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Enhancing Employee Engagement to Improve Financial Performance

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MS, Walden University, 2009

BS, Niagara University, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Business leaders are negatively affected when many employees are not engaged in their jobs. Business leaders who struggle to achieve employee engagement suffer decreased profitability, sales, employee retention, and customer satisfaction. Grounded in employee engagement theory, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies IT business leaders use to engage employees. The participants were five IT business leaders who successfully developed strategies to engage employees. Data were collected from semistructured interviews, company documents, and artifacts. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Two themes emerged: creating a company culture conducive to employee engagement and using communication to build employee engagement. A key recommendation is for IT business leaders to allow employees to participate in the decision-making process, which results in increased employee engagement. The implications for positive social change include potentially increasing employee engagement that could increase profits, provide more employment opportunities for community members, and improve their living conditions to maintain a balance between work and personal lives.

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Dedication

I dedicate my doctoral study work to my son Giovanni who was my constant reminder to never give up and to just keep on going. I need to set the best example possible to follow your dreams and to always finish what you start. I want my son to reach for the stars and to always dream big. Education is important and knowing that you can do anything you set your mind to makes all the difference.

I also want to dedicate my doctoral study work to my husband Peter for supporting me through the process. I want to give him a special thanks for helping me to finalize my dream of getting my doctoral degree. I want to thank my friends and family that supported me by providing words of encouragement and being my cheerleaders.

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I would like to thank Mark DiStefano for starting me on the journey that we were going to accomplish together. I would like to thank my co-workers for always listening to my complaints and pushing me along the way. I would like to thank the Walden University faculty for helping me to pursue and complete my goals.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Employee engagement is a tool that business leaders use to improve organizational outcomes (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board [MSPB], 2018). Engaged employees show increased effort towards obtaining organizational goals and embracing values and a greater sense of motivation to contribute to the business' success. Generating a workplace environment in which employees become engaged in their work improves working conditions; increases enthusiasm and motivation to work towards organizational goals; and leads to improving customer loyalty, market share, and profitability (Adarsh & Kumar, 2017). In this study, I explored the strategies that business leaders used to successfully improve employee engagement, leading to an increase in their organization's financial performance.

Background of the Problem

In the global market, the economy is volatile, growing regulations and business standards exist that force companies to prioritize responsibilities and seek strategies to fit the market and keep employees engaged (Anand, 2017). When appropriately managed, people are the most valuable asset to a business, thus the need for leaders to engage employees (Madan, 2017). Business leaders are responsible for communicating to employees that their work is meaningful, engaging the employee, and increasing the employee's involvement, satisfaction, and enthusiasm (Madan, 2017). According to Galeazzo et al. (2021), leaders need to consider several focus areas to provide strategic solutions through employee participation. Mueller (2019) provided several managers' characteristics to lead employees in a more efficient and productive environment to include respectful, responsible, proactive, participative, sociable, and empathetic leadership. Engaged employees are more enthusiastic, involved, committed, and support innovation, growth, and revenue (Mueller, 2019). Engaged employees are a valuable asset because engaged employees illustrate commitment, passion, and determination to meet career goals. Employee engagement is a prerequisite to business success (Anand, 2017).

Problem Statement

Lack of employee engagement affects business organizations negatively because employee engagement is an organizational tool that improves financial performance due to increased profitability, sales, employee retention, and customer satisfaction (MSPB, 2018). Seventy-one percent of employees are not engaged in their jobs (Rao, 2017). The general business problem is that some information technology (IT) business leaders are experiencing profit losses in their organizations because of a decrease in employee engagement. The specific business problem is that some IT business leaders lack strategies to engage employees.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies IT business leaders use to engage employees. The target population consisted of five Maryland IT business leaders from a business organization with successful experience using strategies to engage employees. The implications for positive social change include study findings that could help business leaders with strategies to engage employees and aid in reducing financial losses. Business leaders achieving financial success could provide more employment opportunities for community members, allowing local communities to prosper. Business leaders could become empowered to create a work environment conducive to employee engagement and assist the local community in bringing about social change by helping employees improve their living conditions and personal well-being to maintain a balance between work and personal lives (Luke & Chu, 2013). Business leaders using innovative practices address social entrepreneurship and pave the way to address social needs (Luke & Chu, 2013).

Nature of the Study

Yin (2018) described three research methodologies, which are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. A qualitative study is interpretive, as there is a need to explore the phenomenon through subjectivity and socially constructed meanings (Lanka et al., 2021). A qualitative study is naturalistic in nature since there is a need to operate within a natural setting (Lanka et al., 2021). Yin described qualitative research as a method to explore the *what, why,* and *how* of a phenomenon in its real-life setting. I used the qualitative research method because it was my intent to explore the *what*, *why*, and *how* of employee engagement. In a quantitative study, the researcher examines the relationship between various variables, using measuring techniques to analyze the data while incorporating controls to ensure validity (Lanka et al., 2021). In quantitative research, a researcher establishes clear and concise questions and hypotheses (Mohajan, 2020). I did not select the quantitative method for this study because I did not examine relationships among variables using statistical analyses through hypotheses testing. In a mixed-method study, the researcher uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Yin, 2018). Researchers use the mixed-method research methodology to employ both inductive and deductive reasoning (Yin, 2018). Because there are no hypotheses to test and numerical data to evaluate for this study, I did not select the mixed method for this study.

The qualitative research designs that I considered included narrative, phenomenological, ethnographic, and case study. The narrative approach entails participants' experiences through their personal stories in an open, interpretative way, which is typically sequential and nonstructured (Yin, 2018). I did not use the narrative research design because I did not focus on participants' experiences, described through their personal stories, in an open, interpretative way. The phenomenological design is a form of interpretivism where the researcher focuses on the participants' lived experiences to understand meanings and gain insights (van Manen, 2017). The phenomenological design was not the best-suited research approach for this study because I did not focus on studying the personal meanings of participants' lived experiences. I did not use the ethnographic research design approach because, according to Hammersley (2018), researchers use the ethnographic research design to conduct an in-depth explanation of everyday life's social and cultural organization for a specific community, which is not the focus of my study. Researchers use the case study design to highlight real-world business issues in business and management research related to business practices (Yin, 2018). Researchers also use the case study design to investigate a phenomenon in-depth within the participants' environmental context and triangulate data as part of the strategy for validating findings (Ridder, 2017). I used the case study research design because I explored the *what*, *how*, and *why* of a particular phenomenon, which, for this case study, was exploring strategies for employee engagement.

Research Question

What strategies do IT business leaders use to engage employees?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have proven successful to engage employees in your organization?
2. Based upon your experience, what are some of the consequences of not having strategies to engage employees in your organization?
3. How did your employees respond to those strategies?
4. How are strategies to engage employees effectively communicated throughout the organizational ranks and among stakeholders?
5. What were your key processes for engaging employees in your organization?
6. What were the key barriers to implementing your organization's strategies to engage your employees successfully in your organization?
7. How did you address the key barriers to engage employees successfully?
8. What else would you like to share that I have not asked you regarding successful strategies your organization used to engage employees?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Shuck and Reio's (2011) employee engagement theory. Shuck et al. (2011b) defined employee engagement as the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state of an employee towards the organization. Shuck et al. linked employee engagement to job satisfaction and commitment to include long-term emotional involvement. Shuck and Reio grounded and founded employee engagement theory on Kahn’s (1990) conceptualization of personal engagement and later modified the theory to reflect employee engagement. Shuck et al. (2017a) contributed further to the theory of employee engagement with the employee engagement scale. Shuck et al. (2011b) employee engagement theory contains multiple employee engagement constructs, including work, job, organizational, intellectual, and social engagement.

Shuck and Reio (2011) suggested that engaged employees are more likely to be productive in the workforce, remain with their current employer, and positively interact with consumers. Employee engagement is a significant factor in the success of a business organization (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Shuck et al. (2017b) established the employee engagement scale to measure the employee engagement experience from the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral perspectives. I selected the employee engagement theory to serve as a foundation to understand strategies business leaders use to engage employees, resulting in improved financial performance.

Operational Definitions

Employee engagement: A positive organizational outcome consisting of the three original states cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and the fourth state psychological in relation to an employee active work-related role (Shuck et al., 2017a). According to Shuck et al. (2017a), employee engagement is a positive and active psychological state with characteristics of maintenance, intensity, and direction that relate to work activities affecting employees' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy.

Employee disengagement: Employees' withdrawal from work tasks, an absence of emotional, social, and physical engagement (Shuck et al., 2011). Disengaged employees are a threat to engaged employees, as disengaged employees demotivate the performers of the organization (Madan, 2017).

Not engaged: Employees not engaged are task-oriented rather than focused on organizational goals (Madan, 2017). When an employee does not fully invest in the work environment by refraining from a member, work, and group activities, the employee is not engaged (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are specific beliefs related to the study that a researcher encounters in the research process and the way the researcher's values influence the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I assumed that the data collected during the interviews would accurately reflect the participants' experiences. I assumed that the use of the concept of employee engagement was universal across all industries, cultures, and organizations. I also assumed that the data collected from participants would help answer the overreaching research question of what strategies business leaders use to engage employees. I assumed that business leaders in the IT industry are willing to participate in the study and that documents for review would be accessible.

Limitations

Limitations are those aspects of a study that a researcher cannot control, a threat to the internal validity of a study, or the restrictions of the study (Morgado et al., 2018). A limitation of this study was that only a few IT business leaders participated in this study. Conducting a study with only a few leaders from a few different organizations prevented the application of findings across the IT industry. Some business leaders of IT companies could have chosen not to participate in the study; however, all participants selected participated fully in this study. The time limit for interviews was another limitation of the study.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the scope and boundaries of a study, as set by a researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). In this study, I conducted in-depth, Zoom interviews with only a few business leaders from the IT industry in Maryland. I interviewed only selected participants that met the eligibility criteria. The business leaders of IT companies had to possess successful experience in engaging employees.

Significance of the Study

Value to Business

Highly engaged employees perceive value in their work in the form of intellectual stimulation that is energizing, invigorating, and meaningful (Wang et al., 2017). Managers believe that power comes from controlling information (Huang et al., 2015). This type of mindset is the reason managers lack strategies to engage their employees, as managers are less likely to share information or limit what they share (Huang et al., 2015). Low employee morale and productivity negatively affect business organizations' bottom lines, and, consequently, engaging employees in their work typically increases morale and productivity, resulting in increased profit (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). Business leaders' ability to engage employees could significantly impact the organization's success (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). Engaged employees become enthusiastic about developing and delivering better products and services, resulting in increased employee investment in the company, sales, and profits (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). Business leaders see high growth levels in profits, ranging from 10% to 15%, when the business organization has highly engaged employees (Kumar & Pansari, 2015).

Contribution to Business Practice

Leaders able to engage their employees achieve various organizational outcomes, including higher shareholder returns; greater return on assets; higher shareholder value, profitability, and productivity; and greater customer satisfaction (Saks, 2017). Engaged employees tend to have a positive job attitude, a higher level of task completion, and an increase in job and contextual performance (Saks, 2017). Engaged employees also experience an increase in personal and work-related health and well-being (Saks, 2017). All of these benefits lead to increased organizational performance and employee retention because engaged employees are less likely to leave the firm (Saks, 2017). Engaging frontline employees is critical to the success of an organization because business leaders are able to achieve a competitive advantage in a highly competitive environment (King & Lee, 2016).

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change from this study include the opportunity for business leaders to effectively engage employees, improve productivity, reduce financial losses, and reduce employees' intentions to resign (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Reducing employees' intentions to resign may reduce the overall unemployment in the local community, which benefits members of the local community because unemployed individuals have elevated rates of mental and physical health problems, higher mortality rates, and experience detrimental changes in family relationships (Wahlbeck & Mcdaid, 2012). Enhancements in employee engagement can result in improvements in living conditions and the emotional well-being of employees (Shuck & Reio, 2014). When business leaders are able to engage their employees in their work, business leaders create an organizational presence within the firm's region, encouraging engaged employees to volunteer within the community and enacting change (Burcher & Mayer, 2018).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

I reviewed the literature on employee engagement published in various journals and seminal scholarly books. Linked to the Walden University Library's website, Google Scholar served as the primary source for accessing journal articles. The Walden University Library allows students access to various databases. Databases used to obtain literature for this study included Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Complete, Emerald Management, Sage Premier, Academic Search Complete, and ProQuest Central. Furthermore, I also accessed various open journals to obtain literature related to employee engagement. AOSIS OpenJournals provides open access to peer-reviewed scholarly journals from various academic disciplines. Similarly, ScienceDirect provides both tolled and open access to a full-text scientific database containing journal articles and book chapters. In some instances, I accessed government websites to obtain information about employee engagement.

The strategy for searching through existing literature entailed the use of keywords and phrases in the various databases listed above. I applied filters to database searches to narrow down the search results. These filters included specific keywords, a specified period, and specific databases. When using Google Scholar, I gave preference to articles published in or after 2017, ensuring the literature is topical and relevant. Secondly, I gave preference to articles that were available in the Walden University Library. The keywords and phrases I used in my search were *employee engagement*, *work engagement*, *engagement theory*, *engagement*, *engaging employing*, *and benefits of employee engagement.* Crossref and Ulrich's Periodicals Directory are tools to verify that literature is peer-reviewed. The 255 references that the study contains include 222 scholarly peer-reviewed articles representing 87% of the total, 17 nonpeer-reviewed articles representing 6%, two government websites representing 1%, and 11 books representing 4%. The total number of references in this study published within the 2017-2021 period is 182, which is 71% of the total number. The literature review contains 118 references, with 79 references published within the 2017-2021 period, representing 67%, and 102 from scholarly peer-reviewed sources, representing 86%.

Literature Review Organization

The literature review section has several subsections. It begins with an introduction, which includes information about the strategy for searching the literature, the frequencies, percentages of peer-reviewed articles, and publication dates. In the next section, I focus on the application of the literature to the research question and include a brief description of the purpose of the study. In this literature review, the themes I discuss are Shuck and Reio’s (2011) employee engagement theory, other supporting and contrasting theories, management strategies in employee engagement, effective leadership practices in employee engagement, and employee productivity. Throughout the literature review, I compared and contrasted different points of view and relationships between previous research and findings with this study.

The first theme, employee engagement theory, includes critical analysis and synthesis of the conceptual framework I selected for my study, which is Shuck and Reio’s (2011) employee engagement theory using supporting and contrasting theories from relevant literature on the topic of employee engagement. Some of the supporting and contrasting theories are Kahn’s (1990) theory of engagement, Demerouti et al.’s (2001) job demands-resources (JD-R) model, Schaufeli and Bakker’s (2004) Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, and Maslach and Leiter’s (1997) job engagement. The second theme, management strategies in employee engagement, starts with a brief overview of the development of employee engagement construct over time. Next, I discuss common concerns relating to the construct as well as the various definitions, antecedents, and consequences of employee engagement. The third theme for discussion is effective leadership practices in employee engagement. The theme starts with a general discussion about leadership and leadership styles as it relates to employee engagement. Leadership styles reviewed include transactional leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership. The fourth theme, the impact of disengaged employees on an organization, is about a leader's ability to improve or promote employee productivity in disengaged employees to engage employees.

Application to the Applied Business Problem

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to engage employees. Developing an understanding of such strategies requires a qualitative approach, more specifically, an exploratory single case study. The findings from this study might provide insight into employee engagement from a group of leaders' perspectives.

The findings of the study may assist with the development of appropriate strategies for employee engagement. Once an understanding of the underlying meaning emerges, appropriate strategies might equip leaders with the skills to improve employee engagement. The findings from the study might improve business practice by identifying appropriate strategies, leading to increased productivity and organizational competitiveness. The potential for social change rests in the development of strategies to improve employee engagement and personal well-being.

Employee Engagement Theory

Employee engagement continues to increase its presence in research studies as leaders pursue added workplace benefits of engaged employees (Shuck et al., 2011).

Shuck et al. (2011) described the state of employee engagement as an emotional event that is inclusive of long-term involvement and a precursor of temporary employee sentiments regarding job satisfaction and obligation. Enhancing engagement can lead to the obtainment of performance-related outcomes, much like the creation of competitive advantage, the exploration of productivity, as well as organizational and citizenship behaviors (Shuck et al., 2011b). As of June of 2021, Shuck and Reio (2011) have been cited roughly 1180 times on employee engagement; however, most citations are within the 2017-2021 period, according to a Google Scholar search.

There are a plethora of definitions for employee engagement, as there is not one agreed-upon definition. While there is no consensus in defining employee engagement, Shuck and Reio (2011) believe employee engagement is a keystone business concept. Shuck and Reio defined employee engagement as revolving around the employee's reflections and understanding of their organizational role, the culture, and the employee's rational commitment to the organization and the company's well-being. Shuck and Reio studied the antecedents of employee engagement using the following variables: job fit, affective commitment, and psychological climate as influencers of employee engagement. Shuck and Reio found that employees that perceived their managers as supportive contributed to the workplace had a higher potential to engage in discretionary effort and experienced a proper level of challenge in the employees' work roles. Shuck and Reio used Kahn's (1990) engagement theory as a foundation for their employee engagement theory.

Kahn (1990) explained employee engagement as employees expressing themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally throughout their role at work. The human resource development theory incorporated a psychological foundation of employee engagement. Shuck (2011) named four approaches with fluctuating need-satisfying associated measures. Much like Shuck and Reio (2011), Truss et al. (2013) studied employee engagement through the lens of human resource management (HRM). Truss et al. focused on the link between employee engagement and improved performance through the HRM process. Truss et al. explained that Shuck and Reio provided insight into the conceptualization of employee engagement.

Engaged employees outperform disengaged employees (Reissova et al., 2019; Shuck & Reio, 2011). Engagement is positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and reduced intention to resign (Reissova et al., 2019; Shuck & Reio, 2011). Culibrk et al. (2018) agreed with Shuck and Reio (2011) that organizational conditions positively impact work behavior. Koch et al. (2019) agreed that employee engagement is an organizational asset, plays a significant role in HRM and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Engaged employees provide a substantial organizational benefit, as shown in all conceivable organizational metrics. Leaders engaging their employees are making a measurable difference in the workplace and the overall organization (Aksoy et al., 2018). Employee engagement is an essential aspect of an organization; engaged employees improve productivity and profitability in the organization by expressing themselves through work activities (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). Osborne and Hammoud (2017) contended that engaged employees and managers have a higher likelihood of enhanced performance as a result of a deep commitment towards achieving organizational goals.

Shuck et al. (2011) used human resource development to introduce employee engagement theory. The majority of researchers employ Kahn's (1990) theory of personal engagement because there is no single agreed-upon definition of employee engagement (Byrne et al., 2017a). The foundation for Shuck et al. (2011b) engagement theory is Kahn's personal engagement concept of cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement. Leaders need to focus on employee engagement to remain at the forefront of emerging engagement (Shuck & Reio, 2011). The beginning of employee engagement started in 2008 when academy-sponsored conferences began to publish engagement proceedings (Shuck & Reio, 2011). In 2009, the *Academy of Human Resource Development Journal* published an article in which the author termed the phrase *employee engagement* (Shuck & Reio, 2011). However, according to Shuck and Reio, there is no consistency in the definition of employee engagement or in the application of employee engagement, in which scholars view the term as reconceptualization.

Shuck and Reio (2011) claimed that there is a gap in the scholarly exploration of employee engagement, as many researchers often advocate and address the distinctiveness of employee engagement. However, there is a working relationship between employee engagement and job performance (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Shuck and Reio (2014) found that poor workplace engagement is detrimental to an organization, leading to a decrease in employee well-being and a reduction in productivity. Shuck and

Reio’s (2011) employee engagement theory included more than the traditional predictors of workplace performance. Shuck and Reio included employee job attitude along with the traditional elements of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy of an employee.

Shuck and Reio (2014) found that employee engagement is more predictive of task performance than intrinsic motivation, job immersion, and job fulfillment. Increased levels of employee engagement link to higher overall revenue of an organization (Shuck & Reio, 2014). To produce a positive work environment conducive to employee engagement, Vu (2020) found that empowering employees motivates them to achieve excellent performance levels, allowing managers to reach organizational goals.

Companies in which leaders implemented strategies for employee engagement by using enhanced recruitment and safe workplace practices achieved excellent retention rates, stronger customer relationships, and a more profound organizational expertise from employees (Madan, 2017). Shuck and Reio (2014) explained that a consensus on employee engagement would produce a positive outcome for the organization. There are several driving factors in employee engagement, including workplace well-being, compensation, organizational policies, team and coworker relationships, training and career development, leadership, and work environment (Madan, 2017).

Shuck et al. (2016) declared that employee engagement, as seen through a critical lens, is a phenomenon of privilege and influence, depending on the person or persons (a) controlling the context of the work, (b) determining the experience of engagement, (c) defining the value of engagement, and (d) benefiting from high levels of engagement. The experience of employee engagement benefits the employee and the organization

(Shuck et al., 2016). Researchers interchange job satisfaction with employee engagement; however, employee engagement is a separate concept from job satisfaction (Wang et al., 2020). Job satisfaction relates to the active, positive psychological work-related state of the employee (Wang et al., 2020). Emotional intelligence has a positive effect on employee engagement at work (Mangi et al., 2021). Culibrk et al. (2018) defined engagement as the characterization of vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Niswaty et al. (2021) explained that authentic leadership indirectly affects employees' work engagement, job satisfaction, and life fulfillment through psychological empowerment. Evidence provided through empirical research on the benefits of employee engagement goes beyond the traditional aspects of workplace performance, including job attitude (Shuck & Reio, 2014). By evaluating the needs of employees, leaders are addressing the workplace environment, creating a positive effect on staff productivity, and decreasing employee disengagement (Allam, 2017). Ge (2020) suggested that engaged employees have the potential to increase their skills at work when provided the opportunity to meet or exceed job requirements effectively in a positive environment with psychological safety. Schaufeli and Taris (2014) explained that employees recognize the importance of engagement through well-being and positive psychological and eudemonic dimensions.

Workplace engagement is critical to an organization’s success, as employees are the organization's backbone, and successful employee engagement results in improved financial revenues (Byrne et al., 2017a). Bakker (2011) suggested that job fit or crafting allows employees to fit their job role into their personal knowledge, skills, and abilities, creating a personjob (P-J) relationship and increasing the employees' P-J fit perceptions. Airila et al. (2014) studied work engagement over ten years and found that resourceful jobs and positive self-esteem play a significant role in the organization's ability to support and promote workability and to decrease employees' intentions to retire early. Successful employee engagement in an organization is a positive construct and predictor of contextual performance that goes beyond the positive effects of job satisfaction (Byrne et al., 2017a).

Business leaders need to invest in the development of successful employee engagement beyond a monetary investment and involve the managers in the strategic application of employee engagement (Gorgi et al., 2019). Leaders need to develop strategies that managers can use to challenge employees through hardships and difficulties in achieving workplace success (Gawke et al., 2017). Popli and Rizvi (2017) explained the *service triangle* as an indicator of a relationship among the employees, organization, and customer. Popli and Rizvi found a positive relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction. Byrne et al. (2017a) stated that engaged employees are more productive as they can improve customer service, create a positive customer experience, and improve employee retention.

Shuck and Reio (2011) expanded Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement as the foundation for their engagement theory. Kahn defined engagement as the principle that individuals use varying degrees of themselves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally throughout their work roles. Shuck and Reio factored in the three original aspects of employee engagement and the employees' organizational roles, culture, and employees' rational commitment to the organization and the organization's well-being. Kahn explained that as employees invest themselves to varying degrees in their organizational roles, the employees' performance becomes inspiring, and the employee develops a better fit within the company in their roles.

Other Supporting and Contrasting Theories

There are many supporting and contrasting theories to Shuck and Reio’s (2011) engagement theory. Supporting theories include Kahn’s (1990) theory of engagement and Demerouti et al.’s (2001) job demands-resources (JD-R) model. Contrasting theories include Schaufeli and Bakker’s (2004) Utrecht Work Engagement Scale and Maslach and Leiter’s (1997) job engagement.

Huertas-Valdivia et al. (2018) explained that Kahn’s (1990) theory of engagement was the theoretical development of employee engagement. Huertas-Valdivia et al. stated that Kahn’s theory of personal engagement or disengagement influenced work contexts and personal variables. Huertas-Valdivia et al. established a link between employee engagement and HRM policies, showing how HR practices influence an employee’s level of engagement. Huertas-Valdivia et al. argued that leadership also influences engagement because empowered leaders promote self-development, self-leadership, and self-regulation. Leadership enhances the work climate and reinforces positive behaviors, thus stimulating engagement (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2018). Huertas-Valdivia et al. found that organizations can accomplish the goal of engaging employees by satisfying their most important psychological needs, which are a sense of achievement and self-realization.

Byrne et al. (2017b) used Kahn’s (1990) theory of engagement to boost employee engagement levels by fostering and producing supportive work environments. Leaders encourage employee engagement by supporting and promoting positive leadership through the physical, mental, and emotional energy that employees devote to work. Byrne et al. (2017b) explained that positive leadership creates favorable psychological conditions, encourages employee engagement, and improves employee retention. Cesario and Chambel (2017) reflected on Kahn’s (1990) theory of engagement and defined work engagement as the degree to which employees relate to their job and coworkers. Employees demonstrating a high level of involvement and engagement are more likely to be physically, cognitively, and emotionally engaged (Cesario & Chambel, 2017). Cesario and Chambel found a link between engagement, organizational commitment, and employee performance. Cesario and Chambel explained that engagement is a predictor of employee performance and that the higher the level of engagement, the better the performance. Cesario and Chambel asserted that engaged and committed employees are valuable assets that lead to improved performance and organizational effectiveness.

Sahu et al. (2018) explained that Kahn’s (1990) theory of engagement expanded on the initial definition of employee engagement to describe views of life, an employee’s state, and behavior. Sahu et al. discussed the way Kahn included psychological meaningfulness, availability, and safety when explaining employee engagement. Sahu et al. stated that leaders could enhance employee behavior by applying the aforementioned factors. Sahu et al. studied the influence of transformational leadership, employer engagement, employer branding, and psychological attachment on employees' intention to leave an organization. Sahu et al. found that employee engagement facilitated transformational leadership and employer branding. Sahu et al. described how leaders could positively affect employee engagement through the organizational environment, leadership and ultimately affecting the organization positively. Kahn's theory is only one of the supporting theories of Shuck and Reio's (2011) employee engagement theory. Kahn's theory of engagement is one of the most common theories to describe or test employee engagement throughout history. Kahn was one of the first to document on theorizing employee engagement (Bakker, 2011).

Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement supports Shuck and Reio's (2011) theory, as they grounded their theory on Kahn's three main characteristics of employee engagement that employees physically, cognitively, and emotionally invest in their work and workplace environment when they are engaged (Kahn, 1990). Kahn proposed that employees both involve their whole selves in work and remove their whole self from the work environment or task based on behavior (Kahn, 1990). Kahn grounded his theory of engagement on the principle that individuals are active participants in their behavior, experience, and perception of the organization and its members. Kahn's theory regarded the psychological engagement and disengagement of employees. Work engagement is a better predictor of job performance than that of job satisfaction (Bakker, 2011). Kahn explained that disengaged employees simply go through the motions of their work roles and often are defensive and withdraw from work engagements. Disengaged employees are more likely to separate from the organization than engaged employees (Allam, 2017;

Kahn, 1990). In both Shuck and Reio and Kahn's theories, employees experience psychological meaningfulness in relation to the three pillars of employee engagement.

Authentic leadership plays a role in the employees' willingness to engage, their ability, and the employee's sense of safety in the workplace environment (Niswaty et al., 2021). When leaders empower employees, employees experience a higher level of engagement and lower levels of burnout (Kahn, 1990). Both Shuck and Reio (2011) and Kahn (1990) claimed that meaningfulness, safety, and availability are factors that induce greater levels of engagement (Shuck et al., 2016). Meaningfulness perpetuated the employees' self-worth and sense of personal and professional value (Kahn, 1990; Shuck et al., 2016). The theory that employees value trust in the workplace environment contributes to the employees' sense of well-being and a safe work environment (Shuck et al., 2016). Along with employee engagement is the theory of job engagement.

Maslach and Leiter's (1997) job engagement theory supports Shuck and Reio's (2011) engagement theory, as job engagement looks at burnout as an erosion to engagement. While burnout in employees has the characteristics of challenging work becoming unpleasant, unfulfilling, and meaningless, engagement has the characteristics of energy, involvement, and efficacy (Dai et al., 2021). Maslach and Leiter found three interrelated dimensions related to burnout and job engagement: exhaustion/energy, cynicism/involvement, and inefficacy and efficacy. Maslach and Leiter researched the positive three dimensions of job engagement rather than focusing on burnout. Maslach and Leiter proposed six domains of job environment and that the higher the gap between the employees and their jobs, the more likely the employees are to burnout.

Leadership also affects employee engagement (Muddle, 2020). Maslach and Leiter (1997) studied the constructs of commitment, job satisfaction, or job involvement when referring to engagement. Maslach and Leiter classified engagement as complex, and further explained the importance of the employee's individual work relationship. Maslach and Leiter believed that the study of employee engagement is more functional than the study of burnout. Maslach and Leiter (1997) proposed several main predictors of engagement, which include (a) job demands, (b) job control, (c) rewards and recognition, (d) a community of support, (e) fairness, and (f) compatibility of values between job requirements and that of the individuals' principles. Demerouti et al. (2001) reviewed engagement from the point of view of job demand and resources.

Demerouti et al. (2001) job demands-resources (JD-R) model is a contrasting theory to Shuck and Reio's (2011) engagement theory. Demerouti et al. researched engagement through job demands as an initiator of the motivational process, facilitating organizational outcomes, goals and influencing positive leadership and satisfaction. Researchers use the JD-R model to understand resources and demands in the context of engagement (Shuck et al., 2016). There is one assumption with the JD-R model that every occupation has resources and demands and that, as such, every employee will experience a combination of those two aspects (Shuck et al., 2016). The JD-R model refers to the psychological and physical aspects of a job that help employees achieve work goals and reduce demands while stimulating the employee's growth, learning, and development (Shuck et al., 2016). JD-R relates to employee well-being with the idea that job demand leads to burnout and that resources lead to engagement that addresses burnout (Airila et al., 2014). Airila et al. (2014) pointed out that one of the drawbacks to the JD-R model is that Demerouti et al. neglected to clarify the relationship between the job and personal resources with health-related outcomes. Saks and Gruman (2014) explained that the job demands model in its initial state is an extension of the burnout theory where burnout is the result of high job demand, which leads to exhaustion, and the lack of job resources leads to employees withdrawing and disengaging. The common types of job demand refer to an employee's job role and include work overload, job insecurity, role ambiguity, time constraints, or role conflict (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Job resources reflect the physical, psychological, social, or organizational functions of an employee's role at work (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Another contrasting theory to Shuck and Reio's (2011) theory of engagement is the Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES).

Schaufeli and Bakker's (2004) UWES has a foundation of three different dimensions of engagement vigor, absorption, and dedication. Schaufeli and Bakker's UWES is one of the most popular forms or measurement standards in work engagement research. Unlike Kahn's (1990) theory, UWES shifts from the negative aspects of engagement, such as burnout, to focus on the positive aspects that encourage optimal functioning (Martin, 2017). The UWES scale focuses on positive aspects, such as motivation and job satisfaction, and investigates the work engagement construct based on the three factors, which are vigor, dedication, and absorption (Martin, 2017). The characteristics of vigor include high levels of energy and mental resilience, the ability to invest effort, and persistence (Kulikowski, 2017). The characteristics of dedication include the employee having a sense of understanding of the significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and willingness to challenge (Kulikowski, 2017). The last factor, absorption, include the characteristics of an employee that is fully concentrated, engrossed in their tasks, and the inability to detach from work (Kulikowski, 2017).

The most common UWES scale is Schaufeli and Bakker's (2004) short scale consisting of nine items, rated on a seven-point scale that ranges from zero to six and assessed on the three factors (Airila et al., 2014). Researchers use the UWES to obtain the validity of employee engagement, adding stability and reliability; for example, Kulikowski (2017) and Martin (2017) found the three-factor structure superior; however, most suggest using a one-factor construct as an overall measure of work engagement. UWES references work engagement as opposed to personal engagement because workers are more likely to outperform disengaged employees (Truss et al., 2013). UWES measure of engagement is independent of the measure of burnout (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The original UWES was UWES-17, and the shortened version of the Utrecht scale, UWES-9, is the version researchers most commonly use (Kulikowski, 2017). Traditionally, engagement studies focused on a negative aspect of burnout; however, engagement studies include positive aspects of employee engagement and how engagement benefits the company and the employees (Kulikowski, 2017). The UWES' attributes include superior work performance and promotion as well as the mental and physical health of employees (Kulikowski, 2017). For leaders to successfully implement and support employee engagement, managers need to develop effective strategies, a definition of engagement, and a measure of engagement success.

Effective Strategies in Employee Engagement

Effective employee engagement strategies may include managers implementing important work characteristics, such as self-actualization, social impact, personal accomplishment, and perceived ability to meet the employee's projected career goals (Shuck & Reio, 2011). Some critical steps that managers can take to produce a positive workplace environment include engagement strategies that empower employees and emphasize the individual's contributions to organizational goals (Vu, 2020). Kumar and Pansari (2016) suggested that managers may engage customers through listening, servicing, and treating customers to the best of their ability by focusing on employee engagement. Leaders need to foster employee engagement to improve the organization's cultural setting. Thus, all levels of the company need to be involved (Suvalov & Suvalova, 2020). Establishing effective employee engagement practices can lead to higher individual and organizational performance outcomes (Inamizu & Makishima, 2018). Managers are leaders and, as such, have the responsibility of (a) interpreting and executing organizational strategies, (b) facilitating workplace changes, (c) generating effective working environments, (d) ensuring operations run efficiently, and (e) building up and motivating teams as well as individuals (Agarwal, 2014). Self-efficacy is, in part, the mediator between managers' rate of effectiveness and employee engagement (Albrecht & Marty, 2020).

Workplace practices are a crucial factor in employee engagement. Practices of enhanced recruitment and safe work environments lead to increased engagement, excellent retention, a stronger customer relationship, and a more developed understanding of the organizations (Agarwal, 2014). Glavas (2016) described how engaged employees present a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Mangi et al. (2021) stated that engaged employees generate shared perceptions and collectively engage as a group when they analyze the strategic structure of the organization for whom they work. Leaders supporting their employees present a positive influence on the organization and provide the employee with a sense of value (Shuck & Reio, 2014). According to Kahn (1990), employees reveal a dimension of self-expression and use the skills in their designated roles. Thus, managers providing a positive work environment present a supportive workplace that encourages employee engagement (Madan, 2017). Leaders who take the time to re-engage their employees through a thoughtful change intervention benefit the business (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

Communicate With Employees

Communication is vital, and leaders use it to determine the best method to respond to employees, depending on the current situation (Kahn, 1990). As technology has grown and become a valuable tool of communication, managers are more likely to use technology to engage with their employees (Mohamad Nor et al., 2018). There are several ways in which managers can build trust with employees, including the implementation of internal campaigns, such as kick-off meetings, distribution of flyers and announcements via the intranet, and the publication of information in the organization's internal magazine (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). As a strategic move, managers seek to improve employees' time management skills to help them learn effective communication skills and increase job effectiveness (Byrne et al., 2017b). Ljajic and Pirsl (2021) explained that effective communication among employees leads to establishing employee connections and achieving organizational success.

Share Knowledge

As leaders, managers communicate their knowledge by sharing their procedures with the employees (Ouedraogo & Rinfret, 2019). According to Offord et al. (2016), leadership traits, such as social and cognitive ability and motives and values, provide managers with the capacity to share knowledge with employees. Leaders engaging in knowledge sharing and innovation activities encourage creativity and participation among employees (Yadav et al., 2019). According to Kahn (1990), leaders are effective at building relationships when they share their personal philosophy and vision with employees. Managers can foster team creativity and employee engagement through knowledge sharing (Dong et al., 2017). Leaders' internal knowledge is key in promoting proactive employee work behavior by fostering the behavioral characteristics of the employee, such as initiative, risk-taking, and the introduction of innovative ideas (Gawke et al., 2017).

Provide Employee Resources

Balunde and Paradnike (2016) described aspects of a given job: physical, psychological, social, and organizational resources, which help employees achieve their work goals. Leaders are more likely to create a sense of security that can improve engagement practices by providing sufficient job resources (Byrne et al., 2017a). Job resources directly affect increasing work engagement, as employees use these resources to obtain better learning opportunities (Culibrk et al., 2018). Managers should seek to reduce negative stressors from the work environment and secure resources that positively associate with employee engagement practices (Menon & Priyadarshini, 2018). Job resources and personal resources help employees balance their abilities and needs (Gawke et al., 2017).

Empower Employees

Empowerment allows employees to feel supported by their supervisor, which is an opportunity to recognize the power of empowerment and the need to serve and aspire (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017). Social media sites and applications are an outlet that allows employees the chance to articulate their opinions and provides a more personalized and intimate environment, encouraging employees to create a relationship with the organization (Mohamad Nor et al., 2018). Transformational leaders empower their employees and influence workplace engagement, providing a leader-member exchange (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Rao (2017) explained that positive leaders empower their employees by giving them the freedom to make decisions and respect an employee's failures by allowing them to learn from their mistakes and become successful leaders.

Encourage Employees

Bonner et al. (2016) described that employee with low morale often view their managers as unethical or disengaging. Incentives, such as adequate salary and career opportunities, may motivate employees to engage in high work performance (Balunde & Paradnike, 2016). As an incentive to encourage and stimulate employee engagement, some managers may implement a reward system (Kulikowski & Sedlak, 2017). A manager's integrity is an important trait, and when the manager focuses on building personal integrity, the manager also improves citizenship and engagement (Reunanen et al., 2017).

Build Trustworthiness

Rao (2017) explained that trust is essential in delivering positive results. Without trust, employees tend to focus more on placing blame on others, missing deadlines, and failing to serve customers efficiently. Managers practicing transparency build trusting relationships with employees (Rao, 2017). As an organizational strategy that focuses on employee engagement, managers need to involve all employees of the organization to create a supportive culture that builds trust, and thus employee engagement should be a leadership goal (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). Byrne et al. (2017a) described that managers offering consistent responsiveness and attention could help employees develop a positive internal process of trustworthiness. The building of trust in a supervisor creates the development of an employee's social capital outcome and generates positive attitudes and behaviors (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018). According to Reunanen et al. (2017), when employees believe in the *wow factor*, they are more likely to lead results in their work environment and transfer excitement and engagement to their coworkers. Trust is critical within the organization as trust allows individuals to fulfill their job roles more efficiently (Trepanier et al., 2014).

Link Engagement to High Performance

According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement is a motivational state where employees fully invest themselves in their work role emotionally, cognitively, and physically. Employees demonstrating high-performance skills are beneficial to the organization as a whole and are more likely further to develop their cohesion level (Ghasemaghaei, 2020). Dong et al. (2017) explained that managers have the ability to customize individual performance levels for their employees, influencing follower development, stimulating the intrinsic need for growth, and communicating lofty expectations. Higher performers believe in the give and take relationship as it relates to their work role and their ability to have meaningful work (Kahn, 1990). Superior job performance enhances employee engagement and self-efficacy by encouraging motivation, enhancing experiences of excellence, and fostering success (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Lead by Example

Managers that lead by example have a more effective implementation of employee engagement (Eldor, 2021). Leaders expecting their employees to engage in their job role need to lead by example by making the employee experience part of their engagement (Tucker, 2020). Effective leaders establish themselves as role models for their team by articulating a compelling vision, developing acceptance of collective goals, emphasizing common ground, shared values, and ideology to employees (Dong et al., 2017). Leaders interacting with employees effectively and providing sufficient support are more effective in engaging employees (Parr et al., 2021).

A receptive leader creates a cohesive pattern where employees can psychologically function in their job role by repeating interactions with responsive and supportive actions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017). Effective leaders leverage the talents of their employees, allowing business-oriented leaders to focus on the business’s role within the organization, and perform tasks more efficiently (Rucker, 2017). An effective leadership strategy that draws employees towards engagement has a structure of nurturing and collaborative capabilities (Saad et al., 2018). Inspirational leaders can close the gap between themselves and employees while developing a positive employee engagement experience (Rao, 2017).

Effective Leadership Practices in Employee Engagement

Leaders play a unique and important role in their organizations by monitoring progress, participating in diverse tasks, making decisions daily, and using self-regulation and motivation, which take energy to maintain (Lanaj et al., 2019). Leaders' behavior plays a key role in satisfying employee needs and enhancing employee engagement (Mariappanadar, 2018). As with most organizations, leadership is known to play a role in the health of the company and employees, as leadership style impacts the cultivation and clarification of collective identity (Steffens et al., 2018). Leadership is a critical driver of effective leaders, as leaders shape employee attitudes and behaviors and engage employees, which is a valuable asset that leads to increased organizational competitiveness and performance (Oh et al., 2018). Steffens et al. (2018) proposed that leaders engage their employees in identity entrepreneurship by encouraging employees to work together and develop a sense of shared group norms, values, and goals are less likely to experience burnout. Leadership styles reviewed include transactional leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership.

Transactional Leadership

According to Ghani et al. (2018), leadership is an essential aspect of employee engagement. Quintana et al. (2015) explained transactional leadership in three dimensions: contingent upon reward, active management or corrective leadership, and passive management or non-corrective leadership. Transactional leadership has a contingent reward factor that emphasizes or clarifies what the employee needs to successfully complete the task either physically or psychologically and focuses on the effort-reward relationship involving an exchange between the leader and the employee (Quintana et al., 2015). In transactional leadership, the leader focuses on three core employee outcomes, which are (a) the employees’ satisfaction with the manager; (b) the employees’ level of effort; and (c) the employees’ perception of the leader’s effectiveness, as management’s leadership style directly impacts employee satisfaction, which in turn has an effect on employee engagement (Quintana et al., 2015).

Ghani et al. (2018) explained that transactional leadership helps leaders measure rewards and penalties by creating a formal authority between the employee and the employer and supporting a routine for the employee or by managing group performance. Leaders prefer the transactional leadership style in a crisis or emergency situation because managers emphasize the responsibility to the organization and group performance (Ghani et al., 2018). Transactional leadership is effective in enhancing employee engagement, as transactional leaders focus on two-way communication, employee obligation and performance, practices, and the culture of the organization and employee (Ghani et al., 2018). Happy employees maintain a relationship with their organization and are more apt to engage, resulting in increased profit and sustainability for the business (Ghani et al., 2018).

Engelbrecht et al. (2017) explained the importance of employee engagement as a driver of an organization’s competitiveness and success, as engaged employees exert more effort in their work and are more likely to reach optimal performance. Thus, leadership and the leader’s ability to obtain trust are critical in enhancing employee engagement (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). Through transactional leadership, leaders establish rewards, thus creating a degree of commitment, loyalty, and job involvement from the employee, generating a positive predictor of employee motivation, commitment, and organizational goal achievement (Sukoco et al., 2020). Rana et al. explained that the employees' perception of the leadership style is crucial in the leader’s ability to impart positive organizational citizenship behavior.

Talent management practices, organizational culture, and perceived organizational support significantly influence employee engagement and employee interactions (O’Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2019). Vignoli et al. (2018) explained that transactional leaders offer contingent reinforcement. In transactional leadership, the goal is to accomplish the task set forth by the leader to avoid punishment or corrective action due to mistakes (Kark et al., 2018). While transactional leadership may stimulate motivation or commitment, Kark et al. (2018) explained that transactional leadership could lead to less creativity, limit exploration, and limit risk-taking behaviors.

A transactional leader sets the standards and norms, highlights obligations, and directs employees on the expectation of completing the desired tasks in a set process or procedure (Kark et al., 2018). Transactional leadership emphasizes safety as leaders signify specified routines, rules, and regulations to follow in order to achieve positive reinforcement (Kark et al., 2018). Mgeni (2015) explained transactional leadership as a transaction between employee and employer in behavior that concentrates on implementing strategies, improving hierarchical structure, and following the set structure or rules of the organization. Transactional leaders guide and motivate their followers (Mgeni, 2015). Transactional leaders focus on job satisfaction and motivation by creating an expectation that employees should seek to accomplish (Zeb et al., 2015). While the root of transactional leadership is a rewarding system, the basis of authentic leadership is positivity (Oh et al., 2018).

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leaders exude trust through the cultivation of supportive relationships between leaders and followers by developing techniques and empowering, recognizing, and engaging employees (Du Plessis & Boshoff, 2018a). Authentic leaders become self-aware and transparent, establish balance in processing, and provide positivity (Du Plessis & Boshoff, 2018a). Mehmood et al. (2016) explained that an authentic leader’s ability to be self-aware promotes self-awareness in employees and helps employees to improve capabilities by gaining new skills. While authentic leaders promote positivity, they acknowledge mistakes and stimulate employees to learn from their mistakes by providing proactive feedback to improve the learning process (Mehmood et al., 2016).

Authentic leaders empower their employees to seek a greater sense of ownership and influence the employees’ psychological, physical, and cognitive state, behavior, and performance (Oh et al., 2018). Authentic leadership has an impact on an organization's culture and social identity; therefore, behavioral factors are a core value in influencing employee engagement (Oh et al., 2018). Kahn (1990) discussed authenticity in leaders and the manner in which authentic leaders show genuine care for their followers, which strengthens the relationship, improves social ability, and enhances engagement. Authentic leaders lead by example, and the level of effect that a leader can have on an employee's performance is dependent upon the leader's behavioral integrity and predictability (Wei et al., 2018).

Authentic leaders are self-aware, establish a system of beliefs and values, act based on their beliefs and values, and interact with transparency (Wei et al., 2018). As employees enhance their ability to acquire a more positive evaluation of self, a positive self-image leads to enhanced engagement between the leader and the employee (Wei et al., 2018). According to Wei et al. (2018), authentic leaders can improve organizational commitment and work-role performance through the promotion of employee trust and work engagement. Du Plessis and Boshoff (2018b) explained that authentic leaders personally identify with their followers and thus influence the thinking and behavior of the employees. The positivity, personalization, and internalization of authentic leaders help employees find meaning and purpose in their work, as it pertains to their strengths, enhancing employee vigor, dedication, and absorption (Du Plessis & Boshoff, 2018b). Authentic leaders emphasize the moral and ethical elements of leadership, and, as opposed to transactional leadership, authentic leaders react according to their values rather than providing a reward (McDowell et al., 2018).

Authentic leaders present optimal self-esteem and exude confidence, optimism, hope, and resilience through their trustworthiness and a positive approach (McDowell et al., 2018). Authentic leaders can impact innovation and creativity and motivate employees to exhibit higher levels of creativity (Mubarak & Noor, 2018). Managers can make a vital difference within the organization through the implementation of authentic leaders as authentic leaders enhance communication, psychological empowerment, and work engagement (Mubarak & Noor, 2018). According to Hsieh and Wang (2015), leaders can gain trust through consistency in action and perception, which facilitates cooperation that enhances employee engagement. Hsieh and Wang found that leaders whose employees perceive their behavior as authentic have an increase in trust. Hsieh and Wang explained authentic leaders as showing enthusiasm for their purpose by demonstrating consistent values and leading with both their head and heart. Trust is an influential component in the efficiency of leaders and the cooperation of employees within the organization (Hsieh & Wang, 2015).

Adil and Kamal (2016) explained that authentic leadership is positive in that authentic leaders support a positive ethical climate, positive psychological capacities, self-development, and promotion of self-awareness. According to Adil and Kamal, authentic leadership and work engagement have a positive association through the facilitation of the experience of engagement by crafting an authentic self and job roles. Adil and Kamal also suggested that employees of authentic leaders identify with their leaders and have a better sense of psychological empowerment, thus enhancing work engagement. Adil and Kamal proposed that employees of authentic leaders have an honest self-awareness, which may result in improved well-being through environmental mastery, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Kulophas et al. (2018) explained authentic leadership using the following four dimensions: a) self-awareness as it relates to one's strengths and weaknesses, b) relational transparency the leader demonstrating their personal values when relating to stakeholders, c) balanced processing in relation to analyzing the objective and relational information in the decision-making process, and d) internalized moral perspective the adherence to articulated values. Authentic leadership is comparative with transformational leadership, except authentic leadership emphasizes articulation and modeling of the moral clause and is ethical and motivational in engagement and commitment (Kulophas et al., 2018).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders focus on the interests of their employees, provide employees with appropriate counseling regarding awareness and recognition, and motivate their employees for the betterment of the group (Zeb et al., 2015). Transformational leaders promote the employee's interest, create awareness and acceptance, and motivate employees (Zeb et al., 2015). Zeb et al. explained that a transformational leader promotes sustainability and growth. Transformational leaders develop employees to their fullest potential by meeting their needs; establishing a value system; being conscience; providing motivation; inflating responsibilities and autonomy; and establishing that the employee does meaningful and valuable work, thus meeting the growth and development needs of employees (Li et al., 2018). Among other widely used leadership styles, transformational leadership has a stronger impact on an employee's attitude and behavior (Li et al., 2018).

Transformational leadership gained momentum with leaders regarding employee engagement when Burns (1978) first introduced his theories on transformational leadership and when Bass (1985) built on Burns' work (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Breevarrt and Bakker explained that modern technologies and flexibility in working hours and workspaces have neutralized transformational leadership's impact on employee behavior and performance due to less physical contact with employees daily. Besieux et al. (2018) believed that transformational leadership and employee engagement are intra-organizational drivers of organizational performance, characterized by leaders helping employees achieve team and organizational goals.

Transformational leaders transform employees from an individual-achievement mindset to a collective-organizational goal seeker through an ethical role (Besieux et al., 2018). Ghani et al. (2018) explained transformational leadership as future-oriented rather than present-oriented leadership in which the leader instills commitment and creativity to perform beyond the company's expectations, leading to more effective and efficient management. Transformational leadership contributes to employee engagement by increasing motivation and the mechanism used in employee achievement and performance (Ghani et al., 2018). Popli and Rizvi (2017) discussed transformational leaders as leaders in charge of motivating by appealing to the ideals and values of their employees and inspiring and instilling a vision of the vision of the future for the employee. Transformational leaders focus on important issues, influence decision-making, motivate followers, stimulate followers, and seek to achieve a higher standard (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). Transformational leaders incorporate compassion, empathy, sensitivity, and innovation into their leadership style, as transformational leaders have a can-do attitude (Popli & Rizvi, 2017).

Martins Abelha et al. (2018) explained that the success of transformational leaders could be dependent on employee characteristics and organizational contexts. Regarding employees of an organization that are not already positively influenced or motivated, transformational leaders tend to have a stronger influence on the employees' attitudes and behaviors (Martins Abelha et al., 2018). Martins Abelha et al. suggested that leaders must consider charisma as an attribute when reviewing the transformational leadership style, as charisma is a characteristic that can differentiate a leader. Ma and Jiang (2018) indicated that transformational leaders inspire extraordinary employee actions that relate to employee creativity, innovation, and exceptional performance. Carleton et al. (2018) suggested that trait mindfulness relates indirectly to transformational leadership positively related to self-efficacy and leadership behavior. Trait mindfulness reflects an open, receptive, and nonjudgmental leader, and transformational leaders inspire, challenge, promote innovation, coach, mentor, and support employees (Carleton et al., 2018). Frieder et al. (2018) explained that transformational leaders motivate employees by stimulating their intellect and providing individualized mentoring to employees by considering the employee's behavior, situation, and interactions. Transformational leaders set high-performance standards, enhance introverted employees, and reduce variance in the employee's perception of meaningfulness (Frieder et al., 2018). Transformational leaders are more likely to be a role models for employees, as transformational leaders are respected, admired, and trusted (Getachew & Zhou, 2018). Transformational leaders are critical to an organization's performance, as they are persistent in employee development, collaboration, and cohesiveness, to boost collective efficacy and increase employee confidence in their ability to be effective and efficient (Getachew & Zhou, 2018).

Impact of Disengaged Employees on Organizations

The fourth theme, the impact of disengaged employees on an organization, is about a leader's ability to engage disengaged employees to improve or promote employee productivity. Kahn (1990) explained disengaged employees as a separation of the employee's self from the employee's work role and withdrawal from people, causing employees to defend themselves in the workplace cognitively, emotionally, and physically. Disengaged employees can be detrimental to the organization because disengaged employees demotivate other employees and do not perform well (Madan, 2017). According to Kahn, disengaged employees physically and mentally disengage from the workplace and fail to connect with their coworkers. Employees failing to believe in a perceived organizational support system become disengaged (Glavas, 2016). Managers that fail to analyze and address the disengagement of employees allow a form of bullying to occur in the workplace (Allam, 2017). Disengaged employees are task-oriented rather than seeking to obtain organizational goals (Madan, 2017). Kumar and Pansari (2016) explained that disengaged employees do not provide effective customer service and, therefore, decrease organizational revenue. Disengagement is not only detrimental to the organization in terms of loss of revenue but also to the employees on an individual and personal level (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Kahn coined the term *personal engagement*. Ford et al. (2015) reviewed research conducted on the supervisor's knowledge sharing and disengagement and found that most researchers compared engagement theory and adaptive cost theory. Most researchers examining the relationship between a supervisor's moral disengagement and employee engagement use the moral disengagement theory regarding perceptions of ethical leadership (Bonner et al., 2016). Ford et al. explained that managers lack knowledge sharing or lack the ability to share information with the staff, contributing to employee disengagement, as explained in engagement theory.

The term employee disengagement relates to the uncoupling of the employee's self and in the work roles (Allam, 2017). Offord et al. (2016) explained that disengaged employees struggle with work responsibilities and performance, have low morale, and are less likely to take advantage of work resources that are available. The dilemma of employee disengagement reduces employee creativity, participation in the workplace, and innovation (Offord et al., 2016). Ethical leaders reduce employee disengagement, resulting in more employee commitment and job satisfaction and reduced employee turnover (Mostafa et al., 2020). Sievert and Scholz (2017) discussed the importance of acknowledging employee disengagement to work towards a strategically sustainable organization as employee engagement boosts employee loyalty and productivity. Khan et al. (2014) referenced that self-efficacy has a stronger impact on a leader's ability to have an increasingly adverse effect on disengagement rather than the commitment to goals. A weak association between employee satisfaction and employee engagement creates a disconnect within the organization (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2014). Disengaged employees have a negative financial and nonfinancial effect on organizations (Byrne et al., 2017a).

Disruptive Employees

In the 1994-2019 period, both the physical and psychological negative aspects of workplace aggression or employee versus employee grew significantly (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2014). Mental distress is a psychological effect of low self-esteem and is a contributor to disruptive patterns in aggressive employees (Geck et al., 2017). Disruptive behaviors cause managers to implement resolution tactics that consist of open discussions, respect for the employees, and moral awareness (Babalola et al., 2019). Disengaged employees are more likely to engage in illegal behavior, such as fraud or theft (Larkin & Pierce, 2016). Employees' unethical behavior could emerge from other employees or through the organization's failure to prohibit such actions (Larkin & Pierce, 2016).

Poor Employee Performance

Inattentive employees in the workplace have an emotional disconnect and lack connection to perform their job duties; for instance, Ford et al. (2015) found that when employees deem that their job is meaningless, they become disengaged in their work and from the organizational goals. Lu et al. (2014) explained that disengaged employees could not identify with their work roles, and therefore they perform poorly. When demands are high, disengaged employees decrease their work performance and fail to meet work goals (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Employee performance directly links to the organization's success, regardless of financial or non-financial outcomes (Madan, 2017). Leaders can hinder employee performance by being overly judgmental or by failing to allow employees to adopt or evaluate their performance (Madan, 2017). Lu et al. (2014) explained that leaders not providing feedback and social support contribute to the poor performance of employees, and when employees feel that they have insufficient opportunities for development, employees may become disengaged.

Airila et al. (2014) explained that the way employees evaluate themselves affects how the employees become engaged in the workforce as well as to how the employees assess their workability. Thus, low self-esteem is a consequence of poor job performance. According to Bonner et al. (2016), a supervisor's moral disengagement helps to form the employee’s perception of poor job function and unethical leadership. When the working relationship between the leader and the employee or colleague to a colleague is negative, the results can lead to poor work performance and job burnout (Shaukat et al., 2017). Thus, an employee's underperformance is a result of disengagement (Bhana & Suknunan, 2021).

Leaders contribute to an employee’s poor work performance when they continually criticize employees regarding their work performance and cause workplace stress that results in a deficient performance (Shaukat et al., 2017). Therefore, many organizations have turned to self-training for employees through e-learning programs instead of traditional instructor-led training (Charlier et al., 2016). E-learning can be beneficial when employees use the software and apply the training to their work-related tasks (Charlier et al., 2016).

Financial Consequences of Disengaged Employees

Wong et al. (2015) reported that there is evidence that employee engagement has an impact on the financial growth and viability of the organization. Christian and Ellis (2014) explained that disengaged employees are directly related to the organization’s financial status. Disengaged employees reduce the organization's financial return because disengaged employees demonstrate lower levels of daily engagement (Bakker, 2011). Rao (2107) found that employees not enjoying returning to their jobs decrease the organization's bottom line, as the employees do not contribute their best work.

Disengaged employees are more likely to engage in pilferage, which is very costly (Harris & He, 2019). According to Rose et al. (2015), in the United States, disengaged employees cost the economy $24 million annually in lost revenue, production, and innovation. Another contributor to financial ruin in an organization is leaders that exhibit dysfunctional behavior patterns (Rose et al., 2015). Negative employee attitudes lead to a decline in financial returns (Hultman, 2020). Larkin and Pierce (2016) noted that compensation systems and extrinsic incentives might produce perverse economic incentives as well as generate psychological and social responses that may tempt employees into criminal misconduct that can cause an organization to endure financial penalties. A weak organizational culture of disengaged employees leads to an unhealthy revenue system (Samnani & Singh, 2014). Disengaged employees contribute to low revenue due to low productivity and lack of progressive, innovative ideas (Samnani & Singh, 2014). Leaders making poor decisions reduce revenue and disengage employees (Miles & Van Clieaf, 2017). Therefore, leaders are responsible for finding strategic ways to engage employees in the workplace and protect the firm's financial resources (Wong et al., 2015).

Transition

In the literature, researchers claimed that there is a need to conduct research to explore strategies that business leaders use to successfully improve employee engagement to increase financial performance in their organizations. Section 1 encompassed the business problem and purpose of this study. The literature review included detailed insight from various scholars regarding the data retaining to the importance of employee engagement, which directly affects financial performance. Employee engagement was the relevant construct for this study, as the insight gained from employee engagement theory contributed to enhancing employee engagement, management strategies, leadership style, and the impact of disengaged employees on financial performance. In Section 2, I provide information concerning the (a) role of the researcher, (b) selected participants, (c) method and selected design for the study, (d) population and sampling, (e) data collection and analysis processes, and (f) reliability and validity of this study. In Section 3, I will present the actual findings from the study, discuss the application of the findings to professional practice, present the implications of the findings on social change, provide recommendations for action based on the findings, provide recommendations for future research, including my reflections of the DBA process, and provide conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to engage employees. The target population consisted of five Maryland IT business leaders from a few different business organizations with successful experiences using strategies to engage employees. The implications for positive social change include study findings that could help business leaders with strategies to engage employees and aid in reducing financial losses. Business leaders achieving financial success could provide more employment opportunities for community members, allowing local communities to prosper. Business leaders could become empowered to create a work environment conducive to employee engagement to assist the local community in bringing about social change by addressing issues that transcend the organization, its employees, and external stakeholders (Opoku-Dakwa et al., 2018). Business leaders using innovative practices address social entrepreneurship and pave the way to find ways to address social needs (Opoku-Dakwa et al., 2018).

Role of the Researcher

In the data collection process, researchers have a critical role because they generate the data by obtaining access to participants, the assembly of data, organizing the research study, collecting and analyzing data, maintaining the data, and reporting the findings (Chen et al., 2020). I collected data regarding strategies business leaders used to engage employees to positively affect the organization’s financial performance. As the main research instrument, I controlled all phases of the study, including the definition of employee engagement, multiple-source data collection using interviews with business leader’s organizational documentation, transcription of the interviews, data analyses, and development of themes. I used additional sources of data, as suggested by Yin (2018), including data on financial performance and other organizational documentation relevant to the phenomenon under study. I contacted information technology leaders and asked them to help me develop a prospective list of qualified business leaders from which to selectively invite candidates.

My 12 years of experience in academia, IT, hospitality, and finance allowed me to have a clear perspective of the employee engagement phenomenon. In addition, working with individuals in higher education and IT has allowed me to gain a better view of relevant issues related to employee engagement. The opportunity to learn from a diverse group of professionals over the years helped to form the interview questions in a way that helped to ensure the collection of rich data from study participants that assisted me in answering the study’s overarching research question. My knowledge helped me to purposefully select participants for this study.

The Research Ethics Committee provides an ethical guide for researchers to utilize when conducting social research that includes information privacy laws, guidance for data protection, and regulations that professional associations and review boards will enforce in the form of guidelines and codes (Mallia, 2019). Perrier and Barnes (2018) explained the moral obligation that a researcher has to the participants in a research study in order to conduct research ethically and to ensure data integrity as well as protect sensitive data. The Belmont Report contains a set of guidelines that includes the protocol that all researchers need to follow as part of their moral obligation (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). When conducting research involving human subjects, The DHHS includes three basic principles for researchers to follow: respect for persons, justice, and beneficence. A researcher honors the *respect for person* principle by first establishing informed consent and acknowledging participants' autonomy, as some participants may have diminished autonomy (Mallia, 2019). In accordance with the *beneficence* principle, researchers can maximize the benefits of their research while protecting their participants from harm. Under the *justice* principle, the researcher must treat participants fairly regarding potential benefits as well as any burdens that the participant may encounter throughout the course of the research study.

When it comes to ethical principles in research, The Belmont Report protocol includes information on the way the researcher should apply the ethical principles in relation to the securement of informed consent, assessment of risks and benefits, and selection of participants (Mallia, 2019). It is of utmost importance that the researcher pays close attention to the concept of informed consent and the disclosure of information, establishing the voluntary nature of participation in a research study (DHHS, 1979). As the researcher, I had the responsibility to conform to the ethical principles found in the Belmont Report protocol, followed all guidelines as presented by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and adhered to any additional ethical requirements that the participating organization required. Once I received permission from the IRB, I began my research study. To ensure the ethicality of the research study, I did not collect data until I received, I consent, informed consent emails from all participants. Before asking participants to sign the informed consent forms, I explained the *informed consent* principle to all participants. Additionally, before I proceeded with the interviews, I reminded all participants that participation is voluntary, allowed participants the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time throughout the course of the study, ensured all participants that the information provided throughout the study is confidential, and treated all participants fairly.

According to Yin (2018), while avoiding bias is difficult, researchers can avoid bias in their research by being sensitive to contrary evidence and by conducting ethical research. Confirmation bias occurs when researchers favor evidence that supports their underlying beliefs or reflects their perspective into the interview, rather than utilizing the participant's mood and exact words. Researchers should guard against utilizing one form of bias to mitigate another (Yin, 2018). One way researchers can review the descriptions of the interviewee’s experiences is to use member checking as it allows the participant to take part in the research process and increase the validity and credibility (Iivari, 2018). I incorporated member checking into my study by providing participants with my interpretation of their responses to interview questions and asking participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations. I recorded the assumptions and limitations of the study to allow the reader to evaluate the reliability and validity of the study.

Yin (2018) described the interview protocol process as information that will help participants understand the risks and conditions associated with the interview process, including the interview procedures, script the introduction and conclusion, obtaining consent from the participants, and the interview questions. The interview protocol (see

Appendix A) is a tool that I used throughout the interview process to ensure that I consistently and accurately provided each participant with the same information.

Participants

Researchers must first identify the suitable participants to partake in their studies and define a clear purpose before they can proceed with collecting data (Yin, 2018). In a case study, researchers define the participants' eligibility criteria using the overarching research question to align the problem under investigation with participants' eligibility criteria with the primary goal to protect the participant's safety (Kim et al., 2017). According to Maramwidze-Merrison (2016), researchers face challenges associated with identifying and access to a suitable organization, the selection of the organization, and the ability to gain access to the organization participants. Researchers also face the challenge of securing participants agreeing to participate in the research study (Padgett, 2017). Researchers establish the eligibility criteria before the selection of participants to ensure that each participant in the study qualifies to participate (Yin, 2018). Participant eligibility criteria may include age, employment status, or years of service (Yin, 2018). Researchers determine if participants meet the study's eligibility criteria by ensuring that the participants possess experience and knowledge related to the phenomena under investigation (Yin, 2018).

I set participants' eligibility criteria based on participants' experience in engaging employees. Part of the eligibility criteria required that participants had at least 5 years of successful experience in engaging employees. For this study, I identified participants from the area of information technology in organizations located in Maryland.

Researchers experience challenges associated with gaining access to potential participants and organizations (Padgett, 2017). Kingstone et al. (2020) suggested using social media such as Facebook or Twitter, word of mouth, or other known networks, and additional recruitment tools as well as gaining an understanding of the target population to overcome the access challenge. Yin (2018) explained that researchers reveal their assumptions as well as the setting of the research study when accessing participants. During this study, I utilized Facebook messenger and local Baltimore neighborhood associations to find leaders from IT because working with the community was a suitable strategy to gain access to participants to conduct the study.

Researchers must develop trust with the participants throughout the research process and gain their acceptance (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Researchers establish rapport with the study participants during the data collection process to collect rich data (Yin, 2018). Researchers may engage with participants regularly to gain their trust and acceptance and to build rapport with participants to collect rich and thick data (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). My ability to regularly engage with participants through email, Facebook messenger, and Zoom interviews helped gain the participants' trust and acceptance and build rapport with the participants, leading to collecting rich and thick data.

One technique that researchers use to ensure alignment between the research question and the participant eligibility criteria is to select the appropriate research design (Fusch et al., 2018). Participants must possess knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon under investigation, allowing researchers to answer the overarching research question of a research study (Yin, 2018). To align the participants with the overarching research question, I used participants meeting the participants' eligibility criteria because participants possessed experience and knowledge regarding the phenomenon under investigation, which is employee engagement.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

According to Yin (2018), there are three types of research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018) explained the qualitative method as a flexible, holistic perspective allowing the researcher to enrich themself into the investigation. Qualitative research is a social, cultural, and historical real-world context and a more natural method (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Researchers use the qualitative method to explore the *what, why*, and *how* of a real-life phenomenon in its natural setting (Yin, 2018). I explored the what, why, and how of a real-life phenomenon in its natural setting, which is employee engagement; therefore, I used the qualitative research method for this study. Nguyen et al. (2017) explained that quantitative researchers examine the relationship between variables, using several measuring techniques to analyze the data collected and controls to ensure the validity of the study. The quantitative researcher develops pointed research questions and hypotheses (Nguyen et al., 2017). In this study, I did not examine relationships among variables using statistical analyses via hypotheses testing; therefore, I did not select the quantitative method. Yin explained that the mixed method is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods, where researchers use inductive and deductive reasoning in their research process. I did not have numerical data and do not need to hypothesize the strategies that technology leaders will use; thus, I did not select the mixed method.

Research Design

During the research design stage, I considered narrative, phenomenological, ethnographic, and case study for this qualitative study. Felton and Stickley (2018) explained the narrative approach as a process in which participants share their personal stories in an interpretative way that is generally nonstructured and sequential. In this study, I did not focus on the participants' experiences or personal stories, as shared by the participants in an open and interpretative way; consequently, the narrative research design was not suitable for this study. In the phenomenological research design, the researcher focuses on the participants' lived experiences to gain insight on phenomena (van Manen, 2017). I did not focus on the participants' meanings and lived experiences; thus, the phenomenological research design was not the best approach for this study. Cadena-Camargo et al. (2020) explained the ethnographic research design as an in-depth explanation of the life stories and participants' observations in a particular social and cultural organization in a specific community, which is not the focus of this study. Researchers use the case study design to address real-world business problems and study business practices (Rashid et al., 2019). Researchers use the case study design to conduct an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon in its natural setting, using methodological triangulation to validate study findings (Ridder, 2017). I selected the case study research design because I explored the what, how, and why of a particular phenomenon in its natural setting, which for this study is employee engagement.

Data saturation is the point where researchers collect and analyze additional data, but no new information or themes emerge (Fusch et al., 2018). A researcher needs to reach data saturation to derive conclusive findings (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). If I had not reached data saturation with the five participants, I would have continued interviewing them until no new meaningful information or themes would have emerged.

Population and Sampling

To improve the validity of a research study, researchers need to establish the most suitable sampling method (Yin, 2018). Researchers use purposive sampling as a method to reduce the participant pool, intentionally pulling a sample group of people that can best fit the eligibility criteria to provide their experiences related to the research problem under investigation (Campbell et al., 2020). I used purposive sampling as a method to identify potential participants for this study, meeting the participation eligibility criteria that I had established, to obtain participants' experiences with the phenomenon under study, which in this study was employee engagement.

I collected data from five IT business leaders located in Maryland with successful experiences in engaging employees. As researchers seek to determine the sampling size within a minimum of one case study, they consider the nature of the study, the richness of the data, and the generalization of the sampling size to the larger population (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) recommended that four or five participants with successful experience in the phenomenon under study are an appropriate number to conduct case study research. Yin explained that while researchers often experience difficulties in determining the appropriate sample size for their studies, three to five cases are a suitable range for the number of participants. If five participants had not been sufficient to reach data saturation, I would have continued conducting interviews until data saturation reached saturation.

When researchers can no longer obtain new information during the interview process, researchers reach data saturation (Abdul Majid et al., 2018). Conducting three to five interviews to collect rich and thick data about the phenomenon under investigation could lead to data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I conducted semistructured interviews with open-ended questions and reviewed organizational documentation and artifacts to obtain rich and thick data to reach data saturation. As I tried to find eligible, qualified candidates to participate in this study, I emailed candidates an invitation to participate and secure their approval to participate.

Having an open dialogue with study participants throughout the interview was a critical aspect of this study. Researchers selecting an interview setting that is convenient to participants can establish rich dialogue, build rapport with participants, and address participants' anxiety (Yin, 2018). Researchers suggested creating an atmosphere that is quiet and not in a loud public facility to allow for a more comfortable setting for participants (Yin, 2018). Because establishing an open dialogue with study participants is very important, I asked participants to select a convenient time for them to participate in the Zoom interviews to reduce their anxiety, generate rich dialogue, and build rapport. I ensured that the interview setting was quiet without distractions during the Zoom interviews. I emailed participants an invitation to participate in this study and attached the informed consent form. After the participants had an opportunity to read my invitational email and review the informed consent form, those participants agreeing to participate responded to my invitational email with the words “I consent.” While I had already included the informed consent form in my invitational email, I explained the informed consent form to participants to ensure they understood the contents of the form. At the beginning of each interview, I reminded the participants that the interview would take approximately 60 minutes.

Ethical Research

An essential part of the case study process is to obtain consent from participants (Choi et al., 2019). A requirement of all participants is to consent by email after reviewing the informed consent form before participating in the case study. According to Yin (2018), the informed consent form has several sections, including the nature of the study, an explanation of what the participants should expect, the potential risks and benefits of participating, and the researchers’ contact information. I informed participants that their participation is completely voluntary. Participants had the right to withdraw from any research study by simply informing the researcher without providing a reason for withdrawal or suffering any negative consequences (Choi et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). I informed participants that if they should choose to withdraw from the study, they may do so without any penalties or reason for withdrawal. The informed consent form that I gave participants to review included a section related to participants having the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences or providing a reason for such withdrawal.

As a researcher, the priority should be the participants' privacy and confidentiality (Dhakal, 2018). I informed the participants that participation is completely voluntary. Participants did not receive any compensation or incentives before, during, or after participating in the study. Providing participants with compensation or incentives may integrate biases into the research process (Dhakal, 2018).

As I acquired participants, I required that each participant be over the age of 18 and meet the minimum criteria that I established to participate in the study. Upon receipt of permission to conduct the study from Walden University’s IRB, I began the data collection phase. In adherence to Walden University’s IRB guidelines, I maintained the participants’ safety and informed consent when conducting interviews. The Walden University IRB approval number for this study is 03-13-20-0064767.

Some researchers divide the informed consent process into two steps: creating an informed consent form and explaining the contents of the informed consent form to the participants (Dadzie et al., 2018). I created the informed consent form using basic English to ensure all participants from various levels of education could easily comprehend the interview questions that I asked. After I identified the qualified participants, I emailed each participant a copy of the informed consent form and explained the contents of the form to each participant. A critical aspect of the interview process was to review the informed consent form with each participant to ensure that each participant understood the contents of the informed consent form because, sometimes, the participants do not read the entire informed consent form, as Dadzie et al. (2018) claimed.

I used fictitious names for the study participants and their affiliated organizations to ensure all participants' confidentiality. I protected the participants' confidentiality by not including any personal information that could lead to an indirect discovery of the identity of participants and their organizations. I stored the participant key in a separate password-protected folder on a separate storage device. The researchers’ goal should be to deliver ethical, valid, reliable, and meaningful results with minimum effect on the study participants (Yin, 2018). I collected the interview data and securely stored all related research documents on a password-protected area of my personal computer. For any physical documents, I will keep those stored in a lockbox at my personal residence for a period of 5 years. At the end of the 5 years, I will destroy all research-related data, adhering to Walden University’s IRB guidelines.

Data Collection Instruments

Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced the notion that the primary research instrument is the researcher. Qualitative researchers view themselves as the primary research instrument because of the leading roles they play in data collection and analysis and all other research processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers using the case study design collect data from conducting interviews, making observations, and analyzing organizational documents (Yin, 2018).

Often during qualitative research, researchers use open-ended questions to conduct semistructured interviews (Levitt et al., 2017). Researchers conduct semistructured interviews with participants to better understand participants’ experiences with the phenomenon under investigation (Levitt et al., 2017). An advantage of using semistructured interviews is that researchers can ask follow-up, clarifying questions to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences related to the phenomenon of the study (Yin, 2018).

I purposively selected Maryland IT leaders from business organizations with successful experience using strategies to engage employees. Researchers collect rich and thick data regarding the phenomenon under investigation by conducting semistructured interviews with participants to collect open-ended data while exploring the participant's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs as well as analyze organizational documentation and artifacts that could lead to the emergence of themes (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). I conducted semistructured interviews with participants and asked follow-up, clarifying questions during the interviews to obtain rich and thick data that allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of employee engagement.

Because I was the primary research instrument in this study, I collected data from participants by conducting semistructured interviews, transcribed the interviews, and followed an interview protocol (see Appendix A). As described in the interview guide, I asked participants open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B). After conducting the interviews, I gave study participants the opportunity to provide parting thoughts regarding their experiences with employee engagement. When researchers ask participants to provide parting thoughts, the participants have an opportunity to share any additional information that might not have emerged during the interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Researchers will inevitably integrate some biases into the research study (Thomas, 2017). Researchers address these biases by practicing reflexivity and bracketing (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Reflexivity is a process in which researchers reflect on thoughts and the decisions made in the data collection process, recording everything to refer to it later (Thomas, 2017). During the researcher's process, reflexivity is key to obtaining transparency as the researcher engages in self-understanding regarding biases, values, and experiences (Yin, 2018). Because I recorded my thoughts and decisions made, I practiced reflexivity and bracketing in the study to address my biases by engaging in reflection exercises about the data collection and analysis process and other parts of the entire research process.

Qualitative researchers use the document analysis technique in the data collection process (Yin, 2018). Researchers often use interviewing and document analysis in the same study to explore the phenomenon further, as both techniques can help improve rigor and enable the researchers to conduct methodological triangulation (Fusch et al., 2018). According to Yin (2018), researchers may analyze organizational documents, such as financial statements, annual reports, and budgets during the case study. Researchers may use these documents to provide specific information that pertains to the phenomenon in the case study, such as detailing events and the spelling of names (Yin, 2018). I analyzed training materials, internet documents, internal news blasts, external company volunteerism accomplishments, emails, and memos related to employee engagement, leading to the improvement of the organization's financial performance.

To improve research validity, researchers use member checking by giving participants researchers' interpretations of participants' answers to interview questions and asking participants to verify the accuracy of such interpretations (Madill & Sullivan, 2018). This way, participants can make corrections, additions, and deletions to researchers' interpretations of participants' answers to increase the validity of the study (Yin, 2018). To increase the validity of the study, I conducted member checking by giving study participants my interpretation of their answers to interview questions and asking participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretation of their answers.

Data Collection Technique

In a semistructured interview process, the researcher collects the participants' experiences directly related to the phenomenon under scrutiny (Brown & Danaher, 2019). The researcher asks study participants open-ended questions to obtain rich and thick data related to participants' experiences with the phenomenon under investigation (Brown & Danaher, 2019). During the investigation of the phenomenon, the researcher uses the overarching research question to guide the direction of the semistructured interview and uses supporting questions to gather additional information regarding the phenomenon (Brown & Danaher, 2019). I conducted semistructured interviews with leaders in the IT field in Maryland to obtain the strategies they used to engage employees and increase financial outcomes. Researchers also analyze organizational documents related to the phenomenon under scrutiny and conduct semistructured interviews (Yin, 2018). To enhance the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and increase the rigor of the study, researchers use several methods of data collection, such as semistructured interviews and organizational documentation and artifacts, to conduct methodological triangulation (Fusch et al., 2018). I analyzed organizational documentation and artifacts related to the strategies leaders used to engage employees in the IT industry in Maryland to increase financial performance.

Advantages and disadvantages exist when collecting data during the semistructured interviews and while analyzing organizational documentation (Yin, 2018). An advantage to the researcher of conducting semistructured interviews is the opportunity to ask participants clarifying questions, which allows participants to elaborate on their responses (Brown & Danaher, 2019). A second advantage is that researchers using semistructured interviews could observe participants' nonverbal cues when answering interview questions (Yin, 2018). An advantage of analyzing organizational documents and artifacts is that researchers could conduct methodological triangulation by collecting data from various sources, such as semistructured interviews and organizational documentation and artifacts, and compare the data collected to see if there is alignment in the data collected (Fusch et al., 2018). A second advantage of reviewing organizational documents and artifacts is the possibility of discovering new themes or areas of exploration (McDermott & Lanahan, 2015). As the organization provides documents, the researcher gains the advantage of confirming information, such as spelling of employee names and detailed descriptions of various events that are related to the phenomenon (Siegner et al., 2018). In my plan to collect data, I conducted semistructured interviews, asked clarifying questions, and allowed participants to elaborate on their answers using open-ended questions. To achieve methodical triangulation, I used semistructured interviews and reviewed organizational documents and artifacts. After completing the semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts, I compared the data to ensure alignment exists.

Disadvantages exist in conducting semistructured interviews and analyzing organizational documents and artifacts (Lancaster, 2017). One of the drawbacks of a researcher conducting semistructured interviews is that participants may become nervous or uncomfortable when a researcher uses a recording device to record participants' answers to interview questions (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Beginner researchers may not possess sufficient experience conducting semistructured interviews (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Researchers may introduce bias by expressing their views or exhibiting nonverbal cues related to the phenomenon under investigation (Galdas, 2017). Participants may also introduce bias into the study to please the researcher by providing the information they think the researcher is seeking (Mummolo & Peterson, 2019). When the researcher analyzes organizational documents, it is essential to realize that the documents from the participant's organization may include bias, depending on the employees' interests (Opdenakker, 2006). Participating organizations' documents and artifacts may contain an inaccurate account of events and numbers due to employees incorporating their own bias into the documents (Opdenakker, 2006). The researcher may encounter difficulties gaining access to certain organizational documents (Brown & Danaher, 2019).

When appropriate, researchers conduct a pilot study; for example, researchers may conduct a pilot study to confirm the coverage and relevance of the content of the study (Yin, 2018). A drawback to a pilot study is that it is a time-consuming study, not essential when using a variety of data collection techniques (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For this case study, I did not conduct a pilot study due to its time-consuming nature and because I used a variety of data collection techniques.

Researchers use member checking to give participants an opportunity to review the researchers' interpretation of the participants' answers to ensure accuracy (Yin, 2018). Researchers use member checking to increase the credibility of the data collected (Varpio et al., 2017). There are a few disadvantages to member checking, such as the researcher may interpret the participant's silence to mean that the participants agree with the researchers' interpretations of the answers to the question, when in fact, the participant may not have read the interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An additional disadvantage is that the participant may have reservations about disagreeing with the researcher's interpretations of the participant's answers and could accept these interpretations as accurate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I conducted member checking by providing the study participants with my interpretation of their answers to interview questions and asked the participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations. By using member checking, I increased the trustworthiness of the study.

Data Organization Technique

Researchers organize the data collected before engaging in data analyses (Yin, 2018). Researchers organizing data collected successfully are more likely to conduct rigorous research studies (Salma, 2018). Researchers may find that compiling data in an orderly fashion is useful, just like quantitative researchers use a database (Yin, 2018). According to Salma (2018), after the researcher orders the data collected, the researcher can begin the data analysis process.

I conducted Zoom semistructured interviews using open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B) with five IT business leaders in Maryland with successful experience in engaging employees. To ensure confidentiality, each study participant must have a unique participant code (Yang et al., 2018). I assigned codes to study participants using the letter P for a participant and a number between 1 and 5 to ensure the study participants' confidentiality. I removed all identifying information from the interview transcripts and any other documentation. To ensure the confidentiality of study participants, Lancaster (2017) postulated to change the names of participants, any names mentioned by participants, as well as the names of places mentioned by the participants. After each interview, I transcribed the participant’s interview, removed any information that could lead to the discovery of the participant’s identity, and allocated the participant’s code to the interview transcript.

Yin (2018) suggested that scanning the documents and annotated bibliographies will improve indexing and retrieval. I saved electronic documents for secure storage and retrieval. I saved documents such as the electronic version of interview transcripts, observations, and notes on a password-protected flash drive. I ensured that each of the participant’s documents included the participant's code.

I imported electronic raw data from the flash drive into a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program to improve data organization. A CAQDAS is a software program that researchers use to organize and analyze data more efficiently (Antoniadou, 2017). While CAQDAS allows the researchers to enhance the data analysis process, CAQDAS is not a replacement for the researcher's role in organizing and analyzing data (Housley & Smith, 2011). Another software program is DeDoose, a cloud-based program that is user-friendly, inexpensive, and researchers use it to obtain security through password protection (Hart & Achterman, 2017). I used DeDoose to import, file, and organize audio recordings of the interviews, interview transcripts, organizational documents, and any notes. Keeping all data collected and well organized assisted me in retrieving data more efficiently to analyze them.

Researchers use a reflective journal to demonstrate research process transparency and assist in the bracketing process (Kerelian & Jordan, 2019). For example, researchers use a reflective journal to record research processes and capture thick and rich descriptions, including participants' reactions to interview questions and interview settings (Fusch & Ness, 2015; McDermott & Lanahan, 2015). To ensure transparency, I used an electronic reflective journal to document rich and thick aspects of the interview process, such as participants' reactions to interview questions, interview setting, information related to organizational documentation, and decisions about coding and theme identification.

Researchers must keep data stored in a secured place for a set number of years to protect the data, as required by the research data protection legislation (Rocha Flores et al., 2014). To ensure adequate data protection during and after a research study, researchers should review and implement research data protection legislation and best practices that other researchers have adopted (Yang et al., 2018). Some of the best practices include (a) defining the purpose for collecting data, (b) obtaining informed consent from study participants, (c) collecting only the information needed for the study, (d) using the data only for research study purposes, (e) keeping the data for a specified period of time, and (f) securing the data (Yang et al., 2018).

To maintain the security and integrity of the data, I stored all raw data on a password-protected flash drive in a locked safe and retrieved data only when needed. Several researchers have also used this strategy to ensure data security and integrity throughout the research process (Yang et al., 2018). Researchers must adhere to ethical requirements during the entire research process, including data collection, as researchers must store hard copies in a locked place and electronic documents in password-protected devices (Hallova et al., 2019). Following Walden University's requirements, I will maintain raw data in a locked safe for 5 years. I will destroy the raw data by shredding any hard copies and destroying the flash drive after 5 years.

Data Analysis

The use of triangulation during the research process helps to enhance the depth and richness of a research study (Renz et al., 2018). Methodological triangulation consists of using various sources of data collection to increase the credibility and validity of the data collected (Kotus & Rzeszewski, 2015). Renz et al. (2018) stated that researchers use methodological triangulation to obtain data from various sources and perspectives regarding the phenomenon under investigation. To gain a different perspective, researchers may employ methodological triangulation during the exploration of the research phenomenon (Lehmann et al., 2019). For example, researchers can develop convergent evidence through the process of triangulating data collected from conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts (Yin, 2018). To strengthen the construct validity in qualitative case studies, Yin (2018) suggested developing convergent evidence.

I conducted methodological triangulation by comparing data that I collected from conducting semistructured Zoom interviews with participants and reviewing participating organizations' documents and artifacts. Using methodological triangulation, I confirmed the authenticity of the data, validity, credibility, interpretations, and analyses. I conducted member checking to ensure the data that I collected were an accurate representation of study participants' experiences related to employee engagement. During the member checking process, I provided study participants with my interpretations of their answers to interview questions and asked participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations to confirm the alignment of the data collected. I compared the member-checked data with the information I obtained from reviewing organizational documents and artifacts to determine if data alignment had occurred.

There are various qualitative data analysis methods, including thematic, content, and discourse (Belotto, 2018). The data collection process will often run parallel to the interactive qualitative analysis process (Housley & Smith, 2011). In the thematic analysis process, researchers must read the interview transcripts multiple times to identify the patterned meanings in the text (Hastings & Pennington, 2019). Researchers use various CAQDAS programs, including DeDoose and NVivo, in the qualitative analysis process to assist with the classification, order, and analyses of data collected (Woods et al., 2016). CAQDAS programs assist researchers in identifying conceptual themes and the relationships between those themes (Woods et al., 2016).

In the data analysis process, Yin (2018) suggested using the following steps in sequential order: (a) compile, (b) disassemble, (c) reassemble, (d) clarify, and (e) conclude. The first step in compiling data involves data organization to determine patterns and themes in the interview transcripts that researchers have compiled. Belotto (2018) recommended using NVivo software for qualitative data analysis when coding and analyzing data collected. Software programs, such as NVivo, are tools researchers use to organize, code, and categorize massive amounts of data in a relatively short period of time (Guo, 2019). Once the data organization is complete, researchers need to disassemble the data and assign codes to the relevant data (Yin, 2018). Next, researchers need to reassemble and reorganize the data according to various themes. The fourth step consists of conducting thematic analysis to validate the interpreted data against the interview transcripts. Engaging in thematic analysis helps researchers to identify patterns and themes in the data to answer the study’s overarching research question (Hastings & Pennington, 2019).

I used NVivo to organize data into common themes, code, and interpret raw data from the interviews and organizational documentation and artifacts. I also used NVivo to group the participant codes, map themes, and identify various relationships among the themes in the data. Researchers use member checking to validate and interpret data with the study participants, using thematic analysis (Lehmann et al., 2019). To improve the accuracy of the data collected, I conducted member checking by giving participants my interpretation of their answers to interview questions and asking participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations.

Often in case study research, researchers use multiple sources of data (Yang et al., 2018). Conducting methodological triangulation increases the richness and thickness of data (Fusch et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). Researchers conduct methodological triangulation of data collected from conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documentation to increase the credibility and validity of the data collected (Zhao et al., 2016). Researchers also use organizational documentation and artifacts as another source of data to conduct methodological triangulation (Yin, 2018). Multiple methods exist for data analysis of data collected from reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts, such as thematic and content analysis (Hastings & Pennington, 2019).

To analyze the documents that are relevant to this study, I used content analysis. Researchers first need to classify the identification codes and identify the emerging themes using content analysis to analyze the data (Yang et al., 2018). There are three phases to the content analysis approach, which are a) preparation, b) organization, and c) reporting (Roller, 2019). I conducted methodological triangulation using data from conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts. Finally, the fifth step in Yin's (2018) five-step data analysis process consists of developing conclusions and recommendations from the study findings to allow the researcher to answer the study's overreaching research question. In the data analysis phase of the study, I collected, compiled, and assembled the data collected, disassembled the data collected by codes, reassembled the data by themes, clarified and validated data collected using thematic analysis, and arrived at conclusions based on study findings.

Yin (2018) suggested that determining the relationships among themes in data collected from different sources allows researchers to concentrate on key emerging themes to answer the study's overarching research question and to correlate these key themes with current literature and the conceptual framework. Researchers correlate important themes into various data categories by coding data with different labels (Zhao et al., 2016). In order to determine the statistical occurrence of thematic codes in each of the data categories, researchers conduct a frequency analysis (Lehmann et al., 2019). I used NVivo to identify key themes and organize them into categories, increasing the credibility of the study. Throughout the research process, researchers correlate key emerging themes with current literature and the conceptual framework selected (Belotto, 2018). Researchers use the conceptual framework selected to connect their study with previous literature, research methodology used, and study findings (Yin, 2018). I correlated the key themes that emerged in the study with current literature and the conceptual framework selected for the study, which is employee engagement theory.

Reliability and Validity

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that qualitative researchers use four widely accepted criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, to establish reliability and validity in qualitative research studies. The research community considers these four criteria as study trustworthiness or authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In a qualitative study, researchers ensure the trustworthiness of their studies to address the equivalent aspects of reliability and validity in a quantitative study.

Reliability

In qualitative case studies, establishing reliability is crucial to ensure study trustworthiness. Researchers must generate reliable results, and, consequently, researchers must use instruments and measurements that are reliable (Leung, 2015). Researchers should use several sources of data collection, such as semistructured interviews and organizational documentation and artifacts, to add rigor to their studies (Karjalainen et al., 2015). I conducted semistructured Zoom interviews and reviewed organizational documentation and artifacts to ensure I collected data from various sources. Yin (2018) suggested that researchers should rely on as many data collection sources as possible and recognize that all data collection sources are equally important because they complement each other.

Researchers use member checking as a method to increase data dependability because the use of member checking prevents the integration of biases into the data collected (Lishner, 2015). Using the same interview questions in all semistructured interviews increases data dependability (Olaru et al., 2019). To increase data dependability, I asked all study participants the same interview questions (see Appendix B). Researchers use member checking to confirm data dependability (Smith & McGannon, 2018). I used member checking with each study participant to confirm data dependability. The member checking method requires the researchers to provide the participants with the researchers' interpretation of the participants' answers to interview questions and to ask participants to review such interpretations for accuracy (McGrath et al., 2019). Researchers use member checking to increase data dependability by avoiding the integration of researchers' biases into the data collected (Birt et al., 2016).

Recording the interview sessions assists researchers in producing reliable transcripts and themes by reviewing and reflecting upon participants' answers to interview questions (Arsel, 2017). To reduce the probability of integrating my biases into the data collected, I asked the participants in this study to explain their answers with a sufficient amount of detail, as Arsel (2017) recommended. To ensure that I collected rich and thick data, I asked study participants to provide greater detail if answers given lacked substance. I refrained from discussing the nature of the study with study participants before inviting them to participate to ensure I did not introduce biases into participants' perspectives and produce more reliable results, as Olaru et al. (2019) recommended. Researchers use an interview protocol to ensure that they do not introduce new questions during the interviews, maintaining consistency and increasing reliability (Yin, 2018). I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) and asked each participant the same interview questions without asking any additional questions to maintain consistency and increase reliability.

Validity

The research validation framework consists of credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Langtree et al., 2019). Researchers conducting a case study use an interactive process for data collection to compare data within and across other cases, ensuring the credibility and validity of data collected (Gerstein, 2021; Tongqing Zhou et al., 2016). Researchers carefully read the interview transcripts several times to establish credibility to ensure that they capture rich data from participants' perspectives (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I carefully read the interview transcripts several times to ensure I captured rich data from participants' perspectives, which helped me establish credibility. I also focused on the similarities and differences found in all study participants. Researchers conduct member checking after transcribing the audio-recorded interviews and before analyzing the data to ensure the validity of the data collected (Gunawan, 2015). I conducted member checking after transcribing the audio-recorded interviews and before analyzing the data to ensure I established the validity of the data collected. I provided all participants with my interpretations of their answers to interview questions and asked them to verify the accuracy of my interpretations.

Researchers establish transferability by ensuring that study results could apply to other studies (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Yin (2018) recommended the use of internal and external validity with a semistructured interview format to support additional research using other populations to achieve transferability. To achieve transferability, I attained internal and external validity with a semistructured Zoom interview format to support the applicability of study results to other populations. My goal was to select appropriate study participants, deliver detail-oriented demographic information for each participant, conduct comprehensive data analyses, and present high-quality results to increase the transferability of the study.

Researchers establish confirmability by demonstrating that the data collected from study participants are an accurate interpretation of participants' answers to interview questions without researchers' biases (Langtree et al., 2019). Researchers establish confirmability after they establish dependability, credibility, and transferability (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I consciously made every effort to carefully listen to each participant's interview responses and wrote notes related to my thoughts, insights, and biases. After each interview, I focused on transcribing audio-recorded interviews, establishing connections between data collected and results generated, and comparing results to current literature to increase the confirmability of study results.

Researchers conduct methodological triangulation to improve the validity of a qualitative case study (Yin, 2018). Methodological triangulation involves the researcher using multiple sources of data collection to confirm study findings (Heesen et al., 2019). I conducted methodological triangulation by using several sources of data collection, including semistructured Zoom interviews and organizational documentation and artifacts, to establish validity in the study. Methodological triangulation is a crucial strategy to establish research validity in a qualitative case study because the case study design's foundation is the collection of data from several sources (Somer & Ataria, 2015).

Data saturation is the point where researchers collect and analyze additional data, but no new information or themes emerge (Fusch et al., 2018). A researcher needs to reach data saturation to derive conclusive findings (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). If I had not reached data saturation with the five participants, I would have continued interviewing them until no new meaningful information or themes would have emerged.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I presented the role of the researcher, participants, and research method and design. Section 2 also included information regarding the population and sampling, ethical research information, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity. In Section 3, I present the findings of the study, application to professional practice, implications for positive social change, recommendations for action and future research, reflections, and a conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In Section 3, I present a statement about the purpose of the study, the overarching research question, the study findings, and the applications of the research study to professional practice. I present a discussion related to the implications for social change and the recommendations for action and further study. Finally, I present my personal reflections and the concluding remarks.

Introduction

This qualitative single case study aimed to explore strategies IT business leaders use to engage employees. I conducted Zoom interviews with five IT leaders with at least 5 years of experience using strategies to engage employees successfully. I analyzed organizational documentation and artifacts, such as employee surveys, employee engagement best practices, documentation on steps taken to enhance engagement, documentation on employee engagement and wellness, annual reports, and various tool kits that some of the organizations have implemented.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this qualitative single case study was: What strategies do IT business leaders use to engage employees? To answer the overarching research question, I conducted semistructured Zoom interviews with IT leaders and reviewed organizational documentation and artifacts in various IT organizations. I analyzed the data collected using Yin's (2018) five-step process, including the use of methodological triangulation and member checking. Following the coding and triangulation process, two themes emerged from the data: creating a company culture conducive to employee engagement, and using effective communication to build employee engagement.

Theme 1: Creating a Company Culture Conducive to Employee Engagement

After analyzing all data collected, the first theme that emerged was creating a company culture conducive to employee engagement. Four (P1, P2, P3, and P4) of the five participants shared that building relationships and having high-quality interactions led to improved employee engagement. P4 articulated that a strategy used for improving employee engagement was to motivate by highlighting the benefits of a successful outcome. For example, P4 explained that employees could save time and reduce their workload by implementing a new application. P1 also highlighted the importance of knowing the actions that motivate employees to become engaged.

P1 found that smaller events, such as a happy hour, only had about 5% employee participation. However, if the company held a more significant event that allowed employees to add ideas on which event or activity to do and then vote on these events and activities, there was 50-60% employee participation. I reviewed employee responses to a 2014 employee survey. I learned that the employees’ response rate was much higher when employees provided input directly related to the most important employee needs that leaders need to address. Employees felt that by completing the survey, leaders would incorporate employees’ suggestions into practice. I learned that P1’s organizational leaders encouraged all employees to take the survey each year, ensuring that they incorporated the employees’ voice and an implementation plan of action developed.

P1 and P3 referenced the importance of engagement and aligning workloads. P1 stated, “I think especially in the tech industry, engagement is seen as table stakes for being in the industry. If you want to keep talent in your company and keep people engaged, you need to go beyond their daily work.” P1 highlighted the importance of creating a company culture conducive to employee engagement. P1 explained that engaging employees is good for team-building efforts, stating that P1’s organization moved to focus on engagement activities that employees would enjoy instead of the things that the company thought employees might enjoy.

In public documentation on organizational development, I reviewed a document in P3’s organization from 2014 and discovered that tenure or length of time at the workplace, rather than the employee's age, strongly influenced the employee’s workplace perceptions. According to Shuck and Reio (2014), the employees’ engagement experiences directly relate to the employees’ interpretations and perceptions of the working environment. P1 and P3 noted that employee engagement increased when employees were involved in the activity, had a choice in the activity or training, were active in the problem-solving process, and received open or direct communication. P3’s organizational public documentation on organizational development from 2014 included information on the fact that greater workplace civility is related to greater employee satisfaction with the job and supervisors. In P3’s organizational development documentation, I discovered the results from a survey showing that, as occupational rank increased, the employee's perception of the workplace also increased.

When looking at creating a company culture conducive to employee engagement, P3 highlighted the importance of focusing on employee strengths, knowing the employee's workload, and having a good balance. P3 stated that engaging with employees, knowing their workload, knowing when they should receive training, and investing in improving employees' skills will enhance the company’s ability to meet customers' needs and set the employee up for advancement or additional opportunities. In P3’s organization, I reviewed a document developed in 2019 and referencing employee engagement essentials as a top-down and bottom-up approach. In this document, leaders explained that employees exercising their strengths during their daily activities were 8% more productive and six times more likely to engage in the workforce. When employees can use their strengths during their daily work processes, employees are more likely to be more productive in their work tasks.

In documentation from P3’s organization’s workshop brief, leaders described their plan as a curriculum with three interrelated no-cost workshops that sought to strengthen working conditions and support heightened employee engagement. Daneshgari and Moore (2016) found that profitability improved when organizations used teamwork and fostered learning together. P2 admitted to using a flexible leadership style, as not all people are comfortable with specific methods, focusing on the practices that work best for the employees. At the same time, P3 indicated using an incremental approach to engaging employees and having alternatives highlighting employees' strengths. P4 indicated that the most significant barrier to employee engagement is that, many times, employees are resistant to change.

To overcome that reluctance or stubbornness, leaders need to show the employee the benefits of new technologies or processes, such as making employees’ work easier to accomplish. Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) found that organizations might gain a competitive advantage by focusing on employee engagement, and employees can personally benefit by flourishing and growing. P5 stated that P5’s organizational leaders use engagement surveys to gather employees' thoughts and experiences voluntarily; P5 claimed that employee surveys are among the most successful ways of creating an organizational culture conducive to employee engagement because employees are given an opportunity to provide their ideas. P1 stated that “having an employee engagement process that employees can play a role in, and not just something they participate in, was key to engaging employees.” Kang and Sung (2017) explained that employees perceiving that the organization is committed to employee success are more inclined to be more engaged and motivated to improve their performance.

Leaders also build relationships centered around high-quality interactions between the leader and the employees to create an environment conducive to engagement (Buil et al., 2019). These high-quality interactions lead to increased employee engagement (Buil et al., 2019). P2 indicated that employees' personal interactions were a key aspect of creating a company culture conducive to engagement. Albrecht et al. (2018) explained that the organization's contextual factors, such as senior leadership support, clarity of vision and goals, climate, and supportive human resource practices, might directly or indirectly enhance employee engagement.

In P3's organization, I reviewed a document related to the organization's best practices and found that leaders indicated that to drive improvements, senior managers need to demonstrate support for work and life programs, reward creativity and innovation, promote communication among different work units, and support collaboration across work units to accomplish work objectives. Osborne and Hammoud (2017) found that the leaders' ability to influence subordinates depended on the leaders' ability to emotionally connect with their employees. All five participants indicated that employees' personal interactions were fundamental to creating an organizational culture conducive to enhanced employee engagement, citing the importance of building high-quality working relationships, providing flexibility, and envisioning employee engagement as a humanistic problem. In public documentation provided by P3's organization, engagement was consistently high in terms of a high-performing workplace in such categories as employee development, innovation, leadership, performance, civility, psychological safety, and diversity. Employees that benefit from such leadership behaviors prefer the influence of two-way communication, build trust and confidence, create an emotional attachment with their leaders, and are more likely to be highly engaged (Amah, 2018). Researchers have recognized the importance of utilizing transparent communication to build an organizational culture conducive to employee engagement, strengthen relationships, and foster positive employee outcomes (Jiang & Shen, 2020).

P4 stated that to enhance employee engagement, leaders need to think of engagement as a humanistic problem. P4 stated, “employees are not just another cog in the machine,” which meant that employees have feelings, thoughts, and perceptions. P3 indicated that when employees feel “stuck in a rut” or underappreciated, they tend to feel that they do not fit into the organization, which leads to a lack of engagement. To avoid this problem, leaders need to build high-quality personal interactions with employees. P3 provided an example by stating that knowing the employees well could lead to employees perceiving that they are the organization's best fit. P3 said that P3’s organization had an employee that was in tech support, and the employee’s entire job consisted of moving around from person to person to assist with problems. P3 made an effort to establish a relationship with the employee from tech support and found that the employee preferred to be stationary and have set tasks from day to day. After transferring the employee to another position, P3 stated that the employee became more satisfied with their job and more engaged, which increased productivity. Providing the employee with a better fit in the organization allowed the employee to increase performance and maximize their potential. P5 said, “one of the biggest drivers of engagement was making sure that people are constantly developing and receiving constant feedback from managers and leaders.” P2 admitted to using a creative approach to engaging employees rather than just dictating directions to employees. Effective communication and interaction strategies where leaders effectively balance authority and behavior positively affect their perceived leadership style and employee engagement (Othman et al., 2017).

P1 explained that the company created a culture in which employees received funds to develop organizational events to increase employee engagement. P1 stated that engagement rose as employees were allowed to participate in the selection process as employees became the creators and promoters of the events. Leaders can foster organizational commitment by allowing their employees to voice their opinions, participate in decision-making, and listen to their thoughts and ideas (Saleem et al., 2019). In a public organizational document from P3’s organization, I found inclusive strategies for engaging employees, as leaders indicated that they must make employee engagement a leadership priority. P3’s public organizational documents also included information that the organization needed to involve employees in engagement activities, support managers and supervisors, establish accountability across the agency, and implement strategies. According to Roozitalab and Majidi (2017), organizations can empower employees by providing training, developing information systems, and increasing employees’ motivation and willingness to learn.

All five participants specified that it is essential to have employee input in the organizations' choices. Jena et al. (2018) explained that when employees have the autonomy to make decisions without the leaders' intervention, leaders build trust and confidence in the employees' abilities and competencies, resulting in employee engagement. P2 highlighted the importance of knowing the employees well and the things that work well for them, allowing them to make choices. P5 indicated that P5's organizational leaders give a high level of importance to employee engagement surveys to integrate employees' anonymous feedback into organizational practices. Leadership styles significantly affect employee engagement (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). I found public documentation for P3's organization that listed the key drivers of engagement within that organization: trust in leadership, hands-on management, meaningful work and growth opportunities, and a positive work environment.

In public documentation from P3's organization, leaders showed that disengaged employees had 37% higher absenteeism, 49% more accidents in the workplace, and 60% more errors or defects in the production. P3 and P4 indicated that leaders must provide employees with options that benefit employees and find the best fit for employees within the organization to engage employees successfully. Several organizations that participated in this study have deployed or were deploying Toolkits, which are online resources for managers and leaders to increase employee engagement. P3 discussed the importance of providing employees with realistic plans and goals, the opportunity to participate in training, and a balanced workload that leads to employee engagement in everyday tasks. P3's organizational leader provided documentation of its four pillars of engagement, which included that leaders need to (a) listen and foster an inclusive culture in which all employees would be valued and respected; (b) develop and promote career progression, provide rotation options for knowledge sharing, retain talent, accelerate advancement opportunities, and build leaders; (c) lead by ensuring managers have the proper training and equipment to lead effectively and engage their teams; and (d) support employees by resolving issues quickly, offering the needed resources and tools, and providing exemplary customer service. Anitha (2014) identified organizational culture and leadership as two of the main factors required to satisfy Kahn’s (1990) psychological conditions of engagement.

Correlation to the Literature

The findings noted in Theme 1 aligned with Harrell-Cook et al.’s (2017) findings in that, to reap the rewards of high-performing employees, leaders must engage employees by developing an organizational culture in which there is a commitment from all employees. Raelin (2016) explained that the leadership role in employee engagement is more about leaders facilitating employees' activities and less about the action of leading. Facilitating improved organizational performance requires leaders to use certain leadership styles suitable for the development of employees’ attitudes and behaviors (Prottas & Nummelin, 2018). Gutermann et al. (2017) stated that highly engaged leaders have a better relationship with their employees; thus, employees will become more engaged in their work. Fanggidae et al. (2020) found that the quality of work life and the organization’s culture were influential and had a positive significant impact on employee engagement. Putri et al. (2021) found that the more conducive the culture of the organization is for employees, the greater the level of employee engagement, thus company culture has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement.

Correlation to the Conceptual Framework

Theme 1 relates to Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions and Shuck and Reio's (2011) employee engagement framework, as both lead to creating a company culture conducive to employee engagement. In this study, leader behaviors, such as the ability to create a culture conducive to engagement, inspired the way employees valued their work environment. Shuck and Reio (2014) explained that the basis for cognitive engagement lies with the psychological conditions for engagement. Leaders may develop better employee engagement strategies when leaders create an environment conducive to engaging employees more effectively. An emotional connection exists between the employees' willingness to engage at work and their actual perception of their work environment (Shuck et al., 2014). Employees' favorable cognitive perception of their work environment and organizational support leads to employees actually engaging in their work.

Theme 2: Using Effective Communication to Build Employee Engagement

While Theme 1 related to creating a culture conducive to employee engagement, the second theme that emerged after analyzing all data collected was using effective communication to build employee engagement. According to Verghese (2015), effective internal communication within an organization improves business outcomes as employees are more committed and engaged, increasing employee productivity. P1 spoke of daily stand-up company meetings and monthly all-hands-on meetings where all the employees use Zoom to discuss any updates. P1 explained a concept called "human time" in the stand-up meetings where all the staff members would get an opportunity to share, in 2 minutes or less using a Zoom call, something that they have been doing personally. P1 stated:

> So employees might speak about a movie, a book that they read, or some home improvement project that they have been working on or something about their kids or pets, and then we kind of build a little bit of a nonwork-related relationship between people.

Shaik and Makhecha (2019) explained that informal communication among team members allows employees to get to know each other better, increasing the team's bond. P2 explained that there are consequences of having poor strategies for engagement. For example, employees make assumptions about the actions they should take at a given time. P2 explained that having good communication, guidance, and regular check-ins keeps employees well informed of their duties and prevents them from going down the wrong path and doing double or unnecessary work. Men and Yue (2019) argued that employees recognize humanistic care and that responsive leaders can fulfill this need through communication by using a warm, tender, and sincere response, thus engaging employees to go beyond the call of duty.

Seymour and Geldenhuys (2018) stated that effective dialogue among team members directly influences team communication, the relationship between team members, and the relationship that individuals have with their supervisors. P2 explained that communication is key to engaging employees in their work. P2 also spoke of rumors and that, without proper communication, the rumor can get out of control and hinder employee engagement. The organizations' ability to provide effective internal communication can reduce uncertainty and rumors and catalyze change (Verghese, 2015).

P3 explained that communication is essential as a strategy to addressing the critical barriers to employee engagement. P3 stated that having open communication with team members helps keep employees engaged and allows supervisors to learn the employees' perception of their work and environment. P3's organizational documentation included information on the way in which the company implemented electronic suggestion boxes to allow employees to have additional communication. According to Ganapathi (2019), employees are the organizations' most significant asset and, when engaged in their work, organizations achieve financial potential. Therefore, clear communication is essential to improve employee engagement and avoid conflict (Ganapathi, 2019).

P3 explained that P3's organization has formal and informal one-on-one and team meetings with employees to find key barriers to engagement and seek solutions. Verghese (2015) explained that the organizational leaders' ability to communicate effectively with the employees could build organizational commitment; influence the company's reputation; and allow leaders to share knowledge, gain trust, create a sense of awareness, and engage employees. In an engagement work group document from P3's organization, I read that communication needs to include everyone from the leaders setting the tone to managers listening to employees and advocating for development and support for employees, fostering a culture of empowerment and providing open and honest feedback.

P2 explained the importance of having different communication channels, such as direct communication with the employee; email communication; and various chat formats, such as Skype, Teams, and Slack, as not all employees will be comfortable with all communication formats. An engagement document on wellness included information about leaders explaining that communication was key to successful employee engagement. Leaders also explained that the organization could benefit from focus groups that provide information on the best methods and frequency of communication. According to Bao et al. (2020), the main purpose of internal communication is to align strategy, goals, and values, allow communication to be easily accessible, establish structure, and allow employees to engage with the message.

P5 explained that “internal focus-type groups can help to establish a more in-depth detail about why employees may feel the way they feel about certain aspects, whether it's compensation benefits, their supervisor, or anything.” P5 felt that the best communication came directly from leaders either in a face-to-face or verbal form in the new electronic workplace that is remote, allowing employees to see that leaders believe in the message or strategy. Companies’ leaders need to be transparent in their message, strategies, goals, and values, as an open discussion with supervisors and close workplace relationships can positively affect employee engagement (Bao et al., 2020).

P1 explained that P1’s organizational leaders found that verbal, direct communication was the most effective in engaging employees. P1 also stated that leaders should also follow up the communication with another form of communication, such as email, to promote the message and establish responsibility. P2 found that when employees are less likely to use the company's electronic communication platforms, such as Skype, Teams, Dropbox, Slack, or Hubspot, enticing the employee to use these platforms is to upload the information that employees want to know on these platforms. P1 found that employees were more likely to communicate their ideas regarding engagement when they could be part of the process. According to Thelen and Men (2020), an effective organization firmly holds to its core values and communicates those values of great importance to employees. P1 stated, “I think making the employee engagement process something that employees play a role in and not just something they participate in has played a big role in our process.” Ruck et al. (2017) explained that managers could promote various opportunities for upward critical communication or dialogue through various channels, including organization-wide team briefs, questions-and-answers sessions with leaders, interactive online sessions, listening lunches, or anonymous surveys.

P3 stated that P3’s organizational leaders use effective communication to keep employees engaged; for instance, leaders meet weekly with employees to discuss workloads. P3 stated, “that one-on-one was the most successful tool in communication.” P3 said, “one-on-one relates to open communication, to keeping them aware of what is going on and engaged.” Kim et al. (2017) explained that open communication positively relates to the employee’s organization and the relational outcomes; researchers pay less attention to top management, even though top managers are ultimately responsible for transparent communication. P4 also stated that “while direct communication was best, with the change in work culture and COVID-19, communication is now primarily email.” Thelen and Men (2020) found that having a communication system that was open and transparent helped adapt employees to the organization's culture, resulting in more engaged employees.

Bucata and Rizescu (2017) dictated three managerial communication roles: interpersonal, informational, and decision-making. P1 stated that employees need to be able to make suggestions and know that they will get credit for their ideas. P1 also stated the importance of allowing employees, not feeling comfortable in publicly sharing their ideas, to share those ideas anonymously. Finally, P1 stated that while most of P1’s organizational communication is through face-to-face or Zoom meetings, the company follows up with emails or other social media applications to complete the messages. As constant advancements in organizations occur, leaders need to adapt and change their communication approach to connect with their employees, as managing a social media presence that is effective in engaging employees requires time and effort (Rasheed et al., 2021).

Correlation to the Literature

Theme 2 aligned with the findings of Moletsane et al. (2019) in that several factors lead to an increase in employee engagement and productivity, including personal feelings, work environment, communication, leadership, and commitment. Estell and Davidson (2019) explained a positive relationship between employee voice and emotional, organizational engagement, and between the receptiveness of leaders and a positive leader-employee relationship. In addition, an employee’s ability to engage and be comfortable in the work environment depends on organizational communication (Azmy, 2019). According to Buil et al. (2019), effective communication is essential in a digital age; the workplace is rapidly changing; and leaders need to have a quick and easy-to-use platform with the correct information, news, tools, and collaboration, allowing employees to access the work-related information and become more engaged. Kalogiannidis (2020) explained that proper and effective business communication is important to enhancing employee engagement as well as organizational management, profitability, employee performance, and employee commitment. Markos and Gossaye (2021) found that internal communication plays a pivotal role in enhancing engagement. Using effective internal communication strategies that provide quality information offer the opportunity for upward and reliable communication, eliminating or minimizing communication barriers that leads to enhanced employee engagement.

Correlation to the Conceptual Framework

Theme 2 relates to both Kahn’s (1990) psychological conditions, as communication deals with the employee and management's emotional aspects, and Shuck and Reio’s (2011) employee engagement framework concerning job fit and the employee’s ability to be involved in a meaningful way. In the context of this study, a leader’s ability to communicate influences the way employees value their work environment. Shuck and Reio (2014) explained that the basis for cognitive engagement lies with the psychological conditions for engagement. As leaders develop employee engagement strategies, leaders need to create communication platforms conducive to engaging employees effectively. Shuck et al. (2014) explained that an emotional connection exists between the employees’ willingness to engage in their daily work activities and the employees’ perception of their workplace environment. Therefore, organizations need to support their employees on an emotional level appropriately (Shuck et al., 2014). In this study, I found that organizations need to have open communication and effective communication platforms for delivering messages to create an environment conducive to employee engagement.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings of this study on employee engagement are meaningful to the professional practice in that employee engagement impacts businesses’ financial bottom line. The main objective of this study was to explore strategies IT business leaders use to engage employees. The implications for professional practice from this study include the opportunity for business leaders to effectively engage employees, improve productivity, reduce financial losses, and decrease employees’ intentions to resign, which aligns with Shuck and Reio’s (2014) claims regarding the benefits of engaging employees in their work effectively. The information from this study supported and added to prior and existing knowledge regarding employee engagement.

The first theme that emerged from this study consisted of creating a company culture conducive to employee engagement. IT business leaders could implement the strategies used by participants in the study to create a company culture where employees become engaged in their work. Akhigbe and Osita-Ejikeme (2021) explained that building a company culture of engagement is a cognitive process that helps individuals make decisions and generates employee dedication, motivation, solidarity, identification, and sameness. During the study, P1 explained the way the company often held small events or social hours that would engage only a small portion of the employees; however, when the company created a culture that allowed employees to participate in the decisions and to help promote and choose the events, at least half the employees participated. Fanggidae et al. (2020) explained that a company creates a positive work climate when the employees are actively involved and engaged.

The second theme that emerged from this study included using effective communication to build employee engagement. IT business leaders could implement communication strategies this study's participants used to engage their employees and improve company performance. Prasetya and Kartikawangi (2021) explained the vital role that internal communication plays in an organization, as it can strategically influence the way employees talk about the organization both within and outside the organization. During the study, P2 explained that in P2's organization, leaders used many forms of communication within the company for work purposes. For example, P2 stated that the organization uses the Microsoft Teams application to hold employee chat sessions to discuss work and personal issues. Shirina and Sharma (2021) found that internal communication aided in the building of relationships throughout the organizational hierarchy and played a major role in the productiveness and involvement in the workforce.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include strategies that business leaders may use to engage employees and aid in reducing financial losses. Business leaders achieving financial success could provide more employment opportunities for community members, allowing local communities to prosper. Business leaders could become empowered to create a work environment conducive to employee engagement and assist the local community in bringing about social change by helping employees improve their living conditions and personal well-being to maintain a balance between work and personal lives (Luke & Chu, 2013). Business leaders engaging their employees successfully address social entrepreneurship and pave the way to address social needs (Luke & Chu, 2013).

Reducing employees' intentions to resign may reduce the local community's overall unemployment, which benefits members of the local community because unemployed individuals have elevated rates of mental and physical health problems, higher mortality rates, and experience detrimental changes in family relationships (Wahlbeck & Mcdaid, 2012). Enhancements in employee engagement can result in improvements in living conditions and employees' emotional well-being (Shuck & Reio, 2014). When business leaders are able to engage their employees in their work, business leaders create an organizational presence within the firm's region, encouraging engaged employees to volunteer within the community and enact change (Burcher & Mayer, 2018).

As organizations establish partnerships with local communities, charities, or sports groups, there is a potential to increase employee engagement and influence work relationships between employees and employers (Cornwell et al., 2018). Nothwehr and Rohlman (2019) explained the creation of a symbiotic relationship where businesses experience an increased impact on employee engagement, improved recruitment and retention, increased productivity, and enhanced community benefits resulting from an increase in the number of volunteers encouraged by their employers to volunteer their time and share their knowledge and experience. In addition, as employees become more engaged within their organization, they become cognitively and emotionally invested in their organization's image and outcomes and the company’s contributions to the local community (Opoku-Dakwa et al., 2018).

Recommendations for Action

Business leaders should pay attention to this study's findings and consider implementing the strategies used to engage employees effectively. Based on the findings of this study, I provide the following recommendations for action to become more successful in engaging employees:

1. Business leaders should create a culture that is conducive to engaging employees. Leaders of IT companies may consider policies that will help improve employee engagement, leading to an increase in their organization's financial performance. Managers should treat engagement as a humanistic problem to build relationships with employees and create high-quality interactions. Business leaders should offer employees the

opportunity to participate directly in the decision-making process, allowing employees to provide feedback. Finally, business leaders should implement policies that allow for a flexible leadership style and highlight employee strengths.

2. Business leaders should use effective communication to build employee engagement. Business leaders may consider implementing policies to create and improve open and effective communication, promoting employee engagement. Business leaders should consider creating policies to establish effective internal communication to improve outcomes and increase productivity. Leaders should hold frequent meetings that allow employees the opportunity to share their ideas and concerns to increase team bonding casually. Business leaders could establish policies to use open and effective communication by training leaders to be responsive to the needs of employees. Some of these policies could include multiple communication channels, such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Slack, and Skype.

3. Business leaders should establish practices that may help business leaders enhance employee engagement and increase financial profit. Leaders of IT organizations should actively engage with employees to increase productivity and profitability. Some examples of best practices include building employee-employer relationships, allowing employees to

participate in the decision-making process, and establishing frequent, open, and effective communication.

Each participant will receive a summary of this study’s findings. I also intend to publish this study on the ProQuest database of dissertations and theses to reach a greater audience. In addition, I plan to submit a condensed version of this study to an academic journal for review and potential publication.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies IT business leaders use to engage employees. This study is limited in scope, and the outcome is constrained; therefore, further research is needed to explore additional strategies IT business leaders use to engage employees. Based upon the results of this study, I would like to offer several recommendations for future research:

1. This study has several limitations, and the recommendations for future research should address some of the limitations. For instance, a limitation of this study is the use of a small sample size, which consisted of five IT business leaders in the state of Maryland and limited the generalizability of the results of this study. Thus, future researchers should expand to other states and other areas not centralized to IT.
2. Researchers conducting similar studies using IT leaders from more organizations located in different areas of the United States should lead to the collection of rich data related to strategies used to enhance employee engagement and increase profit.

3. Researchers could also consider interviewing subordinates of IT leaders to gain a different perspective on strategies used to enhance employee engagement.
4. Researchers could also interview business leaders working in different industries to learn the strategies they use to enhance employee engagement and increase profit.
5. Future researchers could examine the relationships between employee engagement and other variables. To achieve this goal, future researchers could conduct quantitative or mixed-method studies. In addition, future researchers seeking strategies to enhance employee engagement to improve profit may want to conduct a longitudinal study to collect more data to learn strategies used to engage employees.

Reflections

While on this academic journey to complete this study, I have grown in several ways as a researcher and in life. Obtaining my doctoral degree is a bucket-list item, and checking it will be an outstanding achievement. I gained the knowledge as a researcher that my role was not to have a perspective of my own but to view employee engagement through the participants' eyes. The purpose of this study was to explore strategies that IT business leaders used to enhance employee engagement. When interviewing participants, I followed the interview protocol in adherence to Walden University’s IRB guidelines with each participant to not integrate personal bias into the study throughout the data collection and analysis phase.

Throughout the interview process, I felt overwhelmed with all of the information from each of the interviews. I noticed that each participant had a different perception of employee engagement when discussing the strategies and procedures of their perspective organizations. While each participant had a different perspective, I found that some of their strategies remained similar. Each participant imparted profound knowledge that indicated the importance of leading by example when implementing and establishing strategies, such as creating a company culture conducive to employee engagement and using effective communication to build employee engagement. In this study, I found that employers use many different strategies to engage employees and increase financial performance. While some leaders implement strategies through technology, others utilize getting to know the employees and their interests.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies IT business leaders use to engage employees. The specific business problem is that some IT business leaders lack strategies to engage employees. After researching employee engagement, it became apparent that leaders must create a culture conducive to employee engagement by treating engagement as a humanistic problem for leaders to increase financial performance within their organization. Two main themes emerged during this study: Creating a company culture conducive to employee engagement and using effective communication to build employee engagement. In this study, I found that leaders applying these strategies enhance employee engagement, increase productivity and financial performance, and create a healthier organization.

While researching employee engagement in IT, I gained a better perception of some of the successful strategies that IT leaders used to enhance engagement to increase profit. As I reflected on each of the conversations with the study participants, I observed that while all leaders had a different perception of employee engagement, each leader created a healthier workplace environment for the employees. I recognized that each participant leads by example to promote a culture conducive to employee engagement and establish internal communication that is open and transparent to achieve goals and increase financial outcomes.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interviewee: ___________________________ Location: ____________________

Date: ______________________ Time: _______________________

Notes:

1. Greet the interviewee and introduce yourself.
2. Provide an overview of the study and indicate the usefulness of the outcome.
3. Obtain a signed consent form. Offer to answer any questions that the interviewee may have.
4. Remind interviewees about their volunteer efforts to participate in the study.
5. Remind the interviewee about recording the interview and start the recording.
6. Start the interview by recording the interviewee's pre-assigned coded name, date, time, and location.
7. Start asking interview questions. Allow enough time to answer those questions.
8. Listen carefully to the interviewee. Ask probing and follow-up questions, if needed.
9. At the end of the interview, thank the interviewee for their participation and time.
10. Provide participant your contact information if they have any questions.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What strategies have proven successful to engage employees in your organization?
2. Based upon your experience, what are some of the consequences of not having strategies to engage employees in your organization?
3. How did your employees respond to those strategies?
4. How are strategies to engage employees effectively communicated throughout the organizational ranks and among stakeholders?
5. What were your key processes for engaging employees in your organization?
6. What were the key barriers to implementing your organization's strategies to engage your employees successfully in your organization?
7. How did you address the key barriers to engage employees successfully?
8. What else would you like to share that I have not asked you regarding successful strategies your organization used to engage employees?