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Leadership Strategies for Improving Employee Engagement in the Multimodal Transportation Industry

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Michael Throgmorton

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Leadership Strategies for Improving Employee Engagement in the Multimodal

Transportation Industry

by

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MBA, Webster University, 2018

BS, University of Phoenix, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2023

Abstract

Low levels of employee engagement can impact productivity, profitability, and culture in the multimodal transportation industry. Leaders in the industry without leadership strategies to increase engagement can expect lower levels of productivity and higher levels of attrition. Grounded in transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore leadership strategies to increase employee engagement. The participants were eight directors or vice presidents from a large multimodal transportation company in the west-south-central United States. Data collection included semistructured interviews and a review of company training documents. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Five themes emerged: (a) experience, (b) understanding the individual, (c) motivation, (d) challenging teams intellectually, and (e) influencing team members. An important recommendation is for leaders to understand their followers' needs and to focus on their goal attainment. Implications for positive social change include the potential to increase business growth, improve income opportunities and spending behaviors, and strengthen local economies through tax revenues.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my wife and five daughters. The journey has been long, but they have supported me from beginning to end. Let this study be a reminder that limitations are placed on us by what we believe our limits to be. Find what you're passionate about and pursue it with all your heart. Success is reaching out to you; have the courage to reach back.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Engaged employees benefit their organizations because they are more productive, which increases profits. Engaged employees also tend to have increased longevity at their place of employment (Jena et al., 2018). Retained employees benefit from their intricate working knowledge that is not easy to pass down when training others (Swaroop & Sharma, 2022). In the transportation industry, recruiting is growing increasingly more difficult. The pressures of deadlines and negotiations contribute to a stressful environment. Leaders in the industry must use leadership strategies that increase employee engagement because disengaged employees cost companies as much as \$300–\$400 million a year (Bialowolski et al., 2020; Rashidin et al., 2020). According to Suhartanto and Brien (2018), strategies that drive employee engagement also increase productivity and reduce turnover. Disengaged employees can also impact organizations, from increased costs for training someone new to higher turnover rates, and may negatively affect organizational culture (Hejjas et al., 2018). The current study explored successful employee engagement strategies the multimodal transportation industry uses.

Background of the Problem

The competitive multimodal transportation industry's drivers include customer service, deadlines, and costs. The competitive nature of the business adds to the dynamic of a stressful day at work. Employee engagement is critical not only to the organization's success but also to the individual's success (Budriene & Diskiene, 2020). According to Budriene and Diskiene (2020), organizations with a higher level of employee engagement can be 3 times more profitable than organizations experiencing low levels of engagement.

Engaged employees drive innovation, strive to reach organizational goals, and uphold the culture of their surroundings (Mahmood et al., 2019). Researchers have studied employee engagement many times, presumably at the cost of hundreds of millions of dollars, to discover ways to increase employee engagement. Leading employees may be challenging, but leading employees to growth adds another dimension. Further information is needed to define successful leadership strategies for improving employee engagement to create an environment of enjoyment, productivity, and profitability.

Problem and Purpose

The specific business problem was that some leaders in large multimodal transportation organizations lack strategies to engage employees. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore leadership strategies some leaders in a large multimodal transportation organization use to engage employees. The study's targeted population was six to eight leaders in a large transportation organization located in the corporate headquarters in the west-south-central United States who had successfully implemented leadership strategies to engage employees. Implications for positive social change include increasing business growth, improving income opportunities and spending behaviors, and strengthening local economies by increasing and sustaining tax revenues.

Nature of the Study

There are three research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Strijker et al., 2020). I chose the qualitative method for this study. Qualitative researchers focus on visual and language-based data. These data are qualitative and nonnumerical and are not

converted into numerical values for purposes of quantitative analysis. In contrast, quantitative research includes numerical data for statistical examination of relationships between variables and hypothesis testing (Lo et al., 2020). Statistical analysis of variables' characteristics or relationships among variables was inappropriate for my study because I sought in-depth knowledge from personal interactions. The mixed-methods approach requires qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods to reach a conclusion (Gallant & Luthy, 2020). The mixed-methods approach was not appropriate for my study because I did not need to examine the variables' characteristics or relationships to address my study's purpose.

Founded in traditional inquiry methods, qualitative research designs, such as case study, phenomenology, narrative, and ethnography (Mykhalovskiy et al., 2018), are valid research designs. I selected a single qualitative case study design for this study. According to R. K. Yin (2018), a case study is a social science research strategy used to probe current circumstances applied to real-world conditions. I selected a single case study to collect data from a multimodal transportation organization. I chose this case because of R. K. Yin's third rationale for single-case studies: capturing everyday circumstances and their lessons. A multiple case study would not have been appropriate because it involves collecting data from multiple organizations. Also, only one organization of this size in the United States uses multimodal transportation with assets including intermodal. I elected to use the corporate office as the single location for the single case study. Phenomenological researchers focus on the personal meanings of lived experiences (A. C. Kilinc et al., 2020). In this study, I focused on strategies, not lived

experiences. The data collection came from the leadership's experiences and perspective, not from those affected by the strategy; therefore, the phenomenological design did not apply. A narrative design encompasses an individual's interpretation of historical experiences through personal stories (Lewis, 2015). Therefore, a narrative method did not fit my study. Ethnographic researchers study a culture or social group and observe behavior patterns (Ross et al., 2016). The current study did not address a culture or social group; the study's aim was to explore successful leadership strategies in a professional environment, not a group's culture.

Research Question

What leadership strategies do leaders in large multimodal transportation organizations use to engage employees?

Interview Questions

1. What successful leadership strategies did you implement to increase employee engagement?
2. How did you develop your leadership strategies to encompass employee engagement?
3. How do you think leadership style affects employee engagement?
4. How do you measure the success of your leadership strategies?
5. What principal obstacles did you encounter when implementing your strategies?
6. How do you address the principal obstacles to implementing leadership strategies for employee engagement?

7. What is a leader's role in getting employees engaged or increasing engagement?
8. What are some benefits you have seen from your experiences successfully implementing employee engagement strategies?
9. What other information can you share about your organization's strategies to increase employee engagement?

Conceptual Framework

For this study, the conceptual framework I chose was Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory. According to Burns, transformational leadership is a defining employee engagement and development mechanism. Bass (1985) identified a link between motivation and the importance of a relationship between leader and follower. Transformational leadership's defining behaviors are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

According to Bass (1985), idealized influence is a leader's ability to gain trust and promote acceptance and respect by influencing individuals with charisma. Inspirational motivation is a leader's ability to create motivation and inspire employees to accept and accomplish individual and organizational goals. Inspired individuals may feel empowered to exude needed behaviors for personal and organizational achievements (Sivarat et al., 2021). Intellectual stimulation is a leader's support for fostering and increasing an employee's ability to take the initiative and stimulate creativity in the workplace. Intellectual stimulation also invites a follower to become a critical thinker and develop the ability to think through complex assignments. Intellectual stimulation also fosters an

environment of autonomy and gives followers the confidence to address complicated matters (Thuan, 2020). Individualized consideration is a leader's ability to recognize the needs of individuals and promote individual development with performance initiatives and action plans based on the individuals' known needs (Bakker et al., 2022).

Transformational leadership helps develop followers in a manner that allows individual and organizational growth. Transformational leaders challenge team members to reach and exceed goals, engaging them and increasing their commitment (Rawashdeh et al., 2021). I selected the transformational leadership theory to enable me to identify and understand the strategies the participating organization's leaders used to increase employee engagement. I viewed this study through the lens of transformational leadership aligned with path-goal theory.

Operational Definitions

This section includes definitions of terms used in this study. These terms may have an ordinary meaning, but the descriptions presented represent the intended interpretation for the context of this study.

Employee attrition: Employee attrition is a reduction in human resources as effected by termination, resignation, or death (Krishna & Sidharth, 2022).

Employee engagement: As defined by Kahn (1990), employee engagement connects from an ardent, cerebral, and physical perspective to elevate performance in a working environment.

Employee retention: Employee retention is maintaining employees over an extended period (James & Mathew, 2012).

Leader-member exchange theory: Leader-member exchange theory focuses on relationships between leaders and followers and uses three stages: role taking, role making, and routinization. The leader sorts the teams into in-groups and out-groups (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Path-goal leadership theory: The path-goal leadership theory consists of four leadership styles: (a) directive leadership, (b) supportive leadership, (c) participatory leadership, and (d) achievement-oriented leadership (Boone, 2019). Path-goal leadership is a leadership style by which leaders guide followers to accomplish specific goals.

Situational leadership style: Situational leadership comprises four aspects, telling, selling, participating, and delegating, and uses two facets for success: tasks and relationships (H. Munir & Akhter, 2021).

Transactional leadership style: Transactional leadership depends on two aspects: contingent reward and management by exception. Leaders define requirements and award individuals according to performance (Sivarat et al., 2021).

Transformational leadership style: Transformational leadership results in followers transforming related to experience with particular leaders utilizing specific attributes to help followers grow and become a more significant part of the team (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020).

Turnover intent: According to Mobley et al. (1978), turnover intentions include an employee's thoughts or intentions of finding employment outside of the current workplace.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The following section includes definitions and descriptions of this study's assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. These are important to know because each helps to clarify the study's boundaries and the areas outside of my control as the researcher.

Assumptions

Assumptions are outside a researcher's control but are included in a study and are essential to the study's parameters (Grant et al., 2018). According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2018), assumptions are claims researchers take for granted, such as obtaining honest and unbiased participant feedback. In the current study, I assumed all interview participants would provide honest feedback during the interviews and that the sample population would be qualified to provide pertinent information regarding successful leadership strategies to reduce employee turnover. I also assumed that all information contained in reports and documentation was reliable.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses in the study that could affect the results (Greener, 2018). Limitations are the shortcomings of the information provided that could lead to additional studies to advance the unanswered questions generated by the study (Greener, 2018). Limitations are beyond the researcher's control (Marshall & Rossman, 2016)

One limitation of the current study was that participants may have been subjective in their responses and may have exaggerated results because they had knowledge of the interview questions before the interview. Each participant may have had different levels

of success with leadership strategies. Another limitation was that the qualitative data collected were from one company in the west-south-central United States. The data and results are not generalizable and not applicable broadly to other organizations in the industry. Lastly, the information collected depended on the interpretation of the interviewee.

Delimitations

Researcher-controlled boundaries or restricted study confines are called delimitations (Qui & Gullett, 2017). A common delimitation of a study is the focus and scope of the research problem. In many instances, the results may not reflect the responses of others in similar organizations (Qui & Gullett, 2017). My focus was on leaders who had used successful strategies to engage employees. Therefore, strategies that failed were not part of the study. Another delimitation of my research involved the participant demographics limited to one large multimodal transportation company in the west-south-central United States. I also chose to restrict my participants to a level of authority with more than four direct reports and teams of 20 or more.

Significance of the Study

Multimodal transportation is the transportation of goods using two or more modes (UNECE, 2009). There may be many challenges involved in transportation because it is a dynamic industry with many interrelated parts. In organizations lacking leadership strategies to engage employees, turnover is typically high, and productivity loss is usually substantial (Holten et al., 2018). The current study's purpose was to understand the leadership strategies the participating organization used to engage employees to increase

performance. When successful leadership strategies are understood, the strategies may become implementable or adaptable across a more comprehensive collection of teams to increase engagement on a broader scale for the benefit of organizations, employees, and communities.

Contribution to Business Practice

Employee engagement is a factor in predicting an organization's performance (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). The results of the current study could help leaders understand how to engage employees to drive results. Understanding leadership strategies for employee engagement may help leaders increase engagement by empowering and enabling employees. An engaged employee typically acts more responsibly than a disengaged employee (Swaroop & Sharma, 2022). Engaged employees are more creative, empowered, and enabled (Mahmood et al., 2019). As employee engagement increases, organizational performance typically increases, leading to success for employees and organizations (Jena et al., 2018).

Implications for Social Change

Increasing productivity may lead to increased organizational success. Success can enable organizations to increase hiring, providing more opportunities for community members to increase their means and spend more money at local businesses. As organizations grow and gain market share, the need for additional employees arises. Additionally, successful companies may create more revenue for local governments, creating more opportunities for increased benefits to citizens of local communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this case study was to explore leadership strategies for improving employee engagement in the multimodal transportation industry. Exploratory interviews occurred at the director and vice-president levels at a sizeable multimodal transportation company in the west-south-central United States. I sought to discover successful leadership strategies that increase employee engagement.

I completed an exhaustive search for peer-reviewed academic and professional literature related to this research topic. I searched the following databases to find relevant literature for this review: ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text, ProQuest Central, PsycINFO, Science Direct, ABI/INFORM Complete, EBSCO Host, Emerald Management, Sage PREMIER, Academic Search Complete, Emerald Management Journals, Business Source Complete, Dissertations and Theses at Walden University, and Google Scholar. The search focused on peer-reviewed articles and studies published within the last 5 years. The keywords and phrases used to set the search parameters for academic and professional literature in this study were *leadership*, *leadership styles*, *leadership theories*, *transformational leadership*, *path-goal theory*, *leader-member exchange*, *transactional leadership*, *intellectual stimulation*, *individualized consideration*, *inspirational motivation*, and *idealized influence*. My research focused on articles highlighting the value of leadership styles, theories, and differences. My research also focused on how transformational leadership variables impact path-goal theory and Vroom's theory of expectation. Table 1 provides the breakdown of sources used in the study.

Table 1*Synopsis of Sources in the Literature Review*

Reference type	< 5 years	> 5 years	Total
Books	3	3	6
Peer-reviewed articles and studies	98	14	112
Non-peer-reviewed-articles	0	0	0
Total	101	17	118

Leadership guides in many ways to ensure teams and individuals achieve organizational goals. The essence of leadership is inspiring and influencing followers and getting them headed toward organizational success (Bakker et al., 2022). The competencies of corporate leaders could be crucial to developing a competitive advantage (Surucu et al., 2021). The leadership style of an organization can be one of the critical pieces of motivation to entice employees to produce their best work with the highest speed and accuracy. According to Gandolfi and Stone (2018), there are many leaders and leadership styles, but one thing widely agreed upon is that leadership is necessary. It is also widely accepted that good leadership not only contributes to the success of an organization but also is the driving force behind the organization's success. Razak et al. (2022) stated that the leader's style influences nearly 25% of workers' performance. Two important leadership concepts, transformational and transactional, are examples of leadership styles intent on influencing followers (Holten et al., 2018). According to Jensen et al. (2019), a need exists to improve leadership strategies to increase organizational success.

Many indicators demonstrate that transformational and transactional leadership styles may produce results. Transformational leadership is the most researched theory in public and private practice business. Jensen et al. (2019) stated that transactional leadership works with pecuniary or nonpecuniary rewards. Transformational leadership is a long-term investment in the employee by the leader to develop the employee to be more successful. The potential to improve organizational performance is the goal and value of providing leadership training (Jacobsen et al., 2022). Leadership skills and expertise held by a leader are critical to an organization's ability to reach its goals and achieve its mission.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership has often been researched and touted as the best leadership style for developing employees. According to Nam and Park (2019), increased interaction with leadership, specifically transformational leadership, reduces turnover intent. Transformational leadership is the direct interaction between leader and follower, with the follower's development being the outcome of the interaction. Transformational leadership attracts business firms because it can produce high-level performers to reach higher level goals (Rawashdeh et al., 2021). Cultural intelligence is significant in the development of individuals, and transformational leadership affects the transformation of thoughts and processes by leading people in the most effective way (Nam & Park, 2019). Leaders have options in how they choose to lead.

Transformational leadership, introduced by Burns in 1978, gave insight into the leader and follower relationship. Burns segmented the theory into four categories,

commonly known as the four I's: intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and individual consideration. Researchers have studied transformational leadership in-depth to understand its impact on many aspects of a business. According to Jha and Malviya (2017), transformational leadership helps followers derive empowerment and support and aids development. The transformational leadership model facilitates followers in realizing organizational vision and aids in achieving organizational goals (Muthimi et al., 2021). Transformational leadership increases employees' responsibility inside and outside of the dedicated role (Buil et al., 2019). Employee interpretation of leadership styles will vary.

An employee's interpretation of leadership may determine the effectiveness of the leader. Many experts agree that there is a connection between leadership styles and increased employee engagement, producing positive outcomes (Drzewieck & Roczniowska, 2018; Putri, 2018). According to Zhu et al. (2018), employees evaluate and interpret leadership styles for compatibility with their beliefs and values, which they consider essential. Employee evaluation of leadership may be critical to developing the leader relationship. The best leaders enable transformational and transactional leadership traits (Bass, 1999; Jia et al., 2018). Innovative behavior requires employees to take risks. Transformational leaders know innovation involves risk and provide the support followers need to feel empowered to take those risks to be more creative and successful (Surucu et al., 2021). Business moves so quickly today that an organization must be innovative, or they may be left behind.

Innovation is vital to the survival of organizations today. Employee innovation is critical in developing organizations at every level (Ge & Sun, 2020). When employees are innovative, it can have a sizeable impact on their level of engagement.

Transformational leaders may be the key to increasing employee creativity and innovation by fostering behaviors that create an open thought process. According to Curtis (2018), transformational leadership is the most effective leadership style for active focus on behavior because hard skills are easier to teach. Transformational leaders can also help followers develop soft skills such as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. A leader's responsibility is to create a positive environment as often as possible.

A transformational leader can elevate goals, thereby allowing the leader to encourage autonomy among followers and create a level of ownership that drives engagement and increased positivity. When a leader can drive positivity within a working environment, they may also generate higher levels of engagement. Xu et al. (2021) found that transformational leadership as a mediator of positive work reflection depends on the cognitive appraisal theory. Knowing that transformational leadership affects people differently helps define the mediating aspect of transformational leadership on a positive work reflection. Researchers also noted that trait mindfulness, as drawn from the cognitive appraisal theory, can affect a positive or negative work reflection (Xu et al., 2021). An emotional assessment of experiences within an environment will differ from person to person; transformational leadership affects employees differently.

Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation may allow employees to increase their capacity for critical thinking and managing their responsibilities to achieve a better outcome. Intellectual stimulation also invites a follower to become a critical thinker and develop the ability to think through complex assignments (Thuan, 2020). Intellectual stimulation in the workplace serves individuals and teams alike, increasing responsiveness and positively affecting individuals and teams (Sanchez-Cardona et al., 2018). When a leader increases the ability of a follower to think critically and be a better problem solver, the follower learns to work autonomously and becomes more creative. The ability to think critically may be the difference in the success or failure of a business today because it can lead to a creative environment.

Creativity can stimulate innovation. Intellectual stimulation is a leader's support for fostering and expanding an employee's ability to take the initiative and stimulate creativity in the workplace (Hughes et al., 2018). Intellectual stimulation refers to a leader's ability to challenge followers to take risks, be creative, and challenge preexisting assumptions (Gao et al., 2020). Farahnak et al. (2020) noted that intellectual stimulation encourages employees to consider new ways of doing things, helping to create efficiencies through innovative processes. Intellectual stimulation also fosters an environment of autonomy and gives followers confidence to proceed in complicated matters, become risk-takers, and produce creative work (Sahu et al., 2018).

Creativity is at work in many aspects of a business, including gaining or keeping a competitive advantage. Golden and Shriner (2019) stated that creativity is part of

innovation, and innovative organizations can maintain a competitive advantage over noninnovative competitors. When employees are creative, they can invest human capital in what they do and take ownership. When employees take ownership, they begin to grow and increase productivity; as individuals grow and become more significant contributors, the entire team benefits.

The contribution at the team level can provide a more dynamic and creative atmosphere than individual contributors. According to Shafi et al. (2020), intellectual stimulation is essential in developing a team member's innovation ability. Sanchez-Cardona et al. (2018) indicated that intellectual stimulation helps individuals learn and creates an inspiring learning environment within a team setting. Hughes et al. (2018) also noted that teams working under intellectual stimulation showed higher creativity and performance. Intellectual stimulation is more than creativity and performance. It also gives followers confidence in offering opposite opinions.

Employees want to feel safe at work and know that what they say will be taken seriously. Intellectual stimulation conveys to followers that it is a safe environment to challenge the status quo and express differing opinions and thoughts without fear of ridicule or negative consequences (J. Yin et al., 2020). The confidence a follower builds by having the ability to push back or redefine an idea may encourage them to become more of a leader among their peers. Gilbert and Kelloway (2018) stated that transformational leaders use intellectual stimulation to challenge followers to look at old problems from new angles to form new ideas. Developing problem-solving skills is critical to the development of individuals and teams. Although intellectual stimulation

plays a significant role in an individual's development, inspirational motivation is also essential to the transformational leadership style.

Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation is a leader's ability to motivate and inspire employees to accept and accomplish individual and organizational goals. The leader will also maintain a vision for the future (Haleem et al., 2018). Sivarat et al. (2021) stated that inspirational motivation can help leaders motivate followers to achieve individual short-term goals. Inspired individuals may feel empowered to exude needed behaviors for personal and organizational achievements. Many studies indicated how individuals affect career adaptability as a psychosocial construct. However, there was limited information about inspirational motivation as an influencer on career adaptability. According to Langat et al. (2019), three components worthy of investigation are communication, teamwork, and motivation as a component of transformational leadership. Communication is vital to the success of a business.

Theoretical and empirical evidence indicated that leadership can impact the emergence of communication as a tool of inspirational motivation. Dissemination of information through direct contact in strategically organized briefings and leader-implemented communication increases leaders' ability to motivate their followers by providing relevant, timely, and essential information (Boies & Fiset, 2018). The communication needs to be relevant, concise, and complete. As individuals become motivated, their motivation may spill over into the team to inspire a greater sense of teamwork.

Leader-directed communication via huddling may increase a team's ability to perform at a higher level. Inspirational motivation may be as critical in team development as in individual development. The leader's involvement is relevant and presents the leader with an image of being involved, caring, and available to help (Aase et al., 2021). The third component, motivation, is a critical factor when breaking down the three parts of inspirational motivation defined by Langat et al. (2019). Many things contribute to motivation, but leadership contribution is the greatest.

Motivation is one of the four components of transformational leadership. According to Sivarat et al. (2021), leaders motivate followers to perform and meet objectives by building confidence and belief in the mission. Inspirational motivation may encourage followers to believe in their leader, develop the confidence to share learnings, and help the team grow, thereby creating a more robust, unified result. According to Muthimi et al. (2021), inspirational motivation is prominent in innovative organizations and drives outcomes. Leaders use inspirational motivation to inspire followers with an appealing and compelling vision (Schuesslbauer et al., 2018). Transformational leaders put more power in the hands of their employees.

Idealized Influence

An essential characteristic of leaders is being able to lead by example. The relationship between leader and employee is critical in forming the employee's commitment to varying cultural aspects (Afshari, 2022). According to Rais and Rubini (2022), idealized influence, the element of the leader taking a role-model approach to lead, is ranked as the number one way to increase creativity in teachers. Breevaart and

Bakker (2018) stated that leaders who represent themselves as role models create positive relationships with their team members. Idealized influence may be one of the most significant pieces of transformational leadership. According to Siti et al. (2020), idealized influence has a dominant and affirmative effect on an employee's innovation ability. Idealized influence incorporates a charismatic leader demonstrating their strength and tenacity in achieving organizational goals, portraying the example of the leader-follower connection necessary for idealized influence to succeed.

When employees feel like their work is valued and receive encouragement for that value, it can increase their level of engagement. Transformational leaders appeal to the follower's sense of purpose and provide an environment of encouragement and positive reinforcement to give meaning to the employee's work contributions (Afshari, 2022). In doing so, leaders may influence their followers to work at an increased level. Transformational leaders influence team members' behaviors and viewpoints to accomplish the organization's mission or goal (Martins Abelha et al., 2018). Leaders who exhibit idealized influence or role models portray confidence and power to their followers to ensure their problem-solving attempts (Khan et al., 2022). Leaders can use idealized influence to encourage and guide their teams; moreover, transformational leaders exhibit charismatic traits to promote the interaction of the leader-follower relationship.

Charismatic leaders can influence their teams to guide them toward the organization's mission and goals. Mbindyo et al. (2021) indicated that idealized influence plays a substantial role in advising and that transformational leaders are held in high regard and looked up to as role models. Idealized influence is critical to developing trust

and respect and relaying a clear vision in the advisor and advisee relationship. The importance of a professional bond between leader and follower may experience a level of difference according to the leader's ability to use idealized influence in helping followers develop.

Individualized Consideration

Transformational leaders interact with team members and understand their strengths. Individual consideration is a leader providing support with frequent interaction and allowing followers to use their skills and abilities to succeed (Bakker et al., 2022). Teymournejad and Elghaei (2017) noted that leaders must be able to develop individuals in ways unique to each individual. Therefore, individualized consideration can apply to leading each team member differently as they are individuals and require different approaches to help hone their current skills and develop new skills. Individualized consideration is the process leaders use to discover and illuminate the needs of followers, including two-way communication and frequent one-on-one meetings to determine the level of involvement needed by the leader (Bakker et al., 2022). In addition, it helps the follower visualize, stabilize, and verbalize a clear vision or pathway to meet the organizational goals and professional development plans (Sivarat et al., 2021). As team members believe in leaders and the bond becomes trusted, growth and success can follow quickly. Individualized consideration may carry more than one meaning or helpful designation. According to Oswald et al. (2022), individualized consideration has a different context when applied in various organizational settings. For example, in the construction industry, it is more important for construction workers to understand their

well-being than for leaders to understand their skills. Transformational leaders may use individualized consideration to help followers develop according to their strengths.

As leaders incorporate all four elements of transformational leadership: intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and individualized consideration, individuals may grow and take ownership of their business and organically increase employee engagement. Scholars argue that an engaged employee is likelier to produce more work with higher quality than a disengaged employee. One might say that it is the leader's responsibility to ensure employees are engaged and working at their maximum potential for the betterment of the organization.

Employee Engagement

Employees who are not engaged can cost the workforce millions. Jena et al. (2018) opined that today's business environment is more robust, demanding, and competitive than ever. Engaged employees tend to have increased longevity within organizations (Milhem et al., 2019). James and Mathew (2012) explain that employee retention is maintaining employees over an extended period. The success and failure of many organizations depend profoundly on employees, and the level of employee engagement is one of the most critical indicators to measure an organization's workforce and predict its success or failure (Ismail et al., 2021). As organizations work to find better ways to engage employees to produce healthier work environments, they learn to adjust to different organizational cultures and expectations (Risley, 2020). Employee engagement and performance have many predictors, and it is essential to note that employee engagement is a valuable aspect of strengthening an organization.

Employee engagement affects many aspects of an organization. Researchers indicate that organizations are three times more profitable when employee engagement is high than similar companies with a low level of engagement (Budriene & Diskiene, 2020). Developing employees may contribute to a higher level of employee engagement. Employee engagement is affected by personality and job satisfaction (Linggiallo et al., 2021). According to Rodrigues da Costa and Maria Correia Loureiro (2019), happier employees are more engaged and committed and take a deeper level of ownership in their jobs. They are also happier when recognized for their efforts and driven to work better and contribute more. An engaged employee may take their work to the next level based on the challenge, tasks, and being results-driven.

Employee engagement can refer to the level at which employees take ownership of their responsibilities and contribute to the overall success of the individual, team, and organization. Edelbroek et al. (2019) stated that employees are not afraid to take ownership and become more innovative when they feel empowered. An empowered employee might feel more confident and, therefore, more engaged. According to Matthews (2018), a proactive approach to employee engagement requires leadership involvement to create consistency. Tucker (2020) argued that engaged employees are more committed to organizational goals than disengaged employees. According to Hultman (2020), employees not used optimally can become disengaged. Some employees are naturally involved, and others need help from leadership to become engaged. When employees favor their leaders, they tend to be more loyal and committed and do not seek

to leave in search of employment elsewhere (Book et al., 2019). Transformational leaders play a vital role in employee engagement.

Transformational leadership, as a whole, is a vital tool. Transformational leaders may develop team members to increase engagement and add value to member performance. Identifying situational environments that increase work engagement is crucial for long-term sustainability and growth (Budriene & Diskiene, 2020). The sustainability and development of an organization can be affected by employee tenure.

Organizations may need to increase the longevity of employees as it could help improve every aspect of meeting organizational goals. Yamin (2020) stated that increasing employee retention increases competitive advantage. As employees increase tenure, they increase knowledge, and innovation becomes a natural outcome. When companies are innovative, they can gain, keep, or improve their competitive advantage. As individuals become more engaged, their work quality increases and turnover intent decreases (Sahu et al., 2018).

There are several avenues organizations can take to increase employee engagement, thereby increasing retention. Employee engagement might be the most significant reason employees remain with organizations for extended periods. Krishna and Sidharth (2022) state that employee attrition is a reality of business, which is prominent, causing companies to spend additional money training new employees. Additionally, talent development and management may play a vital role in employee engagement and retention.

Talent management can help organizations decrease turnover by training and developing people, increasing promotion rates, and encouraging a culture of success. Pandita and Ray (2018) stated that talent management is synchronous with increasing employee engagement and reducing employee turnover. Talent management may play a role by ensuring the right people gain tools for career paths suitable to their talents, wants, and needs. Pandita and Ray (2018) also argued that employee engagement is a primary determining factor in employee intent to leave. Keeping employees engaged can increase the likelihood of keeping them employed longer. Sun and Wang (2017) said that employees become more engaged and less likely to leave when they find greater job satisfaction. Training employees may increase engagement and also continue to help develop their strengths.

Combining employee strengths and work engagement helps employees become more innovative as they are more intimate in their roles. Ge and Sun (2020) found that strengths alone enhance employees' creativity and innovation ability. Witasari and Gustomo (2020) argued that strengthening organizations by developing people provides a positive return over the long haul as it increases longevity and keeps knowledge within the company. Employee innovation is critical in the development of organizations at every level. Ge and Sun (2020) also stated that engaged employees help organizations increase activity within the walls of the business units to help innovate and keep the company moving forward. The relationship between the learning environment and employee engagement is vital and promotes a higher level of engagement resulting from organizational education, among other offerings (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). There are many

aspects of employee engagement, and all are critical, including the leader-follower relationship.

Perhaps the most critical piece of the leader-follower relationship is trust. Trust in leadership is paramount to developing a subordinate employee (Engelbrecht & Samuel, 2019). When employees trust their leader, they are willing to perform at a higher level. However, when a leader trusts a subordinate, the leader can give the subordinate more responsibility. Team members may grow and develop faster when trusted in a more independent environment. Sun and Wang (2017) declare transformational leadership positively affects turnover intent as it helps develop and engage employees. According to Kahn (1990), turnover rates are reduced by engaged employees because they are less likely to leave an organization when they have leadership who increases employee security by enhancing meaningfulness, safety, and being available. Personal engagement and disengagement define employees' psychological characteristics. Culture is essential in creating personal engagement.

Personal Engagement

Transformational leadership does affect organizational culture, which, in turn, affects organizational citizenship behavior. According to Ratya et al. (2020), transformational leadership and its effect on organizational culture and job satisfaction can be profound when leaders provide foundational support objectively. As expected, organizational culture represents a significant relationship between employee and work satisfaction. Transformational leadership may positively impact culture and citizenship to help encourage a higher level of employee engagement. Sahu et al. (2018) stated that

employees feel most aligned with their organization when its morals and beliefs match the individuals. Culture is essential in organizations, and employees should emphasize the company culture.

As one might expect, values are something individuals hold in high regard, and matching said values in the workplace might create a higher level of engagement. Tong et al. (2019) explored the relationship between corporate social responsibility and employee creativity related to employee engagement. Tong et al. (2019) stated that employee creativity grew when the perception of corporate social responsibility increased. When employees perceive their organizations as more socially responsible, they tend to take more interest and work at a higher, more engaged level, ultimately helping develop a more reliable, stable company. Siangchokyoo et al. (2020) posit employees attempt to align internal beliefs with how a company or organization represents itself.

Transformational leaders help followers develop in a manner that holds to those beliefs yet focuses on the organization's mission. Tong et al. (2019) argued that employees are related to how others perceive their organizations, and organizations can invest in communities to increase employee engagement. The engagement level may also indicate an employee's desire to pursue promotion.

Promotion at work can also increase one's engagement. Hakanen et al. (2018) insisted that work engagement is a strong predictor of choosing future jobs for employees' well-being and satisfaction. Alignment such as this may indicate an individual's appreciation for work as much as pleasure. According to Kim and Beehr (2020), leaders can help employees find an enriching life at home and work. Leaders may

directly impact an employee's home life, which helps increase productivity during the employee's time at work, helping to increase employee engagement. The ability of a leader to affect a subordinate's home life is a profound responsibility, as that effect can be either positive or negative (Kim & Beehr, 2020). There is more to transformational leadership than leading with a directional appointment. It impacts subordinates psychologically, creates work efficiencies, and increases employee engagement (Pasha & Ur Rehman, 2020). Psychological empowerment can lead to greater job satisfaction and better employee performance.

Disengaged Employees

Disengaged employees are costly and can hinder the forward progression of an organization. Rashidin et al. (2020) posit that a limited amount of disengagement appears in about half of the American labor force, resulting in a \$400 billion annual loss in worker output. According to H. Sharma and Goyal (2022), in human resources specifically, only about 39% of employees worldwide are engaged in their work. Today's business world is cut-throat, and the competition for talent is intense.

Human resources, aptly named for caring for and recruiting the workforce, is also a consistent and significant contributor to employee engagement. According to Presbitero (2017), two HRM practices of improving reward management and talent development contribute to employee engagement on many levels. Disengaged employees can lead to lower productivity levels, causing lower profitability. Likely, employees who feel safe and connected to leadership and human resources will have a higher level of engagement as it provides a blanket of safety contrary, unlike an employee who feels disconnected.

Disengaged employees who feel disconnected from their supervisors may interpret that as having no support. Many studies have shown that employees are far more engaged when leaders and followers are connected. There is a direct link between the connection of the leader and follower to transformational leadership and the leader-follower interaction.

Disengaged employees can also spread negativity through a team and organization, possibly causing other employees to lose sight of their goals and reduce productivity among co-workers. A decrease in employee engagement proves detrimental to organizations because it affects employees' performance (Ahmed et al., 2018; Harris & He, 2019) and the level of their organizational commitment (W. Kim et al., 2017). Performance and organizational commitment may be two critical factors in the longevity of employees.

Disengaged employees can impact more than just productivity. According to Nienaber and Martins (2020), employee engagement can affect the success of strategy implementation and organizational effectiveness. The lack of drive in a disengaged employee can have a very negative impact on them personally and professionally.

Path-Goal Theory

Previous studies indicate that leaders should let the follower dictate the leadership style used. Path-goal leadership could be a valid leadership theory at many levels. At the organization level, the company is responsible for developing talented people. For the employees themselves, the development lies directly within their commitment to achieve through effort and guidance. Kim and Beehr (2020) stated that managers look beyond

performance and emphasize satisfaction and commitment to the team. According to Saleem et al. (2021), the primary purpose of path-goal theory is to remove any obstacles that might impede an employee's ability to work. D. Sharma et al. (2021) suggest that path-goal leadership theory emphasizes the transactions between the leader and follower; the higher the quality, the better the outcome. The foundation of the path-goal theory may be related to how leaders inspire performance, motivation, and satisfaction for employees by giving concise direction for reaching goals with correlated rewards.

Robert House introduced the path-goal theory in 1971. Path goal theory is a leadership style by which leaders guide followers to accomplish specific goals (House, 1971). According to Vieira et al. (2018), the path-goal theory indicates that leaders encourage followers to choose the most equitable path for reaching their goals. For individuals and teams to achieve organizational goals, leaders must be willing to use the most effective leadership style to gain the most from their followers. As the leader and follower work together to design the path to the goal, the leader will help remove roadblocks while the follower makes the necessary moves to be successful.

Path goal theory helps individuals reach goals related to the effort put forth. Raza and Nadeem (2018) stated that it is essential to reward for performance-related reasons and reward for employee engagement as it is a predictor of increased employee satisfaction. In short, the path-goal theory is a model a leader can use to lead and develop followers to promote them to the next level (House & Mitchell, 1971). The path-goal leadership theory consists of four leadership styles: (a) directive leadership, (b) supportive leadership, (c) participatory leadership, and (d) achievement-oriented

leadership (Boone, 2019). Each style serves a different purpose and makes up the whole of the Path goal theory.

Directive Leadership

Directive leadership may be similar to transactional leadership in part. According to Olowoselu et al. (2019), behaviors demonstrated under directive leadership include giving instructions on completing the task, gaining alignment on the due date with the employee, and ensuring all performance expectations are understood. Directive leadership might benefit employees who need structure and perform detailed or complex tasks. Lahiri et al. (2021) stated that for directive leadership to work, there needs to be a strong relationship between leader and follower. Contrary to directive leadership is supportive leadership.

Supportive Leadership

Supportive leadership might be more like the transformational leadership style, specifically individualized consideration. Rana et al. (2019) posit that an approachable and amicable leader represents a supportive leadership style. Supportive leadership may also be effective in areas where tasks are simple and less time-consuming. Saleem et al. (2021) stated that supportive leadership assists followers in reaching their goals by providing employees with the support needed. These supportive leaders create an enjoyable and respectful work environment where employees can focus on their work and proceed as required. Supportive leaders give the employee control and authority over the work, creating a more engaged employee (Rana et al., 2019.) Supportive leadership can

contribute to greater job satisfaction (Lahiri et al., 2021). Similar to supportive leadership, in that the leader trusts team members, is participative leadership.

Participative Leadership

Team members may become more involved and engaged when leaders trust them enough to ask for advice. According to Northouse (2021), participative leadership is advantageous when leaders request suggestions from skilled team members who can take on more responsibility. Participative leadership can also increase the natural value of the work of team members with a high need for achievement, thereby increasing job satisfaction and employee engagement. Saleem et al. (2021) research showed that participative leadership used by school principals increased teachers' KPIs positively. The increase was minimal, but the study was not exhaustive. The research also showed teachers exhibited higher satisfaction with their job performance when principals used participative leadership. Participative leadership might be closely related to the intellectual stimulation aspect of transformational leadership as the leader challenges the team to provide feedback or ideas. This particular leadership style might be most effective in an environment with trained, skilled workers who are engaged and understand their roles in depth.

Achievement-Oriented Leadership

Understanding the relationship between achievement and reward is not tricky. Employees like receiving rewards for their efforts and accomplishments. Rana et al. (2019) proclaimed that setting goals leads to higher productivity. In recent years, organizations have encouraged employees to develop personal and professional goals to

aid in their development. Rana et al. (2019) also warn that goal-oriented leadership can lead to emotional distress in subordinates with low emotional stability or strength. There is a dark side to achievement-oriented leadership. A leader driven to succeed might push subordinates too hard for increased production. Leaders need to understand team members and know their limits. Achievement-oriented leadership style may work best when the leader consistently sets goals, and the goals are understood. Directive and achievement-oriented leadership might work well together to increase productivity, accuracy, and employee engagement. The downside is that it is a lot of work for the leader as they are essentially micromanaging to ensure employees reach their goals.

Path-goal theory and Vroom's Expectancy theory share similarities in that followers are motivated by the expectation of performance rewards. Higher motivation results are directly associated with increased performance. Path-goal may be similar in that performance is a means to achieving goals.

Path-goal theory is similar to transformational leadership as each of the four aspects of leadership within Path-goal theory links to the four elements of transformational leadership. So far, in this section, I have defined the four leadership styles within path-goal theory: directive leadership, supportive leadership, participative leadership, and achievement-oriented leadership. Beyond those four leadership styles are two characteristics: follower and task characteristics.

The characteristics of the path-goal theory are both followers related. According to Northouse (2021), follower characteristics refer to followers interpreting leader behaviors. Research has focused on the need for affiliation, which works well with

supportive leadership; preference for structure blends well with directive leadership; desire for control works well with participative and directive leadership styles; and perception of one's task ability works well with directive leadership (Northouse, 2021).

Task characteristic is impactful to how leaders influence the motivation of their followers. Northouse (2021) stated the task characteristic consists of three parts: the design of followers' tasks, the formal authority system, and the primary work group of the followers. These three subtopics combined can impact follower motivation. As followers recognize structured tasks with a formal system of authority, the group's makeup can effectively lead people and create motivation.

Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation

Individual motivation can be critical to the success of an employee. Victor Vroom's expectancy theory describes the motivational push behind behavior-driven actions as a function of three significant components: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence (Komal, 2019). According to Vroom (1964), the basis for employee performance is individual factors such as skills, knowledge, personality, experience, and abilities. A subset of two factors can contribute to motivation as a driver of motivation. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors drive employees at different levels for different reasons. Niloofar et al. (2020) described intrinsic as being connected or feeling like one belongs and extrinsic as being an outsider and not related to the work. According to Monday (2020), expectancy correlates effort to reward. Instrumentality is a dual-level choice. Action leads to performance, whether high or low, and performance leads to the reward or outcome related to the level of performance. Valence refers to choosing one outcome

over another (Monday, 2020). According to Monday (2020), the analysis of Vroom's theory follows a specific formula of $\text{Motivation} = \text{Valence} \times \text{Expectancy} \times \text{Instrumentality}$. The preceding formula is an indicator of motivational force. The higher the value, the greater the motivation. Individuals are motivated by choices, and a desire for improved options creates more outstanding performance. Expectancy theory allows people to choose based on multiple alternatives (Monday, 2020). Defining expectancy, instrumentality, and valence might help one understand how Vroom reached his theory of motivation.

Expectancy is when a person internalizes a reward related to the output outcome. The expectancy of reward is the relationship between the perceived probability of employees garnering meaningful rewards from the organization equal to their contributions (Zeng et al., 2018). Muthee and Masinde (2019) opine that an individual's experiences can influence expectancy. Furthermore, combining the outcome's value with the expectancy level can determine the amount of motivation an individual might have. Expectancy can be different from person to person. It is the perceived value, by the employee, of an employee's performance level. The second part of motivation theory is defining the outcome.

Instrumentality might be the most crucial part of Vroom's theory. Kohli et al. state that instrumentality is the belief that performing well will lead to a successful and particular outcome. Focusing on the outcome could drive an individual towards achieving the expectancy award.

Valence could measure the outcome, as valence defines the reward. A greater reward is typically the goal; therefore, employees might be more motivated to achieve better results (Kohli et al., 2018).

Although the expectancy theory of motivation identifies how much motivation one needs to reach one's idealized reward positively, there is also an opposing view. According to Kohli et al. (2018), allowing negative values for instrumentality and valence can cause motivation to decline or default to zero. Without a vision for reward or clarity around it, one can lose focus as the outcome is not appealing and, therefore, lose motivation. Leaders can use Vroom's Theory of Expectation to lead teams.

A transformational leader can employ the theory in conversations. Idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation can all link to Vroom's theory to help motivate individuals to perform at a higher level to reach individual, team, and organizational goals. Vroom's expectancy theory can support transformational leadership and allow leaders to lead more rewardingly for their followers.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

Leader-member exchange theory focuses on relationships between leader and follower (Dansereau et al., 1975). Lloyd et al. (2017) stated that with successful relationship building between leader and follower, many benefits, such as increased performance and positive direction toward organizational goals, begin to develop. Researchers have shown that Leader-member exchange can produce a positive work environment as it might have affirmative psychological effects on employees' well-being.

Desrumaux et al. (2022) state that LMX directly and significantly impacts innovative work behaviors and the psychological well-being of those following an LMX leader. There is the risk that not all employees will respond well to the LMX leadership style. The theory compiles three stages: role-taking, role-making, and routinization. Role-taking is when a member joins a team, and the leader assesses the member. Role-making occurs when a new team member begins to work on projects and assignments. The leader sorts the teams into two groups: in-groups and out-groups. Routinization occurs when routine establishment happens between leaders and followers. As routinization develops, followers tend to become more innovative.

Leader-member exchange theory is also vital to innovation. Surucu et al. (2021) found that adding the leader-member exchange theory proved helpful in encouraging followers to be resourceful and innovative. Researchers found that transformational leadership positively affects innovation in followers. LMX helps leaders build relationships, trust, and loyalty with team members who are open to their leaders. The LMX relationship helps employees feel empowered as they understand that the leader encourages and supports creative ideas and the implementation of innovation. A well-executed LMX is vital for employees' attitudes and behaviors. Behaviors include organizational commitment and connection, job satisfaction with a commitment to maintaining success, and a clear vision for innovative behavior (Zhang et al., 2021). Behavior differentiation can be a distinct advantage of leader-member exchange theory.

Researchers have found that if leaders differentiate team members' treatment, it can positively affect the team overall. They have also found that high-quality leader-

member relationships can also have a positive effect on teams. R. K. Yin (2018) stated that differential treatment among team members is noticed and has a stimulating effect on the interaction of team members. Leader-member exchange focuses on the quality of the leader and team member's relationship. This focus ties directly back to transformational leadership into individualized consideration whereby the leader builds a relationship with the team member based on the member's needs.

As the leader-member relationship begins to strengthen, it helps improve communication. Hackney et al. (2018) state that stronger relationships lead to increased contact with more information sharing. As the relationship becomes high-quality, the member feels more supported, and there is the potential for improved performance, creativity (Khalili, 2018; Wu et al., 2018), and engagement (Gupta & Sharma, 2018).

Transactional Leadership Theory

Weber introduced a type of leadership that would later be named transactional leadership by Burns. In 1978, Burns expanded upon the theory. According to Berkovich and Eyal (2021), transactional leaders tend to lead using the utilitarian aspect of teleologic theory to make decisions based on what is best for most of those involved. Transactional leadership is a leadership style that punishes failure and rewards success or accomplishment (Sivarat et al., 2021). Transactional leaders reward or discipline followers according to their performance sufficiency by giving contingent supplementary using affirmative contingent reward or negative forms such as management by exception, with active or passive delegation (Passakonjaras & Hartijasti, 2020). Transactional leadership heavily depends on self-driven individuals and works well in a micromanaged

environment. Jacobsen et al. (2022) postulate that transactional leadership encompasses deploying the use of contingent rewards and or sanctions to gain alignment between employees and organizational goals. As reported by Khan et al. (2022), employees are hesitant to accept transactional leaders because of the use of punishment as part of the leadership style. Leading in an authoritative and delegating manner can indicate transactional leadership.

Transactional leaders rely on being authoritative to motivate employees and believe managers should delegate and execute. Jensen et al. (2018) declare that transactional leaders rely on objective punishments and rewards for successful employee engagement. When an employee achieves desired rewards and avoids unwanted sanctions, the employee may become engaged and energized and directly align behavior with the outcome Jensen et al. (2018). Transformational and transactional leadership styles serve a purpose.

Many scholars argue that transformational and transactional leadership styles are independent, and each works best when used independently. Others say the best leaders can incorporate both types into their leadership strategies. According to Jacobsen et al. (2022), training leaders to have command of both transformational and transactional leadership styles proves to have the most significant positive impact on behavior related to employee perceptions. Burns (1978) describes transactional leadership as having two dimensions: contingent reward and management by exception. Bass (1985) takes it further and divides management exceptions into active and passive.

Contingent Reward

The aspect of reward is essential to successful transactional leadership. The use of contingent reward is the main factor in transactional leadership as it entices followers to meet goals based on a system of rewards (Hilton et al., 2021). Contingent reward encompasses a process by which leaders influence followers to perform at a higher level by rewarding them according to performance levels. According to Hilton et al. (2021), academics indicate that using the contingent reward aspect of transactional leadership effectively motivates employees and increases the likelihood of organizational success. An element of contingent reward is when the leader gains alignment with the follower on what action to take and how to implement the action and offers rewards for completing the assignment (Passakonjaras & Hartijasti, 2020). A contingent reward can have both a positive and negative effect on followers.

As subordinates do not always get to pick who they work for, it can be difficult for some to work for a transactional leader. According to Young et al. (2021), transactional leadership can go either way when predicting the outcome of follower performance, and contingent reward can encourage the Leader-member exchange relationship. Still, it can also hinder the empowerment of the employee. On the other hand, management by exception can reduce the effectiveness of LMX but increase empowerment (Young et al., 2021).

Management by Exception

Management, by exception, requires an almost micromanaging style of leadership. Bass (1985) noted that management by exception has two categories: active

and passive. The difference between the two categories is vast and choosing one over the other can affect how followers respond. According to Bass (1985), active refers to leaders actively tracking and addressing mistakes and variations from the standard. Passive refers to leaders becoming involved only when they feel they must take corrective action, which typically occurs too late. Active versus passive is the difference in real-time correction to ensure employees learn immediately.

Active management by exception might help meet deadlines and milestones. In a study conducted by Sane and Abo (2021), the researchers show that active management by exception proved far superior and had a direct impact. In contrast, passive management had no impact at all. It is possible that management by exception can cause a lack of longevity among employees. In general, management, by exception, might also be responsible for employees lacking innovation, showing less interest in their jobs, and having lower production. Raziq et al. (2018) emphasized that passive and active management by exception style can negatively affect followers and productivity. Adverse effects can lead to employee disengagement and turnover.

Summary

Low levels of engagement contribute to low levels of productivity. Organizations with lower employee engagement and productivity levels can expect significant financial losses (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Losses in employee productivity cost United States businesses an estimated \$300 to \$400 million a year (Bialowolski et al., 2020; Rashidin et al., 2020).

Some leaders do not know that having low employee productivity due to disengaged employees can make their organizations less profitable. Some leaders also do not know enough about transformational leadership's impact on employee engagement and productivity.

Transition

Section 1 of this qualitative single case study contains substantial information on the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the research question, and the interview questions. The general business problem is that organizations continue to experience declining performance with low levels of employee engagement. The specific business problem is that some leaders in large multimodal transportation organizations lack strategies to engage employees.

I provided an in-depth review and analysis of the research, mainly in the last five years, related to transformational leadership theory, transactional leadership, path-goal theory, and leader-member exchange. I also provide a conceptual overview of employee engagement and its impact on employee production. The results of this study produced successful leadership strategies used to engage employees in the multimodal transportation industry.

The intention of Section 2 is to outline the purpose of generating this study. A single-case study with a qualitative data collection methodology is the process by which I performed this study. For this case study, I interviewed participants to discover strategies leaders in the multimodal transportation industry use to engage their employees effectively. Section 3 provides the results and how it is applicable, implications for social

change, a recommendation for action, and further research in future studies—bringing Section 3 to a close with a reflection of the researcher’s experience and a concluding clear and concise statement to ensure the understanding of the study.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 describes the purpose of the study, beginning with the purpose statement. Section 2 also explains the research method. I used a qualitative, single case study design and acted as the data collection instrument for interviewing qualified candidates about successful leadership strategies to engage or increase employee engagement. Section 2 describes the different roles involved in the study, ethical research guidelines, and information about the data collection and analysis.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore leadership strategies some leaders in a large multimodal transportation organization use to engage employees. The study's targeted population was six to eight leaders in a large transportation organization located in the corporate headquarters in the west-south-central United States who had successfully implemented leadership strategies to engage employees. Implications for positive social change include increasing business growth, improving income opportunities and spending behaviors, and strengthening local economies by increasing and sustaining tax revenues.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role is to gather, arrange, and analyze the collected data. The researcher takes a proactive role in creating valuable questions, listening intently, having an in-depth understanding of the research topic, and staying nimble to adjust with evidence to ensure collection reaches completion (R. K. Yin, 2018). In the qualitative data-gathering process, the researcher serves as the primary data collection tool (R. K.

Yin, 2018). According to Abdalla et al. (2018), it is incumbent upon the researcher to gather, arrange, and analyze the data collected using the interview method. Additionally, the researcher is also responsible for protecting the autonomy of the interviewees if desired. Also, the researcher must develop a plan to safeguard and secure the data collected and ensure the analysis results are compatible with the compilation of data.

The Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018) included three foundational principles for ethical research: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Each defined a strict ethical policy for conducting research. I adhered to these principles to ensure compliance with the Belmont Report.

Regarding respect for others, each participant received equal courtesy and gratitude from me for their participation. Regarding beneficence, I ensured no harm to participants and no personal or professional risk to myself. I confirmed that each participant was comfortable and relaxed and that their well-being was prioritized. For justice, the third principle, I ensured that each prospective participant met the inclusion criteria and had an opportunity for equal participation. Participation was voluntary, and no one received compensation.

Applying the three principles of the Belmont Report involves meeting the following requirements: informed consent, risk/benefit assessment, and selecting research subjects (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018). To maintain compliance, I obtained informed consent from each participant before the interviews. To protect the participants' identities and privacy, I did not post their letters of consent in an appendix in this study. According to Fons-Martinez et al. (2021), informed consent involves the

researcher disclosing the purpose, importance, duration, and procedure of the data collection process. Obtaining informed consent before the interview ensures the participants understand the goals and methods. Informed consent comes after full disclosure and all related information has been given to and understood by the participants (O'Shea, 2022). To ensure informed consent, I provided each participant with a letter containing the study's intent and notifying them that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from participation without penalty at any time. Participants were required to consent before any action toward data collection began.

I conducted this study in complete confidentiality instead of anonymity. According to Lancaster (2017), confidentiality provides excellent protection because confidentiality protects from both intentional and unintentional disclosure of data collected from participants. Additionally, participants' names were not included in the data. I assigned an identification code that only I and the participant were aware of.

I will maintain the collected data for a period not exceeding 5 years and will keep them in a locked, secure place. The process for data collection was face-to-face interviews that I transcribed for the participant's review before finalizing. I will destroy the transcriptions and erase the voice recordings at the end of 5 years. As required by the Belmont Report, I notified the participants of the 5-year term of data retention (see U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018).

The depth and breadth of ethical research should not have boundaries. Shanks and Paulson (2020) stated that ethical research involves more than the researcher and includes where the research happens. Shanks and Paulson referred to this as the ethical research

landscape and defined it as an area in which the researcher works to prevent harm or suffering due to the research methods and processes as they seek to capitalize on the maximum benefit. Allowing participants to review the data from their interviews was critical for validation. FitzPatrick (2019) noted that the validity of qualitative research has endured a controversial history, and researchers should perform validity checks to emphasize the data's integrity.

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. For chosen participants, criteria for inclusion and preclusion are required (Campbell et al., 2020). For the current case study, the inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) participants must hold a director-level responsibility or above, (b) participants must have a minimum of four direct reports and a team of not fewer than 20 people, (c) participants must have implemented successful leadership strategies to increase employee engagement, and (d) participants must work at the single case study multimodal transportation company in the west-south-central United States. Failure to meet these requirements disqualified potential candidates from being selected, and I considered additional candidates.

The population targeted for this study included director- and vice-president-level leaders at a multimodal transportation company in the west-south-central United States. I used purposive sampling to recruit participants for data collection in this study. I sent an email to a list of potential participants with questions that, once answered, identified the proper research subjects (see Appendix C). Following the email and responses, I conducted short meetings with the candidates to explain the study further.

Research Method

In this section, I explain my reason for choosing the qualitative method, the research design, and the rationale for my decision. I used consulted research from the last 5 years to provide the most accurate and recent information about transformational leadership and other topics in this study. I also used information from seminal works regarding the original theory and theorist. According to Strijker et al. (2020), researchers use three methods for conducting research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Choosing the correct research method was vital to providing the study framework and completing the research accurately and efficiently (see R. K. Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers focus on visual and language-based data. These data are qualitative and nonnumerical and are not converted into numerical values for purposes of quantitative analysis.

Quantitative research is different from qualitative. Quantitative research includes numerical data for statistical examination of relationships between variables and hypothesis testing (Lo et al., 2020). Statistical analysis of variables' characteristics or relationships among variables was not appropriate for my study because I sought in-depth knowledge from personal interactions. The mixed-methods approach requires qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods to reach a conclusion (Gallant & Luthy, 2020). The mixed-methods approach was not appropriate for my study because I did not need to examine variables' characteristics or relationships to address my study's purpose.

Research Design

Founded in traditional inquiry methods, qualitative research designs such as phenomenology and ethnography (Mykhalovskiy et al., 2018) are good research designs. I considered phenomenology and ethnography as alternative options. I chose a single qualitative case study design for this study. According to R. K. Yin (2018), a case study is a social science research inquiry used to probe current circumstances applied to real-world conditions. I selected a single case study design to collect data from a multimodal transportation organization. I chose this design because of R. K. Yin's third rationale for single-case studies: capturing everyday circumstances and their lessons.

Phenomenological researchers focus on the personal meanings of lived experiences (A. C. Kilinc et al., 2020; Oliveri & Pravettoni, 2018). The data collection in the current study focused on the leadership's experiences and perspective, not on those affected by the strategy; therefore, the phenomenological design did not apply.

Another option was ethnography. Ethnographic researchers study a culture or social group and observe behavior patterns while conducting fieldwork over extended periods (Walford, 2018; R. K. Yin, 2018). Ethnographic researchers also live within the communities they study to engrain themselves with a deeper understanding of the culture in the community (Pallares-Barbera & Casellas, 2019; Walford, 2018; R. K. Yin, 2018). The current study did not focus on a culture or social group because the study's aim was to explore successful leadership strategies in a professional environment, not a group's culture. Therefore, I conducted my study using a qualitative single case study design.

As the collection instrument and researcher, I sought to reach data saturation. For a qualitative study, the selected research method and size of the sample population relate to achieving data saturation (Malterud et al., 2016). The single case study design allowed me to reach data saturation by interviewing leaders from the same organization with the same qualifications.

Population and Sampling

Purposive sampling was my chosen methodology for participant sampling for this study. Purposive sampling is beneficial in recruiting participants who have expert-level knowledge to provide the most accurate data on the study topic (Campbell et al., 2020). Participants should have lived experiences to increase the validity of the data.

The current study consisted of eight director-level or higher leaders with a minimum of four direct reports and a team of 20 people within a large transportation company in the west-south-central United States. Interviewing an entire population of leaders in the transportation company may have been the most fruitful way to gather data; however, it was not possible.

I asked the participants specific questions to elicit information about their experience and knowledge of successful employee engagement strategies (see Appendix B). I asked each participant the same interview questions; responses were voice recorded and analyzed. According to Shaw and Satalkar (2018), research bias is avoidable, and integrity is maintained by asking participants the same questions in similar settings and following an interview protocol (see Appendix A). For this single case study, the

population sample size was eight leaders, director level or higher, at a large multimodal transportation company in the west-south central-United States.

I used purposive sampling to ensure the research subjects met the goals of the study. According to Salturk (2022), in purposive sampling, the researcher defines the characteristics needed for the research and chooses qualified candidates based on their experience and knowledge. Many sampling techniques are available, but purposive sampling allowed me to select the most qualified candidates to collect the richest data for the most accurate results.

Ethical Research

Maintaining ethical standards in research is essential to the validity of the end product. Anytime research subjects are human, ethics must be a high priority (Dixon & Quirke, 2018). To ensure ethical research procedures were followed, I maintained the guidelines of The Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018). Those guidelines are justice, beneficence, and respect for persons. Before data collection, I obtained Walden University's Institutional Review Board approval (Number 52087156 (see Appendix E). Ethics requires protecting the research subjects.

It is the responsibility of the researcher to reach data saturation. According to Mwita (2022), data saturation in qualitative studies is contingent upon five factors: predetermined codes and themes, sample size, relevance of research subjects, number of methods, and length of data collection sessions. Mwita also stated that data saturation occurs when a researcher cannot collect new data. According to Fusch et al. (2018), triangulation, or data from multiple sources, influences the researcher's intended

objectives. I interviewed the subjects about their leadership strategies to increase employee engagement. When my themes and codes began to repeat, I reached data saturation.

To protect the participants' identities and privacy, I did not post their letters of consent in an appendix in this study. To protect the participants, I labeled them using pseudonyms (e.g., P1, P2, P3) instead of using their names in the study (see R. K. Yin, 2018). Obtaining informed consent before the interviews ensured the participants understood the goals and methods.

According to Fons-Martinez et al. (2021), informed consent involves the researcher disclosing the purpose, importance, duration, and procedure of the data collection process. To ensure informed consent, I provided each participant with a letter containing the study's intent and notifying them that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw without penalty at any time (see Appendix C). The option of withdrawing from the study was solely the participant's decision (see U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018). Participation was voluntary, and no one received compensation.

Participants were required to consent before any action toward data collection began. I will maintain the data in protective custody for a period not exceeding 5 years and keep them in a locked, secure place. The process for data collection was face-to-face interviews that I transcribed for the participant's review before finalizing. I will destroy the transcriptions and erase the voice recordings at the end of 5 years. As required by the

Belmont Report, I notified participants of the 5-year term of data retention (see U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018).

Data Collection Instruments

For data collection, I conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants in this qualitative study. I ensured that each participant chosen met the requirements. Facilitating the qualitative research process is the primary collection instrument, the researcher (Clark & Veale, 2018; R. K. Yin, 2018). There are a few different data collection sources available to qualitative researchers: interviews, observation of the participants, archival materials, company documents, and physical factual pieces (Arsel, 2017; R. K. Yin, 2018). According to Abdalla et al. (2018), the researcher must collect, sort, and analyze the data using the interview method. I conducted the interviews in a private, one-on-one setting to maximize the participants' time by limiting distractions. Once I had collected and summarized the data, I provided a copy of the summary to the participants to complete member checking. Member checking increases the reliability and validity of the information as it allows the interviewees to confirm the data (R. K. Yin, 2018). After completing the transcription of the interviews, I provided each participant with a copy for their records. An interview protocol is important to keeping the interviews focused and held to the time constraint of one hour (see Appendix A).

Reducing or eliminating personal bias is important when conducting a research study. According to R. K. Yin (2018), using an interview protocol can reduce personal bias and increase the data's reliability and validity. According to Clark and Veale (2018), qualitative researchers must be aware of and understand the weighted importance of data

collection regarding validity and reliability. Equally important is knowing that biases can render the data inaccurate and affect the results. I asked each participant the same open-ended questions (see Appendix B) in a protected environment to record the most accurate and detailed data given. Akanji et al. (2018) posit that the best way to interview participants to collect the richest data is to ask open-ended questions in a semistructured interview setting. It is vital to keep the interviews consistent to ensure each participant has the same effects. It is also essential to keep the data protected.

Data Collection Technique

Before collecting the data, I was granted permission from the cooperating organization to select and interview the necessary subjects. Qualitative research is exploratory research that produces a deep understanding of the participant's experiences, thoughts, and applications (El Hilali et al., 2020). Once I received approval, I identified, selected, and emailed the chosen participants a letter of consent (Appendix C) for their face-to-face interviews. I did not use observation as a means of data collection. I used two sources of data collection to reach triangulation: document review and face-to-face interviews. I used a voice recorder to record the interview as I took notes. In a qualitative research interview, voice recording is the most widely used approach for gathering data (Greenwood et al., 2017). Greenwood et al. (2017) stated that face-to-face interviews allow the researcher to key in body language and changes in tone of voice to help identify the seriousness of the statement. Non-verbal cues are important in understanding commitment and passion.

The interview data collection process allows researchers to glean information not expressed in a Likert scale quantitative research study. Asking open-ended questions allows the participants to respond with in-depth information about their efforts and experiences with the topic (R. K. Yin, 2018). There are three different methods for data collection.

Qualitative research is one of the three data collection methods, and researchers use it when the data is not numeric, like quantitative, or a mixture, like the mixed method. There are many relative advantages to the qualitative data collection process. The interview process allows the researcher complete access to critical portions of the responses (Annamma, 2018). R. K. Yin (2018) stated that qualitative research provides the researcher with in-depth information from the participants based on their experience and knowledge. There are also several disadvantages relating to data collection within a research study.

Interviews are one source of qualitative data collection and can be a disadvantage. The disadvantages are the time it takes to collect the data through interviews reaching saturation; the participant's biases can contribute to skewed data, lack of participation, and time constraints. According to H. Kilinc and Firat (2017), the need for additional participants can be a disadvantage, as finding them could be problematic. Researchers must continue to conduct interviews until they reach data saturation.

Interviews provide an arena for sharing thoughts about follow-up information from the interview questions. Examining the collected data is vital, and analysis directly relates to the collection mode. According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), interviews allow

researchers to collect robust, detailed data. It is important to transcribe the interviews and then follow up with participants.

Transcribing the data is vital to reconciling to improve reliability and validity with member-checking. When the participant can review the information, it allows them to expand upon and make a correction if needed to reduce the potential for misunderstandings; this helps increase the reliability of the data as it increases accuracy (González & Campbell, 2018). The information must be accurate before the analysis begins.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization could be an essential piece of the research process. According to R. K. Yin (2018), a researcher must have data organized for analysis in the most efficient manner. Qualitative researchers use coding for data tracking, which helps sort and align data (Clark & Veale, 2018; R. K. Yin, 2018). My data collection method for this research was face-to-face interviews and a journal for taking notes during the interviews, and the conversations were voice recorded and transcribed. Using a reflective journal increases the insight gained and enhances critical thinking (Hood et al., 2018). Once the researcher has collected the data, they must maintain it securely.

As I began to collect data, I ensured its safekeeping. The data is stored securely and password-protected on a personal computer (R. K. Yin, 2018). As is required by the Belmont report and its guidelines for ethical research, I will destroy all data at the five-year storage limit (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018). Protecting the data protects both the organization and the participants in the research study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the reason the data is collected. After I collected the data, I used the ground-up strategy for my analysis. According to R. K. Yin (2018), the ground-up theory helps identify patterns and allows for the use of coding. The coding helped identify patterns and similar approaches within the data. Research studies use the collected data to reach outcomes, known or unknown. The data analysis leads researchers to the result and grounds the findings in fact (Williams & Moser, 2019; R. K. Yin, 2018). Data analysis is a methodic process for finding themes, trends, and differences.

Researchers gather data to understand their specific research topic. The amount of data needed varies and has to be enough for the researcher to achieve data saturation. According to Fusch et al. (2018), the data saturation point is when the data collection no longer exposes new information. After collecting the data, I began the thematic analysis to reduce the data to what is specific to the research study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Finally, I started drawing conclusions after the data analysis and reduction (R. K. Yin, 2018). I manually compiled the data per the participant responses to create themes. I used NVivo 14 Plus to continue interpreting the data to align with the conclusions. The software enabled sorting and coding to be more efficient and accurate. The qualitative research analysis is difficult and time-consuming to code. The software increased efficiency. The participants received the interview questions before the interviews, which could cause them to embellish the outcome of their strategies, but I assumed the results were honest.

My chosen conceptual framework was transformational leadership theory. The theory links the research findings to the literature review, the method to produce accurate and actionable results (Borrego et al., 2014). The key focus of the study was to understand leadership styles previously shown in quantitative studies to increase employee engagement (Fletcher et al., 2018). Employee engagement can increase the longevity of employees and help keep tribal knowledge to ensure efficiencies through training and hands-on applications (Jun & Lee, 2023; Strömngren et al., 2017). I have stayed abreast of new research and updated my proposal. I set up alerts in Google Scholar and used other sources to ensure I did not miss anything.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

The dependability of the data might be the determining factor in the acceptance of the study. According to Abdalla et al. (2018), sustained reliability is vital to qualitative research. The determining factor in research for reliability is reaching similar conclusions using the same instruments in replicating the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I used document reviews and face-to-face interviews to obtain reliable data. Campbell et al. (2020) state that member-checking can enhance the reliability of the research.

Validity

Upon completing the interviews, I used member checking after sorting and interpreting the data to ensure the data's credibility. Coleman (2021) stated that member checking is an informal tool for the researcher to substantiate validity. Member-checking ensures I captured the essence of the conversation.

Judging the data is important to understand its applicability. There are four criteria for judging qualitative research: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (R. K. Yin, 2018). R. K. Yin (2018) defines construct validity as using the correct measures for the concept of the study. Reliability is being able to reproduce the study with the same conclusions. If the research is valid, it can produce a level of transferability.

Transferability and generalization might be similar in that both describe the external use if applicable. Transferability refers to the study's external use, and transferability and generalization are determined statistically. In many circles of academia, transferability has replaced generalization (Maxwell, 2021). Ferrando et al. (2019) state that generalization is using the study with other groups or in different settings. Also important to validity is confirmability.

Confirmability is important as it promotes trustworthiness and reliability. According to Ellis (2019), confirmability is how the data is interpreted and keeping a trail to show the data collection methods. Keeping the audit trail allows the research readers to conclude that they may have reached the same result on the same date. Acquiring data saturation is an important way to provide reliable and valid research.

The researcher must exhaust all options to ensure nothing remains left out. I reached data saturation by interviewing as many participants as needed to reach the point when no new data appeared. Fusch et al. (2018) state that triangulation allows data saturation by using different resources to gain the data and reach the point of no new

knowledge (Lowe et al., 2018). Data saturation is critical to producing reliable and valid results.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I outlined the purpose of this study and explained the qualitative research method and process. I used a qualitative, single case study method and acted as the data collection instrument for interviewing qualified candidates about successful leadership strategies to engage or increase employee engagement. Section 2 also describes how data was collected and analyzed, the ethical research guidelines, and information about the data collection and analysis. Section 3 includes presenting the findings and application of the results to professional practice, implications for social change, a recommendation for action, and further research in future studies. Bringing Section 3 to a close reflects the researcher's experience and a concluding clear and concise statement to ensure the understanding of the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore leadership strategies some leaders in a large multimodal transportation organization used to engage employees. Fletcher et al. (2018) stated that the most immediately available act to reduce labor costs is for leadership to minimize turnover. Leadership strategies might be the best way to increase organizational loyalty. For data collection in the current study, I used semistructured face-to-face interviews with eight high-level leaders from different departments in a large multimodal transportation organization in the west-south-central United States. I explored employee engagement through the scope of the transformational leadership theory and how it affects employee engagement. According to Jun and Lee (2023), transformational leaders empower and support employees to increase engagement, thereby increasing innovation and retention. The cost of hiring and training a replacement for a lost employee due to involuntary turnover can be challenging, ranging from 90%–200% of the employee's salary (Hom et al., 2017). The data analysis revealed five themes that leaders use in the multimodal transportation industry: (a) experience, (b) understanding the individual, (c) motivating team members, (d) challenging individuals to be innovative, and (e) leading by example. Transformational leadership practices positively impact employee engagement attributes, including organizational commitment, motivation, and job satisfaction (Strömgren et al., 2017).

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this study was the following: What leadership strategies do leaders in large multimodal transportation organizations use to engage employees?

Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory was the chosen conceptual framework for this study. I conducted semistructured interviews with eight leaders from a large multimodal transportation organization in the west-south-central United States. I used face-to-face interviews that lasted 55–60 minutes to gather evidence to answer the research question. The participants responded to nine open-ended interview questions about successful leadership strategies used to increase employee engagement. In conjunction with the interview questions, I reviewed company training documents indicating the types of leadership styles and principles leaders are learning. I transcribed each recorded interview and presented it to the participant with a summary for member checking. Each participant received an email with their interview synopsis to ensure the accuracy of my interpretation. I contacted each participant and reviewed their responses with them. Participants validated their summaries and agreed that the data matched their intended responses. After I validated the summaries, I used NVivo 14 software to align and analyze the data to ensure accurate analysis. As a supplement to the data collected in the interview process, I reviewed organizational training documents.

The data collected in the interviews were entered into NVivo 14 to begin the analysis. After completing the interviews with eight participants, I determined that no new information was emerging. I reviewed the transcripts and summaries several times to understand the patterns in word use. Upon understanding the data, I developed codes to align the data. I used word frequency tables and coding to define and extrapolate emerging themes regarding successful leadership strategies. I used the codes and themes as references when reviewing the company training documents and found that similar

leadership principles were part of the leadership learning curriculum. According to the data collected and analyzed, successful leadership strategies can lead to increased employee engagement, reduced turnover, opposing views shared in a safe environment, and a more inclusive culture.

Each transcript provided insights into answering the research question. Using Nvivo, I created word frequency tables after including all of the participant interview transcripts. Table 2 provides one example of the word frequencies that led to the theme of understanding the individual.

Table 2

Word Frequency Table Leading to First Set of Codes

Word	Count in transcripts
People	329
Person	95
Employee	55
Employees	34
Somebody	31
Everyone	24
Everybody	20
Individual	18
Together	46
Others	19
Understand	74
Understanding	20
Personal	16
Total	781

Following my ground-up approach (inductive), I repeated the process (see Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6), created a codebook, and identified emergent themes.

Table 3*Word Frequency Table Leading to Second Theme*

Word	Count in transcripts
Leader	156
Leaders	72
Leadership	39
Managers	30
Leading	24
Manager	23
Total	344

Table 4*Word Frequency Table Leading to Third Theme*

Word	Counts in Transcripts
Conversation	26
Implementing	19
Implement	18
Challenge	20
Change	52
Problem	16
Business	37
Question	77
Answer	25
Feedback	25
Questions	25
Company	32
Customer	18
Department	16
Thought	19
Learned	17
Develop	23
Asking	15
Talking	22
Total	502

Table 5*Word Frequency Table Leading to Fourth Theme*

Word	Count in transcripts
Believe	34
Culture	22
Trying	52
Obstacles	21
Increase	23
Survey	30
Benefits	16
Building	14
Successful	27
Working	27
Measure	26
Support	24
Opportunity	23
Process	23
Success	23
Meeting	17
Strategy	36
Total	438

Table 6*Word Frequency Table Leading to Fifth Theme*

Word	Count in transcripts
Directors	14
Direct	23
Experience	24
Decision	21
Director	16
Engagement	99
Engaged	42
Engage	15
Total	254

I analyzed, considered, organized, and reviewed the data and quotations of the participants, using the codes as a foundation, and worked the codes into themes (see Table 7). Each theme summarizes how many times participants used language related to the theme.

Table 7

Code Book and Emergent Themes

Code	Theme	Frequency
Former Prior Failure Success in leading	Experience	254
People Leading people effectively Individual Understand needs Meet needs One-on-one	Understanding the individual	781
Believe Create excitement Build confidence Remove obstacles Effort	Motivating team members	438
Development Problem solving Creative thinking Challenging Out of the box	Challenging individuals intellectually	502
Leadership Style Manage people/teams Do what is right	Leading by example	344

Emerging Themes

Five themes surfaced from the data analysis: (a) experience, (b) understanding the individual, (c) motivating team members, (d) challenging individuals intellectually, and

(e) leading by example. I used the methodological triangulation process to ensure that the data were reliable. The leadership learning curriculum showed that leaders are learning to think more about the individual to develop relationships, understand their needs, and lead them in a manner most closely related to their needs. Additionally, leaders are learning to challenge and motivate their teams to achieve individual success and the organization's overall advancement. The five themes derived from this analysis may aid other leaders in identifying the most relevant and actionable process for increasing employee engagement.

Theme 1: Experience

A popular theme among all participants was how their experiences shaped them as leaders. According to Rybnicek et al. (2019), industry leadership experience allows leaders to develop a stronger team with more significant accomplishments. Each participant could link knowledge from their experiences to their current leadership style and functions. In my observation, each participant was also thankful for the negative experiences that helped them become the leaders they are today. Knowing what type of leader they did not want to be was a factor in developing their leadership strategies.

All eight participants mentioned that their experiences helped them become better leaders. P1 stated "I had a leader in my past who taught me more about what not to do as a leader than what I should do based on how they led me." P3 stated "one of my worst experiences with leadership came at a time in my career when I was trying to decide if I wanted to be a leader. The experience helped me understand how I did not want to lead." P4 stated "I had some outstanding leaders early in my career and have been able to pull

from those experiences to lead my team today.” P8 stated “my experience with good and bad leaders has helped me become the leader I am today.” Learning from their experiences helped them understand how they wanted to lead. It gave them ideas of what to do and what not to do. All eight participants spoke about their experiences, giving them a unique leadership perspective. Experience enabled them to provide guidance in similar situations in which they were confronted before they became leaders.

The experience gained by the participants enabled them to lead confidently and develop better, happier, and more satisfied employees according to how their teams grew and performed. P2 stated “performance on my team has increased. Our numbers are better. My team is happy, and our goals are being met. I attribute that to my experiences as a young leader and how I have developed to this day.” My interpretation from a few interviews was that the best leaders understand the situation and apply known solutions from their experience.

Theme 2: Understanding the Individual (Individual Consideration)

The second theme from the data analysis was understanding the individual. Each person has different needs, and the leadership strategy should encompass those needs. Finding the best way to lead individuals takes time (F. Munir & Aboidullah, 2018). Developing relationships is critical to understanding individual team members’ needs (F. Munir & Aboidullah, 2018).

According to Yue et al. (2019), understanding the individual, their needs, and employee engagement are directly connected to building strong relationships. P5 stated “when I understand a person’s needs, I can lead them in a way that helps them be as

successful as possible according to their specific needs.” Leaders can build relationships by advocating for employees and communicating at every step of the process (Eisenberg et al., 2019). Communicating might be the most vital concept of leadership and relationship building. Effectively communicating within an organization, specifically with teams and individuals, has increased the leader–follower relationship (Eisenberg et al., 2019). Individuals might often feel appreciated and important when their leader communicates concisely and often. P7 said “in my experience, communication has been the best way to learn about the individuals on my team. Communicating with them helps build trust and allows them to open up to me.” It is through communication that the leader might build the most substantial relationships. There are many aspects of understanding individuals and their values and needs.

Leaders must be approachable and flexible, actively ask for feedback, and define clear expectations. P1 stated,

being approachable has allowed me to develop relationships with my team members. Everyone on my team knows that I have an open-door policy, and I take that very seriously. It allows them to feel more comfortable with how they talk to me and what they talk about.

A good indicator of being approachable is how many team members use the open-door policy held by each of the eight participants. Each of these attributes might help team members be open to learning, communicating, and providing constructive feedback that aids in increasing the strength of the leader and team. All participants noted that feedback

from team members is critical in determining the team's direction and taking corrective action if the strategy does not fulfill the leader's expectations. P6 said,

not only feedback but open and honest feedback is important in understanding if a leadership strategy is effective. The feedback helps me make adjustments where needed. I actively seek feedback from my team, and they give it because they know I am trying to help them.

Other avenues of relationship building might be activities such as lunch and learn, challenges providing incentive gifts, and outdoor summer functions. That is a short list of possibilities. Many extracurricular activities help build relationships and strengthen teams. These things encourage individuals to become more active and open with their leaders.

When leaders know how to lead individuals, it can help create trust in the leader and increase employee engagement, thereby strengthening the team and increasing the chances of reaching goals or milestones. Most individuals might prefer a leader who understands them and works to help them succeed. P5 stated,

it is the leader's responsibility to get to know each employee's strengths and weaknesses and get involved to help develop a leadership strategy suitable to the individual. I also want to know the individual's family and friends and how they spend their time away from work.

P1 said,

Getting to know and understand the individuals is important. It provides insight into them personally and professionally. It helps me design the best leadership

strategy to help the individual be successful and helps me understand how to present feedback in an evaluation setting.

All eight participants spoke of the importance of knowing and understanding the individual as a critical component of developing team members.

Theme 3: Motivating Team Members (Inspirational Motivation)

Organizations spend large sums of money to enhance employee performance through motivation (Numbu & Bose, 2019). Motivating team members can prove to be a difficult task for any leader. The approach must be to motivate individuals and the overall team. According to Park and Pierce (2020), inspirational motivation is a leader's ability to articulate goals and motivate their team to complete tasks and meet objectives.

Disengaged employees are a product of low to no motivation, so the leader must inspire them to elevate their performance by motivating them to become engaged (Rastogi et al., 2018). P6 said, "motivating employees can be difficult. Each person responds differently. I use affirmation for some and \$2.00 fidget spinners or other small prizes like toys or gifts." P7 stated,

motivation is a key driver behind reaching goals. If the team isn't motivated, they aren't engaged. If they aren't engaged, they won't be successful. I use team outings, cater lunch occasionally, and offer a Friday afternoon out of the office early.

P3 stated,

motivating teams is easier than motivating individuals. I can throw out a challenge for the whole team, and they will all accept it, but motivating an

individual is a bit different. It requires a good relationship and the right kind of motivational outcome, whether that be lunch on me or gift cards. Motivation applies more in the team environment compared to intellectual stimulation at the individual level.

Theme 4: Challenging Individuals Intellectually (Intellectual Stimulation)

Intellectual stimulation is perhaps the most critical characteristic of transformational leadership (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). Rafferty and Griffin (2004) define intellectual stimulation as enhancing team members' acknowledgment of problems and their increased ability to solve them with creative thinking and innovation. Some studies concluded that intellectual stimulation increases the levels of innovation by encouraging creativity (Hughes et al., 2018). Shin and Zhou (2003) posit that intellectual stimulation motivates followers by questioning belief in the status quo, challenging current assumptions, and encouraging imaginative problem-solving approaches.

Leaders can encourage innovation within their teams with the use of intellectual stimulation. P7 stated,

challenging the team to innovate is one of my favorite things to do. I use a little motivation along with it. For example, I asked each team member to give me three things that would make their jobs easier, so they did. Then, I took those three things, wrote them down in random order, gave each person on the team three problems, and challenged them to find solutions that would fit our structure's framework. The motivation part was the recognition that comes to those who innovate.

P2 stated, challenging my team to be creative is one of my favorite things to do. We have a need all over the company to make changes, just like any other company. I challenge them to pay attention to their processes and how others impact those processes, then find a way to make them better.

It can also mitigate the effects of low engagement as it increases innovative thinking among team members (Endrejat, 2021). According to Endrejat (2021), intellectual stimulation is a behavior exhibited by leaders that can help increase engagement and innovation. P4 stated, “my teams loves for me to throw out challenges. They say it keeps their day interesting.” P1 stated, “challenging individuals is challenging in itself. The challenge has to be at least semi-difficult, or it’s not a challenge. Some people thrive on challenge because they believe it makes a difference in them.”

Theme 5: Leading by Example (Idealized Influence)

Yue et al. (2019) state that when leaders lead by example, their charisma can help instill trust in them and motivate employees to want to be like and please their leader. According to Al-Yami et al. (2018), when a leader uses idealized influence, the leader is putting the team members first and sacrificing their interests to guide the interests of others. Leading by example, as it relates to transformational leadership, aligns with idealized influence. As leaders progress in their careers, they learn what works and what does not. The same goes for their experience. Their leaders set examples for them, and not all are good examples. P6 stated,

the examples we see tend to help us develop our methodologies in more than just leadership roles; that is to say, experiences with leaders from our past tend to define how we currently lead. We need to set the example as leaders.

P8 stated, “leaders from my past who were influential set an example for all to follow. They knew how to lead, and they showed it in their actions.”

Leadership styles are as unique as the leaders themselves. Although there are many leadership theories, the difference is how different personalities apply those theories. Each participant mentioned the importance of leading by example to create employee engagement and be approachable. P5 said, “leading by example is critical to the development of my team. If they don’t see me doing what I am supposed to, how can I expect them to.” P7 said, “I take setting the example very seriously. I don’t want to be seen as a leader who delegates and doesn’t participate.” P2 stated, “if a leader doesn’t set an example, they aren’t much of a leader. It’s one of the most important things I can do.”

Relevance to Conceptual Framework

For the conceptual framework of this study, I used James McGregor Burns’ transformational leadership theory, the four I’s: individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence. According to Hughes et al. (2018), when leaders improve employee relationships, they often use transformational leadership theory to accomplish those improvements. I used the transformational leadership theory to understand the strategies leaders in a large multimodal transportation organization use to increase employee engagement. Transformational leaders may help team members reach higher levels than they thought

they could. It could benefit leaders to understand the four aspects of transformational leadership to help with daily application. Leaders motivate and help individuals reach long-term goals by taking an interest in their employees and understanding the different needs each has (Northouse, 2021). According to Burns (1978), a transformational leader is a leader who engages employees and builds relationships through understanding and motivating their employees to achieve success as individuals and as a team.

The data collection revealed five main themes: (a) experience, (b) understanding the individual, (c) motivation, (d) challenging teams intellectually, and (e) leading by example. Four of these themes align with the transformational leadership framework and its foundational elements. The elements of transformational leadership are (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. Bass (1999) stated that the most influential leaders use all four elements consistently. For leaders to be most effective, they should know and understand the values of transformational leadership. When leaders act as role models, they impart a persona of confidence and trustworthiness. In an environment of job satisfaction, accomplishment, and engagement, employees who follow their leader's example experience tremendous success (Henry et al., 2019). Leaders acting as role models are the first characteristic of transformational leadership, referred to as idealized influence.

The second characteristic of transformational leadership is inspirational motivation. The participants agreed that team-building exercises such as team outings and volunteer work improved team cohesion and created a more enjoyable work culture. Khan et al. (2022) stated that leaders use inspirational motivation to instill confidence in

their followers and disseminate information relevant to the organizational vision and mission. Additionally, leaders then communicate how the team's goals are relevant to the vision and mission of the organization to help motivate.

The third characteristic of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation. Khan et al. (2022) stated that leaders who use intellectual stimulation could motivate team members to seek out and solve complex problems in innovative ways. P1, P4, P5, and P8 mentioned intellectually stimulating their people by encouraging innovation and challenging their teams to find non-traditional ways of meeting their goals. P2 spoke about challenging their team to choose a topic and become a subject matter expert to promote intellectual growth.

All participants spoke passionately about building relationships. The fourth characteristic of transformational leadership is individualized consideration. Transformational leaders know that no reproducible leadership method works for everyone. Individuals are different, and therefore, each requires a different leadership approach. P6 and P7 spoke about the importance of knowing each team member individually to understand what they need from a leader. Applying individualized consideration means understanding team members, knowing that each requires a unique leadership strategy, and understanding them emotionally (F. Munir & Aboidullah, 2018).

Leaders in a large multimodal transportation company in the west-south central US use the four themes of transformational leadership presented in this study. Each participant has succeeded in keeping employees happy, valued, and engaged. Leaders have found that transformational leadership is successful in their culture and company.

Application to Professional Practice

Low levels of employee engagement are an ongoing challenge for organizations of any size. Business leaders and organizations would benefit from learning and implementing a transformational leadership style to help reduce low levels of employee engagement. Employees who are not engaged at all or have a low level of engagement are at risk for voluntary or involuntary turnover.

The results of this study provide information on how to use transformational leadership to help create teams and individuals who can perform at a higher level. According to the participants, their approach has helped solidify their teams. This study indicates that the five themes listed below have the potential to increase employee engagement, as has happened in the teams of the participants. Leadership strategies implementing these five points provide the opportunity for success: (a) experience, (b) understanding the individual, (c) motivating team members, (d) challenging individuals to be innovative, and (e) leading by example. When the results of this study are applied, leaders will have increased employee engagement, thereby reducing turnover and saving the organization large sums of money in hiring and training costs. When transformational leaders lead employees, they develop relationships, leading to engaged employees and reduced turnover. According to De Sousa-Sabbagha et al. (2018), employees with leaders who invest time in them tend to become more engaged and less likely to leave the organization. The results of this study are relevant and contribute to existing data about how to increase employee engagement.

Implications for Social Change

Implications for social change include happier employees with a better quality of life and spending more money in the local economy, providing tax revenue and small business growth. If employees are more satisfied and engaged, organizations see decreased turnover. Happier employees have a higher productivity rate, providing success for the individual, and the organizations will have better opportunities to meet their goals (Bernardino, 2021). Increased organizational success enables organizations to create more jobs and invest in the community they serve.

Recommendations for Action

The results of this study indicate that leaders can increase employee engagement by implementing transformational leadership strategies. Participants in this study have proven experience, understanding the individual, motivating team members, challenging individuals to be innovative, and leading by example helps employees feel valued as they contribute to the team and organization's success. Firstly, I would recommend that leaders understand that each contributor is different, and each contributor will respond differently to leadership strategies. Understanding the individual allows leaders to tailor their leadership strategy to ensure maximum performance from team members. My second recommendation is for leaders to motivate and encourage team members to reach new levels of performance and improve the opportunity for meeting individual, team, and organizational goals. Inspiration can come from team-building exercises, and I recommend it to create a more collaborative culture. Thirdly, I would recommend leaders keep challenging individuals to be innovative and encourage them to seek out and solve

complex problems, allowing room for intended innovation. My final recommendation, and perhaps the most critical piece of transformational leadership, is for leaders to lead by example and build relationships with each team member individually. Building relationships allows the leader to understand the individual better and provide the most effective leadership strategy. These four recommendations can help leaders build higher-performing individuals and, thereby, stronger teams to help meet organizational goals. Leaders within the multimodal transportation organization where I conducted this study could benefit from learning more about the structure of transformational leadership theory and how to apply it by attending classes, focus groups, and reading.

Recommendation for Further Research

The following recommendations for further research will help increase the understanding of the transformational leadership theory related to a specific industry. One limitation of this study is the single location in the west-south central US, yielding non-generalizable results. The study focused on leadership strategies to help improve employee engagement. Further research within other organizations in the multimodal transportation industry can be beneficial. Additional studies conducted in other industries can allow for widespread transformational leadership theory implementation related to improving employee engagement.

Reflections

Pursuing my doctoral degree has been filled with challenges, from family to traveling weekly for work to meeting rigorous degree requirements. The long hours of researching and writing have reached closure. The classes were informative, challenging,

and well worth investing time in. I have had the support of family and friends from the beginning, which has proven to be a difference-maker. The doctoral journey has propelled me to become a critical thinker and given me my academic voice to share my knowledge with those around me.

The participants in this study were all at a director or Vice-President level of leadership. I asked the same nine questions in an environment acceptable to them individually so as not to put any undue burden on them. Upon completing the interviews, each participant received a two-page summary document. The document allowed member-checking to ensure the accuracy of their responses. I kept any personal biases subdued by solely focusing on the data and the member-checking document.

As I progressed through the interviews, I had much to learn. Each participant is well versed in their leadership strategies and confident, as the results have been favorable for each leader. I had the opportunity to learn from some of the organization's finest leaders.

Conclusion

This single case qualitative study explored transformational leadership strategies to increase employee engagement in a multimodal transportation company in the west-south central U.S. Successful leaders shared five common themes amongst them: (a) experience, (b) understanding the individual, (c) motivation, (d) challenging teams intellectually, and (e) influencing team members. Four of these themes aligned with the four I's of transformational leadership theory: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. Experience

was a common theme among the leaders, so I thought it important to address it as part of their strategies.

The results of this study lead me to conclude that transformational leadership theory is overwhelmingly the best way for leaders within the researched organization to gain trust and get employees engaged at a high level. Team members following the participants of this study are some of the top performers in the organization.

Transformational leadership requires a leader to invest time in their people, sometimes at the expense of being unable to invest time in themselves. However, a commonality among these leaders is that they are all willing to do whatever it takes to see their teams succeed; therefore, the organization and the people win.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Before I start the interview, I will thank and acknowledge each participant for donating their time.
2. I will explain that the information provided will remain confidential and coded using a numbering scheme, for example, (P1, P2, P3, etc.).
3. I will remind the participants that participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw anytime.
4. I will remind the participants that a voice recorder will be used to document the interview so I can transcribe the data accurately. I will also inform them that I will make a summary of the transcribed data available to them, upon completion, via email for their review. I will tell them that the interview will last approximately 60 minutes, with responses given to nine interview questions and any follow-up questions.
5. I will inform them that I will meet with them at a later date to confirm the information was gathered and transcribed accurately and correctly by presenting them with a summary of their responses.
6. Upon conclusion of the interview, I will thank the participant again for taking the time and volunteering to be part of the research study.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Organization: _____

Leader Participant: _____

LP's Title and Role _____

- 1) What successful leadership strategies did you implement to increase employee engagement?
- 2) How did you develop your leadership strategies to encompass employee engagement?
- 3) How do you think leadership style affects employee engagement?
- 4) How do you measure the success of your leadership strategies?
- 5) What principal obstacles did you encounter when implementing your strategies?
- 6) How do you address the principal obstacles to implementing leadership strategies for employee engagement?
- 7) What is a leader's role in getting employees engaged or increasing engagement?
- 8) What are some benefits you have seen from your experiences successfully implementing employee engagement strategies?
- 9) What other information can you share about your organization's strategies to increase employee engagement?

Other topics discussed: _____

Post interview comments: _____

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate

Dear ()

My name is Mike Throgmorton, and I am a doctoral student working on my research study at Walden University. The study explores successful leadership strategies to engage employees in the multimodal transportation industry. The goal is to understand how leadership strategies help increase employee engagement and contribute to productivity, profitability, and workplace culture.




I am asking for your participation in a face-to-face interview scheduled for 60 minutes in a meeting room or office inside the organization. I will have a series of interview questions about your experiences and successful strategies that you implemented to engage employees in the organization.

Please know that neither your identity nor the company's identity will be shared. I am attaching a copy of the consent form; no need to sign that; it's for your information. If you would like to participate in this study, please respond to this email with "I consent," I will use that as your official consent to participate. Please respond to this email with your thoughts.

Regards,

Mike Throgmorton
Michael.throgmorton@waldenu.com

Appendix D: CITI Program Certification

		Completion Date 13-Oct-2022 Expiration Date N/A Record ID 52087156
This is to certify that:		
Michael Throgmorton		
Has completed the following CITI Program course:		Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.
Student's (Curriculum Group) Doctoral Student Researchers (Course Learner Group) 1 - Basic Course (Stage)		
Under requirements set by:		
Walden University		
		
Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w3f7635aa-c353-41a4-a235-67354a77011c-52087156		

Appendix E: Permission to Conduct the Study

[Redacted information]

02/17/2023

Dear Mike Throgmorton,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Exploring Leadership Strategies for Improving Employee Engagement in the Multimodal Transportation Industry in this organization. As part of this study, I authorize you to interview leaders who meet the criteria of having used successful leadership strategies to increase employee engagement, use member checking as a method of ensuring data collected is accurate and provide a summary of results to the participants and leadership within this organization. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: use of company offices and conference rooms as well as the use of public documents. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in Proquest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB and an authorized representative.

Sincerely,

[Redacted signature]