

2022

## Effective Leadership Strategies to Engage Employees

Wanda Trujillo Smith  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Wanda Trujillo Smith

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Effective Leadership Strategies to Engage Employees

by

Wanda Trujillo Smith

MS, Walden University, 2016

BSN, University of Puerto Rico, 1990

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2022

## Abstract

Businesses in the United States lose millions of dollars annually due to low employee performance. However, leaders who develop effective strategies to engage employees may increase employee performance and productivity. Grounded in Khan's theory of employee engagement, the purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore strategies health managers use to engage employees. Participants were eight health care managers from two locations in the northeast region of the United States who demonstrated successful strategies to engage employees. Data were collected from semistructured interviews. The themes that emerged from the thematic analysis were (a) transparency, (b) training, and (c) effective leadership behavior. A key recommendation is for leaders to build trusting relationships with their employees, cultivate employee engagement, and lead positive work behaviors that increase productivity and profitability. Potential implications for positive social change include increasing employee engagement, improving employee satisfaction, and leading to employees' voluntary work within their local communities and the organization's corporate social responsibility.

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## Dedication

First, I want to dedicate this doctoral degree to God for his Grace and Mercy. Without the Lord, this would not be possible. To Marvin Smith, my husband and soulmate, who constantly motivated me to continue this journey with love and support. Thank you for showing me how proud you are of my accomplishments. To my daughters, Carla, Wanda, Marielis, and Ashley, who have inspired me to reach this goal, I am forever grateful to call you mine. To my beautiful grandchildren, Jaymar, Patria, and Dontae, who make my heart smile. I am so blessed to have you in my life. To my father, Josue, who believed I would reach this goal, and my mother, Eugenia, who left too soon but continues to be my shining star. To my sister Myriam, Tony, and nephews, Javier and Karina, thank you for being instrumental in my life during these past years. I love you so much! To my brother and sister, Dr. Joshua and Anet Trujillo and nieces Vanessa and Becca!! I did it!

To my Latin sisters, Carmen Mendez and Dr. Jennifer Brito, who became family during the doctoral journey, particularly Dr. Rosalie Rivera. Thank you for those late nights of encouragement and study guides. You are a precious jewel that will shine wherever you go, and I am so privileged to call you my friend. Finally, to all my friends and family, I love you! Thank you for believing in me, and I hope to be a role model that inspires you to keep going.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Employee engagement is a growing concern for organizations. The cost to U.S. businesses is \$550 billion a year due to low employee performance (Kang & Busser, 2018) and has led to organizations losing billions each year (Aslam et al., 2018). Effective leadership is crucial to employee engagement. Leaders who understand employee engagement issues can develop strategies to address them (Joubert & Roodt, 2019). Kahn (1990) explored disengagement as an influence on employees, and found that disengagement is the withdrawal of physical, cognitive, and emotional from work roles to protect oneself from threats. The results of this study could offer strategic insight into effective strategies to increase employee engagement.

### **Background of the Problem**

Employee engagement is a commitment to the work and the task assigned. Engaged employees are involved, dedicated, and enthusiastic about their daily work and commitment to the organization's goals (Jeanson & Michinov, 2020). Statistics from the Gallup Institute highlighted that 85% of the global workforce are neither engaged nor actively engaged (Motyka, 2018). Employee engagement may contribute to organizational effectiveness and innovation, a reason leaders and managers of organizations are concerned about engaging employees at their best (Rameshkumar, 2020). Rameshkumar also indicated a strong correlation between employee engagement and employee performance levels. Engaged employees care about what they do, and they may recognize the importance of their effort in contributing to the success of their employer.

Managers need to address which outcome is the best way to increase employee engagement. Employee engagement proves to reduce staff turnover, improve productivity and efficiency, retain customers at a higher rate and increase an organization's revenue (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Bakker and Albrecht (2018) mentioned how engaged employees are happier at work, have personal lives, and are more productive for themselves and their organization. Management support plays a crucial role in enhancing employee commitment and work engagement. Talukder et al. (2018) described how a supervisor's role provides guidance support and manages the relationship between staff and the organization so that all are successful. Positive leaders increase employee performance.

Leaders use different leadership strategies and styles to engage employees: transformational leaders, who inspire followers to become the best in the organization (Sahu et al., 2018), and servant leaders who have a strong desire to serve and lead. A servant leader prioritizes service and wants to help and put service first (Merdiaty et al., 2019). Engaged, positive, and confident employees keep themselves and their customers happy and positive through their optimistic outlook and efficacious work behavior (Shaheen et al., 2018). In this research, I explored strategies to engage employees, such as rewards and incentives, performance and talent retention, trust, communication, motivation, and empowerment. I also examined engagement factors such as productivity, turnover rates, stress and burnout, leadership behavior, and job demand.

### **Problem Statement**

Business leaders must address disengagement issues to prevent a negative effect on profits (Lynch et al., 2018, p. 1). The cost to U.S. businesses is \$550 billion a year due to low employee performance (Kang & Busser, 2018, p. 1). The general business problem is that disengaged employees can lead to a loss of profit. The specific business problem is that some business leaders lack successful strategies to engage employees.

### **Purpose Statement**

In this qualitative descriptive study, I explored the strategies leaders use to engage employees. The target population included mid-level managers from three locations in the northeast region of the United States who use successful strategies to engage employees. I selected eight health care managers who have demonstrated successful strategies to engage employees. The potential implications for positive social change include assisting small business leaders with the foundational knowledge to identify disengagement within their employees and implement corrective measures to benefit the business and local economy. Enhancing employee engagement within the workplace may foster a more productive outcome and result in higher goal attainment, adding value to the local economy. Engaged employees in an organization that practices corporate social responsibility (CSR) may also offer their time and skills to serve the community through volunteer services and events to help solve social issues associated with community development.

### **Nature of the Study**

The qualitative method was most appropriate to conduct this research. A researcher selects the qualitative research method to ask what, how, or why about business and social phenomena (Yin, 2018). The quantitative approach is a formal, objective, systematic process used to examine variables, characteristics, or numerical measures concerning a phenomenon (Casarrubea et al., 2019). The purpose of my study was not to examine variables, characteristics, or numerical measures concerning the phenomenon, which is why I did not consider the quantitative method. Mixed methods contain qualitative and quantitative methodology and involve collecting both types of data, examining variables, analyzing data, and comparing results through the relationship among variables (Adhikari et al., 2019). My intent in this study was not to examine variables, characteristics, degree of differences, relationships, or predict outcomes. Therefore, I did not select mixed methods for this study.

I selected a qualitative descriptive design for my study. I also considered several qualitative methods, including ethnography, narrative, single case, and phenomenology, which I concluded did not meet the criteria for the proposed research. Ethnography is suitable when a researcher chooses to study a specific cultural or ethnic group for extended periods (Vougioukalou et al., 2019). I did not select ethnographic design because I was not exploring the culture of a particular group. According to Holmegaard (2020), a researcher uses a narrative design to capture common themes across participants' personal stories, using a narrative method did not align with my study. Yin (2018) indicated that researchers use a single case study design to understand the

knowledge of individuals and groups regarding processes and strategies unique to one's organization, which was not the goal of this research. Conducting a descriptive study design can help refocus and consider more participants, allowing me to explore leaders' strategies to engage employees. Researchers use a multiple case study design to conduct face-to-face, in-depth interviews regarding a social phenomenon across different organizations or units to compare findings across cases (Yin, 2018), which was the goal of my study.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do leaders use to engage employees?

### **Interview Questions**

1. How do you identify a disengaged employee?
2. What strategies have you used to engage employees?
3. How do you implement strategies to engage employees?
4. How do you measure the effectiveness of your employee engagement strategies?
5. What strategies were most effective in engaging employees?
6. What key strategies, if any, were least effective in engaging employees?
7. What key challenges, if any, did you experience when implementing the successful strategies to engage employees?
8. How did you address the primary challenges of implementing successful strategies to engage employees?
9. What additional information would you like to share about organizational strategies to engage employees?



## Conceptual Framework

Using employee engagement theory as the framework for this study could guide leaders of organizations who may lack strategies to engage employees. Specifically, employee engagement theory can serve as a framework for leaders to develop strategies, styles, methods, and behaviors to increase employee engagement. I selected William Kahn's employee engagement theory as a conceptual framework for the proposed study. Kahn presented the theory of employee engagement in 1990 and referred to three psychological conditions that facilitate employee engagement: (a) meaningfulness-ensures employees find their work meaningful enough to warrant them to feel engaged, (b) safety refers to when the employee feels safe bringing their whole self to work without negative consequences, and (c) availability is when the employee feels mentally and physically able to harness their entire self at this particular moment. Kahn (1990) communicated that engagement and productivity would thrive once the working environment is physically, socially, and psychologically supportive.

Employees who are engaged are committed to an organization. Employers are continually seeking ways to understand how employee engagement contributes to employee commitment and understand the drivers of employee engagement. Employees feel motivated when their leaders empower them with opportunities and new challenges (Pandita, 2019). The meaningfulness of opportunities and challenges will determine employees' engagement at work (Akob et al., 2020). As a conceptual framework for this study, Kahn's employee engagement theory was used to form a precode book for data analysis, providing a lens for exploring leaders' strategies to engage employees.

Employee engagement theory may serve as a framework for leaders to develop strategies, styles, methods, and behaviors to increase employee engagement.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions will assist readers in gaining a common perspective regarding unique terms used in this study. The following terms are used in this study:

**Cognitive engagement:** whether employees see work as meaningful or have the essential tools to complete assigned tasks. Cognitive engagement is more abstractly defined as psychological investment and motivation and positively influences performance, persistence, and goal orientation (Barlow & Brown, 2020).

**Corporate social responsibility (CSR):** Practices and policies undertaken by corporations intended to positively influence the world (Lee et al., 2020).

**Emotional engagement:** The sense of belonging and bond that employees establish with their organization. Emotional engagement encourages employees to work and contribute with the same passion and commitment, irrespective of disruptions (Shuck et al., 2017).

**Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB):** A voluntary commitment within an organization or company that is not part of the employee's contractual tasks. OCB is the psychological connection that triggers a sequence of desirable behavior, promoting workplace harmony and work engagement that benefits any organization (Uddin et al., 2019).

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

This qualitative descriptive study included three underlying assumptions. Assumptions are facts that researchers consider accurate but cannot be confirmed (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The first assumption was that conducting interviews at one location in the northeast region of the United States would provide enough data to address the research questions. The second assumption was that the selected population would be available and provide reliable, honest, and unbiased feedback pertinent to the research topic. To minimize bias, I used member checking to explore the credibility of the research and allow for corrections at any stage of the study.

I identified limitations in this study. Limitations are potential weaknesses that may threaten a study's credibility (Ross & Bibler-Zaidi, 2019). The first limitation identified was that the business locations are in the northeast United States, and I chose a healthcare organization and a limited number of participants. A second limitation is that the interview discussions might influence the data analysis and challenge its credibility. To mitigate potential bias, I used an interview protocol. Yin (2018) noted that researchers should not introduce their own opinions during the interviews. I limited my personal opinions or views during the interviews following this protocol. The third limitation may be that mid-level managers may be reluctant to participate in the study because of changes in focus and priorities due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

I did not conduct face-to-face interviews as planned during data collection because of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unavailability or inability to conduct face-to-face interviews may rely heavily on data collection using virtual

platforms, such as Zoom, Skype, or Microsoft Teams. Finally, the number of participants represents a small percentage of the businesses located in the northeast region of the United States. The information received from the interviews does not apply to all companies in the area selected for my research. When a researcher identifies limitations that affect the integrity of the data collection, the researcher will plan to reassess the data collection process to increase the credibility of the data and discuss participant preferences for data collection, either remotely or in face-to-face interviews.

Delimitations are known as constraints. Delimitations are constraints consciously set by a researcher and in the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The first delimitation is the target population which was restricted to mid-level managers from the northeast region of the United States. The study included a small sample size that could be helpful to leaders of other businesses located in the northeast part of the United States who are also seeking strategies to improve engagement among their employees. The geographical boundaries are a second delimitation for this study as the information obtained did not apply to other locations in other parts of the region. Other business options were closer geographically, and I selected a remote area where I did not know participants to avoid biases. I chose a health care organization for this research due to my interest in exploring leadership strategies that would engage employees in this specific setting. When a researcher identifies delimitations that affect the integrity of the data collection, the researcher can reevaluate the size of participants and the geographic location.

## **Significance of the Study**

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Small business leaders may use the findings and conclusions from this study to identify strategies to increase employee engagement, productivity, and profitability. Business leaders focus on building passionate, inclusive, and multigenerational teams; therefore, they use workplace engagement as the key driver to accomplish this objective (Nikolova et al., 2019). Negative interpersonal behaviors cause adverse effects on productivity and employee engagement (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017) that, when addressed by leaders, may increase levels of motivation, job satisfaction, and employee engagement. Business leaders who use strategies to engage employees successfully may observe positive changes in organizational performance (Akob et al., 2020). Engaged employees are passionate about their work and motivate others to follow.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Potential implications for positive social change arising from this study could include assisting small business leaders with the foundational knowledge to identify disengagement within their employees and implement corrective measures that would benefit the business and local economy. Enhancing employee engagement within the workplace may foster a more productive outcome and result in higher goal attainment, adding value to the local economy. Engaged employees in an organization that practices CSR may also offer their time and skills to serve the community through volunteer services and events to help solve social issues associated with community development.

Growing evidence suggests that employees' perceptions of their employer's CSR relate positively to employee work engagement and organizational behavior (Farid et al., 2019). CSR practices are a means through which companies can demonstrate shared values and practices that benefit communities and the environment (Nave & Ferreira, 2019). Enhancing employee engagement can increase profitability, enabling companies to grow and sustain. CSR fosters a more productive outcome for local communities and citizens (Farid et al., 2019). When employees perceive their organization is committed to CSR-specific activities, their level of work engagement is expected to be higher (Rupp et al., 2018). Engaged employees that are part of an organization that practices CSR may also offer their time and skills to serve the community through volunteer services to help solve social issues associated with the community's development.

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

In this qualitative descriptive study, I explored the strategies leaders use to engage employees. An extensive literature review produced evidence to enable the discussion, critical analysis, and synthesis of the historical and current literature to explore effective leadership strategies to engage employees. A literature review will establish a foundation for the descriptive case study and research question. The literature review contains published secondary information on the study's history, present, and emergent themes. Through my evaluation and research in published literature, I identified gaps while reviewing existing peer-reviewed literature on leaders' strategies to engage employees. Kahn's employee engagement theory served as the conceptual framework.

This literature review was conducted using multiple databases available through the Walden University Library and identified through Google Scholar. The core databases used were ABI/Inform Complete, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, EBSCO, Emerald Insight, Sage Journals, Scholar Works, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest Central. This literature review consists of 90 references to establish rigor and conduct an in-depth analysis of current literature. Of those cited, nine references published in 2017 and older (10%), and 81 were published 2018-2022 (90%), which is within the 5 years of my anticipated completion date of the program's requirements. This qualitative descriptive study involves relevant data exploring leaders' strategies to engage employees.

The goal of the literature review and the study is to understand the strategies that leaders use to engage employees. Employee disengagement costs U.S. corporations \$350 billion annually (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Enhancing employee engagement within the workplace may foster a more productive outcome and result in higher goal attainment, adding value to the local economy. Engagement at work may encourage employees to reach their potential while helping leaders achieve organizational goals.

### **Kahn's Engagement Theory**

Employee engagement could influence business profitability. Successful employee engagement strategies help business leaders connect employees to the organization, improve their performance, and increase job satisfaction (Kahn, 1990). I used Kahn's employee engagement theory as the conceptual framework for this study. Kahn's research is known as one of the initial theories to explore employee engagement.

In this section, I provided knowledge about published literature, identified gaps, compared viewpoints, and detected the strengths and weaknesses of past and current literature.

Employee engagement is the extent to which employees immerse themselves in their work. Shuck et al. (2021) discussed the foundation of Kahn's theory. The researchers suggested that employees lack consistency in their work roles and are sometimes attached and sometimes detached from their work role performances (Shuck et al., 2021). Kahn (1990) referred to three psychological conditions that facilitate employee engagement: (a) meaningfulness ensures employees find they are meaningful enough to warrant employees to engage their whole selves, (b) safety indicates when employees feel safe bringing their whole selves to work without risk of negative consequences, and (c) availability, refers to employees who feel mentally and physically able to harness their entire self at this particular moment.

Kahn's theory explains the relationship between engagement and productivity. Once the working environment is physically, socially, and psychologically supportive, engagement and productivity will thrive (Kahn, 1990). Researchers use Kahn's employee engagement theory to explain why employees become disengaged from their jobs (Rameshkumar, 2020). Employees may display different levels of personal engagement or disengagement based on three types of attributes: (a) cognitive, (b) emotional, or (c) physical (Kahn, 1990). The cognitive aspect is about employees' beliefs about the organization. The emotional element shows how employees feel toward an organization and its leaders. The physical component of employee engagement represents the number



of efforts expended by individuals to achieve their goals (Kahn, 1990). In contrast, Kahn's theory also explains the effect of employees not being engaged in their workplace.

### ***Cognitive Engagement***

Kahn's research detailed the psychological and physical importance of an employee being cognitively present while working. Cognitive engagement occurs when employees become aware of their task from a mental perspective and define cognitively engaged employees as mentally stimulated, focused, and absorbed in their respective work roles (Kahn, 1990). According to Kahn, engaged employees are psychologically present and invest more vigor in work roles. Employees with high levels of cognitive engagement are reasonably aware of their role and can identify with the organization's mission (Walumbwa et al., 2018). Cognitive engagement relates to the need for employees to be aware of and aligned with the organization's strategy.

### ***Emotional Engagement***

Employees who are emotionally attached to their work roles display high levels of engagement. Kahn (1990) identified how employees use their critical thinking ability to complete work roles. When employees become emotionally connected to their job, they experience a sense of purpose and self-importance (Khan & Lakshmi, 2018). Scholars have contended that emotional events and well-being are related to employee engagement. Organizational leaders who encourage collaboration, create a flexible work environment, understand and respect work-life balance, have a system for educational opportunities, and provide feedback and recognition for work performance will benefit

from a more productive and engaged workforce (Walumbwa et al., 2018). Emotional engagement refers to an employee's ability to be a critical thinker and problem solver (Kahn, 1990). Employees may become engaged based on their emotional and personal attachments to an organization.

### ***Physical Engagement***

Physical engagement refers to an employee's physical and mental efforts to their job performance. Employees cannot accomplish cognitive and emotional engagement without physical engagement (Kahn, 1990). Kahn described the personal experience of a scuba-diving instructor at a summer camp who experienced moments of personal engagement and pride in their job. Kahn explained that to prepare for the diving expedition, the instructor had to be physically prepared and in excellent condition before the dive, cognitively prepared by checking the diving apparatus, and emotionally prepared by displaying vested interest. Physical engagement is the willingness of individuals to immerse themselves cognitively and emotionally in the work they perform (Abun et al., 2021). When employees feel physically engaged with their work, their levels of commitment may increase.

High levels of engagement lead to positive outcomes for both individuals and organizations. Yaqub et al. (2021) found that employee loyalty, commitment, and performance relate to an employee's safety, well-being, and connectedness. The authors collectively confirmed that once employees' psychological needs are met, including security, trust, and loyalty, they are more likely to feel engaged at work (Yaqub et al., 2021). Business leaders must address issues of disengaged employees to prevent adverse

effects on organizational performance (Lynch et al., 2018). Employees need to be emotionally and cognitively vested in their roles at work to feel physically engaged.

### **Employee Engagement Theory in Practice**

Employee engagement refers to how an employee exhibits an emotional connection to their jobs. Montani et al. (2020) found that employee engagement theory includes the psychological conditions with the following elements: (a) meaningfulness, (b) safety, and (c) availability, Levitats and Vigoda-Gadot (2020) stated that engaged employees connect to their job physically, cognitively, and emotionally and that employee engagement promotes physical and emotional experience to connect employees to their jobs. Kahn (1990) initially introduced the engagement concept, noting that individuals become immersed in work roles and express themselves using physical, cognitive, and emotional expressions. Kahn observed that periods of engagement and disengagement were present in work environments based on the tasks assigned to individuals.

I selected Kahn's theory of employee engagement as it describes the characteristics of employee engagement with transparency. Rewards and incentives could result in employee engagement. Effective rewards and incentives are significant and suggest that employers provide appropriate rewards and incentives to motivate employees to remain engaged in their work (Cote, 2019). Leaders should pay attention to rewards and incentives to improve employee engagement, given the numerous engagement triggers.

## **Alternative Theories**

### ***Vrooms Expectancy Theory***

Vroom's expectancy theory refers to motivation. Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation is an established theoretical framework positing that motivation depends on three relationships: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. These relationships consist of four variables: effort, performance, reward, and preference (Yoes & Silverman, 2021). Vroom distinguishes between the effort people put into their performance and the final result. Vroom argued that personality, skills, knowledge, experience, and abilities could measure an employee's performance. The theory suggests that although individuals may have different sets of goals, they can be motivated if (a) there is a positive correlation between efforts and performance, (b) good performance will result in a desirable reward, (c) the reward will satisfy a critical need, and (d) the desire to satisfy the need is strong enough to make an effort worthwhile.

Expectancy refers to the probability that a particular action will lead to the outcome. When employees believe and trust their managers, employee engagement levels increase. According to Vroom, instrumentality is an outcome-driven relationship in which employees expect rewards based on the high value (valence) of work performed. (Yoes & Silverman, 2020). Developing an organizational culture where trust and performance-based incentives and respect are prevalent can increase performance (Heidary & Bandow, 2018). Some employees believe that rewards should have monetary value, whereas others believe that recognition is more important.

Managers need to determine which outcome is the best way to increase employee engagement. Valence exists when employees feel motivated, display high levels of engagement, and are duly rewarded (Heinonen, 2018). A principle of Vroom's expectancy theory is that employees are motivated to change their level of effort when rewards connect to their performance (McGinley et al., 2019). I chose Kahn's employee engagement theory because it was directed toward the physically, socially, and psychologically working environment and how engagement and productivity will thrive versus motivation by a reward system.

### ***Saks's Social Exchange Theory***

Social exchange theory (SET) refers to decisions people make. According to de Souza Meira and Hancer (2021), SET has a significant relationship with psychological empowerment through meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. SET also has a significant relationship with work engagement through service-oriented OCB. SET was developed in 1958 by sociologist George Homans (de Souza Meira & Hancer, 2021). Homan explains that when people make decisions by consciously or unconsciously measuring the costs and rewards of a relationship or action, the people are ultimately seeking to maximize their compensation (de Souza Meira & Hancer, 2021). A leader can use the SET theory to identify employee engagement related to job and organization engagement. Employees have general expectations of the benefits of sharing knowledge, and the knowledge shared between participants lasts for the whole duration of the activity, leading to a long-term relationship (de Souza Meira & Hancer, 2021). An

employee will perform the work because the task is enjoyable and exciting, rather than as an incentive or pressure to complete the activity.

Drawing from Kahn's definition of engagement, Saks's SET provides the theoretical groundwork to explain why employees are engaged or disengaged at work. The antecedents included job characteristics, rewards, recognition, perceived organizational support, and distributive and procedural justice as factors that predict employee engagement. Leaders who use a positive workplace influence employee satisfaction, which reduces turnover (Glaso et al., 2018). According to SET, participants' knowledge-sharing motivators separate into two types in the management system: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic benefit refers to sources that people gain from others and leads to a separable outcome, including bonuses, best-student awards, honor roles, foods, and other reward-focused incentive systems. Intrinsic motivation is the act of doing something without external rewards (Donald et al., 2020). I chose Kahn's employee engagement theory because it was directed toward the physically, socially, and psychologically working environment and how engagement and productivity will thrive versus social behavior.

Researchers use various theories and models to analyze a study thoroughly. To understand which approach is suitable for the research, I analyzed each theory in-depth and presented it in the conceptual framework. In my literature review, I focused on Kahn's engagement model to illustrate the connection between effective leadership and employee engagement in the workplace. I also provided information on employee

engagement, employee disengagement, and leadership styles. Leaders play a role in developing strategies to engage employees.

### **Employee Engagement**

Engagement refers to an employee that commits to their tasks at work. Jeanson and Michinov (2020) shared that engaged employees are involved, dedicated, and enthusiastic about their daily work and display a commitment to the organization's goals. Donald et al. (2020) stated that the key drivers that motivate employees to facilitate value co-creation include: (a) rewards and recognition, (b) opportunities for life-long learning, (c) interpersonal engagement, (d) role of responsibility and accountability, (e) organizational vision, and (f) social purpose.

Kahn observed that engagement periods were present in work environments based on assigned tasks. Kahn defined employee engagement as an active psychological state that covers work experiences such as on-the-job training, teamwork, and jobs and created an overview of constructs related to engagement by providing definitions and unique focal points. Other scholars indicated that types of engagement include work engagement, job engagement, organizational engagement, employee engagement, cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement (Akob et al., 2020). Employee engagement is essential in an organization's growth and development.

### ***Types of Employee Engagement***

Employees are either engaged or disengaged with their employment. Employee engagement may affect organizations' revenue, so leaders and managers of organizations are concerned about engaging employees at their best (Rameshkumar, 2020). Kahn

(1990) characterized employee engagement as inspiring members to play out their obligations to meet the organization's objectives while expressing themselves physically, psychologically, and genuinely in the working environment. Engagement refers to how observant and committed an employee is in his performance and distinguishes itself by vitality, contribution, adequacy, vigor, and devotion (Caniëls et al., 2018; Cooke et al., 2019). Management plays an essential role in engagement. To the employee and the organization, employee engagement is of the utmost importance, and leadership should support engagement strategies as they are crucial to an organization to enhance engagement (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Engagement should be a top priority for organizations and management to obtain a competitive advantage, and employees need to know the impact of being disengaged at work.

### **Engaged Employees**

Engaged employees provide valuable outcomes to the organization. Employee engagement strategies are proven to reduce staff turnover, improve productivity and efficiency, retain customers at a higher rate and increase the organization's revenue. Most importantly, engaged employees are happier at work and in their lives and are more productive for themselves and their organizations (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

The role of every leader is to improve motivation, morale, and productivity within their workplace. Glaso et al. (2018) suggested that employee engagement reflects two essential elements, (a) willingness to contribute to organizational success and (b) a positive and energized employee who is in a motivational state. Employee engagement is crucial to increasing productivity and morale. Leaders who work hard to be supportive in the work



area would increase subordinates' productivity and engagement (Kurniawaty et al., 2019). Employees gravitate toward leaders who take the time to implement tools and strategies to engage employees and pay special attention to their needs. Leaders' positive interactive behavior could influence their followers' engagement levels, propagating their innovation and positive voice suggestions (Tarkang et al., 2022). Engaged employees perform better on their job, are willing to take on new tasks, and are more productive.

### **Nonengaged Employees**

Actively disengaged employees may cause disruption and dissatisfaction within the company. Kahn (1990) was a researcher who explored disengagement as an influence on employees. According to Kahn, disengagement is the withdrawal of physical, cognitive, and emotional absence from work roles to protect oneself from threats. The definition of disengagement postulated by Kahn also appears similar to that of burnout. Job burnout is chronic, emotional, and interpersonal stressor with three dimensions exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of inefficacy (Dishon-Berkovits, 2018). Actively engaged employees can experience decreased morale if the team's level of engagement fluctuates.

Changes in leadership behaviors, including communication, participation, support, and concern for employees' interests, were significant in ensuring employee buy-in and support for planned change efforts. According to Onyeneke and Abe (2021), when leaders change behaviors toward employees (communication, participation, support, and concern), employees would respond positively to change. Poor relationships between leaders and their subordinates hinder employees' progress and threaten the

organization's productivity and long-term success (Tarkang et al., 2022). Nonengaged employees are not focused on their organization's objectives and goals because they only focus on their daily assignments and personal needs.

Leaders may benefit from identifying nonengaged employees. Some characteristics of disengaged employees include (a) lack of commitment and enhanced turnover intention, (b) dissatisfaction, (c) poor work performance, (d) withdrawal, and (e) uncertainty (Aslam et al., 2018; Rastogi et al., 2018). Mahmood et al. (2019) further suggested that another good work habit is for leaders to teach employees how to handle negativity in the workplace. Addressing employees that are disengaged is a matter of great concern. A toxic work environment refers to the cruel and often violent treatment of persons, jeopardizing employee safety and health (Rasool et al., 2021). Disengagement at work may affect employees' performance.

### **Leadership and Employee Engagement**

Positive leaders increase employee performance. An organization's culture is a fundamental characteristic that influences the behaviors of groups and individuals (Khan et al., 2020). Leaders that empower employees are associated with patient satisfaction, followed by employee engagement, psychological safety, and trust. Successful teamwork requires leaders to engage employees in their work and be actively involved in decisions regarding their work. According to Khan and Lakshmi (2018), leaders who empower staff by coaching and mentoring provide ongoing feedback and use awareness, empathy, fairness, integrity, moral values, motivation, trust, relationship management, respect, and self-management. Leadership is effective when leaders demonstrate integrity, trust,

respect, serve others with empathy and fairness, and are personally and socially competent (Talukder et al., 2018). Influential leaders know how to communicate with employees.

Influential leaders have a vision and purpose. When employees feel empowered, this creates a culture of trust and psychological safety (Khan et al., 2020). A leader who listens empowers staff and expands personal abilities while still encouraging others to do Lumpkin and Achen (2018). Lumpkin and Achen described four theories that may add value and effective leadership performance when combined. The theories in this study include motivation, ethical leadership, and servant leadership and are part of the conceptual framework and literature review of this study

Self-determination theory (SDT) According to Ryan and Deci (2020), personal and contextual motivational factors significantly influence human behaviors. Motivation is central to how people stimulate themselves and others to act and suggests three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness resulting in enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity, increasing employee engagement (Ntoumanis et al., 2020).

Ethical Leadership- Is known as beliefs and values directed by ethical leaders. EL has a guiding vision. They are passionate, have integrity, and consistently model honesty, respect, trust, and fairness. An ethical leader holds coworkers responsible for maintaining the same standards (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018).

Servant Leadership (SL)- is included in this study as a leadership theory. SL focuses on serving followers while forming meaningful, long-lasting relationships. SL

refers to leaders who listen, show awareness, empathize, and commit to helping others (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018).

Emotional intelligent, passionate leaders help people break old behaviors and habits, teaching them how to develop and model the following five components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018).

Influential leaders communicate to exchange ideas, thoughts, knowledge, and information. Babakus et al. (2017) reported that collaboration between different employees in the workplace results in effective communication by sharing innovative ideas. Mills et al. (2019) noted that leaders should streamline different strategies through cooperation and coordination between employees. Effective managers know their employees and create team members by interacting with employees over time. Employees may increase productivity when inspired by leaders. Heidary and Bindow (2018) noted that encouraging an employee to complete a task and praising the employee once the job is complete may increase productivity. Leaders may consider implementing different strategies for each employee.

Leaders in the workplace should strive to maintain good work habits. Encouraging employees to work smarter, not harder, ensures employees will accomplish more while remaining positive Holtermann et al. (2018). Working smarter refers to using thinking skills to minimize tasks and extra steps or using time wisely and effectively. Holtermann also recommended evaluating employees' performance expectations to understand daily requirements better. Leaders may give encouragement and ongoing

feedback regarding the employees' performance while setting goals and offering rewards when met.

Leaders might consider addressing negative emotions to avoid decreasing productivity and creating careless work habits. Hassard et al. (2018) noted that negative emotions in the workplace could provoke employees to react inappropriately to consumers. According to (Nanquil, 2019), leaders must acknowledge employees who express negative emotions to avoid putting employees in positions that contribute to productivity and pay close attention to employees' skills and emotional triggers. Leaders who implement good work habits might consider investing in enhancing employees' skills.

Leader encouragement may simplify a productive and positive workplace. Leaders must ensure employees have opportunities to offer input on decision-making that affects the organization's daily operations (Mahmood et al., 2019). Also, Holtermann et al. (2018) noted that employees feel empowered when leaders encourage and provide opportunities to excel. Leaders may positively affect the workplace by empowering employees to input the group's performance.

### **Transformational Leader**

Transformational leaders inspire followers to become the best in the organization. Followers display honesty and engagement and contribute to a reduced employee turnover rate (Sahu et al., 2018). The objective of transformational leaders is to articulate a vision of the future and motivate employees to attain performance outcomes beyond followers' expectations (Choi, 2020). Transformational Leadership requires emotional

commitments from employees; healthy relationships between leaders and their subordinates result in improved performance outcomes (Choi, 2020). Employees are less likely to leave the organization if they feel motivated in their jobs. This last statement ties back to Kahn's (1990) theory that leadership behavior enhances safety and psychological meaningfulness. When leaders transform employees with effective at various leadership, it may empower employees by creating an environment of positivity and connectedness, leading to engaged employees.

Kahn also referred to the link between transformational leadership and engaged employees, where employees are dedicated, inspired, and transformed by their respective managers. Transformational leaders must understand the importance of an effective working environment because it directly affects employee motivation and engagement and displays an ability to empower employees to perform better psychologically (Pradhan et al., 2017). When employees feel psychologically empowered to express their views, discuss new initiatives, and provide input on operations related to their jobs, they feel this adds value to the organization (Pradhan et al., 2017).

When acting in a mentor's capacity, transformational leaders offer individualized help and direction for advancement (Mahmood et al., 2019). The transformational leader is passionate and can motivate followers, thus compelling followers to commit, work hard, and align with organizational objectives (Buil et al., 2019). The transformational leader's focus is on developing members in maximizing their potential.

## **Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership style aligns with employee engagement. According to Andersen (2018), servant leadership is a management style regarding leading and serving. Greenleaf established the servant leadership theory in 1970 and recognized servant leaders to have the following qualities: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Under the servant leadership theory, the leader is a servant first (Jeyaraj & Gandolfi, 2019).

A servant leader has a strong desire to serve, lead, and, most importantly, combine the two as positive reinforcement and is a leader that prioritizes service and wants to help and put service first (Merdiaty et al., 2019). The most substantial impact of servant leadership is on followers' satisfaction, followed by organizational commitment, service quality, work engagement, service climate, creativity, psychological capital, and performance (Gui et al., 2021). Greenleaf was the first theorist who presented servant leadership theory to modern organizations and described how a servant leader facilitates goal achievement by giving team members what they need to be effective (Hai & Van, 2021). A servant leader leads by role modeling behavior.

Servant leaders build influential followers. Servant leaders also create a trusting environment, where employees are treated honestly and work toward building a solid team (Peachey et al., 2018). Servant leaders also provide direction and stimulating assignments for their employees, keeping them engaged and productive (Hai & Van, 2021). The main principles of servant leadership align with the critical components of

employee engagement (developing people, building trust, and accomplishing assignments) experienced in most organizations. Kahn (1990) contended that when employees experience higher levels of meaningfulness at work, they are under the supervision of leaders who care for their needs.

The humility and patience of the servant leader may reflect weakness. The misconceptions of leader and servant combine to result in a wrong understanding that servant leaders engage in a laissez-faire style. What differentiates servant Leadership from other leadership styles is its primary focus on the follower first and directly correlates with employee engagement (Hai & Van, 2021). Servant Leadership can be effective because of the two-way relationship between the leader and the follower.

### **Effective Leadership Strategies to Engage Employees**

#### **Rewards and Incentives**

effective strategies to engage employees and motivate them to be involved in their workplace.

Rewards and incentives could result in employee engagement. The leaders provide rewards contingent on the performance and effort of the employees by stimulating behavior. The provision of fair rewards is a crucial aspect in shaping the attitude and behavior of the employees (Thibault Landry et al., 2020). Rewards and incentives help employees bring positive change in their behavior concerning innovation and creativity. Employees are always concerned with the intrinsic, and Rewards and incentives may or may not positively affect employee engagement. Khan et al. (2020) described contingent rewards as a leader's way of showing positive support or gratitude



toward employees for their work in merit increases, bonuses, and promotions. Contingent rewards could help leaders improve individual productivity and performance and concluded that rewards were not as effective as motivational in minimizing project-related costs (Raziq et al., 2018). Raziq added that rewarding employees also creates an opportunity for leaders to formulate relationships with employees. Leaders may use a contingent reward to enhance employee engagement (Thibault Landry et al., 2020). Leaders should be mindful of integrating extrinsic rewards for efforts, including recognition, economic incentives, promotion, bonuses, and other perks and privileges (Khan et al., 2020). These rewards have an encouraging influence on employees' self-confidence, trust, commitment, and innovative behavior (Khan et al., 2020). Similarly, contingent rewards hold emotional exchange that involves stimulating the leader's behaviors toward their employees in personal recognition.

A fundamental factor to consider among rewards and incentives is the increasingly age-diverse workforce as organizations face the challenge of fostering job satisfaction among younger and older employees. According to Kollmann et al. (2020), while younger employees were satisfied primarily by monetary rewards, more senior employees were satisfied primarily by their task contributions. Rewards and incentives lead participants to experience intrinsic motivation, which leads them to perform better. When monetary rewards are present, they should be presented to employees in an autonomy-supportive way to convey an informational meaning and positively contribute to their psychological need satisfaction (Thibault Landry et al., 2020). Employee satisfaction and engagement may be affected by rewards and incentives.

## **Performance and Talent Retention**

Researchers associate employee engagement with employee performance because engaged employees show dedication to their work. The cost to U.S. businesses is \$550 billion a year because of employee performance (Kang & Busser, 2018). Fast-changing global markets and technology innovation have drastically altered how organizational leaders compete and understand the need to have engaged employees. Fast-changing global markets and technology innovation may increase customer satisfaction, enhance the organization's reputation, and create stakeholder value and competitiveness (Bhatt & Sharma, 2019). Riyanto et al. (2021) determined that companies need active employee engagement by encouraging motivation and fulfilling their job satisfaction to achieve and improve performance. Creative employees show their capabilities and bring out new ideas and creativity (Sekhar et al., 2018). Influential leaders may discuss strategies to identify and retain creative and talented employees.

Organizations are competing to recruit the best talent and retain skilled employees. Once employees complete training, leaders prioritize managers to implement programs to propel the hiring, training, and development process (Bhatt & Sharma, 2019). Employees who perceive the organization as supportive, caring, and potential for growth work harder, find ways to improve work tasks, and present mentally and physically (Othman et al., 2019). Leaders understand the importance of retaining talented employees.

Retention strategies impact employees' behavior and commitment. Ohunakin et al. (2020) completed a study among 312 frontline employees working in the selected 5-star

hotels in Nigeria. The study outcomes revealed a significant role of retention strategies on employees' behavioral outcomes. The study implied that management should show consistent support for their workforce's career development and economic stability, especially for professionals. Retention strategies are essential for gaining their full attention and positive workplace behavior and will create positive employer branding, generate knowledge transfer, strengthen succession plans and retain top talents (Ohunakin et al., 2020). Leaders are increasingly aware of maintaining good employees in business and social environments. These talented workers with high potential are critical for organizations, as they become scarce resources to be attracted and retained (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020). Leaders should be able to know their employees and work toward keeping them.

Leaders should have a plan to retain talented employees. Substituting qualified and valuable employees has high costs, while investing in employees is much less expensive than replacing them (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a tool for talent management that some authors advocate a co-created model, where CSR and HRM practices work together. CSR policies are potential instruments to attract talented individuals to organizations, given socially responsible firms' higher levels of attractiveness (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020). Employee retention is the ability of an organization to identify talented employees and retain them.

### ***Trust***

Trust is a component of employee engagement and the relationship between leaders and employees. Trust results from reliability, fairness, and goodwill, and the

quality of the relationship between the manager and employee drives the level of disclosure (Heyns & Rothmann, 2018). When employees are empowered to make decisions, they display energy and contribute to their daily work and the organization's plans (Morton et al., 2019). Employees' trust in their manager increases when employees perceive the manager as capable, reliable, knowledgeable, dedicated, and able to access the situation when making decisions that may affect them (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2020). Employees perceive their supervisor as trustworthy, caring, genuine, and supportive, and employees' task performance, job satisfaction, motivation, and the quality of the relationship between the supervisor and employees improve (Morton et al., 2019). If the employees perceive the supervisor's motive as legitimate, employees are willing to tolerate certain levels of leadership control (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2020). When employees trust their leaders, the leaders positively influence employee behavior and engagement.

### **Motivation**

Leaders with inspirational motivation could seek ways to create a positive work environment. Motivating employees in the workplace may start with a positive organizational culture. Oliveira et al. (2018) reported that a responsibility associated with any leadership role is to ensure employees feel motivated for success. Donald et al. (2020) acknowledged that job satisfaction is essential for achieving organizational and personal goals, and Bryant (2018) reported that motivated employees directly affect the performance and achievement of the organization. Employees may become an integral asset when the organization's performance improves and proactively build a solid

organizational culture. When employees are motivated, they will work enthusiastically and be passionate about what they do, leading to high labor productivity and contributing to the achievement of business goals. Leaders should engage, motivate, and understand employees' needs to improve the workplace.

### **Communication**

The gap between the motivational needs of employees and the motivational efforts of leaders may be a lack of communication. Employees' perceptions differ from leaders, which creates a disconnect (Kossek et al., 2018). Lack of communication or motivation in the workplace may cause employees to experience job dissatisfaction. . Communication is an effective tool between leaders and employees. Optimal communication is of high importance, as well as leadership training programs. Leadership must communicate effectively with employees. Effective communication could increase employee engagement. Scholars have linked internal communication to employee engagement, suggesting that productive communication is the catalyst for employee engagement (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018). Employees are more likely to remain committed when leaders communicate the organizational mission (Toufaili, 2018). Leaders can use effective communication to facilitate interactions in the workplace, which may lead to meaningful relationships with employees.

### **Empowerment**

The empowerment strategy confirms the principle of Kahn's engagement theory. Kahn's approach supports engagement by motivating employees and influencing their attitudes and behaviors toward the organization. Leaders may benefit from empowering

staff by discussing organizational goals with employees and allowing employees to bring new ideas (Hoang et al., 2021). When employees find that their corporate goals are achievable, they are more likely to work hard for the organization (Akbari et al., 2020). Leaders may benefit from empowering staff by discussing organizational goals with employees. Leaders who empower staff may promote an effective connection, creativity, and innovation.

Another way to empower employees may be (OCB). Akbari et al. (2020) found that leaders help employees achieve OCB by connecting employees' roles and organizational goals. The authors found that OCB enhanced the corporate environment to achieve extra-role behavior, improving employee performance and positively influencing the organization (Akbari et al., 2020). Leaders may use the attributes of transformational Leadership to empower employees to achieve organizational goals.

## **Factors Affecting Engagement**

### ***Productivity***

Employee productivity is a primary factor in every organization. Employee engagement increases when employees are rewarded and informed on ways to improve in the workplace (Heidary & Bandow, 2018). With the Covid pandemic, some employers had to readjust and reassign work from home. Employers must ensure trust, flexibility, choice, the highest quality digital experience, and most importantly, a COVID-19 safe workplace (O'Rourke, 2021). Employees must accept autonomy with responsibility, each accountable for their performance and productivity. Success will require balance, a shared vision, and outstanding leadership (O'Rourke, 2021). If employee performance is

not measured accurately, there is an increased risk of incorrect forecasting, resource allocation, and financial loss (Strömberg et al., 2017). A leader needs to be aware of employee productivity.

Another factor to consider is the physical work environment. Researchers have found that openness, noise, lighting, and temperature can affect productivity (Otterbring et al., 2018). Levitats and Vigoda-Gadot (2020) mentioned that engaged employees connect physically, cognitively, and emotionally to their job. When leaders provide employees with adequate workspace, equipment, education, and technology that employees consider adequate and safe, employees will feel motivated and engaged at work (Levitats & Vigoda-Gadot, 2020). The authors focused on: (a) ratings perceived productivity, (b) cognitive performance tests (working memory, processing speed, and concentration), (c) monitoring computer activity (keystrokes and mouse clicks), (d) absenteeism, (e) presenteeism, (f) reported frequency of health issues, (g) time lost to issues affecting productivity, (h) mood, (i) sleepiness, (j) job satisfaction, (k) job engagement, (l) intention to quit, and (m) turnover. Newer technology has allowed employees to improve productivity and may increase staff satisfaction in the working environment

Significant technological growth such as smartphones, video conferencing, and email communication facilitate communication. (Laitinen & Valo, 2018; Levitats & Vigoda-Gadot, 2020) mentioned that engaged employees connect physically, cognitively, and emotionally to their job. When leaders provide employees with adequate workspace, equipment, education, and technology that employees consider sufficient and safe,

employees will feel motivated and engaged at work (Frémeaux & Pavageau, 2020).

Employees welcome technology as it may decrease steps to communicate among employees.

### ***Turn-Over Rates***

When leaders do not treat employees kindly, employees may consider leaving their employment, affecting productivity. One reason turnover and retention are increasingly pressing issues to managers and executives is that employees are changing. Lee et al. (2018) refer to a Gallup report when describing turnover rates in the United States.

- (a) only 33% of US workers are engaged in their work
- (b) 35% of US workers report changing jobs within the last three years
- (c) 60% of employees say the ability to do what they do best in a role is very important to them
- (d) 12% of employees strongly agree their organization does a superior job at onboarding new employees
- (e) 51% of employees say they would change jobs for one that offers flexible work time.

Millennials form the largest group in the United States workforce. Another area that Lee discusses is concerning how millennials may think. Gallup reports:

- (a) Millennials do not just work for a paycheck; millennials want purpose in their jobs.



- (b) Millennials are not pursuing job satisfaction; millennials are pursuing development and growth.
- (c) Millennials do not want bosses; millennials prefer coaches.
- (d) Millennials do not want annual reviews; millennials prefer ongoing conversations.
- (e) Millennials do not want to fix their weaknesses; millennials prefer to develop strengths.
- (f) It is not just my job; it is my life.

Millennials are known as digital natives. This group looks for jobs that are challenging. Lee et al. (2018) recommended managers look deeper at turnover rates, which may signal a retention problem that needs managerial attention. Lee et al. (2018) also mentioned the importance of completing a thorough exit review to determine why employees resign. Lee concluded that a low turnover rate might not automatically signal that employees are not motivated or less likely to quit. Leaders should develop strategies to engage employees to reduce turnover rates.

### ***Stress and Burnout***

Burnout may affect employee engagement. Gabriel and Aguinis (2022) described burnout as chronic work-related stress. Employees identified with symptoms of burnout are emotionally drained and feel negative and detached from work, which leads to decreased performance, inhibited creativity and innovation, workplace accidents, absenteeism, and physical and mental illnesses (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022). Finamore et al. (2020) mentioned how burnout could adversely affect workforce retention and

delivery of high-quality care and added how supervisors should monitor burnout among the employees to determine what tools are necessary to maintain an engaged employee. Burnout is widespread and costly to human life, firm profits, and society, especially during a global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic Gabriel and Aguinis (2022). This pandemic added new stress to employees when performing at work.

### ***Supervisor Behavior***

Abusive supervisor behavior can result in stress and burnout. Fostering healthier workplaces is necessary, particularly during a crisis that has intensified job demands and drained job resources (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022). Talukder et al. (2018) noted that supervisors' behavior directly affects the employees' ability to maintain a work-life balance. Another factor that affects supervisor behavior is what employees may perceive as favoritism at work. Managers showing favoritism could lead to employees' disengagement and underperformance (Aslam et al., 2018). A leader's behavior is an antecedent of job stress, resulting in employee burnout.

### ***Job Demand Resources***

Job demands refer to the job's requirements. Job demands are the organizational aspects of the job that assist employees in achieving work goals and stimulate personal growth, learning, and development. High job demand and low job resources are two factors that contribute to engagement and burnout (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Breevaart and Bakker added that job resources enable employee engagement while job demands challenge employees, but high job demands could result in job strain and health complaints. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018) discussed a study on teacher perception of job

demands and job resources in the school environment. They determined that teachers' well-being was predictive of higher engagement and lower motivation to leave the profession. The study results reveal that teacher stress is associated with workload and time pressure. However, teacher motivation and well-being are affected by stressors or job demands. Positive relations with colleagues and the school administration and the feeling of doing a meaningful job are positively related to teachers' engagement and well-being and negatively associated with teacher stress (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). When a manager makes organizational resources available to enhance employees, employees feel engaged, and employee satisfaction increase.

### ***Organizational Commitment***

When employees are satisfied in their workplace, the levels of commitment increase, including taking on extra responsibilities; the employees' decisions to take on additional duties may help organizational productivity and efficiency (Gupta, 2017).

When employees feel competent and confident about an organization, they tend to be supportive and helpful to their coworkers and the organization (Gupta, 2017).

Organizational commitment is the cognitive connection between an employee and a specific organization. Employees' commitment to the organization may depend on the level of organizational commitment to the employees Yusuf, 2020. A good and conducive corporate culture enables executive members to build their integrity, competence, consistency, and loyalty toward the organization. It will encourage members of the organization to view the leadership's values, including the matters contained in trust, such as integrity, competence, consistency, and loyalty (Yusuf, 2020). According to

Byrne et al. (2017), organizational politics can be positive or negative. When managers manipulate people and policies, employees reassess their work commitment and contribution by withdrawing and being less productive. The organizational commitment may have a positive retention outcome.

### **Organizational Citizenship Behavior**

OCB provides benefits to the organization and individuals. OCB is an individual, voluntary, and extra-task behavior that is not organized directly or indirectly through the formal reward system and is generally effective in increasing the effectiveness of the organization. (Moradkhah & Naghdi, 2021). OCB is a positive behavior that requires intervention from corporate leaders as role models of citizen behavior (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Ethical leaders influence extra-role performance and OCB, and Pitichat et al. (2018) added that OCB is employees' strength and virtues. OCB is the psychological connection that triggers a sequence of desirable behavior, promoting workplace harmony and work engagement that benefits any organization (Uddin et al., 2019). OCB is a voluntary commitment not part of the employee's contractual tasks.

### **Effective Leadership Strategies to Engage Employees**

#### **Rewards and Incentives**

Rewards and incentives could result in employee engagement. The leaders provide rewards contingent on the performance and effort of the employees. Stimulating behavior. The provision of fair rewards is a critical aspect of shaping the employees' attitudes and behavior (Thibault Landry et al., 2020). Employees are always concerned with the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for efforts, including recognition, economic incentives, promotion,

bonuses, and other perks and privileges (Khan et al., 2020). Rewards and incentives help employees bring positive change in their behavior concerning innovation and creativity.

Contingent rewards hold an emotional exchange that involves stimulating the leader's behaviors toward their employees in personal recognition. These rewards, in turn, have an encouraging influence on employees' self-confidence, trust, commitment, and innovative behavior (Khan et al., 2020). An essential factor to consider among rewards and incentives is the increasingly age-diverse workforce as organizations face the challenge of fostering job satisfaction among younger and older employees. Rewards may have an encouraging effect on employees. According to Kollmann et al. (2020), while younger employees were satisfied primarily by monetary rewards, senior employees were satisfied by their task contributions. Reward systems are welcome by employees.

Rewards and incentives lead participants to experience intrinsic motivation, which leads them to perform better. According to Thibault Landry et al. (2020), when an organization offers monetary rewards, employees will know the purpose of contributing to their psychological needs and satisfaction. Employee satisfaction and engagement are affected by rewards and incentives. Leaders of the organization should provide financial rewards in an autonomy-supportive way (Thibault Landry et al., 2020). Employee satisfaction and engagement may be affected by rewards and incentives.

### **Talent Retention**

Managers should identify employee retention strategies. Ohunakin completed a study in Nigeria among 312 frontline employees working in selected 5-star hotels

(Ohunakin et al., 2020). The purpose was to investigate the influence of talent retention strategies (training and development and job security) on employees' behavioral outcomes (employee job performance and job commitment) in Nigeria's hospitality industry. The results showed a significant role of retention strategies on employees' behavioral outcomes. They implied that management should show consistent support for their workforce's career development and economic stability, especially for professionals. The result is significant for gaining their full attention and positive workplace behavior and will create positive employer branding, generate knowledge transfer, strengthen succession plans and retain top talents (Ohunakin et al., 2020). Employee retention is the ability of an organization to identify talented employees and be able to retain them.

### **Transition**

In Section 1, I described my selection of a qualitative, multiple case study after reviewing several other research methods and designs. The research question: What strategies do leaders use to engage employees to align with the general and specific business problem. The general business problem: disengaged employees can lead to a loss of profit. The specific business problem: some business leaders lack successful strategies to engage employees. I selected William Kahn's employee engagement theory as the conceptual framework for this research study. In this theory, Kahn describes three psychological conditions that facilitate employee engagement: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. I completed section 1 by discussing the significance of the study, its contribution to business practice, and its implications for social change.

Section 2 of this study contains the role of the researcher, where the main objective is to conduct my research ethically, protecting and respecting the participants. To complete my research ethically, protect, and respect the research participants, I adhered to the Belmont Report. I used purposive sampling to select participants. I described the potential participants chosen for the study: nine healthcare managers who demonstrated successful employee engagement strategies. I selected a qualitative method in research to explore and analyze concepts, opinions, or experiences. The aim of the literature review and the study, in general, was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the strategies that leaders use to engage employees. The literature review contains 96% references from 2017 to 2022. In the literature review, I discussed Kahn's theory of employee engagement, alternative theories related to employee engagement, and effective leadership strategies to engage employees. An extensive literature review produced evidence to enable the discussion, critical analysis, and synthesis of the historical and current literature to explore effective leadership strategies to engage employees.

In Section 3, I provided the study findings. I provided the application for professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, further research, reflections, and a conclusion to the study.

## Section 2: The Project

### **Purpose Statement**

In this qualitative study, I explored the strategies leaders use to engage employees. The target population included midlevel managers from a location in the northeast region of the United States who have used successful strategies to engage employees. The implication for social change includes assisting small business leaders with the foundational knowledge to identify disengagement within their employees and implement corrective measures that would benefit the business and local economy. Enhancing employee engagement within the workplace may foster a more productive outcome and result in higher goal attainment, adding value to the local economy. Engaged employees in an organization that practices CSR may also offer their time and skills to serve the community through volunteer services and events to help solve social issues associated with community development.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I am the primary instrument for this qualitative study. A researcher's role is one of the most critical elements in research success and is responsible for the data collection instrument within the study. According to Yin (2018), the role of a researcher is to evaluate literature, define the sample, recruit participants, and collect and analyze data. I chose to research the strategies that leaders use to engage employees.

To conduct my research ethically, and to protect and respect the research participants, I adhered to the Belmont Report. The Belmont Report was signed into law in 1979 and has been a cornerstone in the ethical conduct of research involving human



subjects (Siddiqui & Sharp, 2021). The three basic principles are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice ( National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The Belmont Report shows respect for persons and incorporates at least two ethical convictions: first, individuals are autonomous agents, and second, persons with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection (Earl, 2020). I adhered to the guidelines in the Belmont Report by confirming that each participant knew their participation in the study was voluntary. Each participant received equal treatment during this research study, and each participant had a clear understanding of the consent form.

I acted responsibly and with integrity during my research. In a qualitative study, researchers must remain cognizant of potential personal biases that may affect the reliability of the study and develop strategies to detect and limit bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). To ensure an unbiased perspective when conducting my study, I chose to interview participants in the northeast of the United States, where I do not have any working relationship with the managers who participated in the research.

I mitigated personal bias by using bracketing. Bracketing is the researcher's personal experience, cultural factors, or assumptions that may affect or influence how the researcher views the data collected (McNarry et al., 2019). I used semistructured interviews to explore, in an in-depth manner, matters unique to the experiences of the interviewees (McGrath et al., 2019). A researcher uses the interview protocol as a guide to reduce biases when collecting data (Schnefke et al., 2019). I used a journal to track all

activities related to data collection, transcript validation and review, member checking, interview protocol, and data saturation.

### **Participants**

I selected eight health care managers who demonstrated successful strategies to engage employees. I explored the strategies leaders use to engage employees.

Researchers should recruit and select participants using specific eligibility criteria based on participants' knowledge or experiences about the problem explored (Yin, 2018).

Researchers must ensure that participants satisfy particular eligibility criteria and answer the research question using purposive sampling. The managers selected for this study were required to have been leaders for 4 years in different areas of the organization.

Upon receiving Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (02-28-22-0500235), I contacted potential participants met the study's eligibility criteria via email. I addressed the limits of confidentiality for the organization and the participants. I contacted the potential participants through emails to explain my study objectives. A principle in research ethics is that researchers must respect participants' autonomy, typically by informing participants about the nature of the study, outlining all potential harms and benefits, and obtaining their informed consent before recruiting them into the study (O'Doherty & Burgess, 2019). I waited for the signed consent form before initiating further contact.

The participants received the informed consent via email with clear instructions and a reminder that the interview process was voluntary. The communication included that each participant could withdraw from the interview process by email during the

recruitment and interview process. Developing a relationship with participants is essential to maintaining effective communication during data collection. When participating in research, transparency and effective communication are necessary elements to building trust with participants (Khodakarami & Dirani, 2020). I contacted participants via email to ensure full disclosure of the study, explain the confidentiality process, inform consent, and schedule the interview based on the participant's availability. The interviews were all completed via Teams due to the participant's level of comfort related to the COVID-19 pandemic. I provided the option of face-to-face, Zoom, or teams' interviews, and all participants opted for interviews via teams. Trust is essential to developing a study as it promotes positive researcher-participant interactions.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

I used a qualitative method to explore and analyze concepts, opinions, or experiences. In conducting research, there are three methods (a) quantitative, (b) qualitative, and (c) mixed methods (Yin, 2018). The quantitative method is a systematic process used by researchers to examine variables and numerical measures concerning a phenomenon (Casarrubea et al., 2019). I am not analyzing variables and numerical data and therefore did not select the quantitative method. Quantitative researchers use statistical data to examine the relationships between different variables, and because this study required neither testing hypotheses nor comparing variables, I did not consider the quantitative method. Quantitative data were unnecessary to explore leaders' strategies to engage employees; therefore, I did not select the quantitative approach. Mixed methods

contain qualitative and quantitative methodology and involve collecting data, examining variables, analyzing data, and comparing results through the relationship among variables (Adhikari et al., 2019). Mixed-method studies involve combining qualitative and quantitative methods, and researchers must have the skills to pursue quantitative and qualitative research (Yin, 2018). Mixed-methods research is time consuming, costly, and requires larger sample sizes for the quantitative method section than one would use for qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2019). The mixed-method approach was not suitable for this study because the intent was not to examine variables, characteristics, degree of differences, the relationship among variables, or predict a meaningful outcome. I did not need to select both methods to explore leaders' strategies to engage employees; therefore, I did not choose the mixed-method approach.

### **Research Design**

I selected a descriptive research design for this study. Descriptive research design is a type of research design that aims to obtain information to systematically describe a phenomenon, situation, or population (Saunders et al., 2019). A multiple case study is designed for a researcher to conduct face-to-face in-depth interviews regarding a social phenomenon and cases examined using various data collection methods (Yin, 2018). Multiple case studies require extensive resources and time beyond the means of a single student or independent research investigator. A single case study questions old theoretical relationships and explores new ones (Yin, 2018), which was not the purpose of this study. Using a descriptive study would help me better understand the subject I am exploring.

I considered other research designs that included ethnography and narrative. Ethnography is suitable when a researcher chooses to study a specific cultural or ethnic group for extended periods (Vougioukalou et al., 2019). The ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study because I was not investigating the culture of a particular group. A narrative inquiry relates to stories from a small number of individuals representing a typical or critical case and values lived experience as a vital foundation for knowledge and an essential source of understanding (Kegler et al., 2019). Storytelling often uses chronologies with temporal or episodic ordering. Life histories or life narratives fit within this approach. The narrative design was not appropriate as the purpose of this study was not to gather stories. The narrative design would not have enabled me to collect information through interviews and gain knowledge of my business problem when I reached an appropriate sample size of data saturation.

A researcher reaches data saturation when further data collection or analysis is unnecessary. Saunders et al. (2019) defined data saturation as when new data begin to repeat and no new themes emerge during data analysis. I asked each participant the same questions, took notes, and reviewed documents to ensure adequate data saturation. Saturation is important because it indicates data validity and helps a researcher determine when to continue or stop collecting data.

## **Population and Sampling**

### **Population**

For this study, the managers must have held leadership positions for 4 years in different areas of the organization. After I received IRB approval, I contacted potential

participants via email from health care facilities in the northeast of the United States. Braun and Clarke (2019) theorized an adequate sample size to be between 10 and 15 participants, while Gentles et al. (2015) noted 4 to 10 to be appropriate, and Guest et al. (2013) cited in favor of small sample sizes in qualitative case studies. The population included managers from the health care system who satisfied specific eligibility criteria to participate in this study.

### **Sampling Method**

Selecting participants suitable for this study was done using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is one of the most popular sampling methods in qualitative research characterized by referral. Researchers start with a small number of participants and recommend other contacts who fit the research criteria and who might participate in the study. These new participants may also recommend other potential participants (Parker et al., 2019). I used discretion in selecting suitable participants for the study based on their knowledge of the context.

Qualitative research is meaningful when the chosen sample provides rich information with analytical capabilities (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019). Researchers must ensure that all participants satisfy specific eligibility criteria and possess the ability to answer the research question when they employ purposive sampling (Hennink et al., 2019). Snowball sampling allows a researcher to consider other participants by asking the participants to identify other potential candidates to interview.

Additional elements may affect sample size in qualitative studies, such as data saturation. Data saturation is essential because it indicates data validity and is often

included in criteria to assess the quality of qualitative research. A researcher uses data saturation to determine adequate data to develop a robust and valid understanding of the study phenomenon and apply purposive sampling (Hennink et al., 2019). Saunders et al. (2019) define data saturation as the process in which new data begin to repeat and no new themes emerge during data analysis. Braun and Clarke (2019) described the concept of data saturation as redundancy or the point at which no new themes or codes emerge from the data. I reached data saturation with seven interviews and validated saturation interviewing.

I conducted semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. To ensure consistency, I asked the same questions of all participants. To ensure data saturation, I collected data formed from the conceptual framework. I continued the interviews until there was replication in the responses and when no new codes or themes arose during the thematic analysis. I used snowball sampling to obtain my sample and data saturation for data analysis. I also followed the interview protocol (Appendix B) to ensure I remained attentive and consistent throughout the interview.

Researchers can address the research question by asking open-ended questions, allowing participants to extend their responses (Yin, 2018). The participants received nine open-ended questions and had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I adjusted the interview setting due to COVID-19 restrictions and Walden University guidelines.

### **Ethical Research**

I provided participants with informed consent. The IRB's responsibility includes ensuring all studies comply with the university's ethical standards and U.S. federal regulations. Once Walden's IRB representative approved the study for data collection, I had the assigned approval number. The informed consent consisted of the background and the purpose of the study, information about the researcher, and an explanation of the confidentiality process. According to Yin (2018), ethics in research achieve trustworthiness. Once I obtained IRB approval, each potential participant received an invitation with informed consent via e-mail and a statement with withdrawal information, ensuring participation in the study was voluntary. I informed the participants they would be able to withdraw from the study and there would not be financial remuneration for their participation in this study.

I notified the participants of my responsibility for maintaining all data confidentiality. Confidentiality pertains to the understanding between a researcher and participant that guarantees that sensitive or private information will be secure. I informed participants about their role in the study, the interview questions, and the data collection and provided participants with an opportunity to review data and provide recommendations. I scheduled interviews after IRB approval and after receiving the participants' informed consent. Ilyas et al. (2020) mentioned that codes should label data collected to ensure differentiation and confidentiality among sample participants. I assured the personal protection of each participant's data by assigning a unique code to each participant's responses from the interviews using codes (Participant 1 (P1) through



(Participant 8 (P8)). All the research data are stored in an encrypted flash drive, password-protected, and will be stored in a locked safety box for 5 years. At the end of this period, I will destroy all data by securely deleting electronic files, and all paper files will be cross-cut, shredded, and burned.

## **Data Collection**

### **Instruments**

I was the primary data collection instrument. Yin (2018) mentioned that case studies include six resources: (a) archival records, (b) direct observation, (c) documentation, (d) interviews, (e) participant observations, and (f) physical artifacts. As the primary data collection instrument, I collected data from open-ended, semistructured interviews. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix B) which contains data used to identify the interview phases. Researchers use an interview protocol to develop a suitable approach to the interview process (Yin, 2018). The interview protocol is a guide that the researcher can refer to before, during, and after the interviews. Once I completed the interviews, I summarized the data and contacted the participants via email, requesting them to assess my interpretation of their responses. I ensured accuracy in data collection by audio recording interviews, transcribing, and validating the data. I used a reflective journal to maintain raw data from the interview process. Fusch et al. (2017) noted that researchers use a reflexive journal to reflect on the data gathered in a short time. I documented my preconceptions to keep me aware of them throughout the study.

I incorporated pseudonyms for the information collected during interviews to keep the participants' data private. The pseudonym is considered an effective way to

resist adversary tracking, ensuring that each pseudonym holder communicates with each other depending on a virtual identity but cannot link to the holder's real identity (Manthan et al., 2021). I identified the participants as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, and P8. P1 represents participant 1, P2 represents participant 2, P3 represents participant 3, P4 represents participant 4, P5 represents participant 5, P6 represents participant 6, P7 represents participant 7, and P8 represents participant 8. The data collected during interviews will be secure on my computer, external hard drive, and placed on a flash drive on locked files. I will delete all data in five years.

My strategy to gain participant access was to identify potential participants by contacting potential participants via emails. I sent emails to 12 managers who held leadership positions for a minimum of four years in different areas across the organization and received eight responses. I send a formal request for consent to participate in the study and the invitation for the research study (Appendix C). I discussed an appropriate setting for a future interview, either MS teams or Zoom, based on COVID 19-guidelines and restrictions.

### **Technique**

After receiving IRB approval, I collected data from open-ended, semistructured interviews and followed the interview protocol to collect data for this study (see Appendix B). When conducting qualitative research, researchers have multiple data collection techniques: interviews, onsite visits, telephone, and video conferencing (Yin, 2018). Interviews consisted of open-ended, in-depth questions to obtain rich data to address the phenomenon of the study. My strategy to gain participant access was to

contact participants via email. I initiated contact with potential participants, after receiving IRB approval by sending emails to 12 managers from three organizations who met the study's eligibility criteria to introduce myself and explain the purpose of the initial contact. I received eight responses in two days from two organizations in the Mideast of the United States with interest in participating in the study. I send these potential participants a second email inviting them to participate in the research study (see Appendix C), and I attached the consent form. I requested the potential participant to respond within seven days if they were interested in being part of the research study to schedule an interview. I informed participants that the interview process was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the interview process anytime by email during the recruitment and interview process. During this contact, we discussed the criteria for participation in the study, which included managers who have held leadership positions for four years in different areas of the selected organization in the Mideast of the U.S.

I received eight responses with signed consents in four days via email and contacted the participants via MS Teams to schedule a date and time for the interview. I discussed an appropriate setting for a future interview, either MS Teams or via Zoom, based on COVID 19-guidelines and restrictions. I informed participants the interview process was voluntary, and they were able to withdraw from the interview process by email during the recruitment and interview process. I explained the confidentiality process and informed consent and scheduled the interview based on the participant's availability. The interviews were all completed via MS Teams due to the participant's level of comfort related to the COVID-19 pandemic. I provided the option of face-to-

face, Zoom, or M.S. teams' interviews, and all participants opted for interviews via MS teams. Trust is essential to developing a study as it promotes positive researcher-participant interactions. The participants completed interviews in a secure space; five interviews were from their office at the hospital site, and three interviews from their office at home (telework).

I established a working relationship with the participants by being transparent about the interview procedure. When researchers and participants develop a trusting relationship, they may be less reluctant and more communicative (Mohebbi et al., 2018). The participants knew their participation was voluntary and that all information would be kept confidential. I followed the procedures outlined in the interview protocol (see Appendix B) for each participant and audio recorded the semistructured interviews via MS Teams with the participant's permission. Face-to-face interviews have long been the norm for conducting qualitative interviews in healthcare research; however, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the need to explore alternative methods.

The use of new techniques to carry out interviews through video, telephone, and online applications all come with benefits and drawbacks (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). I used an EVISTR 16GB Digital Voice Recorder and had a second exact model as a backup to avoid interruptions during the interview process. A benefit of recording the interview is that it aids in pointing out corrections in the data and maintains the interviewee's explanation of the questions (Marchand et al., 2020). Recording the interview can also enhance the integrity of the data as the researcher can go back to validate the information.

I included member checking for the participants to validate my interpretation of the data for accuracy. The member checking process allows the participant to confirm the researcher's translation of the information (Naidu & Prose, 2018). Member checking is when participants validate a researcher's interpretation of the interview data. Member checking, also called respondent validation, refers to checking back with study respondents to see if the research aligns with their views (Busetto et al., 2020). According to Busetto et al. (2020), a researcher will provide the participant with a summary of the interview and will be allowed to clarify or elaborate on their responses. I emailed each participant the interview summary and provided them five business days to validate and make changes or recommendations to their answers, per the guidance in the consent form. I did not receive any recommendations or changes from the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is when a researcher uses analytic techniques to explain, demonstrate, reduce and evaluate data. I used thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) indicated that thematic analysis should be the foundation for qualitative analysis. Braun and Clarke recommended a six-phase method that may be interactive and reflective and improve with the analysis and different phases. The conceptual framework is part of my codebook to form the initial analysis. A codebook is a researcher's set of tools to document the data analysis process (Roberts et al., 2019). I adhered to the six phases recommended by Braun and Clark.

### **Phase 1: Familiarizing Yourself With the Data**

As a researcher, I familiarized myself with the data by taking notes, transcribing, and organizing the data collected. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended that researchers familiarize themselves with the data before the coding process begins, while Yin (2018) defined qualitative analysis as examining and categorizing data that results in evidence-based results. Once the first step of the process, data collection, is completed and disassembled, the following steps include data display and preparation for data analysis (Yin, 2018). I transcribed my interactions with participants by re-reading transcripts and listening to the recordings. I used a reflective journal as an added tool to review the data collected. A researcher needs to become familiar with data before moving to the next phase.

### **Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes**

I developed codes in the second phase after reviewing notes and data collected. According to Clark and Vealé (2018), keeping track of data involves coding. Coding is considered a helpful tool for qualitative researchers to sort and organize data. I selected NVivo 12 software to upload the data once collected. NVivo is a tool that will facilitate the researcher's analysis of the data. Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software, specifically NUD\*IST Vivo (NVivo), was used to build and refine program theories (using literature and interview data) in a realist evaluation (Dalkin et al., 2021). Dalkin also mentioned how NVivo helped create an explicitly documented and evidenced audit trail of the process of programmed theory refinement, answering calls for further transparency in realist analysis. I also considered Atlas.ti software which, compared to

NVivo, provides free trials. I selected NVivo over Atlas.ti because with NVivo, it is simple to organize and manage qualitative data from many sources.

The NVivo Integration add-in includes free licenses for 12 months and enables direct import from Word and Excel. NVivo software allows users to import and work with research data from virtually any source, including surveys, interviews, articles, video, email, social media and web content, rich or plain text, PDF, audio, digital photos, spreadsheets, and notes from integrated third-party applications (Dalkin et al., 2021). NVivo provides reporting /analytics, self-service data preparation, and data discovery. According to Clark and Vealé (2018), patterns and themes emerge when coding and sorting the data. Qualitative data analysis uses coding to reveal emerging patterns (Lowe et al., 2018). I organized the list of initial codes that align with the conceptual framework, the theory of employee engagement, research findings, and the literature review, which explores employee engagement and leadership styles to engage employees.

### **Phase 3: Searching for Themes**

In the third step, I searched for themes. The ever-increasing amount of data offers possibilities for discovering new relationships and themes. However, this comes with new challenges involving reproducibility, complexity, security, and privacy risks (Suominen & Hajikhani, 2021). According to Nowell et al. (2017), when a researcher conducts data analysis, this becomes the instrument for research. By making judgments about coding, theming, decontextualizing, and recontextualizing the data. Scharp and Sanders (2019) recommended that researchers focus on data sets that answer their research questions when identifying themes. Braun and Clarke (2019) noted that a

researcher organizes codes into broader themes related to the specific research question. I maintained a reflective journal to record my steps while searching for themes and categorizing codes using tables. A reflective journal is an assessment tool to collect data.

#### **Phase 4: Reviewing Themes**

In the fourth phase, I reviewed themes based on the research question using NVivo software to identify themes, complete the coding process, and identify the themes that aligned with my research question. According to Salahudin et al. (2020), NVivo 12 Plus for qualitative document content analysis facilitated the management, analysis, and data visualization. Salahudin et al. (2020) defined NVivo, as a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) computer software package produced by QSR International, which has many advantages and may significantly improve the quality of research. Applying this software reduced manual tasks, providing the researcher with more time to recognize themes, and derive conclusions.

#### **Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes**

I defined and name themes for this research study. Defining themes involves formulating precisely how each theme relates to understanding the data. Nowell et al. (2017) declared that a researcher determines data collected from participants for each theme. Researchers conducted and wrote a detailed analysis detecting each theme's story (Nowell et al., 2017). Braun and Clarke (2019) stated that a researcher possessed the ability to define what was unique and specific about each theme and concluded that a researcher conducts a final reread of data collected to determine the validity of themes



from data sets. I conducted a final analysis outlining each theme relating to the research question and conceptual framework.

### **Phase 6: Producing the Report**

After the interviews, I completed a report code, searched for themes, and defined data protection. The final step involved forming conclusions, verified after all the data had been analyzed, reduced, interpreted, and confirmed (Yin, 2018). I manually compiled the data collected based on typical responses, created themes, and then loaded the information into NVivo 12 Plus for further interpretation before making the conclusions. A final review of the extracted themes will allow a researcher to tie the themes to the research question and the literature review. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that the summary should be concise, reasonable, coherent, and nonrepetitive, giving a compelling account of the information across themes. I analyzed data by following the six phases recommended by Braun and Clark and using thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report the data.

## **Reliability and Validity**

### **Reliability**

Reliability and validity were necessary constructs to ensure trustworthiness in a qualitative research study. Member checking takes place during several stages in the research process. Member checking can occur during the qualitative interview process, at the end of the study, or using both methods (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). In a qualitative research study, trustworthiness consisted of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. In research, having a reliable source also means having a trustworthy or

dependable source, and the protection of personal data is proportional to reliability and trust (Yevseiev et al., 2021). I addressed trustworthiness by interpreting data collected accurately to validate this research study.

### **Validity**

A study should have adequate measures that are validated to confirm results.

Validation in qualitative research occurs when there is participant verification (FitzPatrick, 2019). Another way of validation is credibility, transferability, and confirmability, which are quality validity indicators (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Member checking and methodical triangulation increase the opportunity for validation (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), to gain a concise overview of the research topic, qualitative researchers may use semistructured interviews, archived documents, and field notes to ensure triangulation, further boosting credibility. I conducted member checking to validate my findings by providing a copy of the interpreted data for review and possibly validation.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is having confidence in the truth of any findings. A researcher needs to accurately and thoroughly understand the research participants, context, and process. I used an interview protocol for uniformity with each participant interview, conducted member checking with each participant, digitally recorded the interview, and maintained a journal.

A researcher can ensure credibility by exemplifying commitment, monitoring, and creating audit trails (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I gained credibility by following

interview protocol, committing to a fair interview process, and answering all participants' questions. I also included member checking to establish the credibility of my research. I used an interview protocol for uniformity with each participant interview.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is when results transfer to another place. It refers to the degree to which we can move the results of qualitative research to another context or setting. (Soltanpour et al., 2020). Readers gain knowledge and insight when the researcher provides detailed descriptions of the research topic (Carminati, 2018). To ensure transferability, I summarized and analyzed the participant's responses.

### **Confirmability**

I addressed confirmability, which is the process where others can support results. Confirmability is there to verify that the findings are shaped by participants more so than by the researcher. Confirmability describes the extent to which the results of a study reflect the respondents' opinions and experiences rather than the researchers' biases, motivations, or interests (Kyngäs et al., 2020). Confirmability is the last criterion of trustworthiness that a qualitative researcher must establish. To ensure confirmability, I asked probing questions, documented the interview proceedings, and returned the data to the participants for member checking.

### **Data Saturation**

Data saturation is the most utilized concept for calculating sample sizes in qualitative research. A researcher obtains data saturation when no relevant information arises with additional interviews (Saunders et al., 2019). Selecting an appropriate sample

size for qualitative research remains a challenge for researchers. Gentles et al. (2015) discussed a sample size of 4-10 to be appropriate, while Guetterman (2015) noted that as little as four to be relevant. Data saturation is essential to ensure the validity of qualitative research. I reached data saturation with 7 participants and validated saturation with participant

### **Transition and Summary**

The qualitative, descriptive study explores effective leadership strategies to engage employees. I selected a descriptive study after reviewing several other research methods and designs. The research question: *What strategies do leaders use to engage employees* to align with the general and specific business problem. *The general business problem is that disengaged employees can lead to a loss of profit. The specific business problem is that some leaders lack successful employee engagement strategies.* I selected William Kahn's employee engagement theory as the conceptual framework for this research study. In this theory, Kahn describes three psychological conditions that facilitate employee engagement: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. I completed section 1 by discussing the significance of the study, its contribution to business practice, and its implications for social change.

Section 2 of this study contains the role of the researcher, where the main objective is to conduct my research ethically, protecting and respecting the participants. To complete my research ethically, protect, and respect the research participants, I adhered to the Belmont Report and used purposive sampling to select participants. I described the potential participants chosen for the study and the specific criteria for

participating in this study. I selected a qualitative method in research to explore and analyze concepts, opinions, or experiences. The aim of the literature review and the study, in general, was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the strategies that leaders use to engage employees. The literature review contains 96 % references from 2017-to 2022. In the literature review, I discuss Kahn's theory of employee engagement, alternative approaches related to employee engagement, and effective leadership strategies to engage employees. An extensive literature review produced evidence to enable the discussion, critical analysis, and synthesis of the historical and current literature to explore effective leadership strategies to engage employees.

In Section 3, I provided the findings for this study, application for professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, suggestions for further research, reflections, and a conclusion.

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

#### **Introduction**

In this qualitative descriptive study, I explored effective leadership strategies to engage employees. Nurdini and Firmansyah (2022) stated how previous studies had shown a relationship between employee engagement and a positive effect on performance. The authors also mentioned how employee engagement affects employee performance by 43% (Nurdini & Firmansyah, 2022). I collected data by conducting semistructured interviews via teams with eight managers who have implemented successful strategies to engage employees. The findings indicate that, through the experiences and perceptions of the managers, particular employee engagement strategies are more effective at increasing productivity and profitability. The most impactful strategies are (a) effective communication, (b) empowerment through recognition, and (c) performance management.

Section 3 includes a presentation of my findings, application to professional practice, social change, and recommendations for actions. Finally, I conclude Section 3 with my recommendations for further research and personal reflections on my experience during this study. I used the qualitative multiple case study design and thematic analysis of participants' feedback, insights, and experiences to determine themes and codes. Data analysis resulted in three themes and subthemes. The themes are (a) employee engagement, (b) transparency, and (c) effective leadership behavior.

## **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do leaders use to engage employees? I conducted semistructured interviews via teams with eight managers who each had over 4 years of leadership experience from three organizations in the northeast of United States to answer the research question. I used an interview protocol to ensure consistency with each interview. I assigned a code to each participant (P1–P8). I used the six-phase analysis technique of Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyze and recognize themes and patterns in my data. I used NVivo software for data organization and analysis. I identified three primary themes from the data collected from the eight leaders through my analysis: (a) employee engagement, (b) transparency (c) effective leadership behavior. Effective leadership behaviors are drivers of employee engagement, affecting performance, customers, and financial and organizational measures (Lambert et al., 2021).

### **Theme 1: Employee Engagement**

The first theme that emerged from the data was employee engagement. The eight participants acknowledged the importance of employee engagement and shared thoughts and strategies to engage employees. Based on my analysis of the data, two subthemes became evident related to practices used by managers to increase employee engagement: human-centered design (HCD) and highly reliable organization (HRO).

#### ***Human-Centered Design***

HCD is a framework that integrates a set of practices to understand users' needs, constraints, contexts, behaviors, and wants. This framework helps managers build

empathy with employees that assists in generating ideas to help solve problems. Human involvement typically involves observing the problem within context, brainstorming, conceptualizing, developing, and implementing the solution (Melles et al., 2021). P1 and P3 referred to HCD as a way of “getting staff involved with the projects to improve performance”, P1 added the importance of “showing gratitude to the staff. If we want staff to feel engaged, we need to show appreciation.” P3 described HCD as a way for the staff to “feel someone is listening to them,” P4 added that an “open door policy” is a way to connect to staff. P8 established a Ph.D. award (professionalism, humbleness, and determination) where staff feel recognized for their performance.

### **Highly Reliable Organization**

HRO is an organization with predictable and repeatable systems that support consistent operations while catching and correcting potentially catastrophic errors before they happen (Veazie et al., 2022). P2 mentioned the importance of taking the first step to being part of an HRO. At the same time, P3 and P5 agreed on making sure the staff felt comfortable reaching out to a supervisor. P4 mentioned staff feel supported when managers listen to them. P3 said that the least formal strategies are more practical to reach staff, and identify huddles, noting the importance of knowing your staff to be fair: “Sometimes being fair is when everyone doesn’t get the same assignment.”

Participants referred to employee participation as a strategy to engage employees. P1 described committees, workshops, and staff development as positive strategies for employee engagement to create a positive work environment. P2 expressed the importance of providing a safe space to allow employees to express their ideas, while P3



and P5 mentioned listening to staff while empowering them to lead. P3 added the positive effects of being a servant leader while creating followers, whereas P4 talked about staff bonuses and recognition so they feel valued. P6 emphasized the importance of creating balance and rewarding staff by acknowledging their experience with promotions and added, “When staff is engaged, they are happy to come to work, we see smiles, and desire to work better.” P6 acknowledged leadership responsibility in providing staff with a safe environment where employees enjoy being part of the organization: “I want the cause of turnover to be related to promotions and not to a toxic environment.” P8 shared drivers of engagement through constant recognition of his staff.

### ***Connection to the Conceptual Framework***

Kahn’s employee engagement theory supports the alignment of a positive work environment that leads to employee engagement. Successful employee engagement strategies help business leaders connect employees to the organization, improve their performance, and increase job satisfaction (Kahn, 1990). Rachmawati et al. (2020) noted that when employees experience a healthy organizational culture, good commanders, and pleasing personalities, it helps create high employee loyalty. Kahn (1990) characterized employee engagement as inspiring members to play out their obligations to meet the organization’s objectives while expressing themselves physically, psychologically, and genuinely in the working environment. Engagement refers to how observant and committed an employee is in their performance and distinguishes itself by vitality, contribution, adequacy, vigor, and devotion (Caniëls et al., 2018; Cooke et al., 2019).

Managers may use this study's results to enhance strategies that would provide support and training and develop[ strategies to engage employees.

### ***Applications to Professional Practice***

Employee engagement is a continuous challenge faced by organizational leaders and has outcomes that impact organizational success. Through data analysis, I was able to identify effective leadership strategies to engage employees. The strategies include open communication, empowerment, and building a trusting relationship with employees, which aids in cultivating engagement. An essential part of an organization's strategy is achieving sustainable competitive advantage through employee engagement (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). Employee engagement is when a conducive and pleasant work environment motivates people to perform at their best by increasing their efficiency and general well-being (Kahn, 1990).

### **Theme 2: Transparency**

The second theme identified during data analysis was transparency. According to McAuliffe et al. (2019), transparency relates to how leaders openly divulge information, present themselves as honest and trustworthy, and allow space for others to be comfortable expressing their challenges, ideas, and opinions. Open and honest communication drives employee engagement (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019; Maximo et al., 2019). P1 identified transparency as having staff representation in shared governance committees: quality improvement and evidence-based practice. P3 described champions in the wards who are empowered to represent peers, educate the team, and lead by

example. P3 also mentioned effective communication through daily huddles to obtain staff input, empowering them to participate in decisions that affect change.

P2, P3, and P7 talked about identifying and respecting cultural differences among employees to build trust and transparency in the communication process. P2 and P3 identified diversity in culture and awareness of diversity as “new successful strategies to engage employees.”. P2 and P3 added “We plan focused diversity activities to allow employees to discuss racial stressors, anti-racism, and black equity.” P3 said, “It is important to identify staff who are not engaged due to cultural differences. Some cultures perceive not agreeing with their leaders as rude.” P3 added, “I want to make it loud and clear that it is okay to disagree with me.” P7 talked about organizational culture and said, “It is imperative to understand employees’ culture and background and grow into a more collaborative culture,” P8 added the importance of “empowering staff, allowing them to come up with new ideas.” Participants revealed that when they display trustworthy behaviors, this leads to transparency and trust, which improves employees’ communication and engagement among employees. P5 described this action as a “domino effect” that leads employees to feel engaged with the performance. P3 said this was a “win–win strategy.”

### ***Connection to the Conceptual Framework***

The alignment of transparency leads to employee engagement, supported by Kahn’s employee engagement theory. Transparency is being open and honest with others. Kahn (1990) identified how employees use their critical thinking ability to complete work roles. When employees become emotionally connected to their job, they experience a

sense of purpose and self-importance (Khan & Lakshmi, 2018). Transparency is a communicative process the aim of which is to provide citizens with information that will promote their participation (Molina Rodríguez-Navas et al., 2021). According to Francis and Keegan (2020), communication from senior and frontline managers is critically important in building work environments that enable employees to engage. An engaged employee displays attachment to their workplace intellectually and passionately (Kahn, 1990). Highly transparent messages contribute to greater perceived organizational credibility (Holland et al., 2021). When employees feel transparency in their work environment, they may discuss information freely with managers and peers.

### ***Applications to Professional Practice***

Employee engagement is essential for leaders who want to reach their business objectives. Engaged employees appreciate, assist, and motivate their coworkers to improve the workplace environment for the organization's success (Menon & Priyadarshini, 2018). Organizational leaders can use this study's findings to develop leadership training strategies and policies that foster effective communication and leadership behaviors. Additionally, organizational leaders can focus on hiring leaders that understand the importance of engaging staff with effective strategies. Managers may use the findings of this study to understand the significant role they play in cultivating the work engagement of their employees.

### **Theme 3: Effective Leadership Behavior**

The third theme generated during the data analysis process was effective leadership behaviors. Leadership behavior significantly impacts building trust and,

ultimately, employee engagement (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019). Participants identified leadership, effective communication, and staff development as the responsibility of an effective leader. Leaders will lead by example by living out their values and striving for authentic relationships with their employees (Maximo et al., 2019). P1 talked about the importance of thanking staff while having them feel appreciated. P3 mentioned how managers lead by example to build trusting relationships with their employees. P6 added that a leader should be responsible and accountable first to employees, committed to their work, and display trustworthy behaviors. P7 described a concept used with managers called WRAP (willingness, responsibility, accountability, and professionalism).

P3 emphasized that an effective organization started with good leaders and added, “I believe in servant leadership. If it isn’t working in your organization, you need to look hard at the leadership. When leaders genuinely lead by example and give up, their staff will follow.” P1, P3, and P7 agreed that leaders could not talk their way into success. P3 said, “We are all working adults, and adults cannot fool adults.” P5 spoke about allowing staff to bring ideas and “allow staff to lead meetings.” P5 has found this strategy to be most effective. P8 talked about rounding to supervise staff’s performance and added, “the staff values a leader that speaks directly to them without hidden agendas” “I like to motivate my staff and recognize them in front of their peers.”

### ***Connection to the Conceptual Framework***

The conceptual framework for this study was the Employee Engagement theory. Kahn (1990) communicated that engagement and productivity would thrive once the working environment is physically, socially, and psychologically supportive. Employees

that are engaged are committed to the organization. Kahn's psychological conditions of meaningfulness and safety mediated the relationship between autonomy and employee engagement, the reason why the alignment of effective leadership behavior leads to employee engagement. Followers implement projects efficiently if they have chosen them themselves but reduce implementation effort if leaders impose the same assignments (Sloof & von Siemens, 2021). Employees feel safe when they have the freedom to participate and empowered when they can bring ideas and be part of the implementation. Employee engagement theory may serve as a framework for leaders to develop strategies, styles, methods, and behaviors to increase employee engagement.

### ***Applications to Professional Practice***

Management support is essential to engagement. Milhem et al. (2019) identified the linkage of employee engagement to organizational and management support, a gratifying work environment, job development, and growth potential. Business leaders face many challenges to stay productive and profitable. The interviewed participants described effective strategies that engage employees at their organization. Strategies identified to improve communication, trust, and engagement were Lean Six Sigma, which relies on a collaborative team effort to improve performance by systematically removing waste and reducing variation. Three-box solution counsels leaders to solve the inherent tension of innovating a new business while running a high-performing business concurrently. Box 1: manage the present, box 2: selectively forget the past, box 3: create the future. And CREW refers to civility, respect, and engagement in the workplace.

Leaders may use the findings of this study to understand the significant role they play in developing and implementing strategies to engage employees. Additionally, they may use the results to understand the importance of building trusting relationships and continue providing an open-door policy, open communication, and transparency with their employees to, in turn, cultivate employee engagement.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This basic qualitative descriptive case study explored effective leadership strategies to engage employees. The findings of this study may have implications for positive social change. When organizational leaders excel in establishing and maintaining employee engagement, they are more likely to experience positive outcomes at both an individual and organizational level. Profitable organizations may provide financial security for their employees, allowing them to take care of their basic needs and pour their finances back into the economy, creating financial stability for their community. At an individual level, engaged employees Additionally, engaged employees are more likely to be involved and volunteer in community initiatives.

### **Recommendations**

Leaders can use the study findings to build trusting relationships with their employees, cultivating employee engagement. According to Noor and Ampornstira (2019), organizations are less productive when employees lack morale, and with an increase in confidence, employees' productivity, performance, motivation, loyalty, and engagement increase. There are three recommendations for action that I identified. I recommend that organizational leaders continue developing effective communication

strategies to cultivate employee engagement; second, increase leadership training among employees to increase participation and empowerment; third, offer employee rewards and recognition as a strategy to improve employee engagement within the organization.

According to Crome et al. (2019), effective communication can positively affect employee engagement, motivation, and productivity. I recommend leaders assess employee performance by planning visits to their work area, recognizing their work, and encouraging communication and feedback. Managers can also engage employees by fostering staff development and performance. I recommend offering work-school opportunities that will assist employees in developing a career path. According to Davis (2020), engaging employees builds trust. I advise leaders to reward employees' achievements, not only for those who exceed expectations but also for employees who have been consistent with work ethics and teamwork. Participants identified effective communication strategies, frequent huddles, open-door policy, employees participating, and leading committees and meetings. According to Choi (2019), employee empowerment influences performance. I will submit this study for publication through journal websites such as ProQuest, ResearchGate, Elsevier, and the Journal of Business Research. I will also summarize the study to the eight participants, and I intend to share the findings with the organization leaders.

### **Further Research**

I used a basic qualitative descriptive case study to explore effective leadership strategies to engage employees. The sample consisted of eight managers from three organizations in the northeast of the U.S. who have implemented successful strategies to



engage employees. A limitation of this study was that business locations are in the northeast of the United States, limiting other areas. A second limitation is that I chose a healthcare organization and a limited number of participants. A recommendation is that future researchers conduct a quantitative or mixed-method analysis to incorporate statistical data on the subject matter. I recommend using quantitative research to assess the existence, strength, and direction of a relationship between (a) employee engagement, (b) transparency, and (c) leadership behavior. In this study, I obtained data from a manager's point of view on what strategies are most effective to engage employees. However, to truly understand if the strategy presented by managers is effective, the employees' perspective would prove to be significant.

### **Reflections**

When deciding on my research topic, I reflected on my 25-plus years of working in health care and how employee engagement benefits the quality of our patient's care. My time throughout this DBA program was challenging and overwhelming. At times, I doubted myself in completing this journey. COVID-19 pandemic presented new limitations to interview participants, but this did not stop me from achieving my professional goals to grow as an academic. I learned how to become a writer, researcher, and scholar during this journey. I recruited experienced managers as participants to add value to my study and answer the research question.

My doctoral research has expanded my understanding of effective leadership strategies to engage employees. When I conducted the interviews, I mitigated my own biases. My doctoral research has enabled me to collect data and present findings that

organization leaders may find instrumental in increasing employee engagement. I have significantly gained an understanding and appreciation of the doctoral program, and my doctoral research has expanded my knowledge of the importance of strategies to increase employee engagement. My knowledge of employee engagement has grown significantly through my literature review and analysis.

### **Conclusion**

Organization leaders must develop and implement strategies to increase productivity, sustainability, and profitability. I concluded that organizational success relies on leaders developing and implementing strategies to increase employee engagement. Francis and Keegan (2020) mentioned how communication from senior and frontline managers is critically important in building work environments that enable employees to feel engaged at work. To engage employees, managers must address the challenges by implementing effective strategies to engage employees. When managers use effective strategies, employees are motivated to come to work, increasing job satisfaction and empowerment in their organizations. William Hahn's theory of employee engagement and the literature provided in this study supported the three identified themes in reply to the research question on employee engagement. Managers who develop and implement effective leadership strategies to engage employees could position their organization to have engaged employees and experience organizational success.

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## Appendix A: Informed Consent

I am inviting you to participate in my doctoral research study about strategies that leaders use to engage employees. This invitation to this study is because of your experience working as a leader for over four years in different areas across the organization and utilizing strategies to increase employee engagement. This form is part of the informed consent process that provides you an opportunity to understand this study before deciding whether to participate. I am seeking six to ten managers to participate in this study.

This doctoral research study is being conducted by Wanda Trujillo Smith, a doctoral student at Walden University.

### **Purpose**

This doctoral research study will be used to explore strategies leaders use to engage employees. This study may provide insights and knowledge that leaders can use to identify employees that are disengaged.

### **Procedures**

The interview is audio-recorded semistructured and should take approximately 45-60 minutes.

### **Member checking**

I will email you an interview summary within five business days to ensure my interpretation of your responses is accurate. The review of the interview summary should take about 10-15 minutes of your time to review. I will ask you to review and validate the information via email.

### **Rights**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary, and you have the right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time. Participating in this study poses minimal risk, such as minor discomfort similar to being upset, daily life stress, or mood changes. Participation in this study would not pose a risk to your safety or wellbeing. I will provide a summary of the study results for your records.

### **Professional Relationship**

There is no personal relationship with the participant.

### **Benefits of Being in the Study**

This study offers no direct benefits to individuals who volunteer to participate. The research study may be useful for leaders in formulating strategies to improve employee engagement.

### **Confidentiality**

To ensure the confidentiality of the data and mask your organization's identity, pseudonyms will be assigned and used in the researcher's notes and data analysis.

**Privacy**

The researcher must protect your privacy, and your identity will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you or your organization in the final study. The researcher will ensure that all interview recordings, notes will be kept in a locked storage box, password-protected, and remain in the researcher's home for five years after this study is published. After five years, all physical documents and electronic files on the USB drive associated with this study will be destroyed.

**Compensation**

There will be no compensation associated with participation in this research study.

**Contacts and questions**

You may contact the doctoral researcher, Wanda Trujillo Smith, at 336-809-3781 or [wanda.trujillo@waldenu.edu](mailto:wanda.trujillo@waldenu.edu). You may also contact the doctoral researcher's faculty mentor and doctoral study chair, Dr. Gwendolyn Dooley, at [gwendolyn.dooley@mail.waldenu.edu](mailto:gwendolyn.dooley@mail.waldenu.edu). If you need to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can contact you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210 or email [irb@mail.waldenu.edu](mailto:irb@mail.waldenu.edu). Walden University's IRB approval number for this research study is 02-28-22-0500235, which expires on February 27, 2023. You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask for a copy at any time using the contact information above.

**Statement of consent**

I have read the consent form and recognize that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without consequence. I understand that any information resulting from this study will be strictly confidential. I realize that I may ask for further information about this study if I wish to do so.

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words, "I consent."

Researcher's signature

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## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee Alphanumeric Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Script:

Hello, before I begin, I want to thank you for meeting with me today. If you would like to stop recording during the interview, please let me know. Your participation in this research study is voluntary, and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Do you have any questions about the consent form? Do you have any questions about the research study?

I want to ask your permission to audio record this interview to later transcribe our conversation and use your response to understand better the strategies you use to increase employee engagement. May I turn on the recording device?

For recordkeeping purposes, I will ask your permission to record this interview to transcribe our conversation later to ensure I accurately capture your response.

We will begin the interview now.

Interview questions:

1. How do you identify a disengaged employee?
  2. What strategies have you used to engage employees
  3. How do you implement strategies to engage employees?
  4. How do you measure the effectiveness of your employee engagement strategies?
  5. What strategies were most effective in engaging employees?
  6. What key strategies, if any, were least effective in engaging employees?
7. What key challenges, if any, did you experience when implementing the successful strategies to engage employees?



8. How did you address the primary challenges of implementing successful strategies to engage employees?
9. What additional information would you like to share about organizational strategies to engage employees?

Observation Notes:

| Observations   | Description | Thoughts |
|--|-------------|----------|
| Attitude and body language   |             |          |
| Organization resources to improve employee engagement                        |             |          |
| Examples of strategies available to managers to engage employees             |             |          |
| Impact of employee disengagement   |             |          |
| employees 'response to strategies implemented by leaders to engage employees |             |          |
| Interest to improve employee engagement                                      |             |          |

As I conclude this interview, I want to thank you again for taking time out of your busy schedule to support my research study. I will send you an email within five business days to review and verify the information I collected from our interview today. The member checking process allows you to make changes or discuss anything further that will contribute to my research study. This process should take about 10-15 minutes to review. I ask that you provide feedback within five business days, and with your consent, any feedback you provide via email will be documented to update the information from this interview. I want to reiterate that any information provided will be kept confidential.

Your input will assist with completing my research study. The final study will not include your name and the company name. Once my research study is completed and published, I will share a 1-2-page summary. If you have any questions or additional comments, I will be available via email or phone.

## Appendix C: Invitation for Research Study Participation

Email Subject: Invitation for Research Study Participation

Dear [Name]:

My name is Wanda Trujillo Smith, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University, pursuing a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree. I am conducting a research study about effective leadership strategies to engage employees. The research study may be useful for leaders in formulating strategies to reduce employee disengagement.

To ensure that you are eligible to participate in this study, you must meet the following conditions:

- a) Be over 18 years old
- b) Have experience working in a higher leadership position
- c) Must be a leader for four years in different areas across the organization.

If you choose to participate, you will be invited to meet with me for approximately 45-60 minutes either by phone or via video conferencing in an audio-recorded semistructured interview to answer various questions about your experiences with strategies to engage employees. As part of the member checking process, I will be emailing you an interview summary that will take you 10-15 minutes to review within five business days after our interview.

Your identity and your organization's identity will be kept confidential and not disclosed within the research study. I will provide you with a summary of the research findings upon completion and publication.

I want to schedule a date and time to speak to you by phone or video conference to explain the research study or answer questions that you may have about your potential participation in my study.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email or contact me at [wanda.trujillo@waldenu.edu](mailto:wanda.trujillo@waldenu.edu). If you have no interest in participating, please disregard this invitation.

Thank you,  
Wanda Trujillo Smith  
Walden University Doctorate (DBA) Candidate  
[wanda.trujillo@waldenu.edu](mailto:wanda.trujillo@waldenu.edu)  
(336) 809-3781

Appendix D: Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Certificate



Completion-Date 01-Sep-2021  
Expiration-Date N/A  
Record-ID 38970748

This is to certify that:

**Wanda Trujillo-Smith**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME

**Student's**  
(Curriculum-Group)  
**Doctoral Student Researchers**  
(Course-Learner-Group)  
**1 Basic Course**  
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**Walden University**



Verify at: [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w78817433-4dcc-48b4-9e9d-9e97cc8950a7-38970748](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w78817433-4dcc-48b4-9e9d-9e97cc8950a7-38970748)