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Influence of Behavioral Leadership Strategies on Employee Engagement in Hospital Departments

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Callie Selner

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Influence of Behavioral Leadership Strategies on Employee Engagement in Hospital

Departments

by

Callie Selner

MS, Indiana Wesleyan University, 2018

BS, Saint Mary's College, 2014

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2023

Abstract

Lack of employee engagement as a result of deficient behavioral leadership strategies has the potential for adverse business outcomes on productivity, business mission, and strategy. As a result of this qualitative single case study, hospital department managers who apply behavioral leadership strategies are more likely to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. Grounded in the employee engagement theory, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore behavioral leadership strategies hospital department managers use to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. The participants were five hospital department managers who had been successful with employee engagement. Data were collected using semistructured interviews, a review of organization employee handbooks, and employee meeting notes. Through thematic analysis, three themes were identified: (a) increased employee engagement with open communication, (b) empowering employee decision making, and (c) relationship development. A key recommendation is for business leaders to acknowledge the needs of their employees and continue to improve their behavioral leadership strategies. The implications for positive social change include the potential to retain valued employees and support the local community workforce through workers giving back their time.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

In the health care industry, leaders are faced with employees who are dealing with turmoil and unhappiness throughout their everyday duties. Whether that be from on the job or at home, leaders must be able to learn and understand how to manage their engagement. No matter the industry, employee engagement is impacted by a leader's engagement strategies (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). These strategies should focus on what characteristics employees need to have an engaged relationship with their leader. However, hospital department managers are faced with many issues with their employee engagement. To assist in employee engagement issues, further research surrounding leadership strategies and employee engagement should be explored (Anitha & Gayatri, 2014). In the current study, I explored successful behavioral leadership strategies that hospital department managers use to promote employee engagement. This research may provide an improved understanding of how leaders should implement and adjust their behavioral leadership strategies to promote an environment that is conducive to employee engagement.

Background of the Problem

The employee engagement concept evolved in the 1990s from Kahn who was able to uncover that an employee uses different parts of themselves within their work roles to determine their level of engagement in two different types of industries (Kahn, 1990). An engaged employee self-identifies to their work role by becoming engrossed in their daily tasks. Conversely, a disengaged employee removes themselves from their work role to where their daily tasks become robotic. However, employees can switch back and forth

from being engaged and disengaged based on psychological experiences, meaningfulness, and availability (Kahn, 1990). These traits can be attributed to the behavioral leadership strategies that leaders use to promote an employee engagement environment. Over time, this problem has become more of a challenge for leaders in all types of industries. In the health care industry, leaders are faced with some employees being more disengaged. Through a process of understanding the employee's reasons for disengagement, leaders can implement strategies that offer different approaches to ensure employees' needs are being met. When employees' needs are met, communities can benefit from happier people bringing forth energy to solve societal issues (Boyd & Newell, 2020). Therefore, employee engagement has implications for positive social change.

Problem and Purpose

The specific business problem was that some hospital department managers lack behavioral leadership strategies to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the successful behavioral leadership strategies that hospital department managers use to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement.

Population and Sampling

An email exchange was conducted with the vice president of patient care services at a hospital in Michigan to gain access to five purposely sampled hospital department managers. To align with the research question, I interviewed hospital department managers who had been successful at promoting employee engagement. The

five participants had a combination of different experiences and successes at promoting employee engagement as hospital department managers within the patient care service line. They were interviewed using a semistructured interview process designed to elicit their successful behavioral leadership strategies that promoted an employee engagement environment. I also reviewed organizational policies regarding employee engagement and conducted discussions with department directors to see if there were specific department policies regarding employee engagement.

Nature of the Study

To answer the research question, I used a qualitative approach. This approach was appropriate for this study because in qualitative studies, researchers study human social behavior and cultures (Bleiker et al., 2019). By developing a case study design, researchers use multiple types and sources of evidence to triangulate information to answer the qualitative research question. Researchers who use quantitative methodology investigate the relationship between independent and dependent variables (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020). Researchers who use the mixed-methods approach combine methodologies by exploring phenomena and analyzing the relationship between variables (Stadnick et al., 2021). The current study addressed human behaviors and their meanings. Therefore, a qualitative approach was appropriate to explore the different behavioral leadership strategies hospital department managers use to promote employee engagement.

Qualitative research designs include narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, and case study. Narrative designs deal with one person's experiences (Stake, 2010). The

narrative approach involves learning about an individual and becoming an interpreter for the person's stories; therefore, this design would have been less appropriate than a single case study. Phenomenology involves exploring participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Gill, 2014). The current study did not address lived experiences related to a phenomenon; therefore, phenomenology was not appropriate. Ethnography involves exploring a culture, which was not the purpose of the current study (see Rapp, 2021). The case study was the best design for the current study because I could use multiple types and sources of data to triangulate information to address the purpose of the study (see Yin, 2014).

Research Question

What behavioral leadership strategies do hospital department managers use to promote an employee engagement environment?

Interview Questions

1. What behavioral leadership strategies do you use to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement?
2. How do you know that your employees are engaged from those behavioral leadership strategies?
3. What tools have you utilized to understand what type of behavioral leadership strategies fit your style?
4. What have you done that has been the most effective in addressing challenges in promoting an environment conducive to employee engagement?

5. What else would you like to share about establishing an environment conducive to employee engagement?

Conceptual Framework

The theory that grounded this study was the employee engagement theory. The employee engagement theory was created in 1990 by Kahn to understand how employees use parts of themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during their work performance. The key components of the employee engagement theory are (a) psychological meaningfulness, (b) psychological safety, and (c) psychological availability (Kahn, 1990). The employee engagement theory was used to identify how hospital department managers engage employees to use different parts of themselves to perform at a certain level at work. As applied in the current study, a connection between an employee's psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability may inform how hospital department managers take action on employee engagement.

Operational Definitions

BPhubbing: A phenomenon in which a supervisor is distracted by their phone while their subordinates are in their presence (Roberts & David, 2017).

Distributive justice: Employees' perception that there is an appropriate amount of fairness between rewards, outcomes, and resources (Y. Liang et al., 2022).

Employee engagement: Activities in which individuals willingly go above and beyond their work responsibilities to lead initiatives to benefit the team and organization (Bergstedt & Wei, 2020).

Flow experiences: Events that result in the psychological state of happiness, optimism, and joy from being immersed in an activity (Kucuk, 2020).

Red tape: A large number of procedural limitations that increase an employee's workload (Mussagulova, 2020).

Successful behavioral leadership strategies: Personal development, coaching, effective communication, collaboration, framework for decision making, mutually valued relationship, and accountability (Saxena, 2020).

Transformational leadership: Methods such as charisma, motivational tactics, inspiration, and intellectual encouragement that enable quality work performance (Muddle, 2020).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are the assertions that allow researchers to conduct a study (Wolgemuth et al., 2017). For the current study, I assumed that the hospital department managers used behavioral leadership strategies that promoted an environment conducive to employee engagement. Second, I assumed that all participants would be unbiased and willing to participate in the study. Third, I assumed that the participants would respond truthfully to the best of their knowledge to the interview questions.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses that may impact outcomes and conclusions within research (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). For the current study, the hours and availability of hospital department managers may have impacted my ability to recruit participants.

Additionally, participants may have suppressed information due to potential repercussions.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries that the researcher chooses to limit their research so the goal of the research is not unreasonable (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The first delimitation was pursuing hospital department managers who had been successful at using behavioral leadership strategies to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. The second delimitation was the location of hospital department managers in southwestern Michigan. The last delimitation was the health care industry because I would not have had a way to interview every type of manager.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Hospital department managers must explore how to maximize organizational performance. Lavigna and Basso (2020) found higher performance of key financial metrics for companies with superior employee engagement compared to companies with lower employee engagement. The current study was significant to business practice because it could provide a practical model for understanding behavioral leadership strategies of hospital department managers to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. These strategies may improve employee engagement levels (Muddle, 2020). The current study may offer hospital department managers opportunities to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement.

Implications for Social Change

Findings from the current study may improve the community's welfare by integrating employee engagement into society. Organizations that encourage family gatherings, bring employees together for nonwork functions, and have more personal conversations are more apt to have employees campaign to solve community issues (A. Kumar & Kapoor, 2019). When resources exist in fulfilling an employee's needs within the job role, a psychological sense of community can begin to develop (Boyd & Nowell, 2020). Social entrepreneurship encourages positive social change by promoting personal reward and growth (Lumpkin et al., 2018). Hospital department managers could use the current study findings to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement by understanding the behavioral leadership strategies needed to do so.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Researchers conduct a literature review to better understand a phenomenon by gathering information from previous studies (Paul & Criado, 2020). Stam (2020) explained that by selecting a theory to be the foundation of the study, researchers can explore the best methodology and strategy to answer the research question. The current literature review covers employee engagement as the central conceptual framework that includes conflicting and supporting views. The employee engagement theory has changed from a human resource and consulting viewpoint to a current conceptualization in which engagement interventions include employees' attitudes and behaviors (Wollard & Schuck, 2011). Qualitative and quantitative studies have revealed an apparent business problem for some behavioral leadership strategies. The current literature review provides

context and validation for addressing the research question regarding behavioral leadership strategies used by hospital department managers.

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the successful behavioral leadership strategies that hospital department managers use to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. At the beginning of this literature review, I provide background to the employee engagement theory. This literature review includes how psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability contribute to employee engagement. Additionally, the literature review addresses the connection to communication, trust, stress, burnout, training, financial performance, well-being, and value within employee engagement through other supporting theories. Throughout the review of literature, there are diverse perspectives on how leaders should behave and how to account for the different ways people work. Section 1 concludes with a summary and transition to Section 2.

Search Strategy

The literature review included data from scholarly sources such as peer-review journal articles and non-peer-reviewed articles. I accessed websites from Google Scholar. Walden University Library databases used included ABI/INFORM Complete, Academic Search Complete/Premier, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost Emerald Management Journals, ERIC, MEDLINE, ProQuest, SAGE Premier, and ScienceDirect. I used the following keywords in the study of existing literature: *broaden-and-build theory, burnout, communication, employee engagement, financial performance, job-demands resource theory, leader-member exchange theory, leader inclusive theory, psychological*

availability, psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, stress, training, trust, value, and well-being.

The literature review included 118 references from journals (see Table 1). Of the total references, 86% of the articles were published within the last 5 years. Table 1 shows the summary of reference type, publication year range, and total percentage of sources published within the past 5 years.

Table 1

Literature Review Source Content

Reference type	Total	< 5 years	> 5 years	% total < 5 years
Peer-reviewed journals	113	97	16	86
Non-peer-reviewed journals	5	5	0	100
Total	118	102	16	86

Background of Employee Engagement Theory

Numerous leadership strategies take into account how to handle employee engagement. Since Kahn presented the employee engagement theory in 1990, this work has motivated leaders to understand how to predict employee behavior (Huang & Yu-Ming, 2020). Kahn (1990) used the employee engagement theory to understand how people use their psychological experiences to determine how much a person will be involved in their work performance. The key components of the employee engagement theory are (a) psychological meaningfulness, (b) psychological safety, and (c) psychological availability (Kahn, 1990). Leaders have used the employee engagement

theory to increase work performance (Bergstedt & Wei, 2020). Leaders in the health care industry can use behavioral leadership strategies to promote employee engagement.

Psychological Meaningfulness

The actions of a leader related to employee engagement can be challenging to balance the key construct of psychological meaningfulness. Research has shown that leaders have dealt with certain types of employee perceptions that affect psychological meaningfulness in their job roles (Roberts & David, 2017; Stander & Rorthmann, 2010). Roberts and David (2017) uncovered a negative relationship to employee engagement around this idea of BPhubbing, in which a supervisor is distracted by their phone when their subordinates are in their presence. This type of behavior can be challenging for employees to feel psychological meaningfulness. Stander and Rorthmann (2010) discovered that the perception of job insecurity based on the actions of a leader could lead to feelings of unpredictability due to emotional exhaustion. James (2021) explained that when employees have a high level of fit perception based on feedback from their leader, they are more willing to put an investment into their work. Negative and positive relationships between employee perceptions of their leader's actions and engagement can impact employees' ability to provide meaningful work toward organizational goals.

Job fit can assist in psychological meaningfulness for employee engagement. Research has shown that employees were engaged when they felt their roles made a psychologically meaningful impact on them at a personal and organizational level (Kwon & Park, 2019; May et al., 2004). May et al. (2004) discovered that job enrichment and work role fit is positively linked to psychological meaningfulness. Additionally, when

leaders strengthened employee engagement over time, employees felt appreciative (Kwon & Park, 2019). Kanungo (1982) identified that job involvement depended on a cognitive judgment about the need satisfying abilities of the job. Aktouf (1992) emphasized the significance of managers understanding that disengagement derived from a lack of commitment and motivation to ensuring job fit for their employees. The impact of employee psychological meaningfulness is derived from job fit and the way leaders create a motivating work atmosphere in which people enjoy coming to work every day.

In any business organization, the human resource (HR) and marketing departments can influence cross-functional employee engagement for employees to feel psychological meaningfulness. Jose and Mampilly (2021) found that HR management practices enabled higher employee engagement. Additionally, marketing practices had a positive relationship with job engagement when empowerment, motivation, information sharing, and work environment were provided (Al-Weshah, 2019). Furthermore, Rothmann and Baumann (2014) identified how valuable psychological meaningfulness positively related to employee engagement when HR recognized employees were being overworked. Chaudhary (2019) uncovered that organizations that use their corporate responsibility predicted how well leaders engaged with employees in their organization. Internal marketing strategies and HR management practices can create value for employees to have a more positive psychological meaningful experiences in the workplace.

Psychological Safety

The behavior of a leader can assist in promoting psychological safety for their employees. Jose and Mampilly (2021) found that employee psychological safety resulted from the counter-relationship between HR management practices that embraced ethical leadership and employee engagement to balance employee emotions and perceptions. Employees who felt psychologically safe generated creative ideas without fear of rejection or penalty by colleagues, felt supported, and embraced organizational culture that diminished untrustworthy perceptions (J. Kim et al., 2020). When leaders portrayed selfless behaviors, employees were more open to working collaboratively toward goals and contributing to a more trusting work environment that promoted engagement (X. Liang & Fan, 2020). Leaders' actions impact the ability of an employee to feel psychologically safe and engaged in their role.

Positive social exchanges between leaders and employees can promote psychological safety within the work environment. Creative work performance was a direct response to the transparent relationship between psychological safety and leader-member exchange theory (LMX; Maus, 2020). Through the use of the LMX theory, leaders influence their employees' job performance by providing compassionate feedback to create high-quality exchanges between leaders and employees (Li et al., 2022; Maus, 2020). When leaders express gratitude, this can influence the ability of an employee to feel safe within their work environment. Positive social interactions between leaders and employees can promote employee engagement through psychological safety.

Through servant leadership, employees can feel psychologically safe within their work environment. When servant leaders provide empathy, healing, support, appreciation, and awareness to their employees, employees feel psychologically safe within their work environment (May et al., 2004). Employees who feel psychologically safe will more often express their feelings about opportunities and potential challenges within the organization. Leaders who possessed servant leadership increased employee engagement due to the emotional connection that they built with their employees (Li et al., 2022). Psychological safety can be maintained by leaders when they are able to implement behavioral strategies that recognize employee perceptions and interactions and use leadership styles that promote employee engagement.

Psychological Availability

Psychological availability involves the way an employee makes themselves available for their job needs. When an employee feels psychologically available, they feel they can physically and emotionally engage in specific work situations even if personal factors are on their minds (Gode et al., 2020). Distractions, such as emotional energy, contribute to challenging experiences for an employee to manage their psychological availability in their personal and work lives (Van der Ross et al., 2022). Leaders must be aware that employees often have roles other than their job title. Employees can be parents, daughters, sons, volunteers, and so on. This can impact their psychological availability and engagement. Furthermore, culture and experiences can impact how an employee deals with job demands based on psychological and resource availability (Laba & Gelenhuys, 2016). Leaders should understand behavioral strategies that cope with the

barriers to psychological availability, which include job demands, transparency, lack of time, capabilities, and burnout.

Job demands can impact an employee's ability to be psychologically available in the workplace. Rozman and Milfelner (2022) discovered that when leaders were transparent and reliable in providing resourceful information to employees to meet their job demands, employees felt able to complete their duties more efficiently. Efficiency provides opportunities for employees to express their concerns during the decision-making process. However, when employees continue to get drawn into situations that take them away from their normal job demands, employees are faced with having to work overtime because they feel like they did not have time to complete their normal job demands (Van der Ross et al., 2022). As a result, employees can become burned out and their job performance and well-being can decrease (World Health Organization, 2019). Leader strategies must be evaluated and adjusted to understand how people handle psychological availability to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement.

Characteristics Involved in Employee Engagement

To collaborate toward organizational goals, leaders should understand how to balance psychological needs within the workplace to promote employee engagement. The responsibility of a leader is to recognize lower employee engagement so they can adjust their behavioral leadership strategies so that organizational goals can be met. Leaders must build relationships with their employees so they can understand their needs. To obtain higher employee engagement, leaders have developed a wide range of strategies:

communicate effectively, gain trust, lessen stress, decrease burnout, provide training, improve financial performance, contribute to a person's well-being, and increase value when employees are engaged within their job responsibilities.

Communication

Mentorship involves interactions between employees and leaders so they can understand each other's needs and practice front-facing empathetic communication for optimum employee engagement. Hameduddin (2021) found that employee engagement involved an energetic mindset that allowed employees to be involved with leading flow and absorption. When employees believe they can communicate openly and effectively, they will be more apt to take the initiative to collaborate on organizational goals (Cunningham, 2019). Through two-way communication, leaders can better understand the needs of an employee and put strategies in place for improved employee engagement.

Manager and employee communication can be critical for employee engagement. Rohatinsky et al. (2020) discovered that communication was one factor that was crucial to implementing a mentorship program because employees felt enabled to voice their opinions on organizational opportunities. When employees voice their opinions and gain receptive feedback, employees can feel more confident in the future to voice their opinions again (Cunningham, 2019). This type of feedback can influence one of the key constructs of employee engagement: psychological meaningfulness. When a leader can communicate with their employee, the employee begins to engage and trust that their leader will support them throughout their journey within that organization.

Employees and leaders must effectively communicate their needs so there can be a balance between work and life. Blok et al. (2020) determined that when nurse leaders talked openly with their employees to promote emotional support and work–life balance, they were more engaged with the job duties. Znidarsic and Bernik (2021) found that leaders who supported work–life balance were able to show an increase in work engagement through the individual perception of organizational support. Work–life balance is an integral part of people’s emotional states. When this is interrupted, leaders must recognize that communication and transparency can help get employees back on track. Leaders who had supportive communication with active empathetic listening had a mutual understanding that helped employees feel like they can be engaged in their work (Jonsdottit & Kristinsson, 2020). This support allows leaders to use strategies to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement.

Leadership styles can impact the way information gets communicated to employees. Saxena (2020) discovered how understanding the leadership model between clinician and non-clinical leaders could differ based on communication. Clinicians and non-clinicians leaders understand behavioral strategies differently. Clinicians often times do not think about the business implications of decisions the same way as non-clinician leaders. For example, clinicians act before they think about the repercussions of their actions and non-clinicians would think about the repercussions before taking an action (Saxena, 2020). Therefore, leadership styles and effective communication can impact how information is perceived by an employee.

Communication tools can allow leaders to effectively interact with their employees to get tasks done. Cunningham (2019) introduced evidence-based tools that assisted leaders in communicating better within their organization included establishing expectations, holding leaders accountable for results, engaging employees through rounding and recognition, and cascading information strategically. Rounding allows leaders to create a personal connection to guide conversation towards positive aspects of the job, recognize employees, and discuss process improvement questions (Cunningham, 2019). Through this process, Schroeder and Modaff (2018) found that employees communicated their engagement between external expressions and role-defined displays. Additionally, forming task forces allowed employees to be engaged in providing feedback on issues so changes can take place (Matthews, 2018). Ultimately, keeping the employee informed and involved allows leaders to keep track of recurring themes that need attention to enhance employee engagement.

Employees should be able to voice their opinions within their work environment to remain engaged. Romney (2021) explored how the threat of misinterpreted information can be improved by the way managers use constructive voice delivery when new ideas are introduced. Rutishauser and Sender (2019) discovered that the social interaction of team members (TMX) levels is related to Kahn's three factors of psychological safety, meaningfulness, and availability. When employees can communicate topics they feel strongly about, their productivity can be enhanced (Romney, 2021). Therefore, when an employee communicates their opinions, leaders can better understand the level of engagement during social interactions.

By understanding the level of engagement of an employee, leaders can utilize tools to help identify the drivers of employee engagement. For several decades communication has been researched to develop and enhance tools for leaders to utilize with their employees to learn how to communicate better within the workplace (De-la-Calle-Duran & Rodriguez-Sanchez, 2021; Panteli et al., 2019). Communication can assist leaders in driving employee engagement as employees become more comfortable with their leader's style of managing. Homann et al. (2021) explored factors that drive employee engagement through a quality communication approach concerning quality, consistency, direction, and environment encompassing the relationship between workers, supervisors, and the psychological climate. By communicating, employees felt that when they were included in safety discussions and decision-making processes, their engagement improved to feel appreciated (Homann et al., 2021). When employees feel appreciated through active communication about being included in decision-making, their potential can be manifested and embraced to reach organizational goals. Therefore, leaders can improve employee engagement by applying strategic models for understanding the tools and drivers of effective communication.

Trust

Trust can be defined as the willingness of people to be susceptible to believing the expectations of one person based on positive intentions that they have expressed (Jiang & Luo, 2018). During the leader and employee relationship building process, psychological relationship building becomes a huge part of creating a robust and trusting connection between the two people from the leader's leadership style. Decuyper and Schufeli

(2021) found that certain leadership styles provided more value in creating a trusting relationship through understanding the employee's psychological needs, trust, and resources. Building a trusting relationship between employee and leader can be difficult due to perceptions and psychological interferences. Jiang and Luo (2018) identified that a proper mechanism should be implemented to create relationship capital through psychological capital. As a result, leaders may benefit from strategic models within their leadership styles to enforce collaboration and inclusiveness between their employees.

Trusting relationships can be built by the way leaders communicate and understand the needs of their employees within their leadership style. Saxena (2020) found that leaders can develop themselves and others to create a dyad leadership model among clinician and non-clinical leaders to have successful leadership strategies. Busse and Regenber (2019) discussed how transformational leadership naturally shapes a trusting relationship between leaders and employees because of how leaders vocalize appreciation and inclusiveness. The dyad and transformational leadership models can assist leaders in developing trusting relationships based on psychological needs.

Another theory that can contribute to trust building between leader and employee is the inclusive leadership theory. Fu et al. (2022) vocalized how the inclusive leadership theory fosters creativity from a leader that promotes openness, trust, respect, and collaboration. When employees receive this type of encouragement, they will be more apt to provide extra support to their leader. When employees can be creative, their true potential can be optimized to generate a positive work environment for their leaders and other employees. Zhang et al. (2022) recognized how the inclusive leadership theory

enabled nurses to innovate through empowering and developing psychological intervention strategies. This level of trust allows leaders to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement.

The research around trust contributes to the foundation of leaders building relationships with their employees to create a positive work environment that fosters employee engagement. As trusting relationships are built, leaders can begin to understand what causes stress for their employees.

Stress

For several decades, employees and leaders have had difficulties expressing and coping with employee engagement strategies. Researchers across all industries have completed quantitative and qualitative studies on the relationship between stress and employee engagement (Dinh, 2020; Steinheider et al., 2019). As society continues to grasp the “new normal” post-pandemic of COVID-19, leaders have been faced with managing stress levels differently. Health care leaders have implemented strategies that promote employee engagement through understanding stressful factors that could be mitigated to enhance employee engagement. When there is perceived stress, there is a negative impact on employee engagement, and a proper organizational structure should be evaluated to promote engagement factors (Allan et al., 2021). Kumar and Kapoor (2019) determined that employees campaign for better solutions when they feel less stressed and overwhelmed with their work. Leaders must be able to recognize these stress levels to adapt to their employee’s needs and continue to assist in organizational goals.

Employees can verbalize or non-verbalize their needs when they are dealing with

stressful situations. Every individual should be treated differently because not all coping strategies help the same way. As a leader, there must be strategies in place to be able to mitigate the stress even if the employee does not express their concerns (Kumar & Kapoor, 2019). For example, when people are a part of a team or embarked on higher education, they learn how to manage their time during stressful situations (Breugh, 2021). This experience prepares individuals to deal with stress in different parts of their lives. Eldor (2018) learned one way that stress could be managed was by providing compassion during stressful conditions so employees could better handle work demands. These coping mechanisms allow leaders to implement strategies that can be valued by employees.

Employee stress levels can be contributed to work-life balance. When employees feel as if their personal lives are being affected by their daily work tasks, they become stressed about how to deal with excelling at work but also in different avenues of their life. Dich et al. (2019) identified that women had more trade-offs, role conflict, and perceived stress when combining work and family duties. Eldor et al. (2020) found that for students who had a positive work-life balance, their stress levels decreased. People respond to stress differently based on whether they have a family to take care of at a home or another job requiring their attention. Stress contributes to the psychological impacts on leaders and employees.

The ability to not be overworked is critical to employees' stress levels and their ability to remain engaged at work. Rollins et al. (2021) indicated that when employees are overworked and utilize time off, they feel re-energized and focused at work.

Breevaart and Bakker (2018) found that workload and cognitive demands positively correlated with work engagement when transformational leadership was present. Weigelt et al. (2019) discovered the themes of psychological detachment, affective rumination, problem-solving pondering, positive work reflection, and hostile work reflection when employees face emotional irritation. Therefore, leaders could benefit from managing overworked stress so employees remain engaged in their work environment.

Overall, the research that has been conducted around stress suggests that when employees feel less stressed in the workplace, they are more apt to make an effort to be engaged (Eldor, 2018). Engaged employees are less likely to feel burnout. Therefore, leaders could benefit from implementing behavioral leadership strategies around mitigating stress to promote employee engagement.

Burnout

Employees can face burnout at different points in their careers. In order to control burnout, leaders must be able to recognize internal and external factors that contribute to an employee's engagement. Burnout characteristics include feeling drained and lessened effectiveness and motivation, interpersonal behavior that exhibits detached responses, reduced sense of one's achievement, and depersonalization (Mitonga-Monga & Mayer, 2020; Sun et al., 2022). Conversely, energized engagement can be seen through intention, preparation, dedication, focus and action with clarity and performance (Samnani et al., 2014; Sun et al., 2022). These two sides of the spectrum offer various indicators to leaders on what behavioral strategies might need to be adjusted to avoid or reduce employee burnout.

Leaders can implement strategies that assist in the prevention of employee burnout. One study suggested three ways leaders can prevent burnout: a work culture centered around employee needs over productivity, management skills that contain authoritarian leadership styles, and development (Rollins et al., 2021). Another way to measure and prevent burnout is through frequency-based response scales, which illustrate how often burnout behaviors occur to avoid burnout in the future (Tong et al., 2020). However, based on individual factors, people can feel mental overload at different times based on psychological factors (Pace & Sciotto, 2020). For leaders, personal and work mental overload can be hard to identify without being actively engaged in the life of the employee. Therefore, no matter the industry, leaders can benefit from understanding if their employees are facing burn out so their performance and engagement can recover.

In healthcare, patient safety indicates how well their employees treat and provide quality care for their patients. Burnout is a high risk to patient safety, and leaders should be aware if their employees are showing decreased energy levels (Calvo et al., 2021). Emotional responses from the amount of work pressure can be caused from perception of expectations, portrayed work-life balance, and depersonalization (Sun et al., 2022). Through consistent communication, leaders can recognize these emotional responses to provide clarity and reduce negative perceptions of expectations. Otherwise, employees will feel as if they do not have an environment that promotes work-life balance and lessen their performance and engagement. Thus, health care leaders can benefit from understanding how much workload pressure employees are facing so they can understand and adjust behavioral leadership strategies.

Collectively, these studies bring a perspective on the relationship between burnout and employee engagement. Energy, culture, dedication, and perceptions provide indicators to engagement levels (Singh, 2021). Through motivation and balance of physical and mental workloads, employees can be more willing to communicate their concerns and opportunities. Therefore, knowing this information allows leaders to implement strategies that target burnout characteristics and create an environment around employees' personal needs to remain engaged in their work.

Training

Training and growth opportunities can take part in employee decision making when looking for a new job. Research has determined that successful management of employees requires adequate training and development for employees to remain engaged (Lavigna & Basso, 2020; Mohanty, 2018). The psychological impact behind an opportunity to grow with an organization enables employees to have a desire to impress and capitalize on their creative thinking skills (McInerney & Niewiarowski, 2022). Gordon et al. (2018) uncovered that when employees were provided training and goals to establish job crafting, there was an increase in well-being and job performance. Therefore, with an increase in well-being and job performance, employees can be more engaged within the organization.

Within the healthcare environment, everyone should have the opportunity to progress and learn to advance their skills for better patient outcomes. Bergstedt and Wei (2020) discovered that nurse leaders should have an environment centered around training opportunities so employees can be empowered to improve the quality of care.

Suomi et al. (2021) recognized that training and how it relates to internal branding is crucial to health care professional employee engagement. Internal branding allows organizations to continue to build on their focus of understanding that employees are customers and their needs are pivotal to the organization's success. Therefore, training and career development opportunities can enable employee engagement.

The job-demands resource theory can be correlated to the training factor that impacts employee engagement. Bakker and van Wingerden (2021) conducted a study that follows the job-demands resource theory to uncover that when employees believe they have the resources they need to execute their job through available resources such as training, they are more engaged within their work. Additionally, understanding the psychological impact of having interventions for employees to utilize their resources to get their job done can affect employee engagement. To optimize resources, employees actualize and reflect on their needs and demands to be involved more within their organization (Gordon et al., 2018). These studies revealed that employees were engaged when they could be trained and developed within the organization. Thus, leaders can benefit by discussing career development with their employees so they can build training programs that will meet the personal needs of employees.

Financial Performance

Organizational goals consistently revolve around increasing financial performance. Akinwale and Ogunyomi (2021) discovered when employees are engaged in their work responsibilities, key financial performance metrics such as profitability, operating efficiency, performance stability, and the ability to raise capital can be achieved

in organizations. Furthermore, employees will likely be more engaged in daily tasks when the organization provides monetary incentives toward achieving optimum financial performance. To make this happen, leaders must implement strategies that create an ethical culture for employees to be engaged (Sarwar et al., 2020). When organizations developed and achieved a strategic competitive advantage around employee engagement, they out performed other organizations that did not take this strategy into consideration (Saks, 2017). Therefore, employee engagement is crucial for organizations to meet their financial goals.

There are other ways for organizations to build on their financial performance other than your typical business metrics. When organizations focus on non-monetary factors such as employee motivation, refinement of tasks, and inspiration to obtain organizational goals, they more often reach their financial goals (Ahmed et al., 2020; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Mani & Mishra, 2020). Cattermole (2018) revealed that there is a higher performance for organizations when there is a focus on the employee experience. A positive employee experience allows relationships to be built between leaders and this foundation creates trust for employees to perform so the organization can achieve its financial goals. However, when unethical behaviors such as blaming, individualism, and favoritism are a part of the organizational culture, employees are less engaged in their work and underperform (Sawar et al., 2020). Therefore, leaders could benefit by considering the non-monetary values contributing to the overall financial performance to encourage employee engagement.

In the business industry, every single employee is important to the success of any

organization. Minh et al. (2022) uncovered that stakeholder management should be concerned with everyone's apprehensions and not just the firm's owners due to the relationship of management and financial performance. When employees are able to voice their concerns, they can make a valuable impact towards bringing excitement towards organizational financial goals. Through the use of the broaden-and-build theory, leaders can capitalize on when employees are happy to perform their best for their organization (Shuck et al., 2017). Employee engagement and financial performance can be instrumental in retaining employees who feel satisfied with their well-being.

Well-Being

People have at least two different types of social environments where their attention is needed, work and home. To contribute to an employee's well-being, employees want to be able to go into work and leave happy so they can continue to be the best version of themselves outside of work. Piszczek and Pimputkar (2021) found when employees can utilize flexible work schedules, they can be more involved with responsibilities outside of work that make them happy. As a result, when leadership made an effort to understand the relationship between happiness and well-being, employees were more engaged in their job duties (Boyd & Nowell, 2020; Obuobisa-Darko & Domfeh, 2018). Well-being involves six different characteristics: positive emotions, engagements, relationships, meanings, accomplishments, and achievements (Singh, 2021). Therefore, leaders must consider the benefit of incorporating an employee's well-being into their behavioral leadership strategies.

The leader-inclusive theory goes hand and hand with well-being and employee

engagement. The leader-inclusive theory allows leaders and employees to create an atmosphere where employees feel comfortable expressing their concerns during the decision-making process (Busse & Regenberg, 2019; De-la-Calle-Duran & Rodriguez-Sanchez, 2021). When employees feel they are a part of the team making decisions, their overall well-being is positively impacted (Busse & Regenberg, 2019). Xu et al. (2019) found that well-being was a positive predictor of organizational citizenship behavior, and work engagement mediated the relationship between employee well-being and organizational citizenship behavior. Through the creation of this environment, leaders can understand and make adjustments to benefit their behavioral leadership strategies that will better impact employee engagement.

Leaders can develop ways to design leadership strategies to optimize a person's well-being. By understanding psychological characteristics of employees, leaders can identify areas of most need. Shuck et al. (2017) found that there are three different conditions of employee engagement that include cognitive, emotional, and behavioral, that affect an individual's health. Chan et al. (2020) found that age, marital status, education, job type, job retention, sleep, distress, and no history of workplace bullying led to higher work engagement due to employees' psychological characteristics of their well-being. No matter the background of any employee, leaders should recognize their leadership strategies because everyone's needs are different, and all employee's opinions should be valued.

Employees who feel valued can contribute to emotional and behavioral well-being. Kim et al. (2020) found that by utilizing Kahn's employee engagement theory,

employees have a positive relationship in voicing behaviors. Voicing behaviors is considered a characteristic of employees willing to go against the expected behavior and challenge potential adjustments to current strategies (Kim et al., 2020). However, it is difficult to understand when employees feel that they have greater well-being from their experiences at work. Through psychological phases, employees' internal and external well-being factors can relate to their ability to be engaged during their work role.

These studies offer variables that can assist leaders in recognizing if their employees are engaged. As a result, leaders must implement strategies that allow them to consider behavioral changes that help an employee's well-being.

Value

In relationship building, people often navigate towards people who value the same type of morals and ethics as one another even in the workplace. Employees want to know that their viewpoints will be considered with their leader when opportunities arise. Prottas and Nummelin (2018) identified that perceptions determine employees' attitudes because employees could have a viewpoint that does not align with the manager's words and actions. When feedback occurs, employees can become optimistic and interact more toward succeeding in their personal and organizational goals (Kumar, 2021). Yang et al. (2019) determined that when actions are put into place from feedback, employees feel more valued and engaged in workflow changes. This type of value allows employees to continue to build their relationships with leadership and collaborate on job tasks which promote employee engagement.

In the healthcare industry, employees' psychological health and values can impact

the quality of care they provide to patients. Bergstedt and Wei (2020) identified an increase in quality of care when nurses are more engaged when their values are supported within their work environments. Furthermore, as nurses are supported within their role, career values can be discussed as opportunities for development. Eldor et al. (2020) identified career values as the outcomes individuals desire and feel they should achieve and sustain throughout their careers. When health care employees feel valued, their patient care and motivation to achieve higher career goals become clear though leaders understanding their psychological health.

On the contrary, there are other types of employees that can be less engaged due to not feeling their value from the work that they are doing on a daily basis. Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) found that non-profit employees are more likely to experience the effects of the lack of behavioral outcomes when job characteristics and values are unavailable. During these circumstances, vigor, dedication, and absorption can be lacking (Jia et al., 2019). Due to this, employees will find themselves in a mental state where they cannot provide an impact to organizational goals. Therefore, leaders can benefit from collaborating with their employees to achieve a positive work-related to mental state.

Employees can feel valued in their work roles through different leadership styles and models. Leaders can influence work engagement through perceived organizational support (Jia et al., 2019). Gadolin and Andersson (2017) and Oh, et al. (2018) found a relationship between authentic leadership's significant influence on core values and work engagement when employees are voicing their concerns. Mohammed Ali Ababneh (2020) discovered that organizational culture archetypes models considerably impacted

how employees felt valued. As leaders learn their strengths and weaknesses within their leadership style, certain values can become particularly important to employees.

In the process of adjusting strategies, leaders can learn what values contribute to the prevention of negative employee engagement. Saito et al. (2018) found that higher individual intrinsic and altruistic work values were associated with improvements in burnout and work engagement. As leaders focused on positive work environment that fosters a culture that values employees, employees were more engaged in their job duties (Boakye et al., 2021; Nekula & Koob, 2021). Their engagement can contribute to the overall goals of the organization by adjusting strategies.

The research in this section identifies how leaders are faced with having to create and implement behavioral leadership strategies that embrace characteristics involved in employee engagement. When leaders are able to effectively communicate, trust, lessen stress, decrease burnout, provide training, improve financial performance, contribute to a person's well-being, and increase value then employees are engaged within their job responsibilities and the organization can achieve their goals. By adjusting and learning from employee needs, increased employee engagement can be achieved. However, leaders must consider other supporting theories to employee engagement to shape their leadership style.

Supporting Theories to Employee Engagement

Organizations and individuals can achieve their goals through collaboration, manifestation, resources, and social exchanges between employees and leaders. Through social exchanges, employees determine their eagerness to be engaged in work

responsibilities through the ability to build relationships. Employee engagement involves the willingness to which employees feel motivated to do their job to the best of their ability (Kahn, 1990). Therefore, employee engagement can be supported by several theories such as the leader inclusive theory, broaden-and-build theory, job-demands resource theory, and leader-member exchange theory.

Leader Inclusive Theory

One theory that can contribute to employee engagement is the leader inclusive theory. This theory can be defined as the way leaders are able to recognize and value employee view points during the collaboration process of working together to make decisions (Busse & Regenberg, 2019; Choi et al., 2016). Korkmaz et al. (2022) found that positive impacts of inclusive leader theory include psychological safety, adjusting strategy, participation in innovation, and employee engagement. Jolly and Lee (2020) utilized the leader inclusive theory to identify how communicative behaviors of leaders impacted employees' voices and psychological factors on engagement. Psychological safety is a crucial attribute to the foundation of employee engagement (Kahn, 1990). Increased employee engagement can be seen through recognizing employees needs through relationship building that encompasses trust and safety (Choi et al., 2016). When leaders can effectively bridge this characteristic, employees can feel safe within their work environment. Leaders who incorporate the leader inclusive theory to their leadership style could lead to work environments where employees are more engaged in their work.

Within the leader inclusive theory, employee engagement can be a result of job fit. Katsaros (2022) discovered that the feeling of belonging and safety in the workplace directly correlates to inclusive leadership and employee engagement. Bao et al. (2021) found that inclusive leadership has a positive relationship with employee engagement through a person's ability to feel that they are the right fit for their job. Job fit is crucial for employees to trust their leader to provide feedback so they can work together to adjust strategies (Choi et al., 2016). Consistent communication becomes a crucial behavioral leadership strategy that can promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. Job fit within leader inclusive theory can benefit employee engagement.

The leader inclusive theory can recognize two different types of leadership styles, authoritarian and transformational. When there is a low level of inclusiveness and lack of two way communication coming from a leader, they possess similar characteristics to an authoritarian leader; however, transformational leaders remain open to communication to build that relationship of feeling appreciated and inclusiveness in the workplace (Busse & Regenberg, 2019). Employees who report to authoritarian leaders can witness the lack of collaboration due to leaders wanting tasks done their way with no employee perspective on the task. When leaders can effectively communicate employees' responsibilities, employees will understand the expectations and be more willing to collaborate toward meaningful organizational goals. As a result, leaders can either promote or disengage in employees based off of their leadership style.

The leader-inclusive theory recognizes that different leadership styles can impact the collaboration among leaders and employees. Additionally, the correlation to

psychological safety enables the ability of employees to trust their leader to communicate on job responsibilities. When leaders are able to recognize characteristics of inclusiveness within their teams, better decision making can occur to meet organizational goals.

Broaden-and-Build Theory

Another theory that can contribute to the employee engagement theory is broaden-and-build theory. This theory can be described as the positive psychological emotion that enhances awareness to higher yields of manifestation to their work (Shuck et al., 2017). When people are happy while doing their job, they will execute higher work performance with less stress, and mindsets will increase personal resources and communication. Personal resources include psychological capital, incorporating efficacy, optimism, hope, resilience, commitment, and grit (Porter & Wang, 2022). Therefore, when leaders enable employees to have positive emotions throughout their job daily, they can have a positive outlook on striving towards goals and have better well-being (Garland et al., 2010). As a result, organizations will be able to meet goals and create better opportunities for their employees by using the broaden-and-build theory.

By developing an organizational culture that strives to achieve higher levels of engagement, leaders will be able to have healthier employees under their guidance. Employees will be more open to engaging with their leader when verbal appraisals are a part of the culture (Kaltainen et al., 2020). Fredrickson (2001) found that when employees balance their positive and negative emotions, they will have better well-being due to an increase in joy, pride, interest, contentment, and psychological resiliency.

Through the development of creating a culture where leaders understand the state of their employee's engagement, behavioral strategies can be implemented and adjusted.

Leaders can facilitate positively reframing different perspectives on a situation to help make the situation more positive (Samios et al., 2013). The broaden-and-build theory relates to people's ability to manage difficult situations by enabling broader patterns of thinking that will allow the construction of personal resources such as physical, intellectual, psychological, and social that will assist in dealing with situations that might come up in the workplace (Garland et al., 2010; Taubman et al., 2011). By allowing employees to freely think, people become aware of other people's needs and by default improve interactions among others (Taubman et al., 2011). Therefore, the broaden-and-build theory contributes to employee engagement theory by leaders understanding the balance between positive and negative emotions through non-monetary appraisals to increase personal resources to decrease stress through communication and psychological meaningfulness.

Job-Demands Resource Theory

Another theory that can contribute to employee engagement is job-demands resource theory. The job demand resource theory (JD-R) assumes that every job has specific job demands, including emotional and quantitative and specific job resources such as opportunities for growth (Druge et al., 2021). Job demands come from the physical, social, psychological, and organizational demands that employees must meet, and job resources are needed for employees to meet goals even when the job demands increase (Kowalewski & Ruschoff, 2019). More specifically, independence, career

growth, and work-life balance are considered resources that can be utilized to predict work engagement (Pace and Sciotto, 2020). By identifying the relationship between demands, burnout, and health status to resources, leaders can predict strain on employee motivation and engagement (Druge et al., 2021). This theory capitalizes on the way employees deal with stressful factors that impact their job responsibilities.

As leaders understand the way employees deal with job demand stress, they can create strategies that are task-oriented and procedural constraints. Tummers and Bakker (2021) discovered leaders who implemented two influential leadership behavior strategies, consideration and initiating structure, understood when the demands and resources of the employee were impacting their ability to complete their job responsibilities. Mussagulova (2020) found that when employees utilized the job resource of autonomy, they were able to deal with their work demands better; however, employees who had numerous types of “red tape” in their way, were not able to concentrate on their main job demands. Bakker and de Vries (2021) found that when employees face stress within their job, they are more likely to use internal strategies, such as self-undermining, instead of trying to recover from the stressful situation. Therefore, the behavioral strategies of a leader could be formulated in a way that considers how employees are feeling as well as what they need to do their job well.

Leaders must consider the resources that have always remained stable to intervene with stressed employees. The stable resources of collaboration and relationship building between employees and leaders were crucial for employees to remain engaged in their work. For example, stress was decreased when human resources and leadership

determined how to relieve job responsibilities to become more sustainable (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Additionally, relationship building can allow leaders to understand what the goals of the employee are so they can focus on gaining experience through their job demands and resources. Lei et al. (2021) identified how career success can be linked to JD-R due to the higher psychological flexibility when employees have a better relationship with their leaders. Therefore, effective behavioral strategies can assist leaders in helping employees relieve stress as well as having a successful career.

The JD-R begins a motivational and health impairment process. The health impairment process includes identifying exhaustion and overloaded at work, and the motivational process predicts work engagement based on job resources and the emotions such as dedication and absorption (Kulikowski & Orzechowski, 2018). Employees can proactively change their responsibilities by job crafting, task crafting, relationship crafting, and cognitive crafting to make their work more meaningful (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Therefore, employees feel empowered to be involved in work decisions to stay motivated in a bottom-up approach. Leaders must be able to implement strategies that cope with these feelings as employees do not feel as if their demands are not being met. Through understanding psychological processes, leaders can create an environment conducive to employee engagement.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

The exchanges between employees and leaders become crucial for employee engagement and how much they are willing to give back to the organization in terms of performance. The leader-member exchange theory (LMX) can be described as the

development of relationships based on social exchanges (Maus, 2020). Through LMX theory, leaders influence their employees by building trusting relationships and continually providing feedback to create a high-quality exchange between leaders and employees for increased engagement (Maus, 2020; Vidyarthi et al., 2014). Interactions between leaders and members create a positive work environment that naturally opens up conversation to continuously build trust and improve verbal and non-verbal communication. Hence, leaders can benefit by creating and implementing behavioral strategies that revolve around promoting employee engagement.

Through building trust, leaders can learn what is important to some employees and not so important to others. One primary focus of LMX is to develop employees' careers and participative management (Pellegrini et al., 2010). Organizations can use different structures to align leaders and employees to optimize the strengths of each member (Vidyarthi et al., 2014). In high-level LMX relationships, employees can have a range of responsibilities and leaders show support and impact beyond the job description; however, in a low-level LMX relationship, the exchanges between leaders and employees are based on contracts (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). The utilization of LMX can be impactful for leaders because they will be able to use part of the information from relationship building to determine what they need to do help motivate or align their employees. Therefore, by building relationships, employees can effortlessly enjoy their time working with their leaders.

Employees who enjoy their time at work can be more engaged with collaboration and relationship building than those who do not. Kucuk (2020) found that flow

experiences contributed to positive attitudes and behaviors of the employee because of the way they were fully immersed in a task or project that joyfully motivated them regardless of how small of a job. However, people can go in and out of engagement from those flow experiences. Wilson and Cunliffe (2022) found that LMX did not just involve the relationships that employees and leaders built, but also the relationship of their lived experiences. This can be correlated to Kahn's (1990) psychological characteristics because people can go through different cycles of engagement based on current and past experiences within the workplace and at home. Therefore, work enjoyment can come and go and it is the responsibility of the leaders to learn about their employees so their perceptions remain positive.

Positive interactions between leaders and employees can develop from employee perceptions of their leaders. Desrumaux et al. (2022) found that perception of workload and resources, support from hierarchy, and empowerment contributed to the link to innovative work behaviors and leader-member exchange theory. However, distributive justice must be met through the proper allocation of rewards, outcomes, and resources from employee perspectives (Liang et al., 2022). Innovative work allows organizations to continue to prioritize and provide valuable impact to their goals. As a result, behavioral leadership strategies can be implemented to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement.

Transition

In Section 1, I presented the characteristics and supporting theories that embody employee engagement and how it relates to psychological meaningfulness, psychological

safety, and psychological availability. In Section 2, the discussion will include the Role of the Researcher, Participants, Research Method and Design, Population and Sampling, Ethical Research, Data Collection Instruments and Technique, Data Organization Technique, Data Analysis, and Reliability and Validity, In Section 3, I will present an analysis of a case study that will be performed to identify the behavioral leadership strategies that hospital department managers use to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I discuss the methods for conducting this qualitative single case study. The elements of this section include the purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, data organization, data analysis, and procedures for ensuring reliability and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the successful behavioral leadership strategies that hospital department managers used to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is to be a data collection instrument (Wa-Mbaleka, 2020). I chose this research topic because of my career goals to be in hospital department leadership as well as working with health care analytics. By understanding what employees need to feel psychologically available, meaningful, and safe, I could develop behavioral leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. Additionally, I wanted to effect change within a health care organization by understanding employee engagement analytics.

The researcher must follow the ethical guidelines of respecting the participants within the study with beneficence and justice (The Belmont Report, 1979). There was fair treatment and protection of the participants' identity throughout the entire study process. I identified the participants as Participant 1–5 and did not use their real names in the case

study. Furthermore, I handled participant information safely so there was no physical or emotional harm. To mitigate bias and personal perspective, Chenail (2011) suggested performing the process of interviewing the investigator as a technique to create interview protocols so they can remain consistent and avoid personal perspective. To ensure that there was no bias in the current study, I selected a facility where I did not have a working relationship with the hospital department leaders, and I followed my interview protocol. Through this strategy, I generated interview questions that allowed me to obtain participants' insights to answer the research question.

Participants

The eligibility criteria of the participants included being a hospital department manager within the patient care service line who had been successful at promoting employee engagement at the health care organization. An email exchange was conducted with the vice president of patient care services at a hospital to gain access to five purposely sampled hospital department managers. I emailed five hospital department managers to ask if they would be willing to participate in the study. I provided them with information about the study and the consent form so they could make an informed decision about participating in the study. I provided as much information as possible in the email so they knew what to expect moving forward. The five hospital department managers agreed to participate in the study.

To establish a working relationship with the participants, I discussed availability strategies over the phone so I could build our relationship. Canevello and Crocker (2010) explained that when researchers email as much information as possible and follow up

with a phone call, this responsiveness promotes reciprocation from the interviewee. Throughout the entire interview process, I remained trustworthy and accountable regarding participants' responses. To ensure that I and the participants were being held accountable, I conducted participant validation and naturalistic inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described naturalistic inquiry as a way in which the researcher can hold themselves accountable throughout different parts of the interview process. Participant validation allowed for transparency in ethical concerns during the interview process because I did not want to assume that output was what was intended by the participant.

Research Method and Design

By using a qualitative single case study, I analyzed participants' experiences to answer the research question. The research method and design included triangulating data to ensure credibility.

Research Method

The selection of the qualitative method resulted from the need to understand how behavioral leadership strategies promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. In qualitative studies, researchers study human social behavior and cultures (Agius, 2013). Qualitative methodology is used to explore how people contribute to a social or human problem by investigating and understanding a phenomenon (Stake, 2010). C. Marshall and Rossman (2011) explained that to complete qualitative research, researchers should choose a framework for connecting issues through discussion that contributes to developing solutions to the research problem. Researchers who use quantitative methodology investigate the relationship between independent and

dependent variables (Salvador, 2016). The scientific approach is used to test hypotheses with numerical data (Wang et al., 2014). Researchers who use the mixed-methods approach combine methods by exploring a phenomenon and analyzing the relationship between variables (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). In the current study, I sought to understand of human behaviors. Neither quantitative nor mixed methods were appropriate to satisfy the purpose of the current study (see Glesne, 2011).

Research Design

Qualitative designs include narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, and case study. The narrative approach involves learning about an individual and becoming an interpreter for the person's stories (Stake, 2010). This design was less appropriate than a single case study. The phenomenological design involves understanding participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Gill, 2014). I did not seek to understand participants' lived experiences related to a phenomenon; therefore, the phenomenological design was not chosen. Ethnographic researchers interpret shared and learned behaviors from a particular culture over a long period of time (Stake, 2010). Due to the amount of time to review observations and interviews, the ethnographic design was not appropriate for the current study.

By conducting a single case study, researchers use multiple sources of evidence to triangulate data to better understand the social problem. A major advantage of a case study is that there are multiples sources of data related to a certain phenomenon (Hutchison et al., 2012). The case study design can be deemed as more accurate and insightful when using several resources for data collection (Hicks et al., 2014). Yin

(2014) recommended a thematic approach to generate themes when analyzing data in a qualitative study. To achieve data saturation, researchers collect data until there is no more new information appearing (Fusch & Ness, 2015). By conducting interviews and reviewing organizational policies on employee engagement, I achieved data saturation in this single case study.

Population and Sampling

I recruited participants using a purposeful sampling method to conduct this single case study. By using purposeful sampling, I ensured that the objectives of this study were met with the participants chosen (see McCabe et al., 2013). To have rich data in this case study, I used purposeful sampling (see Stake, 2010). By having a mixture of people within the population, I ensured participants would have different experiences and knowledge of their role (see Olubunmi, 2014). To answer the research question, I interviewed hospital department managers who had been successful at promoting employee engagement. The five participants provided different experiences and successes at promoting employee engagement as hospital department managers within the patient care service line.

In any case study, data saturation must be met to ensure reliable findings. Data saturation is met when there is no more information or themes presented in data collection (Walker, 2012). When participants' responses are repeated over and over, data saturation has been achieved (B. Marshall et al., 2013). Additionally, by reviewing multiple sources of data, researchers are able to achieve data saturation (Harvey, 2015). In the current study, data saturation was achieved when there were no new themes after

conducting interviews and a review of organizational policies. However, if the responses and the review of documents had not begun to repeat themselves, I would have continued to interview participants and review documents until data saturation was achieved.

Ethical Research

Data collection began after I received institutional review board approval (01-19-23-1061619) and completed a site agreement. Participants received a consent form and had sufficient time to make an informed decision to be a part of the study. The participants were informed of their rights and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time (see U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). If a participant chose to withdraw from the study, all communications and data would have been destroyed (see U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). If a participant had wanted to be removed from the study, they could have contacted me by email or phone. There were no participants who did not want to be a part of the study.

Researchers can provide incentives for participants to participate in their study. However, they must be certain that those incentives do not impact the reliability of the study (Bouter, 2015). There was no incentives for participating in the current study. To ensure the ethical protection of the participants, I maintained ethical standards by bringing awareness to how participants' information was protected and how privacy was preserved throughout the study. I used coding to deidentify participants and the organization in this study (see Mitchell & Wellings, 2013). I will protect the data collected for 5 years after the completion of this study for the privacy of the participants.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument in this qualitative case study. The researcher becomes knowledgeable and insightful of the study topic (Rowley, 2012). However, the researcher must remain unbiased and not bring their personal experiences and feelings into the interview process (Porter, 2015). To assist in making sure that bias did not appear in the data collection and interpretation, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix). I read directly from my interview protocol throughout the interview for each participant.

In this qualitative case study, I conducted semistructured interviews and reviewed policies related to employee engagement. Face-to-face interviews are one of the most popular data collection instruments in qualitative studies (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). After institutional review board approval, I started data collection. First, I emailed the vice president of patient care services to gain access to hospital department managers. After I received access to participants, I reached out to the participants by emailing them to request their participation in the study. Emailing participants allows researchers to have proof of responses and is less time-consuming to receive a reply (Ziebland & Hunt, 2014). All participants responded within the same day of the initial email. If there was a participant who did not reply within a week, I would have sent a follow-up email with the vice president copied on the email. After the participants consented to be a part of the research, I scheduled the face-to-face semistructured interviews. During the interview process, I followed the interview protocol to prevent my bias from entering the study. Following the interviews, I asked to be able to review organizational policies on

employee engagement. Organizational employee engagement policies were a reliable and credible source of triangulating data (see Koelsch, 2013). By conducting face-to-face interviews and reviewing policies, I collected credible and reliable data to answer the research question.

The open-ended interview questions were prepared before the interview to guide the participants' responses as part of the interview protocol (see Fusch & Ness, 2015). Yin (2014) explained that case study protocols guide the researcher to focus on the research question and not to drift off into other areas not pertaining to the study. By answering open-ended questions, the participants were able to elaborate on their responses and go into as much detail as they liked. To ensure reliability and transferability, I used an interview protocol to stay aligned with the research question (see Jacob & Ferguson, 2015). After interviews, researchers should allow participants to check their responses so researchers can prevent misinterpretation of the data (Ketefian, 2015). Member checking will assist researchers in establishing reliability and credibility through their summaries (Weiss, 2016). When conducting member checking, I provided a summary of the key points from the interview for the participant to review and verify.

Data Collection Technique

By conducting semistructured face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions and reviewing employee engagement policies within the partner organization, I obtained adequate data to answer the research question. By following an interview protocol, I was able to stick to the script to ensure all of the questions were consistent (see Appendix). Yin (2014) noted that face-to-face interviewing provides an effective data collection

technique for case studies. I asked each participant what was one of their favorite places to eat so they would feel comfortable during the interview. During qualitative data collection, researchers can observe how the participant responds verbally and nonverbally as part of data collection (Ziebland & Hunt, 2014). I began the interview by thanking the participant for meeting with me and then began asking the five interview questions. I looked for nonverbal cues and asked follow-up questions as needed. Researchers can have control over the information the participant provides (Ziebland & Hunt, 2014). At the end of the interview, I thanked the participant again for participating in the interview and scheduled a follow-up meeting for member checking. Additionally, I conducted policy reviews to assist in validating the interview data as part of the two sources needed for data collection (see Yin, 2014). These two collection techniques allowed me to reach data saturation.

The advantages of face-to-face interviews are (a) synchronized in time and space, (b) body language and facial expressions are visible, and (c) physical meetings can create a safe and comfortable environment (Saarijarvi & Lena Bratt, 2021). Disadvantages to face-to-face interviews are (a) time consuming, (b) require some extent of travel, and (c) safety risks (Saarijarvi & Lena Bratt, 2021). Some advantages to reviewing organizational policies are (a) inexpensive collection of information, (b) reliable official information from the organization, and (c) human willingness to provide policy information (Yin, 2014). Disadvantages include (a) subjective, (b) time consuming, (c) willingness to provide corporate policy information (Zhang et al., 2014).

Member checking in qualitative studies establishes integrity by having participants review summaries from the researcher (Thomas, 2012). After data was collected and analyzed, I utilized member checking to ensure that the findings were what the participant intended to say from the interviews. Trustworthiness can be achieved through member checking because of the checking of patterns and consistency (White et al., 2012). As a result, the findings were considered reliable, credible and valid.

Data Organization Technique

Data collection was organized throughout the entire life of the study. For a quick data retrieval process, Koelsch (2013) recommends that there should be an organizational process in place while doing the interpretation. To stay organized before the interviews start, I used Microsoft Outlook calendar when I scheduled interviews for each of the participants. For managing the data collected, a matrix in Excel was created to include categories that assisted in identifying patterns and themes from the semistructured interviews for management of the data (Hicks et al., 2014). From there, creating a coding process to rank and group themes together will assist in uncovering insights in the information that is being collected (See Zamawe, 2015). In addition to manual organization, I utilized NVivo to assist in managing and organizing the data from the case study.

There was a plethora of data that was collected throughout this case study so I ensured a data storage strategy was in place so information did not get lost. By using an external hard drive and online versions with password protection, this would have assisted in retrieval of information if a scenario risen where there the backup information

needed to be used. The raw data collection has retention of 5 years after the study. After 5 years, I will delete and shred all information in my possession relating to this case study.

Data Analysis

I used methodological triangulation for my case study research. I gathered data from organizational policies regarding employee engagement and semistructured interviews. Yin (2014) stated that by using a variety of sources for data collection, the quality and complexity of the study would be enhanced. The data analysis assisted in developing themes that emphasized behavioral leadership strategies that managers used to promote employee engagement. Yin's 5 step approach to data analysis process includes: (a) compiling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the meaning of the data, and (e) concluding the data (Yin, 2014). In step one, I compiled the data to develop categories. In step two, I disassembled the data to eliminate themes that are changing. In step three, I reassembled the data into core themes. In step four, I checked for patterns against interview transcripts and the review of internal documents to interpret the meaning of the data. In step five, I concluded by summarizing the data into individual descriptions of the experiences. These steps helped with reaching data saturation.

In this study, I utilized open-ended interview questions to continue to build off of one another to understand how hospital department managers dealt with employee engagement. This helped influence the analysis of the data to better understand how employee engagement is handled at this particular organization (See Rubin & Rubin,

2012). By using semistructured interviews and organizational policies, they can contribute to triangulation to support validity and credibility (Wahyuni, 2013).

To protect the participants' identities, I created a labeling system when I transcribed the participant interviews, where P1 meant Participant 1. After completing transcriptions of participant interviews, the interviewees confirmed my interpretation by participating in member checking. Once the participant validated my interview interpretation, I then processed the data using NVivo. I created a coding matrix to assist in uncovering themes throughout the analyzation process. Chang and Graham (2013) stated that by using software to develop themes assists in reducing human error to maintain reliability and validity.

The theme development was crucial to the triangulation process. Themes can be generated through commonly used words by the participants and linking them to the conceptual framework (Emmel, 2015). By comparing previous research in the literature to this case study, it will assist in identifying gaps in data (Salijeghe et al., 2014). The conceptual framework of employee engagement and themes generated from this study allowed for hospital department managers to have the opportunity to make adjustments to their behavioral leadership strategies in the future.

Reliability and Validity

While doing any research study, researchers must be open to critique and evaluation (Long & Johnson, 2000). During this process, reliability and validity must be established in order to achieve quality research (Yin, 2014). Long and Johnson (2000) indicated that reliability can be achieved by decision making trails and triangulation,

whereas validity can be achieved by peer debriefing, respondent validation, and triangulation. In order to do so, protocols were in place to ensure that validity guaranteed reliability. These protocols should be established throughout data collection and not at the end of the study due to the risks and threats to reliability and validity (Cypress, 2017).

Reliability

During data interpretation, member checking was used to be considered dependable. Vicencio-Ortiz & Kolarik (2012) recommends to researchers to be clear on coding methods and data instruments such as member checking to achieve dependability. Member checking is one data instrument that confirms reliability (Cook, 2013). Yin (2014) proclaimed by documenting the steps taken in a case study provides reliability and dependability by having a reduction in thematic and transcript errors. Ali and Yusof (2011) determined that reliability in qualitative research can be attained through the stages of documenting data interpretation.

Reliability can be accomplished when there were repeated measures in a study that had the same results to uncover truth to findings (Cypress, 2017). Once the researcher analyzed the data, they should return the analyzed data to the participant to assess the trustworthiness of the qualitative results (Birt et al., 2016). In doing so, this ensured that the results were being perceived how the participant intended and were considered reliable. By creating a process with non-bias data interpretation and research integrity, reliability and dependability can be achieved (Shaw & Satalkar, 2018).

Validity

In order to improve the quality of the research in the study, the researcher must gain credibility through validation by creating reliable study findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Stake (2010) proclaimed that the researcher must justify their sample by articulating the potential variability in the population to support credibility, transferability, and confirmability. To support in the credibility of this case study, participants were leaders who were considered successful in promoting employee engagement (See Glaser & Laudel, 2013). In addition, acquiring organizational policies that support this case study gained credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative results (See Gibbert & Ruigrok, 2013). Therefore, the quality of this case study was validated through credibility.

Data collection from participants that impact the demographics of the study could promote transferability (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The findings were clear so the information could be transferred to other managers within other industries who are challenged with the employee engagement business problem. By having the information transferable, knowledge and insights can continue to influence future research (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). The documentation of study interview protocols and coding analysis methods allowed information to be transferred to improve strategies managers used to promote employee engagement.

To ensure validity, researchers should understand their role within in the study. By having the appropriate distance between interviewee and researcher will allow the study to gain confirmability (Houghton et al., 2013). Bringing awareness to bias will

contribute to confirmability through the process of generating interviewing protocols (Chenail, 2014). The interview protocol allowed me to stay on track and to not impose any personal bias into the responses of the interviewee. By doing so, bias was contained and limited to assist in the validation and confirmability of the results.

Data saturation and validation are positively related factors in qualitative research. Data saturation is achieved when the researcher achieves no more new information during data collection (Mwita, 2022). If data saturation was not achieved, I would have continued to interview participants until there were no repeating themes within the data. By recording and coding the responses from the participants in semistructured interviews, the researcher interpreted the data to achieve data saturation and validation (Quintao et al., 2020). When there are repeated themes throughout the data interpretation stage, the researcher met data saturation (Lakshmi & Mohidden, 2013).

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, there was an identification of the Role of the Researcher, Participants, Research Method and Design, Population and Sampling, Ethical Research, Data Collection Instruments and Technique, Data Organization Technique, Data Analysis, and Reliability and Validity. In Section 3, I present findings and digest the study conclusions of the single case study that can identify the behavioral leadership strategies that hospital department managers use to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 consists of an introduction, presentation of findings, application to professional practice, and implications for social change. I also discuss recommendations for further research on leadership engagement strategies and provide reflections on my experience during the doctoral study journey. I conclude with an overview addressing the importance of the influence of behavioral leadership strategies that are conducive to employee engagement.

The influence of behavioral leadership strategies on employee engagement is a complex business problem in the health care industry that requires leaders' involvement. The loss of leadership strategies that engage employees continues to have a negative effect on employee stress levels, perceived perceptions, and values (Allan et al., 2021; James, 2021; Saito et al., 2018). Blok et al. (2020), Hameduddin (2021), and Rohatinsky et al. (2020) indicated that communication is important to keeping employees engaged in the work environment. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the behavioral leadership strategies that hospital department managers use to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement.

I explored behavioral leadership strategies that influenced employee engagement by interviewing five hospital department managers at a hospital in Michigan. Participants had experience implementing behavioral leadership strategies that influenced an environment conducive to employee engagement; all participants (P1–P5) were hospital department managers. During data analysis, I compared transcripts, interview notes, and internal policies on employee engagement to ensure validity and reliability. The data

analysis indicated that at this organization, leaders were able to promote employee engagement by having open communication, empowering employee decision making, and developing strong relationships with their employees.

Presentation of Findings

The research question in this study was the following: What behavioral leadership strategies do hospital department managers use to promote an employee engagement environment? I used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to enable participants to provide detailed information on what behavioral leadership strategies they used to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. In addition, I reviewed company archival documents on employee engagement policies. Before starting the interviews, I sent all participants a copy of the consent form and an email outlining the study details. Interviews took place in a private room in the hospital and lasted 10–15 minutes.

When performing the data analysis with the NVivo tool, I focused on themes that were relevant to the research question and the conceptual framework. The data analysis revealed the following themes: (a) Employee engagement increased with open communication, (b) empowering employee decision making, and (c) relationship development.

Theme 1: Employee Engagement Increased With Open Communication

Employee engagement increased with open communication was the first theme that emerged from a thorough analysis of participants' responses and a review of the organizational employee handbook. P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 explained that by having open

communication, the engagement of employees increased throughout every aspect of the role of the employee. Participants spoke often about having an open-door policy to make sure they are available for their team members to speak about personal and professional ideas. P3 and P4 stated that through shared governance, employees were able to speak openly about concerns and have opportunities for the organization and the department. P4 mentioned

also, sometimes when they have ideas, you're not just like, it's not going to work, but I'm honest with them, and I don't just say, no, it's this is why that's not going to work. But then I follow that up with, if you would like to come up with another solution, we can we can present it to the group and we can try it and then we can reconvene and see if that's the resolution of that solution.

P2 indicated that by creating a culture that embraces an open line of communication, employees begin to lean on one another to problem solve.

All five participants emphasized that leaders should use open communication as a behavioral leadership strategy to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. Kalidass and Bahron's (2015) and R. Sun and Wang's (2016) findings confirmed that open communication led to more engaged employees due to providing more transparent information. For leaders who chose to be closed off with their communication, employee engagement decreased (Romney, 2021). Furthermore, Frear et al. (2017) discovered that leaders who used open communication saw an increase in commitment to the organization. In the current study, open communication between

employees and leaders was found to be crucial to employee engagement in the hospital departments.

P2, P4, and P5 said that using an open-door policy was an effective behavioral leadership strategy for employees to feel comfortable enough to discuss personal and work. P1 stated “when I have weekly individual touch bases with my employees discuss personal and career goals, employee engagement increased.” P3 stated “I meet with individuals once a week to discuss any challenges that they may have encountered in the past week.” Coaching-based leadership involves one-on-one conversations to enhance goals and performance (Zuberbühler et al., 2023). All current participants expressed that they spend a significant amount of time communicating with their employees every day to touch base on their needs. Additionally, P1 and P2 noted that when they were not able to touch base with their employees, their engagement decreased in the workplace. Based on my analysis of the organizational employee handbook, the findings were similar to those of Kahn (1990) that open communication increases employee engagement. The organizational employee handbook document indicated that leaders should practice open communication with their employees by having quarterly touch bases.

All participants stated that open communication was key for employees to feel as though they had purposeful meaning in the workplace. As part of the conceptual framework for the current study, one of Kahn’s (1990) key constructs of employee engagement is psychological meaningfulness. P2 stated “when people come to work, they want to know that the work they are doing is meaningful.” Stander and Rorthmann (2010) mentioned that open communication provides a perception that the viewpoints of

employees are meaningful to extending knowledge around open communication. When leaders are able to implement behavioral leadership strategies around open communication, employees are more engaged.

Theme 2: Empowering Employee Decision Making

Employee engagement increased when employees were empowered to be involved in decision making. This was the second theme that emerged from a thorough analysis of participants' responses and a review of the organization's internal policies. P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 explained when employees are able to vocalize their opinions in the decision-making process, employee engagement increases throughout every aspect of the role of the employee. Participants spoke about having their employees be a part of changes within the hospital departments. P3 and P4 stated that through shared governance, employees are able to vocalize improvements that need to be changed throughout the department. P3 mentioned "it's really putting the autonomy in their hands and making them feel a part of that change. And usually when the teams were more part of the change, the change goes over better than just dictating." However, P2 stated "when leadership is dictating the decision making, employees felt that their voice did not matter and did not feel safe in the work environment." P1 said "when employees are able to be a part of the change that needs to be implemented, employees will provide more feedback to how a situation was going." Through implementation of behavioral leadership strategies that empower employees to be involved in decision making, employees were more engaged.

All five participants emphasized that leaders should empower employees to be involved in decision making as a behavioral leadership strategy to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. These findings were similar to those of Lei et al. (2015) and Ngs (2016) who found that employees being involved in decision making led to more engaged employees. Leaders who chose not to let their employees be involved in decision making had employees who were less engaged in their job roles. Furthermore, Stanczyk et al. (2017) discovered that leaders who encouraged employees to get involved in decision making had employees who were more committed to being a part of a change to better the organization. When leaders empowered employees to be involved in decision making, employee engagement in the hospital departments was positively impacted.

P1, P2, P3 said that using trial and error from the ideas of employees was an effective behavioral leadership strategy to increase employee engagement. P1 and P3 stated that employee engagement increased when a leader tried one of the ideas of their employees. When their team needs to make a decision, P1 stated

I ask how do we want to overcome a certain issue and they come up with ideas that I would have never even dreamed of implementing. I'll say, you know, we'll try this and see how it goes. And if we don't like it, we'll change it. So nothing ever hard and fast and written in stone. It's we sift through things until we find something that works and I take their opinion into account because it matters.

P5 stated that during huddles they ask

What was good about today? What was not good about today? Well, what was the difference between today and yesterday? How can we change that? And then I'm just really one for try it since they are the ones out there doing the work. You're the ones who manage that workflow. My only suggestion is you just don't try it for two days and say it doesn't work to notice any change positive or negative. It needs to be over a course of X amount of time.

When leaders and employees work together by trying different ideas toward reaching common goals, employees can be more engaged in the workplace.

All participants expressed that the more everyone works together to make decisions, the more efficient and better quality of care the employees provide to the hospital department. Additionally, P1 and P2 noted that when employees are not involved in decision making, employee engagement suffers. P1 stated "I have recognized that when employees do not get involved with the team, their attitude is often negative." Based on internal meeting notes, the findings were similar to the conceptual framework of Kahn (1990) that empowering employee decision making assisted in employee engagement. Current participants provided me notes from team meetings after our in-person interviews. The notes displayed how over several meetings more employees were voicing their opinions during decision making.

P2 and P4 stated that allowing employees to be involved in decision making was key for employees to feel as if their job was safe within the workplace. One of Kahn's (1990) key constructs of employee engagement is psychological safety. P4 stated "when people come to work, they want to know that their job is safe, and their opinions are

valued during decision making.” Employees who felt psychologically safe generated creative ideas without fear of rejection or penalty by colleagues, felt supported, and embraced organizational culture that let them be involved during the decision-making process (J. Kim et al., 2020). When leaders understand the triggers to work-related uncertainty for employees, they can manage competitive pressure that can impact engagement (Bunjak et al., 2023). When leaders implement behavioral leadership strategies to empower employee decision making, employees can be more engaged.

Theme 3: Relationship Development

Employee engagement increased with relationship development between leader and employee. This was the last theme that emerged from a thorough analysis of participants’ responses and a review of the organization’s internal policies. P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 explained that by having a solid relationship with their employees, leaders increased employee engagement in every aspect of their role. Participants spoke about creating a work environment that promotes a culture of relationship building. P4 and P5 stated that through weekly meetings with their employees, they are able to develop these relationships. P4 discussed the relationship that they have with their employees:

They rely on each other a lot because of the great culture we have created. I can help them as much as I can, but our charge nurses are also very trustworthy. If they want some guidance or if they want assistance with something, they know that they can go to the charge nurse or they can come to me. So I think it’s just a strong bond. And we’ve had everybody lean into that culture. So it’s not just I hate to say it’s just me, because I don’t think it is.

This leadership strategy of relationship building can assist in promoting an environment conducive to employee engagement.

All five participants emphasized that leaders should use relationship building as a behavioral leadership strategy to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. The findings that supported leaders using relationship development were similar to those from Muthusi-Nzyoka (2016) and Aziz et al. (2017) who found that relationship development led to more engaged employees. Leaders who chose to be closed off with their employees had decreased engagement. Furthermore, Saleh (2017) discovered the connection to relationship development and employee engagement was correlated to leaders being transparent with sharing information with their employees. Employee engagement levels are complex psychological processes deriving from the people within the managerial structure (Fulmore et al., 2023). In the current study, relationship development between employees and leaders was found to be crucial to employee engagement in the hospital departments.

P1, P2, and P5 said that being willing to listen and ask questions about how employees are feeling personally and about work made employees more apt to discuss ideas on a regular basis. P1 and P5 stated that employee engagement increased when a leader took the time to learn about employees' families and understand where their employees' career goals stand. All participants expressed that they know how many children employees have or whether they are married. Additionally, P2 and P5 noted that when a manager does not have a strong relationship with employees, they are not as willing to be engaged in the work environment. Based on meeting notes, the findings

were similar to the conceptual framework of Kahn (1990) that relationship development assisted in employee engagement. Based on weekly meeting notes that hospital department managers shared, there was a trend of more conversation about career goals as well as personal lives.

All participants stated that relationship development was key for employees to feel as if they had leadership availability within the workplace. As part of the conceptual framework, one of Kahn's (1990) key constructs of employee engagement is psychological availability. P3 stated

I'm really close with the people on my team and talk to them every day and talk to them about their home life or talk to them about their kids, their spouse their events in their life, or check up on them. Make sure they have my cell phone, they text me if there's a situation that I'm in or meeting or a conversation that team member needs to speak to me, I'll excuse myself and make sure that I'm available on my team.

Culture and experiences can impact how an employee deals with job demands based on psychological and resource availability (Laba & Gelenhuys, 2016). When leaders implement behavioral leadership strategies around relationship development, employees can be more engaged.

Applications to Professional Practice

Since employee engagement can impact productivity, it is essential for leaders to implement behavioral leadership strategies that keep their employees involved in the workplace (Ugoami, 2016). Lack of employee engagement can impact more than just

productivity, it can also become detrimental in the organization's overall goal of the business mission and strategy (Ahammad et al., 2016). The mission and strategy of the organization enable employees to grow as the organization grows. By implementing behavioral leadership strategies, leaders can ensure their employees are integrated and vocal about opportunities to achieve organizational goals.

Business leaders should consider the needs of their employees in professional practice. The needs include psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability which impact employee engagement (Kahn, 1990). Most leaders are aware when their employees are disengaged and are able to bridge the gap with their behavioral leadership strategies (Maus, 2020). The strategies leaders use can impact employee engagement.

While there are numerous strategies leaders can use to increase employee engagement, participants stated that open communication, empowerment of employee decision-making and developing leader employee relationships were most effective. Open communication improves employee engagement by bringing transparency to information that employees may need to know. Empowering employee decision making can be applied to professional business practice because employees are the ones doing the job and can provide the best insight compared to leaders who may not be doing the work every day. Developing leader employee relationships is pivotal to impacting employee engagement because employees need to know that their work is valued so they will continue to be retained within the organization. However, continuous adjustments need to be considered for hospital department managers can grow.

Additionally, leaders should understand that not all strategies are the same for all employees. The feedback gained from open communication, empowering decision making, and relationship building will allow teams to continue to prosper toward goals. Continual feedback from employees and leaders promotes an environment conducive to employee engagement (Li et al., 2022; Maus, 2020). Therefore, by implementing behavioral leadership strategies, hospital department managers may promote an environment conducive to employee engagement.

Implications for Social Change

This qualitative case study is meaningful to social change because leaders in the healthcare industry can use the findings to implement effective behavioral leadership strategies that could promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. The primary objective of this research was to explore behavioral leadership strategies that engage employees within hospital departments. In addition to understanding the significance of implementing behavioral leadership strategies, leaders must be able to identify which strategies are working for their employees and which are not (Schlechter et al., 2014). Leaders will be able to use the strategies that have appeared from the data analysis to utilize behavioral leadership strategies to engage their employees which in turn might lead to more opportunities for employment for local families and the community.

When the leaders within an organization are involved in the needs of their employees, the leaders could be more engaged with how they can get involved outside of their organization. Engaging employees support leaders in the organization to generate

opportunities to bring positive social change for the communities they serve (Steiner & Atterton, 2014). When resources exist in fulfilling an employee's needs within the job role, a psychological sense of community can begin to develop (Boyd & Nowell, 2020). Furthermore, successful organizations are a driving force of social change such as creating jobs, quality of life, and donating to programs that can benefit an entire community (Steiner & Atterton, 2014). Health care leaders can utilize this research to implicate social change by executing the right behavioral leadership strategies that promote employee engagement.

Recommendations for Action

Leaders in the health care industry can use this information in this study to implement effective behavioral leadership strategies to promote employee engagement. By adopting some of the recommended strategies that were shared by participants such as open communication, empowering employee decision making, and developing leader employee relationships, hospital department leaders have a higher chance of engaging their employees. The knowledge shared in this research may help contribute to the success of leadership in the health care industry when employees are disengaged within the work environment.

The findings from this study also provide leadership in the health care industry additional strategies to promote employee engagement such as open communication with their employees, empowering employee decision making and relationship development. Implementing effective behavioral leadership strategies that promote employee engagement may assist leaders with tools to influence employee career growth and

opportunities within the organization. This study will be disseminated through potentially sharing opportunities with business forums, organizational trainings, and leadership conferences. Additionally, this study will be available through the ProQuest/UMI dissertation database for future scholars to utilize for research.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the behavioral leadership strategies hospital department managers use in southwest Michigan to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. The findings of this study are based on reasons employees are disengaged and how hospital department managers adjust their behavioral leadership strategies to meet the needs of their employees. Since employee engagement is a complex business problem, future qualitative researchers should explore behavioral leadership strategies that promote open communication, empowering employee decision-making, and relationship development.

One recommendation for further qualitative research is exploring behavioral leadership strategies that influence employee engagement in different geographical locations. Since COVID-19, employees and leaders in different locations have been emotionally impacted by the pandemic. Additional research in the areas where the pandemic hit the hardest could provide further knowledge and development surrounding employee engagement. Another recommendation for further qualitative research is comparing older and younger hospital department managers. Both age groups of hospital department managers could utilize behavioral leadership strategies differently, which could provide more constructs to consider for this business problem. Additionally,

interviewing employees who are new to the healthcare industry to explore their perceptions of the behavioral leadership strategies of leaders that might be able to provide insight into the business problem.

Future quantitative researchers should consider the correlation between employee engagement and leadership style. By researching the different leadership styles, the correlation could be found that different leadership styles promote employee engagement more or less than others. Moreover, future research surrounding behavioral leadership engagement strategies could add to the limited scholarly knowledge and understanding of behavioral leadership strategies used by leaders within the healthcare industry.

Reflections

Throughout my doctoral journey, I was able to have an opportunity to present information in several different stages including the prospectus stage, proposal stage, data collection, and analysis stage. I thought the proposal stage was the most challenging with the literature review. The analysis stage was the most interesting as all the hospital department leaders provided different and similar insights. Throughout the analysis stage, it was crucial for me to eliminate personal bias based on past experiences to increase the reliability and validity of my findings.

Since I was the data collection instrument for this study, I was faced with the challenge of not allowing my personal biases impact the results of the research. I made sure to stick to my interview protocol and not go off the script to potentially persuade the participants one way or another so that it would not impact the results of my study. I provided the same opportunity for hospital department managers to participate in the

study, asked the approved interview questions in the same order, and ensured that the findings were from the participants only.

During the data collection process, creating a healthy researcher-participant relationship was key to the participants understanding that communication was key in setting up the interview times and member checking. The participants were attentive and enthusiastic about sharing their good and bad experiences which exemplified the need to research this business problem. I uncovered that qualitative interviews allowed me to gain a deeper yet broaden understanding of the research problem. Since there are so many different variables to employee engagement, I can see why leaders must continue to learn and adapt to what their employees need to remain engaged in the work environment.

Conclusion

The findings from this case study uncovered that leaders in the healthcare industry could influence employee engagement by using open communication, empowering employee decision making, and relationship development. Based on the participants' experiences, hospital department leaders should implement these strategies into their leadership style. When organizations have employees that are disengaged within their work role, they must adjust their behavioral leadership strategies to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement. I recommend that hospital department managers and scholars use these findings and recommendations of this study to gain insights on new behavioral leadership strategies.

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Appendix : Interview Protocol

What I(researcher will do)	What I (researcher) will say-- script
I will ask the participant what is one of their places to eat that they will feel comfortable conducting the interview.	Hello “participant A”, thank you for taking the time to participate in this study, where is your favorite place to eat you would feel comfortable meeting me to do the interview? The day of the interview: Today we will be discussing a few behavioral leadership strategies that you use to promote employee engagement. I have just a few questions, please relax, and know there is no right or wrong response. This is a conversation between professional. Please let me know if there is anything, I can do to make you more comfortable.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will watch for non-verbal queues • I will paraphrase as needed • I will ask follow-up probing questions to more in depth 	What behavioral leadership strategies do you use to promote an environment conducive to employee engagement?
	How do you know that your employees are engaged from those behavioral leadership strategies?
	What tools have you utilized to understand what type of behavioral leadership strategies fit your style?
	What have you done that has been the most effective in addressing challenges in promoting an environment conducive to employee engagement?
	What else would you like to share about establishing an environment conducive to employee engagement?
Wrap up the interview thanking participant	Thank you again for participating in the study. I appreciate your time and effort.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	There will be a follow up for you to review our discussion and make certain the transcript of our discussion has been annotated and transcribed correctly. I will reach out to you to schedule a goodtime to complete this process.