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## Strategies for Nonprofit Organizations to Meet Performance Goals Through Employee

Allicia Graham  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Allicia Graham

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2024

Abstract

Strategies for Nonprofit Organizations to Meet Performance Goals Through Employee

Engagement

by

Allicia Graham

MA, University of Phoenix, 2007

BBA, Temple University, 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

May 2024

## Abstract

Dismal employee engagement can have an adverse effect on an organization's productivity and profitability. Nonprofit organization leaders are concerned about employee engagement because the lack of it impedes meeting organizational performance goals. Grounded in engagement theory, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore strategies that nonprofit organizational leaders used to increase employee engagement to meet organizational performance goals. The participants were six nonprofit industry leaders in the Northeast region of the U. S. who successfully implemented employee engagement strategies and met organizational performance goals. Data were collected through semi structured interviews and from publicly available data and artifacts. Through thematic analysis, four themes were identified: (a) effective communication, (b) effective relationship building, (c) fruitful commitment, and (d) productive open and honest interactions. A key recommendation would be for the nonprofit business leader to be very visible and to lead by example and provide a meaningful connection between the employee and the nonprofit organization, provide a level of comfort, be rewarding, and make the environment mentally and physically stimulating. The implications for positive social change include the potential to receive additional philanthropic funding from individuals and thereby enabling the nonprofit organizations to provide more services to the communities they serve.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my mother, Anna Graham, who continuously encouraged me to be great and is the biggest supporter of my dreams. She witnessed many milestones in this lifetime. She was present for my graduation, building my first home, and raising my daughter, my greatest achievement yet. This is the first accomplishment she is witnessing on the other side of this universe. As I progress through this life, I trust she is watching me from above with pride and adoration for the perseverance she instilled in me. Thank you for being my mother and a constant source of inspiration. I love you so much.

I also want to dedicate this doctoral study to my daughter, Ainyé Johnson, who brings me so much laughter, is a constant source of joy, and gives my life meaning. Your unwavering trust and unconditional love have been my source of strength, and I am so grateful for every moment I spend with you. This doctoral study is dedicated to you as a testament to always follow your dreams and to finish what you start. May you know how deeply you are loved and how proud I am of the young woman you have become. I will always be here to guide and support you, no matter what the future may bring. I love you so much.

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First and foremost, I want to give thanks to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for His grace is sufficient. He has given me the strength and the will to keep moving forward and has never ceased reminding me that He is with me on the road of life. I will continue to give Him praise and honor as He has given me grace and the deepest love that one can imagine.

I want to thank everyone who has helped me along this journey, especially all the participants who shared their leadership experiences and provided valuable information to complete my study.

To my family and friends near and far; the encouraging words, the late-night conversations, and celebrations for reaching each milestone big or small. Special thanks to my family: Francine, Maria, Sheryl, Trina, my Great-Grandmom and Great-Grandpop Wilson for instilling in me the importance of education. Thanks for your never-ending love and for being my biggest cheerleaders. I am so thankful for every connection and every relationship that God has blessed me to experience.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

### **Background of the Problem**

Kahn developed the employee engagement concept in the 1990's after discovering that an employee uses distinct behaviors within themselves inside of their work duties to determine their level of involvement in engagement (Kahn, 1990). An engaged employee creates many positive individual and organizational outcomes (Bailey et al., 2017). Disengaged employees, on the other hand, are concerning because, according to a Gallup report, businesses with higher engagement are 17% more productive and 21% more profitable than those with the lowest engagement among employees (Disengaged Employees Result in Lower Productivity, Gallup Report Says, 2018). Employee engagement is the key ingredient to organizational performance. Finding a perfect strategy to engage employees is a phenomenon; hence, leaders work hard addressing such a process. As organizations implement strategies to engage employees, it involves effective leadership, close examination, support, and excellent communication. A motivating leader influences employee work engagement by increasing specific job resources (Nikolova et al., 2019). Employee engagement has emerged as a critical driver of business success in a competitive market.

Leaders are the precursor to employee perceptions of job resources and work engagement. High levels of engagement could improve organizational performance. Over time, this issue has become more challenging for leaders in both nonprofit and for-profit sectors. Because of resource restrictions and normative demands to keep administrative costs low, nonprofit organizations tend to under-invest in management infrastructure,

particularly human resource management practices, to improve organizational performance (Johansen & Sowa, 2019). Organizations perform better when there is greater engagement and less active disengagement (Hultman, 2020). When organization leaders execute talent management strategies effectively, it increases employee engagement, which helps to improve organizational performance (Hyde & Jain, 2021). The lack of actively engaged employees cost United States organizations over \$350 billion annually (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Engaging leaders could increase and sustain employee work engagement via satisfying the employee's basic psychological needs (Nikolova et al., 2019). Researchers have examined various variables that influence employee engagement strategies. Subsequently, employee performance significantly influences the organization's success or failure. Engaged employees are a tremendous asset to an organization and organizational performance (Anand, 2017).

### **Problem and Purpose**

The specific business problem is that some nonprofit organization leaders lack strategies to engage employees to meet organizational performance goals. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research was to explore strategies nonprofit organization leaders use to increase employee engagement to meet organizational performance goals. The target population consisted of six leaders from nonprofit organizations in the Northeast region of the United States who have successfully increased employee engagement to support organizational performance goals.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population for my study was six leaders of nonprofit organizations within the Northeast region of the U.S., who meet the criteria to have implemented successful strategies that engaged employees to meet organizational performance goals. To increase the validity of a research study, researchers must choose the best sampling strategy (Yin, 2018). Bakkalbasioglu (2020) shared that researchers use purposive sampling to identify and gather valuable data with limited resources. The technique of purposive sampling involves selecting specified individuals or units for analysis. Purposive sampling is the better matching of the sample to the research aims, which improves the rigor of the study and the credibility of the data results (Campbell et al., 2020). I used purposive sampling as a method to identify participants for this study and to obtain their experiences with the phenomenon under my study. I planned to interview six leaders of nonprofit organizations who have successfully implemented strategies to engage employees to positively increase organizational performance. I contacted them via phone, email, LinkedIn, WhatsApp or whichever method was most efficient.

### **Nature of the Study**

Of the following three research methods (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research methods), I selected the qualitative research method. The qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study because the qualitative method comprises collecting data and exploring field-based experiences from the participant's perspectives to understand the business problem (see Lanka et al., 2021). Open-ended questions are used when conducting qualitative research to explore field-based

experiences (Tasker & Cisneroz, 2019). Researchers use qualitative research to collect, collate, and analyze business problems from the participants' perspectives (Lanka et al., 2021). I selected qualitative research as open-ended questions were needed to explore the strategies use to increase employee engagement and meet organizational performance goals. Researchers use the quantitative method to numerically quantify, measure, and grade certain phenomena and their intensity (Suárez et al., 2017). Researchers use the quantitative research method to use statistical inferences and deductions from a broad population (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). I was not exploring statistical inferences or deductions; therefore, the quantitative research methodology was not appropriate for this study. The mixed-method research method combines quantitative and qualitative research methods (Headley & Plano Clark, 2020). The quantitative method of research did not serve the aims of my research, and neither did the mixed method of research, which combines both the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research.

Three types of qualitative research designs were considered to complete this study, including (a) pragmatic inquiry, (b) phenomenology, and (c) ethnography. I selected the pragmatic inquiry to explore strategies nonprofit organization leaders use to increase employee engagement to meet organizational performance goals. The population that I targeted are leaders who have experience implementing successful employee engagement strategies that have positively impacted organizational performance. The participants were approached with in-depth interview questions to incite their attitudes and feelings regarding their experiences. The pragmatic inquiry research design included the participant's subjective opinions and ideas on real-world events and processes (Percy

et al., 2015). The qualitative pragmatic inquiry was the most appropriate selection for my study because investigating people's subjective opinion, attitudes, and reflections on their experiences are desired. Researchers use the phenomenology research method to explore the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group (Qutoshi, 2018).

Exploring the commonality of experiences within a particular group is the phenomenology design; for that reason, it was not suitable for this study. The social sciences that concentrate on social practices and interaction use the ethnography research method most frequently (Kian & Beach, 2019). Ethnography research method is used to explore a particular cultural or social group, and for that reason it was not suitable for this study. The qualitative pragmatic inquiry design was most appropriate for this study.

### **Research Question**

The research question for this study was as follows: What strategies do nonprofit organization leaders use to increase employee engagement to meet organizational performance goals?

### **Interview Questions**

1. How do you define employee engagement?
2. What successful employee engagement strategies have you implemented?
3. Which of your engagement strategies produced the desired results?
4. How do you measure the effectiveness of the engagement strategies you implemented?
5. What challenges did you face when implementing the employee engagement strategies?



6. What did you do to overcome the challenges you experienced?
7. What additional information would you like to add regarding employee engagement that we have not already discussed?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for the study was Kahn's (1990a) engagement theory. Kahn (1990a) defined engagement as the connection of an organization's members' selves to their work roles; during role performances, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally. The three psychological conditions that promote employee engagement were identified by Kahn as (a) meaningfulness, which ensures that employees find their work meaningful enough to warrant them to feel engaged; (b) safety, which refers to when an employee feels comfortable bringing their whole selves to work without fear of repercussions; and (c) availability, which refers to when an employee feels both mentally and physically capable of harnessing their entire selves at this particular job. Kahn (1992) discovered that present and authentic employees in their roles help create shared understandings of their systems that are equally authentic and responsive to change and growth. Kahn (1992) recommended that employees could show different kinds of commitment in action and attitudes such as daily activity levels and confidence in regular tasks, creative contributions, and decision-making, which ultimately influences organizational performance goals.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following definitions of terms used in this study:

*Employee engagement:* Employee engagement is defined as an employee's willingness to go above and beyond their work responsibilities to meet organization initiatives (Berstedt & Wei, 2020).

*Emotional intelligence:* The ability to recognize another person's emotions and particular behaviors of another person, especially concerning that person's interactions with himself and in relationships with other members (Lima et al., 2022).

*Work engagement:* Positive conduct and job satisfaction when executing work activities (Mkhwanazi & Dhanpat, 2023).

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

#### **Assumptions**

A researcher's assumptions are elements of a study that they think to be accurate, rational, and widely regarded (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). I began this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study approach with three assumptions. The validity and reliability of the participants' experiences with the researched phenomena were an essential assumption (Kulshreshtha et al., 2023). The second assumption was that the participants can explain their experiences with the researched phenomenon clearly. As a result, I chose from several methodological options based on the philosophical assumptions and research approaches used in the study (AbuRaya & Gomaa, 2020). A final assumption was that the data collected in this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study will lead to improved employee engagement strategies and increase organizational performance.

**Limitations**

Limitations in a study are potential flaws that are usually beyond the control of the research and may have an impact on the study's design and validity (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). One limitation is that the study's findings may not be generalizable to the general population. Additionally, another limitation of the study would be the time constraints for completing interviews. The goal was to inform all participants of estimated interview duration to obtain rich data.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are the limitations consciously set by the author; the researchers decide to set limits of their work, so the study's aims do not become impossible to achieve (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). There are a couple of delimitations in this study; one is the study is bounded by the geographical location the Northeast region of the United States. Additionally, six nonprofit organization leaders were invited to share their experiences from the interview, hence, limiting the study population to a small audience.

**Significance of the Study**

There are complexities in many organizations that challenge employee engagement (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). An employee's work engagement includes business growth, increasing productivity, and more adaptability with the changing environment, more creativity, and high profitability (Erum et al., 2020). The study findings may be of value to nonprofit organization leaders because their implementation

might result in improving employee engagement, which could potentially increase and support organizational performance.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

This study can contribute to effective improvement of business practice of employee engagement. Employee engagement is an essential prerequisite for successful business operation; it can lead to positive organizational performance (Bailey et al., 2017). Leaders could use the findings of this study to develop improved business practices to engage employees and potentially improve organizational performance.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Increased employee engagement increases performance in organizations (Kumar & Kapoor, 2019). The findings from the study can contribute to improving employee engagement as a business practice. The increase in organizational performance may result in receiving additional philanthropic funding from individuals and organizations that may enable the nonprofit organizations to provide more services to the communities they serve.

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

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study, I explored the strategies nonprofit leaders use to increase employee engagement to meet organizational performance goals. Kahn's (1990a) theory of employee engagement, which is based on a psychological connection between job and self that can promote increased performance, was the basis of my study. Because there are many variables that influence the psychological needs of individuals, the strategic approach is key to the success of positively affecting

organizational performance. Psychological presence drives employee engagement, which enables employees to be available to implement strategy to achieve organizational goals and thus organizational effectiveness (Nienaber & Martins, 2020).

The content of the literature review comprises searches on, and critical analysis and synthesis of scholarship about employee engagement within nonprofit organizations, emotional intelligence, disengaged employees, cost of disengaged employees, and effective employee engagement within nonprofit organizations. Employee engagement is a tool many leaders of nonprofit organizations use to help impact positive organizational outcomes. Employers face a substantial cost when employees are not engaged at work. According to Osborne and Hammoud (2017), disengaged employees potentially cost United States organizations \$350 billion annually. Despite the significant cost, many leaders invest time, money, and energy to create an engaged workforce. Creating an environment involving employee participation and validation could positively impact organizational commitment, job involvement, job satisfaction, and reduced turnover and ultimately positively impact the organization's performance goals. For example, Ryan and Deci (2019) also indicated that 21<sup>st</sup> century organizations have increasingly moved away from model-based goal setting and incentivizing from the top down to being additionally concerned with the psychological needs of their employees.

For existing literature on the subject issue, the following databases were searched: Thoreau Multi-database, Google Scholar, EBSCO, Academic Search, Education Source, SAGE, and Business Source. Additionally, I accessed various journals to obtain literature related to employee engagement. SAGE Journals publishes peer-reviewed journal papers

in multiple fields, including psychology, political science, management, and education that will be helpful in ensuring that 85% of my total sources are peer-reviewed. Over 1600 titles are accessible in ProQuest Science Journals, with over 1200 of them having full text. Researchers may access all charts, diagrams, graphs, tables, pictures, and other critical graphical components in scientific and technical literature in full-text format.

The strategy I used to search the literature entailed using the keywords and phrases along with filters to source peer-reviewed articles published on or after 2018 to ensure a preponderance of the total sources are peer-reviewed literature. There were some significant older sources used in the study, such as to discuss the conceptual framework. To focus on the study factors related to employee engagement, I searched the databases using the following keywords and combination of terms: *employee engagement*, *engagement strategies*, *work engagement*, *organizational engagement*, *job engagement*, *disengaged employees*, *cost of disengagement*, and *nonprofit leadership*.

**Table 1***Literature Review Source Content*

Reference Type	Five years or less	Greater than 5 years	Peer-reviewed	Non-Peer-reviewed
Journal articles	107	15	122	0
Books	0	2	2	0
Government sources	0	1	1	0
Total	107	18	125	0

I organized my literature review by beginning with the reintroduction to the purpose statement, followed by a critical analysis and synthesis of Kahn's (1990a) engagement theory, the conceptual framework I used for the study. In addition, I provided a critical analysis and synthesis of the literature similar to my phenomenon of study including comparable and contrasting viewpoints of previous research and findings.

**Application to the Applied Business Problem**

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study was to explore strategies nonprofit organization leaders use to increase employee engagement to meet organizational performance goals. Employee engagement is an ongoing phenomenon that leaders try to implement in various ways. Employee engagement is defined as a multi-factor architecture that integrates the thorough character of the organizational setting (Kumar & Padhi, 2022). Kahn defined employee engagement as a person's preferred presence and active full role performances while working and expressing themselves (Khodakarami et al., 2018). Admittedly, employee engagement is of huge interest to leaders, finding the solution to its success has its challenges. For instance, to maintain employee engagement when creating or putting in place organizational change manage

initiatives involves strong support from leadership and constant communication to achieve successful change (Hui et al., 2019). Additionally, employee participation is required for change management programs or sustainability efforts to be successful (Hui et al., 2019). For instance, change management involves the importance of sustaining and supporting feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness through the emancipation approach was emphasized, though this strategy must be executed with guidance so that individuals still have a sense of direction (Schroeder-Strong, 2022).

Wang (2022) did a study that theorized that the higher levels of tangible and intangible engagement employees receive from leadership and their communities can predict higher levels of organizational commitment. Because nonprofit organizations have specific purposes, objectives, and personnel, they aspire to deliver public services; therefore, engaged employees find job pleasure in being able to positively impact the organization's environment (Bakotić, 2022). Particularly in nonprofit companies without research on this subject, the relationship between organizational effectiveness and employee satisfaction is still unclear. Several studies, however, have found that nonprofit employees had a high level of work dedication, with employment autonomy, active engagement in decision-making, and coworker support being more essential (Park et. al., 2018).

To gain knowledge of such strategies requires a qualitative pragmatic inquiry approach because the findings are presented in themes (Walden University Pragmatic Inquiry Research Handbook, 2023). This research methodology is more effective than single-case designs as it has more extensive descriptions and explanations of the



phenomenon or issue and increases its trustworthiness and validity (Zivtins et al., 2020).

The findings of my study may provide insight into how employee engagement has a positive impact on the organization's performance.

The findings of the research could aid in the creation of effective employee engagement methods. Understanding what it means to engage an employee could equip leaders with the tools they need to increase employee engagement, which can impact the organization's performance goals. Increased employee engagement could lead to increased organizational performance, which could lead to beneficial social change. Increased performance may result in additional nonprofit services being provided to local communities, improving a person's quality of life.

### **Employee Engagement Theory**

Kahn viewed employee engagement theory as an individual's cognitive, emotional, and physical representation of the authentic and desired self at work. Employee engagement is critical for any organization; a fully engaged employee can produce larger outputs, higher levels of productivity, and commitment to the organization (Dwivedi & Rajendran, 2022). The conceptual framework that grounds this study is Kahn's employee engagement theory. Kahn (1990a) defined employee engagement as the harnessing of organization members' identities to their work norms; it is a psychological state in which people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. There are many methods to describe employee engagement in the workplace; some put an emphasis on the individual employee's internal, emotional state and incorporate their emotions. Dedicated and meaningful work

allows employees to see how important they are to the company and keeps them engaged (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Researchers have utilized employee engagement theory to understand the gaps between employee and organizational strategies throughout time (Matthews, 2018). Researchers have found that employee engagement theory is a full range model suited for investigating phenomena such as employee engagement strategies that lead to a positive impact to organizational performance goals (Jiang & Shen, 2023). The employee engagement theory is accepted in scholarly literature and receives support from empirical research.

There are a variety of employee engagement theories that address the basic premise that by challenging, supporting, and motivating people, companies may raise employee satisfaction and production, which has an impact on the organization's performance goals. Kahn (1990a), the seminal author of employee engagement, focused on the conditions at work in which people personally engaged or expressed and employed themselves. Individuals can employ various degrees of self in their roles while retaining the integrity of the boundaries between who they are and the roles they play, physically, cognitively, and emotionally. Additionally, the concepts of personal engagement and personal disengagement that he discovered in his research Kahn (1990a). Kahn described personal engagement as a person's "preferred self" being simultaneously employed and expressed in task behaviors that foster connections to work and others, person presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full performances.

Engaged employees will go beyond the job description if they feel heard and their needs are met. Individually stimulating actions entail directing one's efforts toward

mental, physical, and emotional efforts (Kahn, 1992). Kahn did a qualitative multiple case study that focused on individual experiences influencing organization members' work behaviors. In his studies, he discovered that several dimensions collectively define a personal sense of being in the work environment. Kahn believed that when people feel completely connected to their job and others, and without the limitations of their assigned function, a psychological presence emerges. People spontaneously call upon any aspects of themselves to say and do what appears appropriate in situations, and this results in the behaviors that accompany the sensation of integration (Kahn, 1992). In a multiple case study, Kahn (1992) discovered that the psychological presence of employees helps create shared understandings of their systems that are equally authentic and responsive to change and growth. Similarly, employees are more engaged in workplaces that support their personal values, implying that structural empowerment enables employees to fulfill organization goals and ultimately encourage engagement (Bergstedt, 2020).

Using Kahn's description of employee engagement as a starting point, Bakker and Albrecht (2018) emphasized the importance of vigor, determination, cognitive engagement, and immersion in achieving employee engagement. Positive human and organizational benefits are produced by engagement, and research indicates that employee tendencies to be involved vary by individual (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). Nikolova et al. (2019) defined engagement as a happy, contented mental state tied to one's work and marked by vitality, dedication, and absorption. Through leadership, characteristics and behaviors tend to be relatively stable across time, the impact of engaging on employee resources and work engagement might be best studied with a

shorter time lag (Nikolova et al., 2019). The perception of an employee's work influences the level of engagement (Kahn, 1990a). Kahn discovered that present and authentic employees in their roles help create shared understandings of the systems that are equally authentic and responsive to change and growth.

The concept of employee engagement has emerged as a critical driver of business success; hence, it is imperative for leadership to identify the engaged and the disengaged employee. Afrahi et al. (2022) identified the assumptions of disengaged employees versus engaged employees. Personal disengagement, Kahn (1990a) further defined as a person's simultaneous withdrawal and defense of their preferred self through activities that foster a lack of connections, physical, cognitive, and emotional absence, and passive, incomplete role performances. A disengaged employee can potentially negatively impact an organization's performance outcome. Afrahi et al. (2022) defined conceptual boundaries that were included in the findings of the systematic review. Nine hundred nineteen articles revealed that disengaged employees are temporarily distancing themselves because of work-related demands (Afrahi et al., 2022).

From actively engaged to actively disengaged, employees are located along a spectrum of engagement. While there are some general engagement-boosting factors that apply to all types of workers, there are also distinctions based on how much people, as opposed to senior management, embrace corporate responsibility inside their firms (Hejjas et al., 2019). Employee disengagement has grown to be a significant problem and a major area of inquiry for many researchers globally (Moyo, 2020). Moyo (2020) explored the factors that influenced employee disengagement during the time of the

pandemic. Moyo (2020) found that the existence of the pandemic influenced the negative behavioral outcome of employees, which included employee engagement. The antecedents of the lack of employee work engagement ultimately impact organizational performance goals.

Leadership has frequently been demonstrated to be a crucial element in encouraging engagement (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). Every leader can influence their employees if they take a strategic approach to incorporate engagement behaviors and may experience higher employee productivity. Matthews (2018) explored the significance of firms producing a return on investment for their efforts by integrating employee engagement, corporate performance, and developing strategy clarity. While a reactive method may be more controllable, a proactive approach necessitates more resources and more constant management attention (Matthews, 2018).

### **Critical Analysis of Conceptual Framework**

The phenomenon of “employee engagement” defines how a company and its employees interact. It creates many positive individual and organizational outcomes. Kahn (1992) believed that a psychological presence appears when people experience a sense of connection to their work. Motivating employees will at some point positively impact the organization’s financial performance because they feel invested (McKee, 2019). The ongoing studies regarding employee engagement suggest that leaders should continue to implement strategies that will improve engagement to ensure optimal organizational performance.

There are several supporting theories to Kahn's (1992) employee engagement theory. Kahn's employee engagement theory identifies three dimensions of employee engagement: physical, cognitive, and emotional. Kahn recommended that employees could show different kinds of commitment in action and attitudes, such as daily activity levels and confidence in regular tasks, creative contributions, and decision-making, which ultimately influences organizational performance goals.

Supporting theories include the self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci (2019), Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In self-determination theory Ryan and Deci (2019) included a framework for intervention development by outlining the required mechanisms that support changes in long-term health behavior, such as fundamental psychological well-being requirements and motivational rules (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Similarly, to Kahn's employee engagement theory, the phrase refers to how well an organization's members can express themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally while doing their assigned responsibilities. Leaders can promote employee engagement by fostering positive leadership through the effort that employees make at work on a mental, emotional, and physical level. Psychological well-being is the state of health that results from reaching one's full potential through self-fulfillment and the pursuit of challenging objectives (Xiang et al., 2023). Xiang et al. (2023) did a study that found that by utilizing the self-determination perspective stems in personal well-being at work, which leads to life satisfaction, potential development, and personal growth. The engaged employee is more likely to solve problems, connect with people, and develop innovation (Ge & Sun, 2020). Comparably Meyers and Woerkom

(2017) explored the use of strengths interventions, which are described as activities and procedures that concentrate on the discovery, development, and use of personal strengths, as a tool for improving employee wellbeing in organizations. For that reason, managers must be aware of the needs of their workforce and identify what is most rewarding.

Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory purported that there are two distinct continuums on which job pleasure and unhappiness can be found, each with its own unique collection of motivation-hygiene theory components (Ihensekien & Joel, 2023). The source of one's interest in a specific outcome or goal is motivation. Extrinsic motivation happens when people participate in things that serve as a means to an aim rather than because they are particularly interested in them (Heyns & Rothmann 2018). The desire to do a task for its own intrinsic enjoyment rather than for some external reward is what defines intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2019).

Maintaining employee satisfaction and proper performance at work requires employers to be aware of the professional and personal demands of their staff (Bhatt et al., 2022). There is an increasing number of millennials entering the workforce, with a different set of values from the generations before them. Bhatt et al. (2022) tested the two-factor theory on 180 millennials in the workplace. The test revealed that there is a research deficit related to the alteration and differences in priorities of younger workers, which offers better information about how to keep these workers satisfied in the job and keep workers themselves. Leaders need to understand the millennial generation's mindset and motivation at work to influence company objectives. An inclusive workplace that celebrates a congruent work environment is the outcome of businesses developing

policies to meet the demands of the millennial generation with the support of understanding of this generation (Bansal, 2017). Generational cohort brings varying beliefs, work ethic, values, attitudes, and expectations (Calk & Patrick, 2017).

According to Bloomberg's analysis of data from the United Nations, millennials and members of generation Z make up two-thirds of the global population (Mudditt, 2020). It is generally agreed that millennials are born between 1980 and 1994, while Gen Zs were born between 1995 and 2015. Mudditt (2020) suggested that both groups are those who seek-out insurers who uphold moral standards. Although Mudditt focused on the younger generation, leaders must understand how to engage employees. It is crucial because having the ability to engage and inspire people of all generations gives you an advantage.

Understanding the needs of the workforce can help to foster a high-performance culture. For instance, Maslow's hierarchy of needs includes five levels of human needs: self-actualization, esteem, social, safety, and physiological. According to time, circumstances, and experiences, Maslow suggested that humans will be encouraged to satisfy their most pressing demands in a hierarchy (Artaya et al., 2021). There are several dimensions within each hierarchy, the first being self-actualization, which is achieved by self-determined activities, and realizing one's highest potential (Schoofs et al., 2022). Self-esteem is the key variable of employees' satisfaction status within the organization because is the perception of their value and worth to the organization (Su et al., 2022).

Because there are many variables that help foster employee engagement, it is imperative for leaders to be clear in defining the direction to accomplish the



organizational objective. For example, Lawler's model was used in a study that explored the reasons for teachers' lack of motivation for self-development in online teaching (Kesselman et al., 1974). The expectancy theory was utilized as a lens by the authors to investigate this phenomenon. They proposed that the issue is not that the employees who took part do not see the benefits of successful online teaching or that they believe the outcomes are meaningless, but rather how valuable the likely outcomes of successful online teaching are in comparison to rewards from other responsibilities in their lives. Similarly, Khan's theory which has a multidimensional construct that included physical, cognitive, and emotional principles to as it relates to the work environment outcomes (Kahn, 1990).

### **Critical Analysis of Employee Engagement Phenomenon**

Employee engagement is a fundamental concept that many researchers have studied over several years. There is an interesting connection to how employee engagement has impacted organizational performance. Organizational efficiency is subsequently influenced by the employee engagement component (Nienaber & Martins, 2020). Finding a perfect strategy to engage employees is a phenomenon; hence, many leaders work hard addressing such a process. As business leaders strategize ways to grow in competitive markets, implementing change involves effective leadership, examination, support, and great communication to foster engagement. Mirvis and Googins (2018) explored ways employees are engaged as social innovators in their companies or co-creators in partnerships with other businesses. Employees participate in organization-wide innovations as members of innovation teams, as intrapreneurs in company

innovation competitions, in partnerships with outside social entrepreneurs, and in free worldwide service initiatives (Mirvis & Googins, 2018). These studies together confirm that leadership strategy is necessary to influence employee engagement and ultimately impact organizational performance.

Leadership can effectively implement employee engagement by contributing to the human factor, which is unlocked by the levers of motivation through the elements of the organizations to support psychological meaningfulness, which drives employee engagement to achieve the goals of the organization (Nienaber & Martins, 2020). As organization leaders implement strategies to engage employees, it involves effective leadership, close examination, support, and excellent communication. There is a connection between work engagement and an employee's positive and committed attitude toward their work, and performance pressure, which emphasizes to employee the importance of good performance in the workplace (Kundi et al., 2022). Ali et al. (2018) recognized that the quality of work is the backbone for organizational development. Nikolova et al. (2019) focused on engaging leadership as a precursor to employee perceptions of job resources and work engagement. An engaged leader can increase and sustain employee work engagement by satisfying their basic psychological needs.

There are three basic psychological needs competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Murphy et al. (2023) instigated that the essential behavior for psychological health and well-being and if satisfied may lead to optimal growth. Assuming that engaging strengths is a pleasurable experience that creates positive emotions. For

example, when an employee has a psychological attachment to their work and could invest his/her energy will ultimately stay with their organization (Purwasono, 2019).

Barreiro and Treglown (2020) explored the facets of emotional intelligence that promote or hinder engagement as a function of the psychological resources provided to employees. According to their study, emotional intelligence is a predictor of how employees remain engaged. For instance, emotional intelligence acting as a personal resource will have positive emotional and behavioral responses to high job demands, and thus maintain and facilitate engagement (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). Additionally, the fluctuation in emotion; they call it emotion regulation. In this situation, employees who are less able to regulate their emotions and experience more significant uncertainties in emotion experience higher levels of engagement at work.

The millennial generation, those born between 1978 and 1998, have expressed a desire to work for an organization that “cares about how it influences and contributes to society,” according to studies (Mirvis & Googins, 2018, p.26). This generation came with very different attitudes and work habits that need adaptation with existing cultures. The use of smartphones, laptops and other devices led this group to a level of communication beyond Generation X or Baby Boomers. Powerful means of communication aids the bridging between logic and the emotions of the listener. Bridging the two results in an increased willingness by the audience to respond (Sundin et al., 2018). Purwasono (2019) referenced how challenging it is to compete in the market in addition to retaining employees. Concerns about the generational gap and the number of Generation Y workers departing their jobs to progress in their careers have lately emerged. According

to global research, one-third of Y generation workers intend to leave their current positions soon in search of new employment (Purwasono, 2019). Sundin et al. (2018) contend that investigating cutting edge methods to convey information and explain it to audiences is essential given the complexity of the issues and interests at stake in environmental management. These studies together confirmed that the engagement of the employee is vital in the level of communication.

Employee engagement is the condition in which workers are highly committed and eager at work. Kahn's theory speaks to three principal dimensions of engagement: the physical, cognitive, and emotional. Even though many theories overlap the various dimensions of engagement, it is important to distinguish between the various perspectives on employee engagement. For example, Vroom expectancy theory suggests that individuals are motivated to succeed when they believe their additional effort will be recognized and rewarded. It highlights employers can predict their employees' behavior and morale based on the extrinsic, intrinsic, and social rewards they receive in their workplace. Extrinsic rewards are described as rewards with monetary value. According to Shen et al. (2022), three categories of extrinsic incentive exist: identifiable regulation, introjected regulation, and external regulation. Intrinsic rewards are characterized as positive motivation, psychological reward to work. The social rewards are associated with a wide range of stimuli. Moreover, Vroom's expectancy theory connects human behavior to rewards. According to Sixpence et al. (2022), rewards in the workplace influence employees' satisfaction, work morale and overall choices as they progress in their careers.

Vroom's expectancy theory is based on the perception that employees will be motivated under the following circumstances: when they believe they can manage the task, when they think their efforts will result in certain success, and when they think, their pay is commensurate with their work (Özaslan & Özaslan, 2023). Vroom formulated the expectancy theory in 1964. A few years later Porter and Lawler refined the model to fill the gaps regarding the complexities of the human being (Özaslan & Özaslan, 2023). Expectancy is the belief that one's level of performance and the results are positively correlated, according to (Özaslan & Özaslan, 2023). The Latin phrase *quid pro quo*, which means "something for something." Though there is a negative implication to the Latin phrase in a business setting, the idea is parallel to the concept of the expectancy theory. Similarly, tasks requiring high performance with the prospect of high rewards promote intrinsic motivation in the workplace, supporting Ryan and Deci's cognitive evaluation theory (Eisenberger et al., 1999). Scholars have revealed that the impact of rewarding people for vague performances or do not require high levels of creativity in that they do not affect or improve intrinsic motivation (Eisenberger et al., 1999).

Intrinsic motivation is presumed to stem from people's core human needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Moreover, when people are driven primarily by the pleasure, delight, fulfillment, and challenge for their work, they are more creative in their work (Aldabbas et al., 2023). The rewards can have both incremental and detrimental effects on intrinsic motivation. According to a meta-analysis, the performance gains of each type of motivation for performance vary on the nature of

the activity (Huber et al., 2023). Leaders should consider tasks that appear to motivate their personnel and match them to the appropriate assignment.

Kaufman (2023) did a case study that focused on Maslow's theory of motivation and the concept of self-actualization as it relates to modern-day individuals. The factors that contribute to psychological well-being and fulfillment were considered as well, as they can affect an individual's performance, attitude, perceptions, and reactions. The tendency to focus on progress and enjoyment rather than being stressed about satiating one's basic requirements can also affect a person's interest in connection curiosity. According to Maslow, exploration, creativity, and love for all people are more important to those driven by growth than anything else (Kaufman, 2023). The big five personality traits that have drawn the greatest interest in contemporary personality psychology research are extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, which demonstrates that most of the covariance among more particular personality traits is explained by these factors (Espinoza et al., 2023).

Yet, the Big Five variables' features are disregarded in a huge portion of personality study. Since the facets certainly make them stronger predictors for many criteria due to their subtlety, some researchers contend that this has impeded scientific advancement by diverting attention away from facet level interactions that may be crucial to theoretical comprehension (Espinoza et al., 2023).

The Likert-scale for 522 participants was used to evaluate the applicability of Maslow's theories in the present day. Kaufman (2023) tried to create a scale with improved loadings on the general factors and external validity evaluated by work-related

outcomes and creative areas that support robust creative expression. The results illustrated that satisfaction of needs was a positive indicator of levels of self-actualization more than the lack of these needs met, and that self-actualized individuals report more positively about their identities.

Ştefan et al. (2020) did a case study to analyze Maslow's hierarchy of needs in relation to the connection between motivation and performance. While Maslow's theory has been widely studied, there is still a gap in how the effects are properly measured as well as controversies about the connections between satisfactions of needs and how it affects job performance. It was predicted that satisfaction of the needs positively correlates to job performance, but that satisfying lower needs does not particularly impact performance the way higher needs do (Ştefan et al., 2020). Ştefan et al. (2020) findings suggest that there is a link between employee motivation and performance. There are different dimensions of motivation that are related to job satisfaction and performance which supports Maslow's hierarchy of needs that when individual's basic needs are met the higher levels of the pyramid become relevant (Ştefan et al., 2020).

As numerous companies struggle to retain their younger employees in Generations X, Y, and Z while previous generations differ in seniority and desires from their workplaces. It is necessary to study and understand these differences, so that issues of monetary loss and human resources do not continue or grow to unrecoverable losses. According to Hinzmann et al., (2019) negative perceptions and stereotypes of the younger generation may also require readjusting, as they contribute to a lack of

cooperation and satisfaction from these groups. The lack of cooperation may result in the overall work performance which could ultimately impact organizational performance.

Ryan and Deci (2019) self-determination theory of motivation is relevant to this study since it contends that all people have three fundamental psychological that inspire growth and development. Similarly, Maslow's hierarchy of needs which includes physiological, security, social, and esteem. Putu et al. (2021), suggested that when these needs are met, employees are more loyal to the organization and have a positive work morale. Additionally, Kahn (1990a), who coined employee engagement theory, discovered that present and authentic employees in their roles help create shared understandings of their systems that are equally authentic and responsive to change and growth. An engaging leader can increase and sustain employee work engagement by satisfying their basic psychological needs (Nikolova et al., 2019).

In Hinzmann et al.'s (2019) quantitative study, he pointed out the factors that influence employee engagement within various generations. When employees feel disregarded and less appreciated are less motivated to be engaged within the organization. For this reason, employee engagement initiatives should be tailored to different generations of employees. Organizational productivities are impacted by the factors that cause high employee stress levels, high employee turnover, and low employee productivity (Bhana & Suknunan, 2021). Hinzmann et al.'s (2019) study included topics concerning the effectiveness of leadership as well as the issues related to the overall workplace environment. Fostering an environment at work that can assist counteract detrimental influences and enhance employees' mental outlook such as the



Employee Assistance Program (EAP). While promoting healthy activities it is equally important to keep employees engaged in creating a culture of health. Leadership commitment, social and physical environment, support, and employee involvement are crucial components that contribute to a healthy culture. Understanding this enables employers to concentrate on maintaining older workers' engagement, resulting in a more collaborative and organizational performing work environment. After all, a multilateral approach by leaders is necessary to develop a viable solution to keeping employees engaged (Hinzmann et al., 2019).

### **Scholar Perspectives on Employee Engagement**

An engaged employee has a positive impact on an organization's performance, growth, and goals. It is imperative for leaders to implement strategies to keep their employees engaged. To promote employee wellbeing and organizational outcomes, it is necessary to understand how and why people become involved in the workplace (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). Employee engagement has challenged leaders to be strategic in their approach to organizational outcomes.

There are several strategic practices organizations implement to engage employees. Organizations with high engagement reduce turnover and hiring costs. Whether it is cultivating strengths or extensive communication, leaders must provide employees' opportunities to grow to keep them engaged. The impact of a disengaged employee can impact the performance of the organization.

Communication and frequent coaching involvement between these age groups prove to a deeper understanding and cohesiveness in the workplace but engagement is

difficult when these groups focus on their differences (Hinzmann et al., 2019).

Communication is an important function of engagement. Through communication and mutual understanding, it eliminates the divide between individuals and groups. For efficiency and decision-making, information is crucial. There is a direct influence of managerial coaching and employee job performance (Ali et al., 2018). Studies have shown that effective communication serves as a great tool to manage relationships at multiple levels. Some leaders believe that there are five essential steps of the framework for comprehending effective communication are as follows: Project stakeholders are identified, their requirements prioritized, a necessary stakeholder management strategy visualized and decided, stakeholders engaged, and stakeholder communication monitored throughout all project stages (Rajhans, 2018).

Every organization has uncovered the need to address the critical problem of employee engagement (Singh & Phoolka, 2023). Identifying the drivers that foster employee engagement became the major challenge for many leaders. When engaged employees value organizational culture, their engagement fosters the organizational development (Sabu & Manoj, 2020). Sadiartha and Sitorus (2018) defined an organizational culture as a working method based on a system of values shared by every member of staff or employees within an organization. Though intensive communication is the key to driving engagement, there must be order in the manner leaders implement engagement strategy.

Leaders have expressed that managing the emotions of the employee is a key driver of engagement (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). Positive emotions enable employees

to access a broader range of behavioral responses by expanding their affective and cognitive resources (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). Some leaders believe that the results of an employee's engagement at work may be influenced by the leadership style.

Many leaders hold the same beliefs about how the activities of transformational and transactional leaders influence employees' emotional engagement to their employment (Aboramadan & Dehleez, 2020). Although transactional leaders will have more work-oriented and focused attitudes and transformational leaders will encourage positive behaviors, both leadership styles expect to have good but different influences. When managers can make such a positive influence for their employees, it is imperative that these initiatives are executed (Molin et al., 2020). Transformational leadership is excellent to build teams and identify areas that need change. Furthermore, (Molin et al., 2020) implied that structured models and practices play a key role in the health and wellbeing of a company's environment. It is imperative to involve staff in a collaborative environment; hence, a good leader would need to have the ability to execute correctly to ensure a positive outcome. However, management is finding it difficult to find time to adopt employee engagement practices and initiatives, which may impede workplace success. The goals of the organization are achieved through the effectiveness of leadership and communication has a significant influence on- job satisfaction (Sadiartha & Sitorous, 2018).

Moreover, leadership styles affect employee engagement, while engagement directly impacts loyalty and intent to stay (Book et al., 2019). It is critical for leaders to comprehend how employee engagement affects an organization's culture and

performance, among other things. Manager's perception of engagement, employee loyalty, and staff retention have a direct impact on leadership satisfaction (Book et al., 2019) and has a favorable impact on the organizational performance outcomes. Tse et al. (2018) provided insight into the research on leadership development and work design in human resource management, which can inform human resource managers to design effective strategies and systems that can increase employees' creativity.

According to Bhana and Suknunan (2021), the issues of disengagement amongst employees and the factors that influence such behavior. They discovered that employees are doing tasks that are beyond their job description. The unequal workload distribution may have an impact on workers, leading to disengagement. According to a Gallup survey, 85% of employees are actively disengaged in their jobs (Disengaged Employees Result in Lower Productivity, Gallup Report Says, 2018). Disengaged employees potentially cost United States organizations \$350 billion annually (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Moreover, some disengaged employee behaviors are influenced by stressful working conditions, which are related to employee wellbeing and work performance (Kot, 2022).

Leaders were aware that employee performance might suffer due to the high levels of techno-stressors that include techno-overload, techno-invasion, techno-complexity, techno-insecurity, and techno-uncertainty (Chiu et al., 2022). Stress that people suffer because of using information and communication technology is known as a techno-stressor. Technostress is referred to the psychological stress connected with the use of technologies and may have a negative effect on employee satisfaction and work

engagement (Bondanini, 2020). Furthermore, an organization that encourages high levels of techno-stressors runs the risk of moral disengagement and poor employee performance (Aktan & Toraman, 2022). The social exchange theory and the effects leadership in nonprofit organizations has on employee engagement, involvement, and creativity, as nonprofit organizations are increasingly facing a decline in staff, funding, and revenue (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020). Researchers discovered that the levels of employee engagement influence more than company loyalty, but attachment to their workplace. Engaged employees demonstrate higher performance and more willing to beyond their job requirements (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020).

Leaders of a nonprofit organization recognized the lack of teamwork, creativity, and initiative in the workplace, as these behaviors affect and identify employee expectations and satisfaction (Stankiewicz et al., 2019). The attitudes and behaviors are also affected by the lack of financial support and sense of community the employees have at work, but that the employees felt that the possibility of improving these circumstances were attainable, so sharing ideas are encouraged (Stankiewicz et al., 2019). For this reason, it is imperative to focus on the low levels of organization commitment in the nonprofit setting with quantifiable measures to assess daily operations, staff support, and tangible vs intangible benefits staff may receive (Wang, 2022). In addition to analyzing the factors that contribute to employee engagement, this study also considers how employers can effectively identify and take care of their employees' concerns and expectations in workplace that emphasizes their mission to their communities. It was proposed that higher levels of corporate commitment may be predicted by higher levels

of employees' tangible and intangible engagement with leadership and their communities (Wang, 2022).

Employee disengagement has a detrimental influence on an organization's productivity. It has become a significant problem and a prominent focus of investigation for many researchers worldwide (Moyo, 2020). Leaders may improve employee engagement by actively communicating, encouraging creativity, and demonstrating great leadership by developing a leadership style that corresponds to the needs of the person or group. Identifying the factors that foster employee engagement is a key component for many organizational leaders. Therefore, leaders who strategically take deliberate initiative to evaluate engagement and manage engagement are more likely to achieve higher employee engagement (Matthews, 2018).

### **Transition**

In Section 1, I offered a detailed examination of how employee engagement might positively impact organizational performance after introducing the research challenge, identifying the conceptual framework, and identifying the conceptual framework. The literature featured perspectives from various scholars regarding employee engagement and how it impacts organizational performance. Employee engagement was the relevant construct for this study because the information acquired from employee engagement theory contributed to improving employee engagement, leadership strategies, and the influence of disengaged employees on organizational performance. Section 1 also includes a critical review of the employee engagement phenomena as well as tactics used

by organizational leaders to improve employee engagement to accomplish organizational performance goals.

In Section 2, I restated the purpose statement for this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research using population and sampling. Additionally, I discussed the role of the researcher, participants, research method and research design. I discussed my responsibilities for the data collection process and the Belmont Report, which is the guide for ethical principle and the guideline for the protection of human subjects of research. Lastly, I reviewed the data collection instruments, the analysis of the data researched, and concluded with the reliability and validity of the study.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes an explanation of the findings and the ties to the conceptual framework. I presented the study findings, as well as the findings to professional practice and the implications of the findings regarding social change. Lastly, I provided recommendations for further research, reflect on my experience within the DBA process, and end with a strong conclusion.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study was to explore strategies nonprofit organization leaders use to increase employee engagement to meet organizational performance goals. This study's targeted population consisted of six leaders from nonprofit organizations in the Northeast region of the United States who have successfully increased employee engagement to support organizational performance goals. The implications for positive social change might be that an increase in engaged employees may result in improved organizational performance. Increased performance may foster more nonprofit services to local communities supporting a higher quality of life for residents.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Researchers are responsible for choosing the proper interview subjects, gathering, and evaluating data, coding, and reporting the results during the data collection process (Lester et al., 2020). The role of the researcher includes asking people to discuss topics that could be extremely sensitive to them (Collins & Stockton, 2022). A researcher is



looking into accounts of people's subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of the world in a qualitative pragmatic inquiry study (Percy et al., 2015).

Because I have been working in human resources (HR) for more than 18 years, I have had the chance to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of employee engagement. I have worked in various industries and learned from diverse groups of professionals. As an HR manager in the payroll industry and in the medical industry, I noticed there is a difference in strategic implementation of employee engagement. My interview questions were designed to ensure the gathering of comprehensive data from the participants within my study.

Additionally, the researchers' role is to conduct an ethical study and follow Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Prior to recruiting participants, gathering data, or gaining access to dataset, all Walden studies must receive ethics review and approval from the IRB. I must also adhere to The Belmont Report, which is designed to present a set of recommendations that all researchers much adhere to as part of their moral obligation (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [USDHHS], 1979).

There is a moral obligation for the researcher to ensure the participants are protected and the information is held to the highest level of confidentiality. Researchers are responsible for conducting research ethically, assuring data integrity, and protecting sensitive data (Perrier & Barnes, 2018). According to the USDHHS (1979), researchers adhere to basic ethical principles when involving human subjects. The principle of

respect of persons calls for individuals to be protected and treated respectfully, equitably, and fairly (USDHHS, 1979).

Another challenge researchers face is not introducing bias and personal ideas into their research, particularly if the data confirm those biases. It is important for a researcher to be cognitive of their biases to keep their experiences from influencing the findings of the study. Romano et al. (2021) defined bias as the combination of various design, data, analysis, and presentation tending to produce findings. By focusing more on information that is confirming than contradictory, confirmation bias may aid individuals in reducing cognitive dissonance and maintaining one's initial belief (Siebert & Siebert, 2023). I analyzed my notes and employed members checking to minimize the opportunity for bias and I ensured that my interpretations are accurate. In qualitative research, member checking has a long-contested history with critical methods (Motulsky, 2021).

Qualitative research is a method that comprises collecting data and exploring field-based experiences from the participant's perspectives to understand the business problem (Lanka et al., 2021). I asked the same interview questions of the participants to ensure consistency in my data collection procedures and to avoid the opportunity for bias. Excellent research questions that are narrowly focused necessitate a thorough review of the literature as well as an in-depth understanding of the problem that is being researched (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022). The rationale for interview protocol within qualitative research is to define a strategy for gathering data to improve and increase the reliability of the data collected (Braaten et al., 2020).

## Participants

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore strategies nonprofit organization leaders take to increase employee engagement and achieve organizational performance goals. Participants were nonprofit organization leaders who have successfully implemented strategies that increased employment engagement and positively impacted organization performance. I interviewed six leaders of nonprofit organizations who have successfully implemented strategies to engage employees to positively increase organizational performance. The participants met the eligibility requirements of having knowledge and leadership experience with implementing successful employee engagement strategies to meet organizational performance goals.

Throughout this journey at Walden University, I used several strategies to establish working relationships with my potential participants. I belong to a few professional associations such as the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the Philadelphia Community of Leaders (PCOL). I shared my research study with several leaders within both organizations to build rapport with those leaders who have implemented engagement strategies. Developing relationships is essential to the success of the study (Fernandez et al., 2021). Additionally, while studying at Walden University, it was important for me to talk to people within my professional networks to learn as much as possible to understand employee engagement strategies. Prioritizing relationships within a population of the study shows promise for supporting participants (Lolkus et al., 2022). My plan was to email participants to invite them to participate (see

Appendix A). When the participant accepted the invitation, I sent the consent form so they would understand the study and their commitment.

### **Research Method**

I conducted this study using a qualitative research approach to help me better understand the business challenge through gathering data and examining participant viewpoints on real-world experiences (see Lanka et al., 2021). When conducting qualitative research to examine field-based experiences, open-ended questions are employed (Tasker & Cisneroz, 2019). Researchers gather, compile, and examine business issues from the participants' views through qualitative research (Lanka et al., 2021). Therefore, I chose qualitative research to study the methods used to increase employment engagement and achieve organizational performance goals.

Researchers quantify, measure, and grade certain phenomena and their intensity numerically using the quantitative technique (Suárez et al., 2017). Quantitative research methods are also useful for statistical inferences and deductions from a broad population (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019), which would not be appropriate for this study. Mixed-method research method combines quantitative and qualitative research methods (Headley & Plano Clark, 2020). I am looking to gather rich descriptions from my interviewees, and the quantitative or mixed methods research does not allow that level of data collection.

### **Research Design**

Three types of qualitative research designs were considered to complete this study, including (a) qualitative pragmatic inquiry, (b) phenomenology, and (c)

ethnography, that is the study of people in their own environment (Saunders et al., 2016). According to Percy et al. (2015), qualitative pragmatic inquiry allows researchers to consider the participants subjective opinions and ideas on real-world events and processes. Researchers use qualitative pragmatic inquiry when they are defining the population with the scope of the study. To meet the goals of the study, the researcher can combine several qualitative methodologies (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). The goal of the qualitative pragmatic inquiry is to comprehend how people interpret phenomena or situations. I employed qualitative pragmatic inquiry to find what strategies business leaders in nonprofit organizations used to increase employment engagement.

Researchers use the phenomenology research method to explore the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group (Qutoshi, 2018). This method addresses several phenomena, including attitudes, ideas, views, sentiments, and similar things (Percy et al., 2015). Exploring the commonality of experiences within a particular group is the phenomenology design; for that reason, it was not suitable for this study.

The ethnography research method is primarily used in social sciences that focus on social practices and interactions (Kian & Beach, 2019). The analysis of the network of social groupings, social traditions, beliefs, behaviors, etcetera, which constitute a “culture” is the focus of this research (Percy et al., 2015). Ethnography research method is used to explore a particular cultural or social group; for that reason, it was not suitable for this study.

Data saturation occurs when no additional interviews are needed, and data collection can end (Squires & Dorsen, 2018). Data saturation is an important aspect of

research integrity. To ensure data saturation, I asked the same open-ended interview questions of each participant until no new information was discovered from succeeding participants. I used member checking to have participants check the accuracy of data collected and analyzed.

### **Population and Sampling**

Researchers select purposive sampling when they anticipate that the participants will contribute valuable and unique information to the study (Campbell et al., 2020). The goal was to identify interviewees who meet the criteria to participate and who would most appropriately answer the research question using the identify qualitative pragmatic inquiry research design. Therefore, I used the purposive sampling method to identify and select the participants that meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. I interviewed six leaders of nonprofit organizations who currently or formerly supervised employees or were involved in implementing successful strategies related to employee engagement. My goal was to undertake interviews until I reached data saturation, beyond the initial six people if the responses to that point were insufficient to achieve data saturation. Data saturation occurs when the interview participants provide no new data that can further add valuable insight (Squires & Dorsen, 2018). My goal was to seek leaders who have led their organization and successfully implemented strategies that increased employment engagement and positively impacted organization performance.

Building a rapport with the participants was key to reducing any apprehension; for that reason, I conducted in-person or Zoom interviews to generate dialogue and build a rapport. I interviewed leaders in the Northeast region of the United States that have been

successful in implementing strategies to engage employees. Researchers choose sample sizes that enable them to accomplish data saturation, which is the accumulation of qualitative data to the point that the sense of closure is attained since new data provide redundant information (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Interviewing participants provides qualitative researchers with the opportunity to ask open-ended questions to explore field-based experiences (Tasker & Cisneroz, 2019). I conducted the interviews via Zoom, Skype, and in-person to make it suitable for the participants. I scheduled interviews via email or phone. I presented each participant with seven open-ended questions. I recorded the interviews to then be transcribed.

### **Ethical Research**

Researchers must adhere to ethical standards to avoid misrepresentation of research data. In qualitative research, the relationship and familiarity that develops between participants, and the researchers can give rise to several ethical concerns (Sanjari et al., 2014). One of the most important ethical and legal considerations in research involving human subjects is informed consent (Ibrahim et al., 2019).

Three components of informed consent were established: information about the research technique, comprehension of the information being conveyed, and voluntariness, which is required for a valid consent to participate (see U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). I did not offer any participant monetary incentives, or otherwise, for participating in the study. Participants could contact me via text, phone, or email to withdraw participation in the study without consequence. Should the participants, for any reason, wish to withdraw from my study, they only needed to notify me via email with

their intentions to so and I acted accordingly. Any data up to that point provided by the participant wishing to withdraw would be shredded into a locked, confidential bin.

Prior to conducting my research, I received approval from Walden University's IRB, #01-02-24-0186275. They guided me through the ethics approval process. I took every measure to ensure that I delivered and collected valuable, meaningful information. While using the qualitative methods in business ethics research raises challenges of carrying investigations in a fair and suitable manner as well as effectively communicating the research methodology and outcomes to readers (Nair, 2021). Additionally, according to Walden University's IRB guidelines it was my responsibility to keep my participants confidential. I protected the identity of the participants by using codes such as P1, P2, P3, etcetera to hide their identities. A letter of invitation, informed consent, and interview protocol forms are included in this study as Appendices (please see table of contents and appendices A, B, and C). Furthermore, I secured all research information on a password protected thumb drive, which will be placed in a locked file cabinet for a period of 5 years.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

I was the primary data collection instrument for this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research study. Human research is the process of discovering new information about issues (Thomas et al., 2018). I conducted semi structured interviews with six leaders of nonprofit organizations who currently or formerly supervised employees and were involved in implementing successful strategies related to employee engagement. The interviews took place via Zoom, in-person, and by phone, whichever was most suitable



for the participants. I allowed 45 to 60 minutes per interview per participant in alignment with the interview protocol. I enhanced the reliability and validity of the data collection process by using member checking, in addition to field test my interview questions with my Chair and Second Committee Member. I provided a copy of my interpretations of participant responses to the participants and asked them to verify the accuracy of my interpretations. Member checking confirms the researcher's interpretation of the data collected; it allows the researcher to make sense of the organizational realities (Iivari, 2018). The interview protocol is in Appendix B.

### **Data Collection Technique**

I explained to the participants the informed consent to allow them to understand the study prior to conducting the interviews. The draft Informed Consent form and the Invitation Letter are contained in Appendix A. Informed consent is imperative to the study, to guarantee transparency and participant autonomy, it is important to be aware of participants' concerns and information needs surrounding expanded consent (Lutomski et al., 2023). I asked open-ended questions to encourage effective two-way conversation and data collection. Data gathering can be improved and made more reliable by using a formalized method for adjusting interview protocols (Braaten et al., 2020). The purpose of the interview protocol is to ensure uniformity in the interview questions and ensure that the interviews yield comprehensive information within a specific time range (Azungah, 20118). Listening carefully and allowing enough time for the participant to answer the questions is essential to successful data collection. Providing participants the chance to reflect carefully is vital to the outcome of the interview (Braaten et al., 2020).

After completing my interviews, I thanked each participant for their participation and time as well as providing them with my contact information if they have questions.

There are advantages and disadvantages when collecting data during the semi structured interview process. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, in-person, and by phone, whichever was most suitable for the participants. During a semi structured interview conducted virtually, the obvious advantages are convenience and comfort (Steele et al., 2022). When conducting a semi structured interview whether it is conducted via Zoom, in-person, or by phone the researcher has the advantage of observing the body language and voice tonality. Lastly, the researcher has the advantage of conducting the Zoom semi structured interview throughout various time zones. The disadvantages include the overwhelming commitment for both the researcher and the participant and the possibility of bias (Maya-Jariego & Cachia, 2019). For instance, conducting an open-ended interview with participants requires a lot of time. An additional disadvantage of conducting a semi structured interview via telephone is the inability to observe the nonverbal cues. Body language is central to social interactions and its role is clearly diminished when going online (Paradisi et al., 2021).

Sharing with the participants my interpretation of the data collected regarding strategies nonprofit organization leaders used to increase employee engagement to meet organizational performance goals was a vital piece to member checking. Employing member checking as an iterative-generative process during data collection is used as a method of accountability (Naidu & Prose, 2018). To avoid my own biases, I analyzed the data shared by the participant and asked the participant to validate my interpretation.

### **Data Organization Technique**

I used journal entries, research logs, and cataloging and labeling system techniques during the interview to ensure data organization and my understanding of the data collected. For the interview process, I used a digital recording device and took written notes. I used technology such as Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word to identify themes within the data. I labeled the participants P1, P2, P3, etcetera to protect the identity of the interviewees and the companies for which they work. It is crucial to protect the privacy and interests of individuals while allowing research that benefits society (Wise, 2014). I am the only one with access to the participants' information to ensure that I protect the data and maintain the participants' confidentiality. Additionally, I stored all information onto a protected thumb drive, and it will be destroyed after 5 years.

### **Data Analysis**

It is imperative for a researcher to have an appropriate strategy to examine their research study data. Data analysis is a collection of methods designed to explore relevant information. To ensure the validity and dependability of the research study results, the data analysis method consisted of meticulous and reliable procedures that include certain steps. My qualitative data analysis plan is to use the pragmatic inquiry research design, a logical design, pre-described data collection techniques, and pre-determined analysis. Specifically, in the data analysis process (see Yin, 2018) suggested a 5- step method for data analysis; compile, disassemble, reassemble, interpret, and conclude data. A researcher should have an appropriate strategy to examine their research study data. In qualitative research, data triangulation refers to the utilization of several techniques or

data sources to create a thorough understanding of the phenomenon. Data triangulation is valuable to research because it increases the validity, accuracy, and reliability of investigations; researchers implement triangulation (Ibrahim et al., 2019).

For my study, I followed all five stages given by Yin (2018). For the first step, I conducted semi structured interviews via Zoom and in-person to help me uncover recurring patterns in the data as I analyzed the data. The second step consisted of evaluating the information from the interview notes. To help me filter and organize the data I gathered from my investigation, I utilized Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel for coding, mind-mapping, and identifying emergent themes. According to Lester et al., (2020), researchers typically gather all interview files into one location. Step three consisted of verifying my interpretation of the data collected via member checking to ensure accuracy. Additionally, I organized and coded information within Microsoft Excel software application. At step four, I interpreted the data as I identify the themes that answer my research question for this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research. Finally, in step five, I presented an overall detailed analysis of my findings as it pertains to the phenomenon of study and the conceptual framework, which is supported by the appropriate literature from the literature review as well as any new information available through new studies published after this writing.

## **Reliability and Validity**

### **Reliability**

Researchers maintain the reliability and dependability of their work by including rich details to assure the consistency of the research findings. Based on the results of a

study some effective methods carried out fundamentally can solve problems thereby ensuring reliability is important to the researcher (Lou, 2022). Additionally, to test the validity of my interview questions, I administered a field test. To ensure the accuracy and credibility of a field test, testing should be replicated to verify the effectiveness and accuracy (Zhu et al., 2023). One of the most important tools for guaranteeing the quality of qualitative research is member checking, which is frequently linked to participants' confirmation of data accuracy (Sahakyan, 2023). I used member checking of data interpretation to support reliability and dependability. Member checking is advised as a validity check, it frequently appears as a requirement for qualitative research. Member checking is the process of asking the participant for input about the researcher's interpretation on the data collected (Motulsky, 2021). I provided a copy of my interpretations of participant responses to the participants and asked them to verify the accuracy of my interpretations. I ensured to establish a dependable interview protocol, which can be found in Appendix B and referenced in the table of contents to guide the interview process.

### **Validity**

In qualitative research, validity refers to the “appropriateness” of the methods, procedures, and data (Leung, 2015). I ensured that I reach data saturation to draw conclusions and ensured that there was no added insight for further data collection. When a theory is enlarged by its validity in a real-world situation and a practical application is based on a concept, knowledge is formed (Kahn, 1990b). Additionally, I used the interview protocol and interview questions to ensure validity. To answer a research

question, a methodology must be appropriate, the design must be valid for the methodology, the sampling and data analysis must be valid for the methodology, and the results and conclusions must be valid for the sample and context (Leung, 2015).

### **Credibility**

Though member checking is a part of data interpretation process to confirm reliability, it also confirms credibility (Keshavarz, 2021). My plan is to use the interview protocol to ensure the interviewee has a clear understanding and purpose of the study, proper triangulation, and member checking to ensure accuracy of my interpretations and the significance with their experience. Depending on the variables like participant characteristics, source type and information kind, the proportional weight of the credibility changes from study to study (Keshavarz, 2021).

### **Transferability**

Transferability provides the reader with evidence that the research could be applicable to other situations and populations. It gives a thorough explanation of the circumstances surrounding the research execution and how it influenced the conclusions (Stenfors et al., 2020). The goal of transferability is to provide key knowledge and essential insights for professionals (Ferrando et al., 2019). I followed an interview protocol and remained consistent throughout the data collection process to ensure that the study process may achieve the highest levels of transferability for future research. Based on the application of the semi structured interviews following the qualitative pragmatic inquiry design, the study may be useful to leaders that lack strategies to engage employees to meet organizational performance goals, for example.

### **Confirmability**

The relationship between the evidence and the conclusions is known as confirmability, and researchers explain in detail how they arrived at their conclusions (Stenfors et al., 2020). To verify that the results would be replicable by others, I validated confirmability by checking and rechecking throughout my data collection and analysis process. I asked the probing questions to hear the various perspectives to enhance confirmability. To assess, confirmability of a study the researcher must ask questions that are explicit and in detail. Additionally, the researcher must ask questions that are congruent to the study design (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019).

### **Data Saturation**

Data saturation is attained when the amount of data obtained covers the themes of interest and more data collection will not yield new relevant information (Fofana et al., 2020). I used in-depth interviews to achieve data saturation and triangulate the data for analysis to offer the study's conclusion. I interviewed six leaders of nonprofit organizations that successfully implemented strategies to engage employees to positively impact organizational performance. I would have gone beyond the initial six people if the responses were insufficient to achieve data saturation. Data saturation happens when it is no longer possible to collect more data and no new concepts or relevant information emerges with additional interviews (Fofana et al., 2020).

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I presented the research method used in this qualitative pragmatic inquiry design to explore strategies nonprofit organization leaders use to increase

employee engagement to meet organizational performance goals. I mentioned the participants that will participate within the study and provided information about the research methodology and design, in addition to my study's population and sampling. Ethical research within a study is imperative to the component of the doctoral research hence I addressed how I will ensure privacy and minimal risk to the participants wellbeing. I am the primary data collection instrument and will actively engage participants with open-ended questions until I reach data saturation. Section 2 lays a solid framework for the transition to Section 3, which will begin with the purpose of the study, the overarching research question, the findings of the study, the applications of professional practice, implications for social change, recommendation for further research, reflections and concluding remarks.



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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research was to explore strategies nonprofit organization leaders used to increase employee engagement to meet organizational performance goals. In this section, I presented the findings from my interviews with six leaders of nonprofit organizations that implemented strategies to meet organizational performance goals. Each participant answered seven open-ended interview questions to identify strategies that they used to increase employee engagement. The in-depth interviews were used to collect data to answer the research question that would result in achieving data saturation. The data were then triangulated for analysis to offer the study's conclusion. I used codes to identify each participant (P1 through P6). Through analysis of the data collected, the following four common themes were identified: (a) communication, (b) relationship building, (c) commitment, and (d) open and honest interactions. The findings of this study were aligned with Kahn's (1990) employee engagement theory through which I explored the phenomenon. Kahn's theory purports that employee engagement is a person's preferred presence and active full role performances while working and expressing themselves (Khodakarami et al., 2018). In the next section, I will discuss my detailed analysis and study findings.

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

In the presentation of the findings section, I presented the overarching research question that guided this research, the themes that emerged from the semi structured interviews with six nonprofit leaders, and describe ways in which findings confirm,

disconfirm, or extend knowledge in the discipline by comparing the findings with other peer-reviewed studies from the literature review. I also tied the findings to the conceptual framework used in the study and then tied the findings or dispute findings to the existing literature on effective business practice.

The overarching research question was what strategies nonprofit organization leaders use to increase employee engagement to meet organizational performance goals. To answer the research questions, I conducted audio-recorded semi structured interviews via Zoom at a time that was conducive for each participant. I anticipated the study population to include six leaders. However, after four completed interviews, I reached data saturation, with no new themes emerging from the interviews. To ensure I reached data saturation I conducted two more interviews. I assigned each participant a code (P1 through P6) to protect their identity.

I analyzed the data gathered from the semi structured interviews using Yin's (2018) five-step data analysis process. First, I conducted the interviews via Zoom and conducted member checking for validation. Secondly, I disassembled the data and evaluated it and the information from the interview notes. Then, I highlighted the themes by color coding them within a Microsoft Word document and Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. After that, the data were manually reassembled and examined for themes once again. Finally, there were four themes identified during data analysis to address the research questions. The themes were (Theme 1) communication, (Theme 2) relationship building, (Theme 3) commitment, and (Theme 4) open and honest interactions. Table 1 displays the number of mentions for each theme supporting this doctoral study.

**Table 2***Themes*

Theme	Number of Participants	Mentions
Communication	6	28
Relationship Building	6	14
Commitment & Development	6	28
Open and Honest Interactions	6	17

The findings from the study revealed that nonprofit leaders' primary focus was to ensure the employees feel a sense of purpose and connection to their work. This aligns with the conceptual framework used in the study. Kahn's (1990a) engagement theory was characterized as the connection of an organization's member identities to their job duties. Though his theory has a multidimensional construct that include the principles the author studied physical, cognitive, and emotional, Kahn defined engagement as the harnessing of organization members selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances (1990a).

**Theme 1: Communication**

Communication is essential to employee engagement as it fosters interpersonal relationships, encourages feedback, and disseminates the organization's mission and visions. Effective leadership is essential to achieving the organization's goals, and communication has a major role in determining job satisfaction (Sadiartha & Sitorous, 2018). All six participants confirmed that communication was the key ingredient to employee engagement. Maintaining employee engagement during the creation or implementation of organizational change management projects requires strong leadership

support and ongoing communication to ensure successful change (Hui et al., 2019).

Participant 2 (P2) noted that the best way to pull the best out of people is to keep the lines of communication open. Leaders must open the dialect so that people can share and build trust. Prior research has demonstrated the communication satisfaction and efficient communication relate to job satisfaction, motivation, job performance, productivity, organizational climate, and organizational commitment (Damghanian & Ghaleroudkhani, 2022).

Though all six participants of nonprofit organizations agreed that communication is essential to the success of the organization, one participant of a nonprofit that received a substantial amount of government funding made a very interesting point. Participant 5 (P5) stated the following:

Communication is vital because the employees must understand how the funding directly impacts the organization and the clients. Employees must understand the promises the organization made to receive the grant. The leaders are responsible for communicating what is required because if they do not meet the requirements the consequences can be detrimental to the organization.

Leaders are required to provide a range of organizational resources and financial indexes, including the number of personnel, the ratio of liabilities to assets, and the ratio of programs to expenses (Fuller & Rice, 2022). Nonprofit organizations are held to higher standard of conduct, prudent financial management, efficiency, and public benefit than for-profit entities.

Participant 6 (P6) noted that effective communication helps build relationships of trust and allows everyone to understand each other better. Having effective communication is essential to keeping the working relation going (Noviantoro et al., 2022). P6 noted that they established six prong benchmarks for employee engagement: honesty, accountability, compassion for one's position, integrity, commitment, and excellence. Although P6 recognized the challenges regarding engagement, they defined employee engagement as creating a good employee environment:

Employee engagement is synonymous with the employee environment because when the environment is right you have great engagement. If you do not have the right environment for people or even promote levels of engagement by having impromptu meetings, then you will not get the full sense of what employee engagement.

A good work environment will have a favorable effect on employees' ability to perform better. Given how much the work environment influences employees' performance, this is one step that may be taken to ensure that workers can accomplish their jobs without hindrance (Noviantoro et al., 2022).

## **Theme 2: Relationship Building**

Relationship building strategies promote employee engagement. The participants confirmed that building relationships with their employees imparts knowledge, expertise, and fosters a culture of collaboration. Participant 1, (P1), noted,

Linking the leader and employee is key because the goal is to enhance strengths and growth while acknowledging inadequacies. While building your clientele

your relationship will be in a honeymoon stage but after over time your relationship will be defined by your actions.

P2 mentioned,

Knowing how to develop relationships is essential to employee engagement. We pride ourselves on understanding the needs of our employees. It is crucial that the relationships we develop within our teams support our clients' success. We understand that relationships are based on respect and the mission of dedication.

P5 stated,

Building positive relationships with your employees has a direct impact on how the team functions. Affording the employees the opportunity to express themselves and learn about their interests. I want to ensure that they are a part of the decision-making process.

Theme 2 findings correspond with the literature review on how nonprofit employees had high level of work dedication, with autonomy, active engagement in decision-making, and supportive relationships being more essential (Park et. al., 2018). Despite being the least often stated among the four identified themes, the participants agreed that developing relationships is a crucial part of having a positive impact on organizational performance. Research has indicated that proficient communication is an excellent means of managing relationships on several levels (Rajhans, 2018). Each participant believed that developing strong relationships with coworkers promotes positive team dynamics. P2 mentioned major challenges arise amongst teams when relationships are lacking such as the member success. P2 reported that relationship building strategy is imperative to their

employees because their performance plan is aligned to the success of the member.

Positive relationships foster team cohesion, which increases the likelihood of overcoming obstacles, accomplishing shared objectives, and adding to the organization's overall success (Braun, 2020).

### **Theme 3: Commitment and Development**

Organizational commitment is a fundamental concept to employees' degrees of attachment to their work, particularly in the nonprofit sector, is a core idea in employee engagement (Wang, 2022). Participant 3, (P3), noted:

Employee engagement is being committed to the objectives, the client, and the development of the client. A successful engagement process refers to the interaction between the social worker employee and the client. The position does not come with a huge paycheck therefore the commitment and desire to help people is critical.

P6 discussed the importance of having compassion for the position held because it comes with a huge commitment. P6 also said:

Clergy are held to high standard of excellence, so we expect the same of everyone (employees\ volunteers). The six prong goals that we have set for employee engagement are: commitment, excellence, integrity, empathy for one's position, honesty, and accountability. Each function has several levels of responsibility; therefore, it is imperative to maintain integrity and make sure that everyone is prepared, accountable, and everything works.

Employee commitment can be demonstrated in a variety of ways, including daily activity levels, confidence in routine duties, creative contributions, and decision-making, all of which have an impact on the performance goals of the business (Kahn, 1992).

#### **Theme 4: Open and Honest Interactions**

An organization's open-door policy shows that its leaders are receptive to the questions and concerns of its employees. Although open and honest leadership is subjective, a culture of openness and sincerity can be established in the workplace by encouraging true and open communication. Participant 4, (P4), mentioned that having open and honest conversations are successful strategies used to ensure employees are heard and feel that they are cared for. P4 was very transparent regarding the changes she had to make to be a better leader, she said:

At one point I was focused on company goals that I forgot about the people working for me. Meeting company goals became more challenging because no one would speak to me, employees felt intimidated to come to my office. To overcome such challenges, I had to soul search and learn more about my staff. I began to peruse the office and have one on one sessions to teach my employees on a human level. Implementing that strategy was the key to our now success in our retention.

The senior team should take a leadership style that gives workers support to accomplish their objectives by hearing what they have to say, acting on their suggestions, and refraining from micromanaging (Wang, 2022). P6 added to the style of leadership that is most effective, he said:



We were faced with challenges that kept people from sharing the truth about their experiences. To be a better church we must hear the good, bad, or indifferent. The vibrancy and excitement from the worship service is one to gauge to effectiveness of our engagement. However, encouraging vulnerability and openness to one another has afforded them positive organizational performance.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Employee engagement is critical to the success of the organizational performance. Hard work and productivity are linked to employee engagement, and both enhance organizational performance. Individual characteristics, such as self-awareness, evaluation of one's capabilities, and having sufficient knowledge and experience with the work, are crucial for ensuring work engagement (Cin & Sonmez, 2024). The research provided insights into how nonprofit business leaders used several strategies to keep their employees engaged through good communication, relationship building, commitment and development, and open and honest interactions.

The data collected from the interviews with six business leaders uncovered four common themes as it relates to the business leaders' strategies for employee engagement. The findings aligned with Kahn's employee engagement theory principles of physical, cognitive, and emotional connections to work performances. Prior research indicated that motivated employees are more creative, inventive, and inclined to go above and beyond the call of duty, which boosts productivity and positively impacts organizational performance (Gede & Huluka, 2024). The findings of my research showed that higher levels of employee engagement can help a business improve their business practice due

to greater employee engagement resulting from the employee's greater connection to their work, and therefore effectively meeting organizational performance goals.

Participants revealed that communication, commitment, and development were by far the most important practices incorporated by them in their respective organizations. Adopting ways to implement effective communication protocols is crucial for business leaders. Maintaining open lines of communication facilitates the expression of concerns and enhances employee engagement. Employees have opportunities for growth when business leaders are committed to communicating with them. Building strong leader-employee relationships is essential to fostering employee engagement because when employees feel appreciated, they stay committed to the organization. The best business practices that emerged were open and effective communication, which engendered commitment from the employee. Providing development to the employees and clients demonstrated to the employee a level of commitment from the organization which lead to employee engagement. Organizations must place a high priority on attracting employees, engaging, developing, and cultivating employee loyalty if they want to gain a competitive edge in the contemporary global market (Abduraimi et al., 2023).

Although communication, commitment, and development are key components to employee engagement, business leaders must pivot strategies when necessary. As teams develop and changes are implemented, employee feedback is vital. A thriving work environment is a crucial psychological driver that transmits the influence of feedback-seeking and encourages employee creativity (Wang et al., 2022).

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings of this study might encourage social change by helping nonprofit business leaders in establishing an atmosphere at work where people feel free to be their authentic selves. The social change implication may also be helpful to improve meeting organization goals by reducing turnover among employees. According to Kahn's (1990) employee engagement theory people bring their physical, mental, and emotional identities to their work. In nonprofit organizations leaders must be aware of the strategies that work for their teams. For these organizations to successfully work with volunteers and employees, their leaders need to possess strong managerial competence, personal integrity, vision, and aspiration (Aboramadan & Dahlee, 2020).

The increase of employee engagement within a nonprofit is beneficial to the employees and to the community. Considering the nature of nonprofit organizations, the accomplishment of their objectives and success are essential to the contentment of its workforce (Bakotić, 2022). The communities being served by the nonprofit organization may benefit from the service or product offering from the nonprofit organization. When employees and or volunteers are happy about how they are treated by organization leadership they will in turn radiate positivity toward their peers and the community they serve.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The purpose of this generic qualitative pragmatic inquiry capstone was to explore strategies that nonprofit organization leaders use to increase employee engagement to meet organizational performance goals. I identified four recurring themes during the data

analysis process which were: communication, relationship building, commitment with development, and open honest interactions. Leaders in nonprofit organizations across all industries may find great value in the study's findings.

It is vital for leaders to comprehend the need of their workforce while executing initiatives for employee engagement. The development of resilience and positive psychological well-being among employees has been demonstrated to be a crucial component in managing these obstacles and stress (Ibrahim & Hussein, 2024). I would recommend that leaders find ways to involve their employees beyond the scope of their position. Employees should understand how they fit in with the organization's mission and vision for itself and how their decisions can impact the business. Kahn (1992) identifies three psychological conditions to fostering employee engagement, (a) meaningfulness, which ensures works find their work meaningful enough to justify their engagement; (b) safety, which is the state in which employees feel safe bringing their whole selves to work without fear of consequences; and (c) availability, which is the state in which employees feel both physically and mentally capable of bringing their whole selves to this specific job. The connection between the employee and the nonprofit organization should be meaningful, a level of comfort, rewarding, and mentally and physically stimulating.

Additionally, it is my recommendation that leaders create an environment that encourages employee engagement. They should ensure they incorporate the strategies in their employee performance and development plans. In a competitive market, organizations need an effective leadership style to help sustain growth and grow (Khan et

al., 2023). Implementing effective strategies such as open communication, relationship building, and open and honest interactions can provide leaders with the tools that increase organizational performance. Furthermore, my goals are to share the research findings with other leaders in various industries at seminars, conferences, and training events that I attend.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The research study, and therefore the findings, were limited to the Northeast region of the US and nonprofit business leaders' population in that geographical area. Additionally, employee engagement has been defined in various ways and considering the inconsistent definitions leads me to believe that we need a consistent definition to address employee engagement.

Further research efforts might focus on employee engagement strategies in for-profit organizations in various industries. As leaders learn the needs of their employees, they will adopt strategies conducive to the team. The results of this study provided a clear indication that nonprofit business leaders must intentionally understand how to engage their employees because it requires a strategic approach. In nonprofit organizations people are connected to the vision and mission of the organization. However, I recommend future researchers to broaden the scope of the study to include for-profit organizations, a wider geographical net, and broaden the participation pool.

### **Reflections**

Being a doctoral student at Walden University doctoral student has been a pleasant and challenging experience for me. Looking back on my doctoral experience, I

realized that developing resilience and determination to accomplish my goals was essential. I was tasked with approaching every participant engagement with an objective viewpoint on the group, the tactics employed, and the procedures put in place by the participants.

When I started this program in 2010, I thought it would be a journey similar to my graduate studies, but God had another plan. Shortly after enrollment my mother became deathly ill and passed away. I thought continuing the program was most suitable for me, however after the second year I realized I needed to take a break. Upon my return, I discovered via this process that I have unique skills and abilities that I had previously been unaware of but developed over time. I also learned how to develop the commitment, adaptability, and consistency needed to complete the doctoral program.

### **Conclusion**

Employees impressions of job resources and employee engagement are shaped by their leaders. High levels of involvement may enhance the effectiveness of an organization. Over time, this issue has become more challenging for leaders in both nonprofit and for-profit sectors.

Employers and employees can both benefit from employee engagement strategies. The results of employee engagement programs will eventually filter down to management and leadership, so they must genuinely believe in their efficacy. Highly engaged employees will therefore exhibit better attitudes and behaviors that support an organization's ability to remain competitive.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Invitation

There is a new study about employee engagement that could help business leaders better understand strategies used to engage employees and positively impact organizational performance. For this study, you are invited to describe your successful strategies to engage employees.

### **About the study:**

- One 30–60-minute phone interview that will be audio recorded (no videorecording)
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you.

### **Volunteers must meet these requirements:**

- Business leaders
- 18 years old or older
- Successful strategies engaging employees and positively impacting organizational performance.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Alicia Graham, a DBA student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during TBD.

Please reach out to [alicia.graham@waldenu.edu](mailto:alicia.graham@waldenu.edu) to let the researcher know of your interest. You are welcome to forward it to others who might be interested.

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

## Notes:

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