study design allowed for a wider exploration of the how, why, and what aspect of the study phenomenon.

Other qualitative designs considered for this study were phenomenological and ethnographic. Researchers use the phenomenological design to study an individual's lived experiences, perceptions, perspectives, and understanding of a phenomenon (Hannon et al., 2016). The phenomenological research design was not appropriate for this study as my intent was not to explore participants' lived experiences. Researchers use an ethnographic design to gain insight into the behaviors of a culture (Gammelgaard, 2017). I did not choose an ethnographic design, as I was not exploring an individual's culture and behaviors.

Data saturation is critical to a study's dependability and validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015) and is one way of establishing rigor in qualitative research (Squires & Dorsen, 2018). Morse (2015) proposed that rigor describes the trustworthiness of research findings. In a qualitative study, the researcher reaches data saturation by continuing to interview participants until no new data, themes, or patterns emerge. Fusch and Ness (2015) asserted that data saturation occurs when no new or relevant information, codes, themes, or data are forthcoming. I reached data saturation when no new data, themes, or patterns emerged from interviewing participants and reviewing company documents.

## **Population and Sampling**

The sample for this qualitative study included four managers from two manufacturing businesses in southeast Jamaica with experience in implementing strategies to increase employee engagement. Moser and Korstjens (2018) stated that qualitative researchers should determine sample size based on (a) the purpose of the study, (b) the broadness of the research question, (c) the information richness of the data, (d) participants' knowledge of the phenomenon, and (e) the data collection method. Participants selected for the study should have knowledge and experience of the phenomenon to address the research topic (Saunders & Townsend, 2016).

I used purposeful sampling to select potential participants for this study. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research to select study participants based on the richness and relevance of information related to the study's research questions (Patton, 2015). Qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling to identify participants who can provide unique and enriched details about the phenomenon of interest and who meet the eligibility criteria for the study (Benoot et al., 2016; Fusch & Ness, 2015). The eligibility criteria for participants included the following: (a) experience successfully implementing strategies to improve employee engagement, (b) experience supervising subordinates, and (c) at least 2 years of experience working in a managerial capacity at a manufacturing company. After establishing the eligibility criteria, I determined the necessary sample size for the study.

Tran et al. (2016) recommended that the researcher choose a sample size that provides the researcher with the best opportunity to gather rich information to reach data saturation. Martino et al. (2017) suggested that a sample size between five and 50 is

adequate for researchers to reach data saturation. According to Boddy (2016), a sample size of four to 10 might be sufficient to reach data saturation. I used a sample size of four managers from two manufacturing organizations in the southeast region of Jamaica. Data saturation enhances research integrity and ensures adequate data support for the study (Gentles et al., 2015). Qualitative researchers can reach data saturation by using multiple data collection sources for triangulation. To reach data saturation, I reviewed company documents and interviewed participants until no new data emerged from the participant's responses. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested that data saturation could occur when the interviews have repetitive themes and no new data emerge.

The interview setting is vital to the success of the interview process. Oltmann (2016) proposed that researchers select an interview setting that is comfortable, convenient, private, and free from distractions to allow participants to share information freely. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted interviews via Zoom and adhered to all ethical guidelines.

### **Ethical Research**

Maintaining high ethical standards is critical when performing research, especially when dealing with human subjects (Yin, 2015). Researchers should adhere to all procedures related to ethical standards. The researcher's ethical responsibility is to fully disclose all information related to the study so potential participants can make an informed decision about deciding to participate (Miracle, 2016). Before commencing the study, I obtained permission from the University's Institutional Review Board. I then emailed a consent document to all participants to review and email me with "I consent." Grzyb (2017) recommended that researchers obtain institutional review board approval

and consent from the participants to participate before conducting the study. The signed consent document serves as evidence that each participant agrees and gives the authorization to participate under the researcher's outlined terms (Purcaru et al., 2014).

The consent document included a statement outlining that participation in the study is voluntary; participants have the option to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, and without repercussion (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Participants did not receive compensation for their participation in the study. By informing the participants of their rights, they had the option to make an informed decision about participating in the research process (Bromwich & Rid, 2015). According to Holm and Ploug (2017), participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time with or without written notification, without giving a reason, and without repercussion. Participants, however, can submit their written withdrawal notice to my Walden University email account.

If a participant had withdrawn from the study, I would immediately discontinue all research activities, communication, and interactions with the participant. I would retain and store any collected data securely in a locked safe. After 5 years from the CAO approval date, I will destroy written data by shredding, erasing audio, and reformatting the external drive with data. According to the Health and Human Services report, if a participant decides to withdraw from a research study, the researcher must discontinue all research activities involving that subject's participation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Researchers are responsible for protecting participants' privacy by implementing confidentiality procedures (Lin, 2016; Miracle, 2016). To protect participants' and

organizations' confidentiality and identity, I used the identification codes P1, P2, P3, and P4 as identification codes for participants and C1 and C2 for organizations. Before starting the interviews, I requested the participant's permission to record the interview using Zoom recording feature and an iPhone as a backup system. I followed ethical procedures by securing and safeguarding the collected data. To maintain ethical standards and protect all sensitive research data, I will retain and store all data in a locked, secure safe located in my home for 5 years from the CAO approval date. I will be the only person with access to protected data. After 5 years, I will destroy all identifying materials and use a shredder to destroy written notes, emails, data from interview transcripts, data from company documents, and consent documents. I will erase any audio data from the digital recorder and reformat the external drive containing the data. The Institutional Review Board approval number for this study is 12-03-21-0636139.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The quality of data collected depends upon the appropriateness of the research method used and the integrity of the individual data collection instruments (Twining et al., 2017). As the researcher, I am the primary data collection instrument in this study. In a qualitative study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument of scientific inquiry (Clark & Vealé, 2018; Stewart & Gapp, 2017). I collected data using semistructured interviews via Zoom videoconference to explore the strategies manufacturing business managers use to increase employee engagement. Interviews are ideal for documenting participants' accounts, perceptions, attitudes, and responses to the phenomenon (Paradis et al., 2016).

In addition to interviews, I gathered data from a review of company documents, including policy documents, employee handbooks, meeting reports, production reports, and employee engagement reports. Rimando et al. (2015) recommended that researchers collect data from interviews and review of company documents. Multiple data sources will allow for data triangulation and a more in-depth understanding of the studied problem (Cleland, 2017).

I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix) in conducting the interviews. I asked each participant seven open-ended interview questions with follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth responses and clarify participant responses. McIntosh and Morse (2015) suggested that collecting data using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions might allow participants to share their experiences within the research topic's boundaries. Researchers using semistructured interviews may provide richer study findings by asking the participants follow-up questions to elaborate on their answers (Algozzine & Hancock, 2016).

After the initial interview, I carefully transcribed and interpreted the participants' responses to the interview questions. After one week, I used member checking to validate the credibility of responses by providing each participant via email a summary of my interpretation of the participant's interview responses to verify accuracy. I requested that participants have 3 days to complete member checking and return responses via email. All participants verified the accuracy of my interpretation of their interview responses and returned via email within the 3 days. Researchers use member checking to assess trustworthiness by validating the credibility of research data and results (Smith &

McGannon, 2018). Yin (2017) suggested that researchers use methodological triangulation and member checking to ensure validity and dependability.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Castillo-Montoya (2016) asserted that semistructured interviews are most appropriate in qualitative case studies to collect information-rich data, understand, and explore the participant's experience. The primary data collection technique was semistructured interviews to address the research question. Semistructured interviews are a popular data collection technique used by researchers due to the technique's versatility and flexibility (Kallio et al., 2016). Through semistructured interviews, researchers can engage research participants via face-to-face or telephone (AlKhateeb, 2018). I conducted interviews via Zoom and administered seven open-ended questions to ensure the collection of rich descriptive data. Researchers use open-ended questions to gain further insight and gather in-depth data (Cairney & St Denny, 2015). In conducting the interview, I followed the steps outlined in the interview protocol (see Appendix) to ensure consistency and strengthen validity. The interview protocol provided researchers with a systematic method of exploring a phenomenon (Jamshed, 2014).

There are several advantages and disadvantages to selecting semistructured interviews as a data collection technique. One advantage was that the researcher can develop an understanding of strategies to increase employee engagement from the in-depth and rich exchange with the participant. Researchers using the semistructured interview technique with open-ended questions can benefit from engaging participants in more in-depth conversations by asking more probing questions (Dikko, 2016). Another advantage of selecting semistructured interviews for data collection is that it allows



researchers to access in-depth participant perspectives, opinions, and feelings, which may produce rich and thick data (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The semistructured interview technique allowed the researcher the flexibility to divert from the established protocol to solicit fully expressed perspectives and opinions (Cridland et al., 2015).

Disadvantages of using semistructured interviews included (a) bias due to the researcher's poor interview skills, (b) the participant's demeanor and actions may change if they became uncomfortable with the recording of the interview, (c) reliance on the participant's ability to recall information accurately, (d) prolonged transcription processes, and (e) it is time-consuming and expensive (Yin, 2018). A lengthy interview process may result in fatigue and stress for participants (Hurst et al., 2015). Birt et al. (2016) recommended member checking to validate the researcher's interpretation of interview responses. Using member checking, I asked each participant to verify and confirm for accuracy my understanding and interpretation of the participant's interview responses to their answers and experiences.

### **Data Organization Technique**

An efficient data organization technique was essential for securing, managing, analyzing, and interpreting data. Yin (2018) suggested using an effective data organization technique for easy access and data retrieval. Pinfield et al. (2014) described data organization techniques as data storage, security, preservation, retrieval, and ethical considerations. I tracked research data using interviews, review of company documents, and notes from journals. To record the interview, I used a Zoom recording device and an iPhone as a backup recording device. Additionally, I maintained a reflective journal to record my observations and document my experience, feelings, and personal biases about

the research and data collected. Through reflective journaling, the researcher can observe and learn more from experience and better understand themselves and their biases (Al-Rawahi & Al-Balushi, 2015). Chamberlain (2016) noted that a reflective journal should address reflections on the situation to develop information related to the research experience.

Before starting the interviews, I requested the participant's permission to record the interview. I used Microsoft Word™ to transcribe interview responses, and organize transcribed and code data. I then reviewed data for errors or mistakes and sorted codes into common themes. Yin (2018) proposed that researchers use an electronic system to organize and retain data. Digital audio recordings for each participant were converted and uploaded to password-protected computer files and placed in folders labeled with each participant's alphanumeric code.

Petrova et al. (2016) suggested that the researcher's responsibility is maintaining the confidentiality and protecting participants' identities. The importance of researchers protecting participants' privacy is part of upholding research ethics (Bromley et al., 2015). I maintained confidentiality and protected the participants' identities using alphanumeric codes such as P1, P2, P3, and P4, and I used C1 and C2 to identify companies on all documents. I stored all raw data, including signed consent documents, transcripts from semistructured interviews and company documents, and journal notes, securely in a locked safe in my home office. I also stored original recordings and transcriptions in digital folders on a password-protected laptop computer backed up to an external hard drive that I kept in the locked safe, with access only to me. All data will be stored for 5 years from the CAO approval date. In the end, I will remove and destroy by

shredding all physical documents and reformat the hard drive to erase audio recordings and electronic data. Jeanes (2017) suggested that researchers store all information safely and destroy it at the end of the project.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative researchers analyze data to examine and interpret results in patterns and themes (Cleland, 2017). The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the procedures used during the critical data analysis stage address the research question (Blanca et al., 2018). Zielke et al. (2016) contended that data are organized, examined, compared, categorized, and coded to answer the research question in qualitative research. I used semistructured interviews and a review of company documents as methodological data triangulation sources to enhance the quality and confidence of the research findings. Methodological triangulation includes multiple data collection sources such as interviews, a review of documents, observation, questionnaires, and data from focus groups to confirm research findings (Lodhi, 2016). Researchers use methodological triangulation to collect and analyze data and strengthen their studies' accuracy, reliability, and validity (Roberts et al., 2019). Methodological triangulation may also reduce data misinterpretation and improve research quality (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility of the research findings.

Yin (2017) proposed the following five-step data analysis technique to analyze data (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. Consistent with an inductive approach, I sorted, compiled, and organized data by examining raw data and listening to interview recordings after the data collection process. I then transcribed and collated interview responses and organized other textual

data from a review of company documents and reflexive journal notes to create a database. Castleberry and Nolen (2018) defined compiling as the process of organizing raw data into a usable form to find meaningful answers to the research question. To ensure accuracy in transcribing data and protect the study's information, I transcribed the interview responses into a Microsoft Word document and validated the results' credibility by returning participants a summary of my interpretation of the transcribed interview responses for member checking by participants.

I dissected and disassembled the data to identify emerging themes and codes in step two. Coding allows raw data to be converted into usable data by identifying and connecting themes, concepts, or ideas (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). After manually working with the data, I imported it into NVivo software to help analyze, organize codes, and explore, identify, and correlate themes with the literature and conceptual framework used in the study. NVivo software is computer-aided software used to organize, categorize, and code large amounts of data (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Computer programs enable researchers to store, easily access, categorize, and code data (Yin, 2017). The process of coding, categorizing, extracting themes, classifying the interview, and documenting the data occurred at this analysis stage

At the reassembling stage, I evaluated the output, interpreted data to identify patterns, and reviewed participants' responses for similarity and closeness to answering the research question. The related categories helped formulate patterns that I used to detect emergent themes. I compared themes from the conceptual framework and recently published literature on employee engagement to connect and analyze the study's findings

with the literature. Researchers should relate the identified themes to the literature and the study's conceptual framework (Borrego et al., 2014).

The interpreting phase involved the researcher finding plausible explanations for the findings and making analytical conclusions from the data presented as themes. Yin (2018) stated that the researcher should be interpret the data accurately, reasonably, and thoroughly. At this stage, I checked patterns against interview transcripts, reflective journals, and company documents to interpret the meaning of the data. The final step in the data analysis process entailed summarizing and making conclusions from the findings (Yin, 2017). After the study is completed and published, I will provide participants with a summary of the research findings.

### **Reliability and Validity**

#### **Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of data collected and research findings if another researcher wishes to repeat the study (Yin, 2017, 2018). Rose and Johnson (2020) asserted that the qualitative researcher establishes the study's reliability in terms of the soundness of the research, selecting the appropriate method, and applying the method to the research. Qualitative researchers can establish the study's reliability by using an interview protocol, an audit trail, a detailed description of the steps used to analyze data to provide a rationale for decisions made, and triangulation (Ang et al., 2016). Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested that researchers establish protocols to increase confidence in collecting and interpreting data and ensuring the quality of the study results. An interview protocol guides the interview process centered on the research questions (Dunn et al., 2017).

I used member checking and methodological triangulation to ensure the dependability of the study results. Member checking helped validate the accuracy and reliability of interview data by sharing a summary of participants' interview responses with the participant to verify my interpretation of the interview responses. Yin (2017) suggested using member checking to increase the reliability of the research. During member checking, all participants agreed with my interpretation of their responses.

### **Validity**

Validity in research refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of data collection findings (Cypress, 2017). According to Polit and Beck (2012), validity is the degree to which inferences made in a study are accurate and well-founded. Yin (2017) suggested using multiple sources of evidence to strengthen the validity of case study research. Qualitative researchers ensure the research's integrity by implementing measures to ensure the study's credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Shenton, 2004).

### **Credibility**

Qualitative researchers establish credibility to demonstrate that the research results are credible and believable from the research participants' perspective (Johnston et al., 2016). Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the quality, authenticity, and truthfulness of findings (Birt et al., 2016). The integrity of research data drives the credibility of the study's findings (Asiamah et al., 2017). I used methodological triangulation and member checking to ensure credibility. Schalock et al. (2017) stated that methodological triangulation using multiple sources to collect data could enhance the study's credibility. Member checking allowed participants to verify the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations of the interview responses. Bengtsson (2016) asserted that the

researcher should focus on achieving research rigor and credibility to validate the study's trustworthiness.

### **Transferability**

Noble and Heale (2019) asserted that transferability is the extent to which future researchers can apply findings to different contexts or settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that when researchers give an in-depth description of a phenomenon, an evaluation can be made based on the extent to which conclusions can be transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. Qualitative researchers achieve transferability by providing rich and detailed descriptions of research data so that other researchers can make judgments about the findings' transferability to different settings or contexts with the same results (Boddy, 2016). I established transferability by describing the research procedures, target population, geographic location, eligibility criteria, data analysis technique, and industry type. Using purposeful sampling to select participants and data saturation helped establish transferability.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the accuracy of research findings and the degree to which other researchers can confirm the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Moon et al. (2016) asserted that researchers could establish confirmability when the study's results and conclusions align, and other researchers can replicate the results. Triangulation and member checking can improve confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability can be established when the participants' views are reflected and not the researcher's (Cope, 2014).

I established confirmability by using methodological triangulation, including interviews and document reviews as data collection sources and member checking to verify the accuracy of interview transcripts. Yin (2017) asserted that reflective journaling in qualitative studies helps to reduce researcher bias and demonstrate reasons for decisions made and challenges encountered during the research process.

Morse (2015) posited that researchers use data saturation to establish rigor in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers use data saturation as a criterion to terminate data collection and analysis (Saunders et al., 2018). I ensured data saturation by continuing to interview participants until no new information emerged. Data saturation was reached when collecting more data did not yield new or relevant information related to the research question (Lowe et al., 2018) and when different themes and coding were no longer feasible (Blum, 2017). Researchers also use data saturation to determine sample size as the selection of participants is done using the judgment of which potential participant will be most informative (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). According to Fusch and Ness (2015), the study's number of participants is appropriate when the main themes show depth and adequately express participants' perspectives and experiences.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2 of the study, I began with a restatement of the purpose of the study, followed by a detailed discussion on (a) the role of the researcher, (b) the study participants, (c) the research methodology and design, (d) population and sampling, (e) the importance of ethical research, and (f) the data collection instruments, techniques, and analysis. I addressed the study's reliability and validity to demonstrate that the study met quality standards. Section 2 ended with a discussion of the measures for achieving data



saturation. In Section 3, I provide (a) an overview of the study, (b) the findings from the research, (c) the application of the study to business practice, (d) a discussion of the implications for social change, (e) recommendations for action and future research, (f) reflections, and (g) conclusions from the study.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies manufacturing business managers used to increase employee engagement. I collected the data for this study by conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing company documentation, including reports, employee handbooks, tracking sheets, and information from publicly accessible websites of two manufacturing organizations in Jamaica. The data collection process included validating and triangulating data gathered via member checking. The research findings revealed strategies that manufacturing business managers used to increase employee engagement in their organizations. Three main themes emerged during the analysis of data: use effective communication techniques to increase employee engagement (Theme 1), develop quality training and development programs (Theme 2), and create attractive rewards and recognition strategies (Theme 3). I also identified three subthemes for Theme 1: encourage open and transparent communication, build a foundation of trust, and provide quality feedback.

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

The overarching research question for this study was, what strategies do manufacturing business managers use to increase employee engagement? Based on the research question, I presented seven open-ended interview questions to participants on strategies to increase employee engagement. Participants consisted of four managers from two organizations who had successfully implemented employee engagement strategies. To protect their identity and to present findings from participants' responses, I established the following participant codes: Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2),

Participant 3 (P3), and Participant 4 (P4). For confidentiality, companies were identified with the codes C1 and C2. Participant responses to open-ended interview questions formed the basis of the research findings. Three major themes emerged from the analysis of data: use effective communication techniques to increase employee engagement, develop quality training and development programs, and create attractive rewards and recognition strategies.

### **Theme 1: Use Effective Communication Techniques to Increase Employee Engagement**

The first theme to emerge from data analysis was effective communication techniques to increase employee engagement. Leaders who align employee performance goals with organizational goals benefit from actively engaging employees in meeting or exceeding organizational goals (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Three subthemes emerged from the study: (a) encouraging open and transparent communication, (b) building a foundation of trust, and (c) providing quality feedback.

#### ***Data Collected***

All participants identified the need for improved communication techniques to increase employee engagement in their organization. Improving communication in the workplace helps ensure greater employee involvement. P1 suggested that “as leaders, we are responsible for setting the temperature of the work environment by how we communicate with employees.” P2 shared, “I try to be the first person on the production floor daily to check in with employees and ensure they have all the resources available to perform their tasks.” P3 added, “employees take their cue from their superiors and will duplicate their energy regardless of whether it is positive or negative.” P4 indicated,

“one-on-one interaction or team discussions are effective communication techniques that help build relationships and trust.” P2 and P4 emphasized the importance of using all communication channels to disseminate information to employees to ensure the information is delivered, understood, and well received. This finding is supported in the literature. P2 explained, “in addition to our weekly meetings, we have added text alerts, emails, and team meetings as communication methods.” P4 spoke to the effect of poor communication on performance and work quality, adding that “clear communication is important to the production process as when the message is distorted work quality is affected.”

Improving communication in the workplace helps ensure greater employee involvement. P1 asserted that as a manufacturing company, effective communication is critical to daily operations as misinformation can affect the whole team’s functioning, leading to workflow and process disruption. P1 added,

Most of my workers have been with me for 20 to 40 years; they are loyal to the company, and we now have their children working here. I try to create a family atmosphere and a space where they can feel comfortable using their voice. They confide in me about everything, and over the years, I have worked to earn their trust. I believe that healthy communication is critical to ensuring employees understand where the company is headed and their future role in the organization. In recent years, I have had to adjust my way of communicating with the younger employees as they do not like to read emails, seldom look you in the face, and are more into texting. I find that in addition to regular employee meetings, one-on-

one communication, and small group meetings work best for this group of employees.

Therefore, C1 and C2 employee handbooks supported P1's response with information on regular general and departmental meetings and company expectations regarding employee attendance at these meetings. P3 and P4 also shared that they use regular employee meetings to inform and make announcements and use department and team meetings to break down and clarify information. P3 indicated that their policy is to turn off all machines and equipment until meetings have ended to improve employees' engagement at meetings. P4 added,

In our weekly employee meetings, we have questions and answers sessions to clarify misunderstandings at the end of the presentations. However, if the message is unclear or distorted, employees will not engage. Also, if employees feel uncomfortable, they will not speak up but retreat to their departments and voice their disapproval.

According to Kahn (1990), employees will express themselves when they feel it is psychologically safe. Therefore, leaders should create a safe space for employees to express themselves without fearing repercussions. Idowu and Abolade (2018) stated that communication positively affects employees' engagement in their roles.

Effective communication is a crucial driver of employee engagement (Alzyoud, 2018). P1, P3, and P4 agreed that employee performance and efficiency are influenced by how information is communicated, what training is provided, and how leaders interact. P1 stated, "it is important that production quotas and quality targets are clearly communicated, and employees should be motivated to achieve them." P3 spoke about

methods training and the impact of poor training on employees' ability to perform at their best. P3 stated, "managers should work out the best method to do the task and ensure it is communicated and understood by employees." P4 explained,

Safety is a big issue for our company, and to uphold good business practices, employees should adhere to safety rules as they work towards meeting production goals. If safety standards and production methods are not communicated effectively, errors can be made, which is detrimental to the operations.

An organization where the communication channels are not effectively utilized will gradually lose its best employees to other competitors because effective communication is the backbone of any organization (Idowu & Abolade, 2018). Regarding employee engagement strategies, P3 noted that "employees prefer to get their information directly from their superiors' mouths rather than from secondary sources and will view it as a mark of disrespect if changes occur without their knowledge and input." P1 supported this response by outlining incidences where employees would stop production and sabotage the process due to a lack of communication on issues related to their job function. Watson (2006) posited that highly engaged employees receive communication from their supervisors and senior management far more frequently than employees with low engagement.

Leadership cannot function to its total capacity without effective communication (Yue et al., 2019). All participants indicated a connection between employee engagement and leadership behavior. According to P1, "employees' feelings about their boss will affect their behavior, level of engagement, and performance." P2 explained, "employees are motivated to perform at their best when leaders make them valued." P3 added,

The production process requires teamwork, happy and engaged employees to achieve production targets and meet deadlines, and a leader who leads from the front and indicates from their actions that they are knowledgeable and have the employees' best interest at heart.

P4 shared, "recently, a leader was dismissed as employees refused to work with him because of a poor work attitude."

Communication is key to improved employee relations and positive organizational outcomes. Mikkelsen et al. (2021) asserted that leaders who are more effective in communicating with employees might increase employee motivation and engagement. Adil and Awais (2016) suggested that effective communication leads to healthy interpersonal relationships and increased employee engagement. All four participants agreed that effective communication motivates employees to engage more and improve performance. P1 spoke to the importance of open communication, stating "our employees like to know that they can voice their opinions and share suggestions without fear." P2 shared that "leaders should make an effort to build relationships with employees as employees will do more when there is trust, respect, and support." P3 voiced, "I am happy with the effort of our company to improve communication but more needs to be done to listen to the employees." Similarly, P4 explained, "our employees perform better when they are involved in decision-making on job-related matters." In responding to the question on strategies to increase employee engagement, P2 added, "I have a good rapport with my employees, and I often ask for their opinions on production-related issues; as they are the ones doing the work, they have great

ideas and suggestions on new operation methods to make the process easier for them."

Primarily, relationships grow out of communication, and the survival and functioning of organizations largely depend on effective relationships among groups and individuals. P3 and P4 mentioned using social platforms to build relationships, enhance collaboration, and foster communication. Men and Yue (2019) contended that communication drives relationships, frames people's behaviors in the workplace, and is a significant factor in organizational effectiveness. P3 explained, "our employees are excited about the social club and the support and involvement of management in planned activities." P4 added,

I love the social club, as employees engage best when off work and are more relaxed. There can have face-to-face conversations and increased interaction.

They speak freely, ask questions, and are willing to share ideas and give their suggestions. They also use this as an opportunity to vent and complain, but they do this respectfully. They share information about their family, goals, and dreams and ask about mine. In these moments, I listen actively and sometimes take notes so I can act on urgent and essential matters. My employees take pride in leading the meetings and taking ownership of this process. My interactions with the employees give them a feeling of being respected and valued by the company.

P3 shared that the employees' response to information communicated is driven by the example and attitude of the leader. P3 further stated, "I am cautious with my delivery and mannerism as employees can be sensitive and sometimes use facial expressions for confirmation and motivation or as an excuse not to engage."



P3 indicated, “I try to make it easy for employees to come in and speak with me and get clarity on issues before things get out of control.” P1 explained that communication is the most vital strategy to keep employees engaged. P1 shared, “we try to communicate continuously verbally, one-on-one, and in groups, so employees can interact more with each other, which can be a challenge in the workplace.” One way is to disseminate information frequently and by using various approaches. P3 and P4 explained that they use the top-down approach and try to get employees involved in disseminating some information. P3 added,

We have team leaders who will represent employees on floor issues that are bothering them and meet with management on their behalf to clarify information and discuss employee issues. The employee representatives take their positions seriously and are usually on the employee’s side. They feel empowered that their fellow employees have confidence in them and that the company values them.

This is a win-win for everyone, so we try to use this to the company’s advantage.

P4 shared, “because of the makeup of our workforce, we use different methods to communicate with our employees so the message can be received and understood.”

### ***Subtheme 1: Encouraging Open and Transparent Communication***

Information is of little or no use until it is adequately communicated to the right person to be received and understood. Nwabueze and Mileski (2018) recognized transparency as the key to effective communication and suggested that communication should be regular, open, and verbal to increase trust between employees and management and make employees feel important. Transparency might help reduce the chances of the employees not knowing what is happening in the organization. Leaders who cultivate a

culture of open, respectful, and transparent leader-employee communication in the workplace may enhance employee engagement. P3 and 4 shared the advantage of using suggestion boxes to facilitate honest communication. P3 explained, “the suggestion boxes have helped to give our shy employees a voice and provide management with information to create programs and policies that can benefit employees.” P4 added,

We strategically place suggestion boxes with writing tools easily accessible for employees to share their ideas, complaints, or information. To ensure honesty, employees may choose to remain anonymous. We clear the boxes at the end of each day and carefully review and act on each suggestion.

Yue et al. (2019) explained that transparency dimensions could be informational, participatory, and accountable. Informational transparency necessitates disclosing truthful, substantive, and valuable information (Rawlins, 2008). However, organizations’ disclosure of overabundant details can cause confusion rather than clarification. Participatory transparency is an organizational effort to involve employees in identifying the most relevant information to meet their informational needs (Yue et al., 2019).

Open and honest communication also fosters respect. P2 explained, “employees will disengage if they perceive management hiding information or implementing changes without giving them adequate information.” P3 stated that face-to-face communication allows for honesty and trust. P3 continued, “employees want to know that the organization values them and that they are given the respect and the opportunity to participate in decisions regarding changes, new systems, and policies that might affect their jobs.”

The accountability dimension of transparency concerns includes positive and negative information (Yue et al., 2019). Otherwise, hiding the negative ramifications of the change initiative will breed rumors and misinterpretations; cause misunderstanding and distrust; and heighten employee uncertainty, insecurity, and anxiety (Men & Bowen, 2016). P1, P2, and P4 agreed that genuine communication would command respect and trust from employees regardless of the information. P1 shared, “some of our employees come with a lot of mental and emotional scars that leaders must be aware of when communicating with them.” P2 added, “some of our employees are very sensitive and have a hard time trusting management; reassurance from management is important to build trust.” P4 shared, “when speaking to my employees, I try to make eye contact, smile, and acknowledge them as they speak.” P3 added, “honest, transparent communication is important to build relationships and should be given upfront so employees will not be taken off-guard with additional information heard later via the grapevine.” Leaders should therefore try to be proactive before disseminating new information and pre-prepared so they are equipped with answers to questions that employees might ask. According to Yue et al. (2019), organizational leaders who value accountability would disclose both benefits and threats of a change initiative.

### ***Subtheme 2: Building a Foundation of Trust***

Trust is a primary antecedent of employee engagement (Mishra et al., 2014). Jiang and Men (2015) found a positive relationship between transparent internal communication and employee trust in organizations. According to Rawlins (2008), crucial to reciprocal trust is an organization’s efforts to be transparent. Trust is one of the primary constructs used to measure successful relationships between parties; therefore,

leaders should demonstrate trustworthy characteristics to connect with employees (Mishra et al., 2014). Furthermore, trusting organizational environments allow for motivation, uncertainty reduction, and influence engagement (Memon et al., 2020).

Trust can result from effective internal communication and affects employee behaviors and overall organizational outcomes (Shockley-Zalabak & Ellis, 2006). When employees trust organizational abilities to implement the change, they are more likely to believe that the change is beneficial and well-intentioned and therefore demonstrate greater openness to change.

All participants agreed that trust is essential to employee behavior and engagement. P1 indicated that when the level of employee trust is high, there is an increase in employee performance. P1 explained, “our employees approach their work with confidence as a result of the effort and time we put into training and preparing them for their tasks so they can work towards achieving their production targets.” P2 stressed that employee level of trust can be influenced by quality of materials, equipment performance, and availability of resources. For example, P2 added, “employees expect to be provided with the resources necessary for them to perform their roles successfully and will see the lack of resources as a sign of sabotage by management.” P3 explained an incident where employees refused to work as they did not trust the intentions of management for the new production quotas implemented. P3 added, “so, in this instance employees felt the production targets were too high, the method to perform the task was not carefully worked out, and their ideas were not respected.” P4 stated, “trust should be established at the beginning by the company’s action aligning with what was promised to the employee.” When there is interpersonal trust, the possibility of working cohesively

with other team members increases due to higher cooperation, information sharing, and less uncertainty (Afsar et al., 2020). Mahajan et al. (2012) described interpersonal trust as the extent to which a person is confident in, and is willing to act based on, the words, actions, and decisions of another. Higher levels of interpersonal trust may also result in psychological safety, confidence, and belonging (Afsar et al., 2020), thus creating a more engaged workforce.

According to Tigre et al. (2022), trust is a prerequisite to employee engagement, and distrust prohibits maximum potential. When employees trust their leaders, their level of engagement increases (Downey et al., 2015). P3 suggested that leaders consciously try to build healthy relationships with employees to build a foundation of trust and respect. Herminingsih (2017) posited that leadership dynamics, trust, and communication determine leadership performance and effectiveness. P3 indicated that employees associate respect and communication with trust. P3 added,

In the past, a regular complaint I get from some of my younger male employees is that they do not trust management to follow through on promises. They complained that they felt they could be disposed of at any time and did not feel that their future was safe at the organization. From the discussions, I realized that disconnect was due to poor and irregular communication from senior leaders, resulting in misunderstandings and fear from employees who did not feel safe speaking up and asking questions. Now, in communicating with our employees, we listen, ask and answer questions, give clear answers, and verify through training and follow-up to ensure a clear understanding.

Kahn (1990) stated that individuals with an interpersonal relationship based on trust within a supportive organizational environment are willing to engage in work roles.

### ***Subtheme 3: Providing Quality Feedback***

Effective communication is a two-way practice of formal and informal information sharing, which can be altered by the feedback level (Adiguzel, 2019). The quality of feedback is critical to effective communication, should be consistent and specific to the goal-related behaviors and process, and result in performance outcomes (Whitaker & Levy, 2012). Communication is sending a message through different media, verbal or nonverbal, formal or informal, so long as it transmits an idea, gesture, or action (Okora, 2021). Feedback delivers information based on direct observation meant to improve performance (Jug et al., 2019).

An employee voice perspective can explain the direct relationship between effective communication and employee engagement (Rees et al., 2013). In an open communication climate, employees are encouraged to engage in open dialogue, share their ideas and concerns, and learn about organizational goals (Gode et al., 2020). The quality of feedback is more than just feedback given in performance appraisals and yearly reviews. Feedback provides concise and consistent information on organizational and individual goals and outlines job expectations. P1, P2, P3, and P4, indicated that feedback is key to their day-to-day operation. P1 explained that with handling materials, accessories, and equipment, feedback is critical for inventory control, quality control, and machinery performance. P1 explained, we run a tight ship as some of our projects are contracts, and the turnaround time to get materials is long, which can cause us to lose contracts or orders.” P2 stated, “the supervisor’s daily tracking form is used as an

informal feedback system where issues that occur throughout the day are reported, and the time noted.” P3 added, “feedback is essential at every stage of the production process to ensure the methods of operation are communicated and understood.” P4 suggested, “it is critical for us as leaders to give employees regular and constructive feedback while encouraging them to share their honest feedback without fear.”

According to Edmondson and Lei (2014), psychological safety is a person’s feeling of acceptance when speaking up. P1, P3, and P4 stated that daily and quality feedback is important for production planning and employee engagement. P1 explained, “the production processes are connected, and one issue can stop the production flow; immediate feedback is necessary for quick response.” P3 added, “feedback from the production floor is often given by a team leader, selected by peers who would communicate the employees' opinions or concerns regarding a task or issue.” P4 noted that in the past, some employees were reluctant to give feedback, but as their communication skills developed, they became more comfortable. P4 shared, “we encourage positive and negative feedback without judgment.” Employees’ ability to voice their opinions without fearing negative consequences aligns with the study's conceptual framework and the body of literature. Engaged employees feel free to voice their opinions or share ideas without fearing negative consequences (Kahn, 1990). Jug et al. (2019) suggested that barriers to effective feedback can be attributed to the environment, giver, and receiver.

Effective feedback requires carefully considering the giver, receiver, and environment (Gaunt et al., 2017). Good feedback receivers learn to hear the message and make conscious decisions on using the information received (Jug et al., 2019). Ensuring

that a committed and caring interpersonal relationship has been established is paramount for effective feedback (Gaunt et al., 2017). When employees feel that their leaders care and show them respect will build employee trust and confidence, which is essential for employee engagement. Failure to recognize the feedback message may elicit an emotional response (Jug et al., 2019). Employees who feel from the feedback message that their voices are not being heard will disengage by disconnecting emotionally from their roles and exhibit disinterest in the organization's mission and goals.

A review of company websites, monthly newsletters, and production reports obtained from C1 and C2 revealed effective communication strategies as an emerging theme. Documentation showed updates from past meetings, schedules and reminders for upcoming meetings and events, and employee highlights. A review of production reports showed daily communication on efficiency, quality, and incentives earned to keep employees on track with their production targets. C1's newsletter committee included employees from different departments. Leaders who create an engaging work environment through effective communication could lead to a more productive workforce.

### ***Evidence From the Literature***

The existing literature aligns with the findings in theme one on the need for effective communication to increase employee engagement. This theme supports Jiang and Men (2015), who indicated that the organization's communication climate is essential to employee engagement. Bakar and Mustaffa (2013) recommended that organizational leaders establish and maintain a healthy communication culture where there is open dialogue and mutual respect. Leaders who communicate effectively and



provide support can increase employee engagement, leading to an enhanced performance at work (García-Carbonell et al., 2018). For employee engagement, consistent and honest communication is an effective management tool (Siddiqui & Sahar, 2019). Leaders interested in attaining an engaged workforce should have the ability to listen to their employees and show interest in what is being communicated.

### ***Evidence From the Conceptual Framework***

The theme aligns with the conceptual framework of Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory. According to Kahn, the extent to which employees fully engage and identify with their work relates to the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Herminingsih (2017) posited that leadership dynamics, trust, and communication determine leadership performance and effectiveness.

Leaders who provide opportunities for employees and encourage open communication and dialogue provide for psychological safety. Employees who perceive a sense of psychological safety show a willingness to immerse themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically in their job roles (Kahn, 1990). Furthermore, employees tend to engage more when they feel it is safe to voice their opinions without the threat of repercussions or negative consequences. A psychologically safe environment often provides a basis for interpersonal trust and followers' engagement (Wang et al., 2018).

### **Theme 2: Develop Quality Training and Development Programs**

The second theme to emerge from data analysis and coded data was to develop training and development programs to increase employee engagement. Training is a critical strategy that manufacturing leaders in Jamaica can use to increase employee engagement. Elnaga and Imran (2013) suggested that organizational leaders invest in

training and development activities to improve employees' skills and competency levels required to perform their assigned roles and responsibilities.

***Data Collected***

All participants indicated that training plays a prominent role in developing their employees to be equipped with the skills to perform their tasks effectively. P1 elaborated that continued training gives their organization an advantage to be globally competitive as they manufacture products competing against other local and international manufacturers. P1 added,

The market has changed, and we, as small manufacturers, have no protection against imports from other countries. We compete against countries such as China and the USA and businesses such as Amazon and Nike. They are more advanced with the resources to wipe us out. Our longevity has resulted from our committed and loyal employees, but it is the consistent training that has set us apart. We work to be the Nike and Amazon of Jamaica, and it is the quality of our products and how we treat our customers that are the main reasons we are still in business after more than 45 years of operation. Years later, many of our customers are still proudly wearing clothing they purchased when they were in school.

P1 response is supported by P3, who explained,

Production employees undergo basic training before being left alone to perform their tasks. They must undergo safety, hygiene, and method training. Safety is a huge factor, so to prevent accidents, in addition to training, we provide employees with the gear and steel-toed shoes to wear on the job. We operate in the food

industry, and hygiene is critical to observe to meet food manufacturing standards.

Training for our company is a continuous process.

Al Karim et al. (2019) contended that training should be continuous to build employee performance, proficiency, and overall business success. P4 countered that the financial investment required for employees' ongoing training is challenging for small companies, so most of their training is conducted in-house.

Organizations can benefit from the development of their employees through training and developmental programs. Sendawula et al. (2018) posited a significant correlation between training and employee performance. P1 credited their business success to their long partnership with the Dutch apparel consultants who provided advanced training and engineering services via Jamaica Promotions programs to help small manufacturers. P1 explained,

I am forever grateful to the Dutch Team, who provided us with ongoing training and support for a long time. We were selected for a pilot study and spent years developing and implementing operating systems and quality standards, developing employee skills, re-engineering the plant, and following up to ensure success. We cross-train some of our workers and promote them to utility operators, which became an asset in line balancing when there was absenteeism.

This training refined the employee's skills and increased their performance.

P1, P2, and P4 agreed that there was an improvement in employee attitude and level of engagement during and after training. P1 indicated, "we put a lot into training and development, which has made the difference in attendance, punctuality, and turnover among our young people." P2 suggested, "our employees are more confident during and

after training as they are now positioned to earn more or to be considered for promotions.” P4 shared, “training prepares our employees to work efficiently, and they are allowed to ask questions if something is unclear and build confidence from practicing.” In contrast, P3 indicated, “some employees are not excited about training and see it as additional work and responsibilities. They are not interested in advancement and are satisfied with their position in the organization.” The goal of training programs can be realized when employees develop an interest and the motivation to learn (Hurtz & Williams, 2009).

Company documents obtained from C1 and C2 indicated mandatory training for new employees and contained the requirements for employees to be eligible to benefit from further training. After probation, and based on performance, employees are eligible to benefit from advanced training and career development opportunities. Information obtained from company websites, newsletters, and notices outlined the monthly training schedules for employees and supervisory staff.

### ***Evidence From the Literature***

The information by all participants supports existing literature on employee engagement, providing evidence that managers who support training and development programs for employees reap the benefits of a highly engaged workforce. Training is considered one of the universal methods of improving employees’ productivity and performance levels in an organization (Siddiqui & Sahar, 2019). The data from all four participants reflect elements of training and development as essential to all aspects of the production process, particularly for ensuring a ready pool of skilled employees for line balancing and promotions. Training develops employee skills and capabilities to engage

and perform their work role (Organ, 1994). For example, continuous operational methods and quality training are likely to increase employee engagement leading to the achievement of production and quality targets while meeting production deadlines.

The investments made by an organization in employee training and development convey a clear signal that the organization cares about employees' personal growth and welfare (Sung & Choi, 2018). Additionally, employees who perceive that training and development are relevant and beneficial in performing their tasks will likely feel more appreciative toward their organization, thereby developing a trusting relationship with and attachment toward their employers (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

### ***Evidence From the Conceptual Framework***

Theme 2 aligns with Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory relating training and development to job satisfaction, psychological availability, and the employees' cognitive, emotional, and physical investment at work. Kahn suggested that employees are psychologically available when there is confidence in their abilities, status, and self-awareness (Kahn, 1990). Employees develop confidence when they possess the knowledge and skills to do their work or have the resources necessary to engage in roles to be psychologically available (Newton & LePine, 2018). Cognitive availability results in emotional investment and positive physical behavior (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015).

Leader's behavior towards training and development may influence the way employees value their work and their desire to engage. Leadership behaviors could shape the employee's perception of the work environment and determine their response behaviors to engage or disengage (Lu et al., 2018). Employee perception of training positively impacts job satisfaction and commitment and reduces job-related anxiety,

motivating employees to engage in their work (Fletcher, 2016). Therefore, organizations need to invest in training and development activities to improve employees' skills and competency levels required to perform their assigned roles and responsibilities (Elnaga & Imran, 2013).

### **Theme 3: Create Attractive Rewards and Recognition Strategies**

The third theme to emerge from data analysis was to create attractive rewards and recognition strategies. To achieve or maintain their companies' profitability, organizational leaders should work hard to engage employees (Kortmann et al., 2014). Leaders can increase employee engagement, performance, and productivity by rewarding and recognizing employees for their efforts (Baqir et al., 2020). Leaders should reward and recognize employees for their performance and contributions to the organization and motivate them to work to achieve organizational goals (Asaari et al., 2019). Rewards include benefits, ranging from cash payments to better working conditions (Sandelands, 1994), which should be aligned with employee performance and be consistent with the company's strategic goals (Allen & Kilmann, 2001).

#### ***Data Collected***

All participants identified rewards and recognition as effective in influencing employee engagement. P2 stated, "employees look to leaders for validation and appreciation for their contribution to the organization. Validation could range from a smile, a pat on the back, encouraging words, to monetary or other rewards." P4 added, "when employees are recognized for their efforts, they are more motivated and committed to the organization." Employee engagement is built on belief, trust, reliability, commitment, and communication between an organization and its employees (Nisha

Chanana, 2020). It is the responsibility of leaders to try to build solid and trusting relationships necessary for employee engagement.

According to Asaari et al. (2019), rewarding and recognizing efficient employees will boost the employee's productivity. Organizations can improve employee outcomes by offering intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (Mahaney & Lederer, 2006). Intrinsic rewards are intangible and include achievement, appreciation, challenge, autonomy, status within the organization, and personal and professional growth; extrinsic rewards comprise monetary incentives, such as pay, job security, promotions, raises, and bonuses (Victor & Hoole, 2017). Organizations show how much they value their employees' contributions by the extrinsic rewards they offer (Asaari et al., 2019). P1 and P2 expressed that in addition to monetary incentives, they show their appreciation for their employees in cost-effective ways to keep them excited and motivated. P2 added,

We have monthly appreciation socials where names are drawn for prizes such as dinners, lunches, small appliances, and movie tickets. We also present employees with certificates for performance and the employee of the month award. We always place a framed picture of the employee of the month on the recognition wall at the main office entrance. Employees take great pride in being a nominee and or a winner of this award and look forward each week to the drawing of prizes.

All participants indicated using performance-based incentives to increase employee engagement and employee performance. According to P4, "this is a win-win situation as employees control their earnings, and the company benefits from increased productivity." P1 explained that employees are given production targets or quotas and are paid weekly

bonuses based on their performance against given targets. P3 includes punctuality and adherence to safety rules in the rewards program, as wearing the correct safety gear and following safety guidelines will ensure that food manufacturing standards are met. Employees are also rewarded for their performance with promotions and advanced training.

All participants indicated that they have an annual celebration and awards event where employees are recognized for their contributions and awarded with end-of-year bonuses, gifts, and certificates. Bonuses are based on the result of annual performance appraisals. Leaders use performance appraisals to formally evaluate employee performance (Harbi et al., 2017).

Leaders can influence engagement or contribute to employee disengagement through their leadership style and support. Recognition and appreciation are significant antecedents of employee engagement (Saks, 2019). Leaders who show appreciation for their employees address and enhance their essential needs, such as recognizing that they belong; feel respected; understand where the company is going; being recognized for excellent performance; and the value of their contribution to the company's success (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2012). P3 added,

Our employees are mostly women, most of whom have been loyal to the company for more than 20 years. Their workplace is like a second home as that is where they spend most of their time. We have incentives geared towards building relationships to show we value our employees, such as monthly games evenings and quarterly family events. We partner with employees to plan family events.

The overall performance of departments determines the quality of the event. We



also have an annual recognition ceremony where we present our employees with performance awards and recognize them with bonuses and monetary gifts for years of service.

P1, P3, and P4 suggested that attractive rewards and recognition systems can significantly boost employee morale and reduce absenteeism and employee turnover. According to P1, employees' desire and decision to stay in a job and give their best are determined by the additional benefits attached to the position and their perception of what they can expect to achieve from the company in the future. P1 continued,

Since we have implemented certain rewards and recognition systems, the energy at work is different. Employees are more motivated and often over-extend themselves to ensure that production targets are met. Before this, line balancing was a challenge, and productivity was low as absenteeism and turnover rates were high. Employees had a "we don't care" attitude and felt that management did not appreciate them for their efforts and that the company was only concerned about making money. The younger male employees often complain that they are not invested in the job as management makes them feel disposable. We now have employees more eager to work towards the different goals and bonuses set by the company.

P3 stated, "our employees will do more for recognition, as with recognition, they feel that the company values their contribution." P4 spoke on team rewards and recognition. P4 expressed, "whenever there are balancing issues or we are behind in achieving production goals, team rewards encourage teamwork and build relationships.

Company documents obtained and reviewed from C1 and C2 indicated rewards and recognition strategies as an emerging theme. The employee handbook outlined that rewards and recognition were integral to the company's compensation plan to attract and retain the best talent. The handbook outlined the different ways and performance measures used to reward and recognized employees. A review of employee performance records and reports, and information obtained from company websites showed that C1 and C2 reward their employees based on performance and work attitude. Annual bonus awards were determined by company performance, local economic conditions, and employee performance.

### ***Evidence From the Literature***

Theme three aligns with the literature on the importance of creating rewards and recognition strategies to increase employee engagement. Facer et al. (2014) asserted that every employee wants to be recognized and appreciated by their managers and supervisors. Jardí et al. (2022) also suggested that feeling appreciated, having mutual respect, gratitude, and interpersonal communication with colleagues, are considered necessary for meaningful job experience. Alignment of the reward system with organizational strategy helps determine organizational effectiveness (Özutku, 2012). Recognition helps reduce employees' intentions to leave the organization, increase their desire to stay and contribute more to its success (Langove & Isha, 2017). Employee engagement involves using human resources to achieve strategic goals such as improved organizational performance (Lai et al., 2020). Both participant organizations rely on an engaged workforce to achieve their strategic goals, and use various measures to reward and recognize employees. Both participant organizations rely on an engaged workforce to

achieve their strategic goals, and they use various measures to reward and recognize employees.

### ***Evidence From the Conceptual Framework***

The findings are consistent with the tenets of Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory as expressed in one's cognitive, emotional, and physical needs. Kahn identified meaningfulness as one of the psychological conditions that enable employees and shape how they perform their work necessary for engagement to occur. Psychological meaningfulness refers to the individual's perception of being recognized or valued for the investment of self in the performance of their roles (Turner, 2020). Maslow (1943) argued that individuals who do not believe their work is valued, meaningful, and purposeful would not perform up to their professional potential. Meaningful work plays a significant role in sustaining employee commitment and productivity in organizations (Geldenhuis et al., 2014). All participants commented on specific rewards and recognition strategies as elements of their success in increasing employee engagement. Organizational leaders can increase employee engagement, performance, and productivity by rewarding and recognizing employees for their efforts (Baqir et al., 2020).

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The application of this study to professional business practice includes providing manufacturing business managers with strategies to increase employee engagement. Business leaders can benefit from this study's findings because it provides detailed strategies to increase employee engagement within their organizations. Business leaders who understand and apply these strategies may improve business practice by increasing

employee engagement, productivity, and business success. Based on participants' responses to semistructured interviews and review of company documents, my findings indicated that manufacturing business managers can apply the findings to aid in increasing employee engagement in their organizations by implementing effective communication techniques, provide quality training and development programs, and create attractive rewards and recognition strategies.

Manufacturing business managers can improve teamwork, collaboration, and trust with practical communication techniques. Study participants provided examples of open and transparent communication techniques to increase employee engagement and productivity. According to Mazzei et al. (2019), employees thrive in an environment with open lines of communication and are aware of the company's overall goals and mission. The application to professional business practice based on the study findings may aid other business managers in determining effective communication strategies to increase employee engagement. Business owners who implement effective communication measures have the advantage of growth, sustaining, and mitigating the effects of employee disengagement. The study findings could be useful for business owners interested in improving their value and performance while minimizing productivity losses.

In theme 2, participants shared the value of quality training and development to employee engagement. Guan and Frenkel (2019) stated that leaders should provide quality training and development to enable employees to develop the skills and competence to perform their jobs effectively. Participants noted improvement in employee engagement, work attitude, and performance during and after training. The

findings are relevant to improved business practice as manufacturing business managers could use the results from this study to increase employee engagement by implementing training and development programs so employees can learn, develop, and potentially advance in their roles. Elnaga and Imran (2013) suggested that organizations invest in training and development activities to improve employees' skills and competency levels required to perform their assigned roles and responsibilities.

In theme 3, all study participants indicated the importance of creating attractive rewards and recognition programs to consistently celebrate and show appreciation for employee performance and their contribution to the organization's success. The rewards and recognition strategies identified by participants in this study are relevant to improved business practice as manufacturing business managers can use these strategies to increase employee engagement leading to increased productivity and business sustainability. According to Asaari et al. (2019), rewarding and recognizing efficient employees will boost the employee's productivity. An increase in productivity can position business managers to be profitable and sustainable with the ability to contribute more to employees and the local community. Business owners can attract and obtain the financial capital necessary to sustain and grow by improving productivity. The strategies identified might also provide new and existing managers with a framework for implementing effective strategies to increase employee engagement.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Social change involves creating positive outcomes that transform society. Herman (2020) states that the manufacturing industry is crucial in many national economies and critical to sustainable economic growth. The strategies identified in this

study may provide manufacturing business managers with the awareness to influence social change by applying their understanding of these strategies to increase employee engagement and improve manufacturing practices. My findings suggested that establishing effective communication techniques, providing quality training and development programs, and creating attractive rewards and recognition strategies may help to increase employee engagement and promote better living standards for community residents.

By establishing effective communication techniques, manufacturing business managers could increase employee engagement leading to increased profit margins that may benefit the economy in local communities. The economic benefits may include employment opportunities for school leavers, individuals who experience problems with obtaining gainful employment, and people with disabilities. Creating new employment opportunities could potentially increase consumer spending and contribute to economic growth within the local community. Further, when manufacturing businesses operate profitably, business leaders can redistribute profits into business expansion and investment into local community projects to improve the social well-being of community residents.

Managers can use the results from the findings to train and develop highly skilled leaders and an efficient workforce who can contribute to a higher standard of work and create more value within the organization. The positive social implication is that an efficient workforce improves organizational performance and economic growth within the local community. Employees who enjoy higher earnings can take better care of their families and are more willing to contribute their time and use their knowledge and skills

to volunteer within the local community. Volunteering could include teaching individuals with learning disabilities, mentoring disadvantaged youths, serving at local food kitchens, and supporting social activities such as community outreach initiatives. Community outreach initiatives such as cancer awareness, wellness education, and neighborhood cleanup projects can benefit the local community. Mishra et al. (2014) indicated that engaged employees tend to display a strong work ethic, and involvement in the community, encourage family values, and positively impact on business and personal relationships.

Organizational leaders may benefit from this study by developing reward and recognition strategies to increase employee engagement. The development of reward and recognition strategies may attract and retain the skilled talent necessary for competitiveness, employee loyalty, and organizational performance. Baqir et al. (2020) contended that leaders can increase employee engagement, performance, and productivity by rewarding and recognizing employees for their efforts. Employees who feel appreciated and valued by their leaders will remain in their jobs and reduce the cost of rehiring and retraining for their positions. Business leaders can reinvest those cost savings into programs for the betterment of employees and the local community residents. Organizations that invest in their community may impact families' well-being by providing employment and economic development opportunities and contributing to education and environmental programs (Appiah, 2019).

### **Recommendations for Action**

The manufacturing industry provides opportunities for the growth and development of a society. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to

explore manufacturing managers' strategies to increase employee engagement. In this study, I found that participants used various strategies to increase employee engagement. Based on the findings of this study, I recommend the following strategies manufacturing business managers and other managers could implement to increase employee engagement in their organizations:

Manufacturing business managers may benefit by establishing effective communication techniques where open and transparent dialogue is encouraged to build trust and provide a psychological safe space for employees to use their voices. According to Tigre et al. (2022), trust is a prerequisite to employee engagement, and distrust prohibits maximum potential. Promote the use of verbal, non-verbal, and written communication channels and encourage collaboration, participation, and information-sharing. Provide and promote quality feedback consistent and specific to individual and organizational goals. The quality of feedback is critical to effective communication, should be consistent and specific to the goal-related behaviors and process, and result in performance outcomes (Whitaker & Levy, 2012).

Second, manufacturing business leaders should consider providing quality training and development opportunities to improve employee skill levels to increase their performance, productivity, and earnings potential. Improving employee capability via training will motivate employees to engage in their work to achieve higher in-role and extra-role performance. Continuous training and cross-training will ensure a ready pool of skilled workers for a smoother workflow.

Lastly, I recommend that manufacturing business leaders create and implement attractive reward and recognition strategies to increase employee engagement by showing



appreciation for employee consistency, performance, and the value they bring to the organization. Encourage employees to go after incentives, production goals, and promotions by showing recognition for minor events and achievements such as birthdays, births, anniversaries, punctuality, and attendance. Use collaboration and partnership to develop fair and attractive programs, such as inviting participation on committees to discuss production-related issues. Create a work environment and an organizational culture that fosters and nurtures employee engagement, such as an open door policy to encourage collaboration and to show that all contributions are valued, celebrate achievements and show appreciation, and empower employees by investing in their development.

The findings in this study could be useful to manufacturing industry leaders and managers of other businesses in developing effective strategies to increase employee engagement in their organizations. After this doctoral study is published, I will provide each participant with a summary of the findings. I will also seek alternate opportunities to disseminate my findings via online teaching at local universities, guest speaking opportunities at Jamaica manufacturing association meetings, and academic and professional conferences such as the annual employee engagement conference. I also plan to conduct and participate in employee engagement seminars and offer consulting services to manufacturing business leaders and other leaders interested in developing successful strategies to increase employee engagement in their organizations.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the strategies some manufacturing business managers use to increase employee engagement. The target

population was four manufacturing business managers located in the northeastern region of Jamaica. The first limitation of this study was that employee engagement in the manufacturing sector and region may differ from other industries and regions. I recommend that future researchers include participants from a wider geographical region, such as central and western Jamaica, to identify if the strategies used by managers in other regions were similar. The second limitation of this study was that results may not be transferable to other sectors. I recommend that future researchers explore strategies used by individuals in companies operating in different industries such as construction, automotive, and retail.

The third limitation of this study was that participants' biases and inability to recall events accurately may influence the interview questions' responses. Future researchers should interview other employees, such as production workers, supervisors, team leaders, and machine mechanics, to understand employee engagement from different perspectives. Researchers could use quantitative or mixed method research to gain new insights, which could help increase employee engagement.

### **Reflections**

The journey of pursuing a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) has been long, challenging, but rewarding. I experienced emotions ranging from excitement to anxiety, joy, disappointment, frustration, and hope. I started this process with preconceived expectations and underestimated how extensive and time-consuming the process was. Early in the journey, I dealt with the devastating loss of my husband and, later, the passing of my second committee member. I faced challenges ranging from creating a balance with school, work, family, and my personal life; to getting participants

to commit to a time and date for the interview. In addition to gaining knowledge from extensive research, I improved my critical thinking skills, learned how to write in a scholarly manner, revise and edit, critique, give quality feedback, and accept and appreciate criticisms. Effective time management, consistency, and focusing on my reason for embarking on this course were keys to completing the journey. Through it all, I have gained a profound sense of accomplishment and have experienced growth in all aspects of my personal and professional life.

Throughout the research process, I focused on preventing my personal biases from affecting the results of the study. My prior experience working in senior management in the manufacturing industry created a personal bias that could have affected the study findings. To reduce the potential for bias, I used an interview protocol to ensure that all participants were administered the same interview questions in the same order and therefore had the same opportunities to contribute to the study. One preconceived idea I had was how much salaries and monetary incentives influenced employee engagement. I found that certain psychological conditions must be present for employee engagement. When employees are engaged, they will harness their full selves to their role and go after wages and monetary incentives.

Finally, this journey gave me a new perspective on the importance of patience and having a strong sense of belief in myself. I gained a tremendous amount of knowledge on the business problem and a new understanding of the challenges manufacturing business managers' face and how they manage employee engagement. I look forward to using my experience to teach, mentor, and support future doctoral students and leaders in the manufacturing industry and other industries.

## Conclusion

Employee engagement is essential for business success due to the high cost of employee disengagement. According to Vila-Vázquez et al. (2018), employee engagement is a psychological affective-motivational state where employees experience a physical, cognitive, or emotional connection to work and coworkers. Kahn's (1990) theory asserts that engagement depends on the psychological states of meaningfulness, safety, and availability, which are affected by people's perception of work contexts and resources. When organizational leaders create strategies that foster and sustain employee engagement, they experience benefits such as enhanced performance, increased productivity, and business success. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies used by manufacturing business managers to increase employee engagement. The targeted population included four managers from two manufacturing organizations in the southeastern region of Jamaica who have successfully implemented strategies to increase employee engagement.

During data analysis, I focused on themes pertinent to the central research question and the conceptual framework. The data analysis revealed three major themes: use effective communication techniques for employee engagement, develop quality training and development programs, and create attractive reward and recognition strategies. The subthemes that developed from the need for effective communication techniques were encouraging open and transparent communication, building a foundation of trust, and providing quality feedback. The findings from this study were consistent with existing literature regarding strategies to increase employee engagement. The strategies proposed in this study may provide managers with tools for creating and

implementing effective systems, policies, and procedures to increase employee engagement within the workplace.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol and Questions

### **Interview Protocol**

1. I will begin by introducing myself as Jennifer Morgan-Petgrave, a doctoral student in the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program at Walden University. I will thank the participant for agreeing to participate in the study and for their contribution to research.
2. I will give a brief overview of the research, the purpose, and inform participant of the estimated interview time of 30-45 minutes.
3. I will review the consent document and explain the following with participants, (a) participation is voluntary, (b) participant can withdraw at any time, and (c) there is no monetary compensation. I will ask the participant if there are questions or concerns.
4. I will remind the participant that the information collected will be confidential and that I will take steps to protect their privacy with identification codes to mask their names.
5. I will inform participant that I will record the interview via Zoom recording feature and a reminder that the participant may terminate the interview at any time and for any reason.
6. I will request participant's permission to begin recording, and I will start the interview by introducing the participant with an identification code noting the date and time.

7. I will ask each participant seven open-ended interview questions and ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth responses when necessary. I will observe for and note nonverbal cues, expressions, and body language.
8. At the end of the interview, I will end by turning off Zoom recording, and I will thank each participant for participating in the study.
9. I will inform participants about the member checking process prior to the initial interview.
10. I will explain to participants that I will transcribe the interview recordings and notes verbatim and, within one week, provide each participant via email a summary of their responses to verify the accuracy of my interpretation. Participants will be asked to review the information and return their response via email within 3 business days.
11. I will follow up with participants via phone or email to answer any question or concerns about member checking.
12. I will end the interview and again thank each participant for participating in the study. Finally, I will verify contact information for possible follow-up questions and concerns from participants.

**Interview Questions**

1. What strategies have you used to increase employee engagement in your manufacturing business?
2. What were the challenges you encountered in implementing strategies to increase employee engagement?
3. How did you address the key challenges you encountered in implementing strategies to increase employee engagement?
4. What strategy did you find worked best to increase operational efficiency in your manufacturing business?
5. How did the strategies influence employee engagement to increase productivity in your manufacturing business?
6. How did you measure the effectiveness of strategies to increase employee engagement?
7. What additional information or comments would you like to share regarding the strategies necessary to increase employee engagement in your manufacturing business?