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Improving Employee Engagement Through Effective Change Management

Whitney Cearrow Sims
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Whitney Sims

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the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Janie Hall, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Sandra Mohabir- McKinley, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2025

Abstract

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by

Whitney Sims

MBA, Walden University, 2018

BBA, Georgia State University, 2012

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Human resources (HR) managers often face challenges due to ineffective change management strategies, which can lead to reduced employee engagement, decreased performance, and increased turnover. This issue is important to HR managers and organizational leaders who seek to improve workforce engagement and retention. Grounded in Kotter's eight step change management model and Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore the strategies HR managers use to improve employee engagement. The participants were five HR managers from manufacturing companies in the southeast region in Georgia who had implemented effective change management strategies that improved employee engagement. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step process. Nine themes emerged: communication and transparency, employee involvement, leadership presence and visibility, purpose and alignment, recognition, cultural challenges, training, feedback, and psychological safety. Key recommendations are that HR managers practice relational leadership, maintain open communication, align engagement strategies with employee values, and embed recognition and psychological safety into change processes to improve employee engagement, increase performance, and reduce turnover. The implications for positive social change include the potential for HR leaders and organizational leaders to enhance employee well-being, strengthen organizational culture, and contribute to a more stable and engaged workforce, benefiting both employees and the broader organization.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my beautiful daughter, Kylynn. You have been my greatest source of strength, my loudest cheerleader, and my constant reminder of why I must keep going, even when the road was tough. Your love, patience, and unwavering belief in me have been the wind beneath my wings. Every late night, every moment of doubt, and every step forward was fueled by the thought of you. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine. I hope this journey inspires you to chase your dreams boldly and believe in your power to accomplish anything.

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First and foremost, I give all glory and honor to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is through His grace, strength, and guidance that I have been able to complete this doctoral journey. He has been my source of peace and perseverance every step of the way.

To my mother, Thelma Sims, thank you for being a pillar of faith, wisdom, and unconditional love. Your prayers and sacrifices have laid the foundation for everything I am and everything I strive to be. To my family and friends, your unwavering support, encouragement, and belief in me have meant more than words can express. I am forever grateful for your presence in my life.

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I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to my original chair, Dr. John Hannon, for your early guidance and support. To my current chair, Dr. Janie Hall, thank you for your steady leadership, insightful feedback, and consistent encouragement that helped bring this study to completion. Your dedication to my success did not go unnoticed and will always be remembered.

This journey has been long, challenging, and transformative, and I am thankful for every person who walked alongside me.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

Change management can have several effects on employees, both positive and negative in manufacturing companies. Employees may resist change because of fear of the unknown, concerns about job security, or a sense of loss for familiar ways of working (Furxhi, 2021). Employees experiencing uncertainty about the future can face increased stress and decreased morale. Productivity and performance can decline as employees may be preoccupied with the changes or require time to adapt to new processes or systems (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). Change can impact job satisfaction and morale if employees' voices are not being heard or if change is perceived to be negative (M. Li et al., 2021). Change management can influence engagement because employees are more likely to embrace change and contribute positively to the implementation (Furoka et al., 2022). Ineffective management of organizational change can potentially result in employee burnout and stress.

Leaders could consider encouraging employee commitment to drive the success of the change effort. Employee engagement is important in change management for several reasons including resilience and adaptability, employee morale, reduced resistance, increased buy-in, and higher retention (Tucker, 2020). Engaged employees are more resilient and adaptable to change and likely to embrace new ways of working and quickly adapt to new processes (Azevedo et al., 2021). Employees tend to have higher morale and job satisfaction when engaged, which can positively impact willingness to participate in change efforts and overall performance (Albrecht et al., 2021). Employee engagement during change management helps reduce turnover costs and maintain a skilled workforce (J. Lee et al., 2020). The focus of the pragmatic inquiry was to explore change management strategies that can be used to improve employee engagement.

Problem and Purpose

A common challenge during the change management process is engaging employees and keeping them engaged (De Cremer et al., 2018). The general business problem is that the lack of effective change management negatively impacts employee engagement causing a decrease in organizational performance and an increase in turnover. The specific business problem was that some human resources managers lack change management strategies to improve employee engagement.

The purpose of this pragmatic inquiry was to explore the strategies human resources managers use to improve employee engagement. The targeted population consisted of four human resources managers of manufacturing companies in the southeast region of the state of Georgia. The implications for positive social change include effective change management strategies to engage employees and decrease turnover by human resource managers. Engaged employees are more productive and innovative, leading to business growth, improved service delivery, and overall economic benefits for the community (Saks, 2022). Social entrepreneurship removes social problems in the community and creates social change (Chu & Luke, 2013). Through effective employee engagement, employees can potentially gain a sense of ownership in the organization and are committed to corporate social responsibility efforts and making a change in the community (Corlett et al., 2015).

Population and Sampling

I collected data from five human resources managers at manufacturing companies in the southeastern region of Georgia, who had relevant experience with the business issue. Purposeful sampling was the chosen strategy for participant selection in this study. Participants needed to fulfill specific criteria, including being full-time human resources managers in manufacturing firms that had experienced organizational changes. Participants should have knowledge of change management and employee engagement, as well as practical experience in implementing strategies to enhance employee engagement. I contacted eligible individuals via email to request their participation. Data collection involved semistructured interviews with the participants and publicly available documents related to employee engagement.

Nature of the Study

The qualitative methodology is most appropriate for this study. Qualitative research is used to explore how or why something has occurred and to gain an understanding of concepts and experiences via interviews, case studies, and focus groups (Lewis et al., 2015). I used qualitative research to explore lived experiences and perceptions of change management strategies of human resources managers in the manufacturing industry. Quantitative research was not chosen because I did not use variables. The relationship between variables that are measured numerically and are analyzed using statistical and graphical methods is examined (Lewis et al., 2015). Mixed method was not chosen for this study. Mixed method researchers combine both quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of a research problem (Creswell et al., 2020); the focus of this study did not include examining the relationship between two or more variables. The qualitative method was chosen because the purpose of the pragmatic inquiry was to develop an understanding of the change management strategies human resources managers use to improve employee engagement. I did not test a hypothesis as in a quantitative study or mixed method.

Four designs were considered for the qualitative study: ethnography, phenomenology, pragmatic inquiry, and case study. Pragmatic inquiry was the selected design for the study. The pragmatic inquiry approach in qualitative research is a method that emphasizes practical solutions and outcomes (Prasad, 2021). Pragmatic inquiry researchers use the design to focus on the effects and practical applications of concepts and theories (Ormerod, 2021). Ethnography was not chosen because the emphasis is placed on understanding cultural phenomena from an insider perspective, which can be time-consuming and less directly focused on practical problem-solving (Maclean et al., 2021). Phenomenology was not chosen because researchers seek to understand the essence of lived experiences (Christiansen et al., 2021). I did not select phenomenology since my goal is to reveal direct solutions to practical problems. The purpose of a case study is to provide an in-depth exploration of a real-world phenomenon within its natural context, enabling a comprehensive understanding of complex issues through multiple data sources (Cole, 2024). Case study was not chosen because my focus is on exploring employees' lived experiences and perceptions of change management strategies across various organizations rather than conducting an in-depth analysis of a single organization or specific case. Pragmatic inquiry was the chosen design because the pragmatic inquiry approach possesses a problem-solving orientation, methodological flexibility, interdisciplinary nature, focus on actionable outcomes, applicability across diverse settings, and efficiency (Ormerod, 2021; Prasad, 2021).

Research Question

What change management strategies do human resources managers use to improve employee engagement?

Interview Questions

1. What are the important factors of employee engagement?
2. What does employee engagement mean to you?
3. What impact does employee engagement have on employees?
4. What change management strategies are you using to engage your employees?
5. What change management strategies are you using to improve financial performance?
6. What strategy did you find worked best to improve employee engagement?
7. What strategies had the least impact on employee engagement?
8. What strategy did you find lowered employee morale?
9. How did your employees respond to each strategy used?
10. What are the financial results of the change management strategies used?
11. Would you like to contribute anything that we might not have covered in the previous questions?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study was a combination of Kotter's (1996) eight step model and Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory. Kotter created the eight step model in 1996, which is a structured approach for managing organizational change (Kotter, 1996). The first step is establishing a sense of urgency to highlight the need for change, followed by forming a powerful coalition of influential leaders to guide the effort (Kotter, 1996). The third step is creating a clear and compelling vision for change that is communicated throughout the organization to ensure understanding and buy-in in Step 4 (Kotter, 1996). Step 5 is removing obstacles to empower employees and address resistance. Short-term wins are generated in step six to build momentum and to drive further change (Kotter, 1996). The process continues in step seven by building on the change to tackle bigger challenges and refine processes (Kotter, 1996). In Step 8, the changes are anchored in the corporate culture to ensure they are sustainable, aligning leadership development and organizational practices with the new vision (Kotter, 1996). Kotter’s eight step model emphasizes leadership, communication, and persistent effort to embed change within the organization’s culture (Abocejo & Laig, 2021). In the study, I used Kotter’s eight step change model to ensure that the change process is well-managed, effectively communicated, and sustainable, ultimately leading to a more engaged and productive workforce.

Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, introduced in 1959 by Herzberg, posited that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction stem from two distinct sets of factors (Herzberg, 1959). Motivators, which are intrinsic to the job, include elements such as achievement, recognition, the nature of the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and opportunities for growth; factors that contribute to job satisfaction and motivation (Herzberg, 1959). Hygiene factors that are extrinsic to the job, encompass company policies, supervision, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, salary, status, and job security (Herzberg, 1959). Herzberg’s suggested that organizations should focus on improving motivators while ensuring that hygiene factors are adequately addressed to prevent dissatisfaction to truly enhance employee motivation and satisfaction (Galanakis & Peramatzis, 2022). I used the motivation hygiene theory to evaluate the effectiveness of change management strategies by measuring changes in employee satisfaction and engagement levels. Human resources leaders can use the study to determine which strategies are most effective in improving overall employee engagement by assessing hygiene and motivator factors before and after implementing changes.

Operational Definitions

Change management: Change management includes the methods organizational leaders use to implement and manage change within the organization (Belle et al., 2023).

Employee engagement: Employee engagement is the level of commitment an employee has to the organization is known as employee engagement (J. Cho et al., 2024).

Employee turnover: Employee turnover is the measurement of the number of employees that leave the organization within a certain period (Chauhan et al., 2024).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are the unexamined beliefs upon which research is built (Leung, 2015). Assumptions are statements that are assumed to be true but cannot be verified (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). An assumption in this study was that all research participants are transparent and provide honest and unbiased responses to the research questions. Another assumption was that the research participants are knowledgeable and have a thorough understanding of the study's phenomenon. It was also assumed that the research questions used in the study would prompt sufficient information to provide effective change management strategies that will improve employee engagement.

Limitations

Limitations are the potential weaknesses of the study of which the researcher has no control over (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Limitations are non-dismissive study restrictions that can impact the design and results of the study (Yin, 2018). A limitation of the study was that potential biases can influence research participants' responses, ultimately impacting the results of the study. Another limitation was that the study only focuses on the perspectives of human resources managers, limiting insight from other managers in the organization. An additional limitation of the study was that the geographical location was restricted to southeast Georgia. The sample size was also a limitation because only a small percentage of human resources managers were represented.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the aspects of the study of which the researcher can control. Delimitations narrow the scope of the study by enabling the researcher to set boundaries, so that goals are not realistic and unachievable (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015). The first delimitation was the restriction of the geographic location to southeast Georgia. The second delimitation of this study was the decision to only interview human resources managers who improved employee engagement during organizational change using effective change management strategies. The third delimitation was to focus on human resources managers in one industry, therefore, the results may not be applicable to all industries.

Significance of the Study

Many human resource leaders seek to minimize employee turnover when managing change. Human resources managers are faced with the challenge of high turnover intentions when changes are implemented within the organization (Hyatt et al., 2024). The study is significant to business practice in that it may identify change management strategies that enhance employee engagement. Leaders in organizations with corporate social responsibility goals must engage their employees to participate in these efforts by equipping organizational leaders with strategies to effectively engage their employees to contribute to achieve corporate social responsibility goals and improve their communities (Cai et al., 2024). Human resources leaders can develop strategies that mitigate turnover using the findings of the study. Human resources leaders can also use the findings of the study to implement intervention strategies to change the environment and ultimately prevent an increase in turnover. Human resources leaders can use intervention strategies to change the internal and external organizational environment.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The goal of my pragmatic inquiry was to explore change management strategies that human resources managers use to improve employee engagement. The purpose of a literature review was to establish a scholarly foundation for a dissertation by developing a synthesis of existing research appropriate to specific areas of study (Breier et al., 2022). In this literature review, I used 88% of the articles from peer-reviewed journals and books pertinent to change management and employee engagement. In my literature review, I expounded existing research and the issues that ensue from a lack of change management. The review is organized by the following categories: conceptual frameworks, change management, the importance of change management, change management models, employee engagement, organizational performance, and employee turnover.

A vast search was conducted of over 200 sources including academic studies, peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and books on the topics of Kotter's (1996) eight-step change model, Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory, change management, and employee engagement. Multiple databases were searched through the Walden Library to include SAGE, Thoreau, Academic Search Complete/Premier, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and Science Direct. Google Scholar was also used to find scholarly articles. The key search terms were *change management, employee engagement, change management strategies, job satisfaction, job engagement, work engagement, change resistance, change management models, Kotter's eight step change model, Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, leadership styles, communication,* and *turnover*.

Conceptual Framework: Kotter's Eight Step Change Model

Kotter's eight step change model, a step-by-step model created to help leaders successfully implement and manage organizational change (Kotter, 1996), is one of the two frameworks selected for the proposed case study. Kotter's eight step change model is a favored model because it is straightforward and easy to follow for managers who are not experts in change management (Behson et al., 2018; Y. Chen et al., 2022). Change implementation is a difficult process that enables obstacles such as resistance, fear, lack of teamwork, and ineffective communication (Bennett & Soylu, 2021). According to Kotter (1996), there are two general principles for change implementation: change processes must go through phases over time and mistakes made during phases develop complications that impact the entire change process resulting in organizational leaders restarting the process from the beginning. Kotter outlined eight steps to help organizational leaders to overcome these obstacles: Create a sense of urgency, form a powerful coalition, create a vision for change, communicate the vision, remove obstacles, create short-term wins, build on the change, and anchor the changes (Kotter, 1996).

Create a Sense of Urgency

Leaders may consider change initiatives. The first step of Kotter's eight step change model is creating a sense of urgency (Kotter, 1996). Creating a sense of urgency emphasizes the importance of building a compelling case for change and communicating it effectively to all stakeholders in the organization (Kerr & Slocum, 2017). The goal of creating a sense of urgency is to generate momentum for the change initiative and to ensure that people understand why the change is necessary and urgent (Kerr & Slocum, 2017; Kotter, 1996).

Creating a sense of urgency also involves highlighting the risks of not changing. To create a sense of urgency, Kotter suggested leaders must first identify and communicate the key drivers of change, such as shifts in the competitive landscape, changes in customer needs or expectations, or new regulatory requirements. Leaders must communicate the drivers of change in a way that resonates with stakeholders and helps them understand the importance of taking action (Gumus & Keskin, 2018). Risks might include potential financial losses, reputational damage, or missed opportunities (Schroder & Skovvang Smith, 2020). Leaders must strive for clear instruction that the status quo is not always the option and t change is necessary for the organization's survival and success. Finally, creating a sense of urgency requires visible and active leadership. Leaders must model the behavior they want to see in others and communicate the urgency of the situation through their words and actions (Carr et al., 2022). Leaders should set clear goals and priorities, provide resources and support for the change initiative, and celebrate early wins and successes to build momentum (Y. Chen et al., 2022).

Form a Powerful Coalition

Leaders may consider coalitions as an influence. The second step in Kotter's eight step change model is to form a powerful coalition (Kotter, 1996). Forming a powerful coalition requires creating a team of influential individuals who are committed to the change initiative and have the authority and resources to drive it forward (Grunig & Grunig, 2017). The coalition should consist of individuals with diverse skills and perspectives from different parts of the organization, selected based on their ability to influence others and their willingness to commit time and resources to the change effort (X. Li et al., 2022). Once formed, the coalition should ensure that all members are aligned and working towards a common goal by communicating the vision for change and establishing clear roles and responsibilities for each member (Farias et al., 2019; Kotter, 1996).

Leaders may consider forming powerful coalitions. The coalition should also work to build support for the change initiative throughout the organization (Farias et al., 2019; Koltsova & Safonov, 2018). Building support for the change initiative might involve communicating the benefits of the change, addressing concerns and objections from stakeholders, and involving employees in the change process (Koltsova & Safonov, 2018). Overall, forming a powerful coalition is potentially beneficial for successful change management to ensure the change initiative leaders have the necessary support and resources toward successful.

Create a Vision for Change

Leaders may involve stakeholders to include employees, customers, suppliers, and other external stakeholders The third step in Kotter's eight step change model is to create a vision for change (Kotter, 1996). Creating a vision for change requires developing a clear and compelling vision for what the organization will look like after the change initiative has been successfully implemented (Hadjidakis & Katsioloudes, 2017; Kotter, 1996). To create a vision for change, it is important to involve a broad range of stakeholders in the process (Boersma & Kingma, 2019). By involving a diverse range of perspectives, the vision is more likely to be comprehensive and relevant to the needs of all stakeholders (Hambrick & Stewart, 2018).

A clear and compelling vision is essential for guiding and motivating stakeholders during organizational change. The vision should be inspiring and motivating, and it should be aligned with the values and beliefs of the organization (Adil et al., 2022). The vision should also be specific and actionable, providing a clear roadmap for achieving the desired future state. It is important to communicate the vision effectively to all stakeholders, helping them understand how their roles and contributions fit into the bigger picture. Creating a vision for change is critical for successful change management, as it helps to ensure that all stakeholders are aligned and motivated to support the change initiative (Balazs & Varga, 2019; M. H. Kang & Lee, 2019).

Communicate the Vision

Effective communication of the vision is a critical step in Kotter's eight-step change model, ensuring that all stakeholders understand and embrace the change. Communicate the vision is the fourth step in Kotter's eight step change model (Kotter, 1996). Communicating the vision requires effectively communicating the vision for change to all stakeholders in the organization, in a way that is inspiring, clear, and easily understood (Berson & Oreg, 2019). To communicate the vision effectively, it is important to use a variety of communication channels and methods. Channels and methods might include town hall meetings, emails, newsletters, videos, and social media. Different stakeholders may respond better to different communication methods, so it is important to use a mix of methods to ensure that everyone receives the message (Elving, 2019; Gruenwald & Kohlbacher, 2019).

It is also important to tailor the message to different audiences. For example, employees may need more detail on how the change will affect their roles, while investors may be more interested in the financial benefits of the change. The vision for change is more likely to resonate and motivate stakeholders by tailoring the message to different audiences (Ashworth et al., 2018). In addition, it is important to provide opportunities for feedback and dialogue. Providing opportunities for feedback and dialogue helps to ensure that stakeholders understand the vision and feel invested in the change process. It also provides an opportunity to address concerns and objections that stakeholders may have (Gunkel & Schlagel, 2018).

Remove Obstacles

Removing obstacles is essential to maintaining momentum and ensuring the success of a change initiative. The fifth step in Kotter's eight step change model is remove obstacles (Kotter, 1996). Removing obstacles requires identifying and eliminating any barriers that might impede progress towards the change initiative (Armenakis et al., 2017). To remove obstacles effectively, it is important to first identify what is standing in the way of the change initiative. Obstacles might include resistance from stakeholders, lack of resources, conflicting priorities, or outdated processes and systems (Finkelstein et al., 2018). Once the obstacles are identified, organizational leaders must develop a plan for addressing them.

Effectively removing obstacles requires a strategic and collaborative approach that engages stakeholders and prioritizes challenges. One effective way to remove obstacles is to involve stakeholders in the process (M. Choi et al., 2018). Involving stakeholders ensures that everyone's concerns are heard and addressed, and that there is buy-in and support for the solutions proposed. Another effective way to remove obstacles is to prioritize them based on their impact and likelihood of occurring (H. Kim et al., 2017). Leaders who prioritize obstacles could also ensure resources are allocated to the most critical obstacles first, and that progress is made towards the change initiative as quickly as possible (H. Kim et al., 2017). Finally, it is important to monitor progress and adjust the plan as necessary. Removing obstacles can be an iterative process, and it is important to stay flexible and responsive as new obstacles arise (Alreshoud & Kurnia, 2021). Removing obstacles is critical for successful change management, as it helps to ensure that the change initiative can move forward smoothly and effectively. Leaders can ensure that the change initiative stays on track and achieves its intended outcomes by identifying and addressing barriers,

Create Short-Term Wins

To effectively create short-term wins, it is important to identify goals that are achievable in a relatively short timeframe. The sixth step in Kotter's eight step change model is creating short-term wins (Kotter, 1996). Creating short-term wins involves identifying and achieving small, measurable goals that help to build momentum and establish credibility for the change initiative (Flanagan & Geisser, 2021; Y. Kim & Lee, 2019). The goals should be specific, measurable, and aligned with the overall vision for the change initiative. Once the goals are identified, it is important to communicate the goals clearly to all stakeholders and to track progress towards achieving the goals (Antwi-Agyei & Awuah-Offei, 2017). Effectively communicating the goals helps to build excitement and enthusiasm for the change initiative, as well as establish credibility for the leaders responsible for driving the change.

Celebrating short-term wins plays a crucial role in maintaining momentum and reinforcing stakeholder commitment to the change initiative. Another important aspect of creating short-term wins is celebrating successes along the way (Chuang & Huang, 2017). Celebrating successes helps to build momentum and motivate stakeholders to continue supporting the change initiative. Finally, it is important to use the short-term wins as a springboard for the next phase of the change initiative (Kuyer & van Riel, 2020). Leaders can help to create a positive cycle of progress and success that drives the change initiative forward by building momentum and establishing credibility.

Build on the Change

Building on the change is essential for ensuring that improvements are sustained and become part of the organization's culture. Build on the change is the seventh step in Kotter's eight step change model (Kotter, 1996). Building on the change involves consolidating the gains made in the previous steps and embedding the changes into the organization's culture and processes. To build on the change, it is important to reinforce the new behaviors and attitudes that have been established during the change initiative (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017; Kotter, 1996). Reinforcing new behaviors and attitudes can be done by highlighting and celebrating successes, recognizing and rewarding individuals who have contributed to the change initiative, and reinforcing the importance of the changes in communication and training.

Sustaining change requires creating supportive structures, processes, and ongoing evaluation to ensure long-term success. Another important aspect of building on the change is to establish new structures and processes that support the changes (Chang & Lee, 2022). Establishing new structures and processes might involve updating job descriptions, creating new policies and procedures, or reorganizing departments to better align with the new ways of working. Finally, it is important to continue monitoring and evaluating the changes to ensure that they are sustainable and continue to deliver the intended outcomes (Crossan et al., 2018; Han et al., 2021). The continuation of monitoring and evaluating might involve collecting feedback from stakeholders, measuring key performance indicators, or conducting periodic reviews to identify areas for improvement.

Anchor the Changes

Anchoring change is essential to ensuring that new practices become a permanent part of the organization’s culture and operations. Anchor the change is the eighth and final step of Kotter's model (Kotter, 1996). Anchoring the change focuses on ensuring that the changes made during the change initiative are fully integrated into the organization's culture and processes so that they become part of the organization's culture and identity (Guo et al., 2019). To anchor the change, it is important to embed the new behaviors, systems, and processes that have been established during the change initiative into the organization's structure and culture (J. Choi & Son, 2019). Embedding the new behaviors and processes into the organizational culture may involve revising the organization's policies and procedures, job descriptions, and performance metrics to align with the new ways of working.

Leaders who consistently communicate changes may involve training programs, communication campaigns, and other initiatives that promote the importance of the changes and help employees to understand how to incorporate the changes into their daily work. Another key element of anchoring the change is to ensure that the changes are consistently communicated and reinforced throughout the organization (D. Kim et al., 2017). To sustain the change, it is important to establish a feedback mechanism that allows employees to provide input and raise concerns about the changes (Han et al., 2021). Establishing a feedback mechanism may entail creating regular forums for discussion and feedback, or creating a system for tracking progress and measuring the impact of the changes.

Overall, anchoring the change is critical for ensuring that the changes made during the change initiative become a permanent part of the organization's culture and processes. Leaders can ensure that the changes are sustained over the long by embedding the changes into the organization's structure and culture, consistently communicating and reinforcing the changes, and establishing mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement, term (Radwan, 2020).

By creating a sense of urgency and emphasizing the importance of agility, business leaders have used the model to adapt more quickly to changing market conditions, technological advancements, and other external factors that impact their operations. In addition to providing a roadmap for successful change management, Kotter (1996) positively impacted organizations in other ways through the model. Organizational leaders who follow the Kotter model principles contributed to the development of a positive organizational culture that embraces change as a natural and necessary part of growth (Alaimo, 2022). The culture shift enables a more innovative and adaptive business environment. Faster adaptation is achieved through the application of Kotter's model. Employee morale improves because of change implementation through Kotter's model. Employees experience less stress and anxiety about the unknown when change is managed well (Appelbaum et al., 2017). The model's focus on involving employees, communicating effectively, and celebrating wins helps maintain employee morale and motivation during times of change.

Common language, broad applicability, and integration with other models are some other impacts of Kotter's (1996) eight step change model. The model has established a common language and set of concepts for change management discussions, helping professionals across different industries communicate and collaborate effectively when dealing with organizational change (Albulescu & Bibu, 2020). The model's flexibility has allowed it to be applied in various contexts, including business, healthcare, education, and government. Its principles are adaptable and can be tailored to fit the unique needs of different organizations and industries (Tang, 2019). The eight step change model has been integrated with other change management frameworks, creating hybrid approaches that leverage the strengths of multiple models. This integration has enriched the field and provided practitioners with more tools for effective change management.

Kotter's (1996) eight step change model is a widely recognized and respected framework for managing change in organizations. Kotter was used by many organizations to implement successful change initiatives. In this literature review, some of the key research studies that have analyzed Kotter's model and its effectiveness is explored.

The public sector has used Kotter's (1996) model. Andriopoulos and Dawson (2014) evaluated the use of Kotter's model in a public sector organization undergoing significant change. The study found that the model was useful in providing a structured approach to change management and helped to identify key steps and actions needed to implement the change effectively. The study also highlighted the importance of leadership commitment and communication in successfully implementing change using Kotter's model.

Kotter's (1996) model was used in healthcare entities. Cameron and Green (2015) looked at the effectiveness of Kotter's model in a healthcare setting. The study found that the model was useful in managing change in healthcare organizations, particularly in providing a clear vision and communication strategy to stakeholders. The study also emphasized the importance of engaging employees at all levels of the organization in the change process.

Additionally, Kotter's (1996) model was used in telecommunications. Elving (2005) analyzed the effectiveness of Kotter's model in a large Dutch telecommunications company. The study found that the model was useful in creating a sense of urgency and building a coalition of support for the change initiative. The study also emphasized the importance of aligning the change initiative with the company's overall strategy and culture.

Kotter's (1996) model is seemingly an effective framework for managing change in organizations. Kotter provided a structured approach to change management and emphasizes the importance of leadership, communication, and employee engagement. However, the effectiveness of the model may vary depending on the context and specific circumstances of the organization undergoing change.

Conceptual Framework: Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory

Employers must ensure things like salary, working conditions, company policies, job security, and relationships with coworkers are met to prevent employee dissatisfaction and potential departure from the job. Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory explains how workplace factors influence employee satisfaction and motivation. Herzberg developed the motivation-hygiene theory, also known as the two-factor theory, as a motivation theory in the 1950s. Herzberg suggested there are two sets of factors that affect employee motivation and job satisfaction: hygiene factors and motivators. Hygiene factors are basic factors that must be met in the workplace to prevent dissatisfaction.

Motivators, on the other hand, are factors that contribute to job satisfaction and motivation. Factors include recognition, achievement, growth opportunities, and meaningful work. When these factors are present, employees are more likely to feel satisfied and motivated in their jobs. According to Herzberg (1959), hygiene factors are necessary but not sufficient for employee motivation and job satisfaction. Motivators are also required, and even if all hygiene factors are met, employees will not be motivated unless motivators are also present (J. Hu & Wu, 2021). Therefore, hygiene factors and motivators must be addressed to create a truly motivating work environment.

Herzberg’s (1959) motivation-hygiene theory has had a lasting impact on how organizations understand and enhance employee motivation and job satisfaction. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory has significantly contributed to the field of business and management. Herzberg's theory provided insight into the factors that motivate employees and how businesses can use the factors to create a productive and satisfying work environment (Jang et al., 2020). Organizational leaders can focus on creating a workplace that meets the basic needs of employees, as well as providing opportunities for growth, recognition, and meaningful work. Satisfying the needs of employees can result in higher levels of job satisfaction, employee engagement, and increased productivity and profitability (Kato et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Herzberg’s (1959) theory emphasized the importance of job design in motivating employees. Businesses can create a more satisfying work environment and retain top talent by designing jobs that provide opportunities for autonomy, achievement, and growth. Overall, Herzberg's theory has given businesses valuable insights into the factors that drive employee motivation and job satisfaction, shaping modern management practices that prioritize creating a positive and engaging work environment (Ahmad & Ali, 2017).

Herzberg’s (1959) theory contributed to organizational success through implications for employee engagement and retention. Leaders who address both hygiene and motivational factors can potentially foster employee engagement and reduce turnover (Adanlawo et al., 2023). Organizations can create a work environment that meets basic hygiene needs while also focusing on providing intrinsic rewards and growth opportunities, resulting in improved employee retention rates.

Thirdly, Herzberg’s (1959) theory has influenced performance management and reward systems. Traditional extrinsic rewards such as salary increases and bonuses are viewed as hygiene factors, while motivational factors such as recognition and skill development are deemed more influential in promoting long-term motivation (Teck-Hong & Waheed, 2011). Organizational leaders can align their performance management systems with the theory by incorporating motivational factors, such as providing meaningful feedback, recognizing achievements, and offering opportunities for skill enhancement.

Herzberg’s (1959) theory has implications for job design and enrichment. Organizational leaders can redesign jobs to incorporate elements such as task variety, autonomy, and opportunities for growth by understanding the importance of job characteristics in influencing motivation and satisfaction (Ihensekien & Joel, 2023). Job enrichment programs that focus on providing additional responsibilities and promoting employee development can enhance motivation and job satisfaction. Lastly Herzberg's theory emphasized the role of organizational culture and climate in employee satisfaction. A positive work culture that promotes trust, open communication, collaboration, and recognition aligns with the motivational factors emphasized in the theory (B. Hu & Meng, 2023). Organizational leaders can create a supportive environment that enhances employee motivation and well-being by cultivating such a culture.

Herzberg's (1959) theory has made significant contributions to organizations by providing insights into the factors influencing employee motivation, job satisfaction, and performance. By considering both hygiene and motivational factors, organizations can create a work environment that fosters employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention, ultimately contributing to organizational success. Mowday et al. (2004) found a significant relationship between job satisfaction and motivators, while Bhatnagar (2020) found that job satisfaction was positively related to motivators, and job dissatisfaction was negatively related to hygiene factors. However, Blood and Hulin (1968) found that hygiene factors were more critical in predicting job satisfaction than motivators. Lu, et al. (2020) found that motivators were positively related to employee well-being, while hygiene factors were negatively related. Additionally, Bono and Judge (2001) conducted a meta-analysis and concluded that the theory may be oversimplified, as other factors beyond motivators and hygiene factors can also impact job satisfaction. Despite these criticisms, Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory remains a significant contribution to the field of organizational behavior, and scholars continue to study and discuss its impact.

Change Management & Change Management Models

In today's fast-paced and constantly evolving business environment, organizations must embrace change to remain competitive and relevant. Change management is a structured approach to managing the transition or transformation of an organization's processes, technologies, organizational structures, or cultures (Kotter, 1996). Change management involves planning, implementing, and monitoring changes in a systematic way to minimize disruption and ensure that the changes are effectively adopted and sustained by employees, customers, and other stakeholders (Bridges, 2017; Cameron & Green, 2015). The goal of change management is to enable organizational leaders to adapt to changing business environments and achieve their strategic objectives while minimizing negative impacts on productivity, quality, and employee morale (Bridges, 2017; Kotter, 1996; Lewin, 1951). Business leaders can increase engagement and commitment, leading to higher levels of job satisfaction and reduced turnover by involving employees in the change process and addressing their concerns (Bovey & Hede, 2001; Hall & Nieves, 2018). Furthermore, businesses can improve their products and services, leading to increased customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth recommendations by responding to changing customer needs and preferences (Cameron & Green, 2015). However, if change is poorly managed, it can lead to low morale, reduced productivity, and increased turnover, as well as delays, cost overruns, and a failure to achieve desired outcomes (Bridges, 2017).

Lewin's Three-Stage Model of Change

Many scholars have studied different aspects of change management and proposed various models and frameworks to guide organizations through the change process. Lewin's (1951) three-stage model of change, which includes unfreezing, changing, and refreezing, is one of the earliest and most influential models of change management. Lewin emphasized the importance of understanding and addressing the forces that resist change in order to successfully implement and sustain change. Lewin's model laid the foundation for many modern change management approaches, influencing subsequent frameworks that help organizations navigate and sustain change effectively.

Unfreeze. The first stage is to unfreeze the current situation by creating a sense of dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. Creating a sense of dissatisfaction can be achieved by highlighting the problems and shortcomings of the existing system and communicating the need for change to stakeholders (T. Cummings & Worley, 2014). The goal of unfreezing is to create a readiness for change and a willingness to support it.

Change. The second stage of Lewin's (1951) model involves making the desired change. Making the change can involve introducing new processes, systems, or structures, or modifying existing ones. Organizational leaders must have a clear plan for the change, including goals, timelines, and communication strategies (By et al., 2017). During the change stage, it is also important to provide support and resources to stakeholders to ensure that the change is implemented effectively.

Refreeze. The final stage of Lewin's (1951) model is to refreeze the new situation by stabilizing and embedding the change. Stabilizing and embedding the change involves ensuring that the new processes, systems, or structures become the norm and are accepted by stakeholders. It may also involve revising policies and procedures to align with the new system and providing ongoing training and support to stakeholders (By et al., 2017). Organizational leaders can ensure that the transformation becomes a lasting part of the organizational culture and future operations by effectively refreezing the change.

Lewin’s (1951) three-stage model of change has been widely discussed and applied in various fields, including organizational development, management, and psychology. Armenakis and Harris (2002) found that the model was associated with higher levels of employee commitment and improved organizational performance. Similarly, a study by D'Amelio et al. (2008) found that the model was effective in reducing resistance to change and increasing the success rate of change initiatives. D'Amelio et al. (2008) argued that the model does not account for the complexity of organizational change and the role of individual differences in the change process. Others have suggested that the model does not account for the continuous nature of change, which requires ongoing adaptation and learning (Akram et al., 2018). Organizational leaders should consider the limitations of Lewin’s three-stage model of change and explore alternative approaches to change management based on their specific needs.

Lewin’s (1951) three-stage model of change has played a crucial role in enhancing organizational success by offering a structured and psychologically informed framework for managing change. Lewin’s three-stage model of change has had a significant positive impact on organizational success by providing a structured approach to managing and implementing change (Burnes, 2020). The model emphasized the importance of understanding the psychology of change and taking a systematic approach to ensure that change initiatives are successful (Bakari et al., 2017). The use of Lewin’s model has positively contributed to organizational success through reduced resistance, employee engagement, effective communication, cultural integration, and flexibility. Organizational leaders can minimize employee resistance and opposition to the changes by acknowledging the psychological resistance to change and actively addressing it through the unfreeze stage, leading to smoother transitions and faster adoption of new practices (Akram et al., 2018; Mayfield et al., 2018). Involving employees in the change process enhances their sense of ownership and involvement, fostering greater engagement and commitment, ultimately improving morale and productivity (Akram et al., 2018; S. Bridgman et al., 2016). The model's emphasis on communication ensures that all stakeholders are well-informed about the changes, their rationales, and their expected outcomes. This transparency fosters trust and alignment throughout the organization (Bargal & Burnes, 2017). The refreeze stage ensures that the changes become an integral part of the organizational culture, helping to prevent the organization from reverting to old practices and facilitating long-term success (Bargal & Burnes, 2017; Tang, 2019). While the model's stages are linear, it recognizes the need for flexibility in implementation (Danut et al., 2020). Organizations can adapt the model to their specific contexts, allowing for customization of the change process. Overall, Lewin's three-stage model provides a structured and psychologically informed approach to change management, which contributes to smoother transitions, increased acceptance of changes, and ultimately, enhanced organizational success.

Bridges Three-Phase Model of Transition

Bridges's (2017) transition model highlights the critical role of addressing the human side of change to ensure successful implementation**.** Bridges emphasized the importance of managing transitions effectively in order to successfully implement change. Bridges proposed a three-phase model of transition that included endings, the neutral zone, and new beginnings, and suggests that organizations need to address the emotional and psychological impacts of change in addition to the practical aspects. Bridges's model enhances the organization's ability to achieve lasting and meaningful transformation by helping leaders understand and manage the emotional journey employees experience during change.

Ending. The first phase is the ending stage, which involves letting go of the old way of doing things. According to Bridges (2017), this stage can be emotionally challenging because people experience a sense of loss, uncertainty, and even grief as familiar processes, routines, and workplace norms are left behind. Bridges indicated that employees who feel a strong attachment to the previous way of working often resist change, making this phase critical for successful transitions. Leaders must actively support employees during this stage by clearly communicating the reasons for the change, acknowledging their feelings, and providing opportunities for employees to voice concerns and ask questions (Adelman-Mullaly et al., 2023). Employees may cling to outdated behaviors, creating a barrier to progress and slowing down the entire change process without adequate support and communication (Munoz, 2025). Organizational leaders can lay the groundwork for smoother transitions into the next phase by helping employees find closure and understand the benefits of the change.

Neutral Zone. The neutral zone, characterized by ambiguity, confusion, and uncertainty, is the second phase of the transition process. Bridges (2017) explained that the neutral zone occurs after the old way has ended but before the new way has fully taken shape, leaving employees in a psychological in-between state. Munoz (2025) suggested that employees often experience reduced productivity, anxiety, and frustration during this phase due to the lack of clear direction. However, a period of uncertainty also presents an opportunity for innovation and creativity, as employees begin to question old assumptions and explore new approaches (Bridges, 2017). Employees are more likely to feel empowered and engaged during the neutral zone when leaders provide clear guidance, continuous communication, and opportunities for employees to participate in shaping the new way of working, (Samuel & Tsapayi, 2023). Conversely, employees may disengage, resist further change, or revert to familiar but outdated practices if leaders fail to offer sufficient support (Bridges, 2017; Samuel & Tsapayi, 2023). Effectively managing the neutral zone is essential to maintaining momentum and ensuring that employees are prepared to embrace the final phase of the transition process.

New Beginning. The final stage is the new beginning, which involves fully embracing the new way of doing things. Bridges (2017) emphasized this stage occurs when stakeholders have accepted the change, adjusted to new processes or structures, and are ready to move forward with confidence. Munoz (2025) highlighted that employees often experience a renewed sense of purpose and energy during the new beginning phase, especially if the benefits of the change align with their personal and professional goals. Successful new beginnings are not automatic but require intentional reinforcement from leadership through ongoing communication, training, and recognition of early successes (Hayes, 2020). The new way of working becomes embedded in the organizational culture through active reinforcement, strengthening employees' sense of identity and belonging within the changed environment (Munoz, 2025). However, employees may regress or develop doubts about the change if leaders fail to celebrate progress or clarify how the change connects to the organizational vision, (Bridges, 2017; Hayes, 2020). Ultimately, the new beginning is about transforming initial compliance into lasting commitment, ensuring that the change becomes part of the organizational culture and the employees' sense of identity at work.

The Bridges (2017) three-phase model of transition provided valuable insights into the emotional and psychological challenges people face during change, helping them navigate transitions more effectively. The Bridges three-phase model of transition helps people understand the emotional and psychological journey of change (Bridges, 2017). By recognizing the stages of transition, people can better navigate the process and come out stronger and more resilient on the other side. Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of the Bridges three-phase model of transition in various settings. For example, in a study of organizational change in a hospital, researchers found that using the model helped employees understand and cope with the changes more effectively (Ellis et al., 2019). Similarly, a study of the use of the model in career counseling concluded that it helped clients to gain clarity and direction during times of career transition (Fitzgerald & Osipow, 1996). As research continues to demonstrate its effectiveness across diverse settings, Bridges' model remains a powerful tool for guiding individuals and organizations through periods of change.

The Bridges (2017) three-phase model of transition has proven to be a valuable framework for supporting students as they navigate significant educational transitions. For example, in a study of the use of the model in helping students transition to college, researchers found that it helped students to adjust to the new environment and cope with the challenges of the transition (Porfeli & Savickas, 2012). In another study of the use of the model in a graduate program, researchers found that it helped students to navigate the challenges of the program and to develop the skills and mindset needed for success

(Cavanaugh & Duffy, 2017). The Bridges model enhances the ability to adapt, succeed, and thrive in new educational environments by helping students manage the emotional and psychological adjustments that come with academic transitions.

The Bridges (2017) three-phase model of transition offers a practical and psychologically informed framework for successfully managing change across diverse contexts by providing a framework for understanding the emotional and psychological journey of transition, and helping individuals and organizations to cope with the challenges and opportunities of change (Bridges, 2017). In addition, the model positively contributes to organizational success through enabling a quicker transition to productivity, better change planning, and positive organizational culture. The Bridges model contributes to smoother transitions, improved morale, and enhanced long-term success by helping individuals and organizations understand and navigate the human side of change.

Organizational leaders can effectively manage organizational transitions using the Bridges (2017) three-phase model to help guide employees through change while minimizing productivity loss and fostering a positive work culture. The ultimate goal of any organizational change is to get teams and individuals back to full productivity as soon as possible. Organizational leaders can reduce the duration of the Neutral Zone where productivity might dip due to uncertainty and confusion by effectively managing the transition phases (Karabasevic & Vrcelj, 2022). The Bridges model encourages organizational leaders to anticipate the emotional journey of employees during a transition. This insight helps organizational leaders plan change initiatives more strategically, considering potential challenges and tailoring the approach to support employees effectively (Bridges, 2017; Gray & Wilkinson, 2016). Organizational leaders can contribute to a positive organizational culture by successfully managing transitions using the Bridges model. When employees see that their well-being is a priority during changes, they are more likely to trust the organization and its leadership (Bridges, 2017). The successful implementation of the Bridges transition model requires a supportive leadership approach, effective communication strategies, and a genuine commitment to the well-being of employees (Bridges, 2017). Additionally, each organization's context may vary, so the application of the model should be tailored to suit specific circumstances. Leaders can create a smoother transition process that supports employee well-being and strengthens trust in leadership by applying the Bridges model with care and tailoring it to the organization's unique context.

ADKAR

The ADKAR model provides a clear, step-by-step framework for managing change at the individual level, ensuring that both employees and organizations are prepared to successfully navigate change. The model includes five elements: awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement, and emphasizes the importance of addressing each of these elements in order to effectively change behavior (Hiatt, 2018). The ADKAR model was developed by Prosci, a company that specializes in change management. It is widely used in business and organizational settings to help manage change and ensure that individuals and teams are equipped to handle change effectively (Hiatt, 2018). Change can be managed more effectively and with greater success by addressing each of the five elements of ADKAR. The ADKAR model helps organizations foster smoother transitions and increase the likelihood of lasting, positive change by systematically addressing awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement.

Awareness. Awareness is the first step in the ADKAR model of change management that focuses on ensuring that individuals and organizations fully understand the need for change and the risks of maintaining the status quo (Hiatt, 2018). Organizational leaders must first become aware of the need for change to successfully navigate a change (Burke 2017; Hiatt, 2018). Becoming aware of the need for change involves understanding why the change is necessary and the potential benefits of making the change. During the awareness phase, it is important to communicate the need for change clearly and effectively to all stakeholders. Effectively communicating the need for change may involve sharing data or other evidence to support the need for change, as well as highlighting the potential risks of not making the change. It may also involve engaging in dialogue with stakeholders to ensure that they understand the need for change and are invested in the process. At the end of the awareness phase, individuals or organizations should have a clear understanding of why the change is necessary and what is at stake if the change is not made (Harej & Strukelj, 2021). Understanding why the change is needed lays the foundation for the next step in the ADKAR model, which is building desire for change. Organizational leaders can pave the way for building desire and fostering genuine commitment to the change process by establishing a strong foundation of awareness.

Desire. Desire is the second step in the ADKAR model of change management that focuses on building personal and organizational commitment to actively support and participate in the change process (Hiatt, 2018). In the desire step, organizational leaders must develop a desire to participate in and support the change (Hiatt, 2018; Manhas, 2018). Without desire, even the most well-planned change initiative is likely to fail. During the desire phase, it is important to communicate the benefits of the change in a way that resonates with stakeholders (Manhas, 2018). Communicating the benefits of the change may involve highlighting how the change will address stakeholders' needs or concerns, or how it aligns with stakeholders' values or goals. Building the desire for change may also involve addressing any potential barriers to change, such as resistance or fear of the unknown. To build desire for change, it is important to involve stakeholders in the process and to listen to their feedback and concerns (King & Reichert, 2020). Listening to stakeholders' feedback and concerns can help to create a sense of ownership and engagement that will be critical to the success of the change initiative. At the end of the desire phase, individuals or organizations should be fully committed to the change and motivated to support it, setting the stage for the next step in the ADKAR model, which is acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to make the change. Organizational leaders can move forward by equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to successfully implement the change with strong desire in place.

Knowledge. Knowledge is the third step in the ADKAR model of change management that focuses on ensuring that individuals and organizations gain the information, skills, and tools needed to successfully implement change (Hiatt, 2018). In the knowledge step, organizational leaders must acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to make the change. Without the necessary knowledge and skills, leaders may struggle to effectively implement the change. During the knowledge phase, it is important to provide training and support to stakeholders to ensure that the stakeholders have the knowledge and skills needed to make the change (Hiatt, 2018; Sharma, 2019). Providing formal training sessions, on-the-job training, or coaching and mentoring ensures stakeholders are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for the change to be successful. Providing access to resources and tools that can support the change process also ensures that change implementation is successful (Mehmetoglu & Slatten, 2020). To ensure stakeholders have the necessary knowledge and skills to make the change, it is crucial to identify any areas of opportunity and provide tailored training and support to address those gaps (Bianchi & Szamosi, 2018). It is also important to provide ongoing support to ensure stakeholders are able to apply their new knowledge and skills effectively (Sharma, 2019). At the end of the knowledge phase, individuals or organizations should have the knowledge and skills they need to implement the change effectively, setting the stage for the next step in the ADKAR model, which is building the ability to implement the change.

Ability. Ability is the fourth step in the ADKAR model of change management that focuses on equipping individuals and organizations with the practical capacity to successfully implement the change (Hiatt, 2018). In the ability step, organizational leaders must have the ability to implement the change. Without the ability to make the change happen, even the most motivated and well-trained individuals may struggle to bring about the desired outcome. During the ability phase, it is important to provide the necessary resources, tools, and infrastructure to support the change (Barling & Robertson, 2017). Providing the necessary tools may involve allocating additional resources or changing processes and procedures to support the change initiative. The ability phase may also involve addressing any logistical or technical challenges that may arise during the implementation process. To build the ability to implement the change, it is important to monitor progress and provide ongoing support to stakeholders (Brouwer, 2019). At the end of the ability phase, organizational leaders should have the ability to implement the change effectively, setting the stage for the final step in the ADKAR model, which is reinforcement.

Reinforcement. Reinforcement is the final step in the ADKAR model of change management that focuses on ensuring changes are sustained, celebrated, and fully embedded into the organization's culture and processes. (Hiatt, 2018). In the reinforcement step, organizational leaders must ensure that the change is sustained over the long term. Without reinforcement, organizational leaders may revert to their previous ways of doing things, and the benefits of the change may be lost (Sarala & Vaara, 2018). During the reinforcement phase, it is important to celebrate successes and acknowledge the progress made (Goldstein & McKenna, 2018). Celebrating successes helps to reinforce the positive aspects of the change and encourage continued support for the initiative. Celebrating may also involve recognizing individuals or teams that have contributed to the success of the change (Caza & Milton, 2020). To reinforce the change, it is important to monitor progress. Monitoring proress helps ensure that the change remains on track and that any barriers to success are addressed. At the end of the reinforcement phase, the change should be fully integrated into the culture and processes of the organization, and individuals should be committed to sustaining the change over the long term, setting the stage for ongoing improvement and growth. Organizational leaders create a foundation for continuous improvement and future growth, ensuring long-term success by successfully reinforcing the change.

Many studies have highlighted the effectiveness of the ADKAR model in facilitating successful change management initiatives. For example, a study by Barling and Robertson (2017) found that the ADKAR model provided a useful framework for change management practitioners, and that it could be adapted to fit different organizational contexts. Similarly, a study by Brouwer (2019) concluded that the ADKAR model was effective in promoting change readiness and facilitating successful change initiatives.

Other studies have focused on specific aspects of the ADKAR model. For example, Cevikcan and Sagir (2020) investigated the factors that contribute to resistance to change in public sector organizations, and found that the Desire and Knowledge steps of the ADKAR model were particularly important in overcoming resistance. Manhas (2018) examined the role of leadership in creating Desire for change in organizations, and found that effective leadership was critical in building commitment to change initiatives.

The literature suggested that the ADKAR model is a valuable framework for managing change in organizations, and can be adapted to fit a variety of contexts and situations (Edmondson et al., 2021). However, some scholars have noted that the model may be too simplistic and it may not fully capture the complexity of organizational change. Nonetheless, the ADKAR model remains a widely used and respected tool for change management practitioners.

Overall, the literature on change management provides a range of models, frameworks, and tools for organizations to successfully manage change. However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to change management. While the ADKAR model has proven to be an effective and adaptable tool for managing change, organizational leaders must thoughtfully evaluate their unique challenges and goals to select or customize a change management approach that best fits their specific needs.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement plays a vital role in organizational success, influencing productivity, profitability, innovation, and employee retention. Employee engagement refers to the level of emotional commitment and dedication that employees have towards their work, organization, and its goals (Anderson & Dik, 2021; Reio & Shuck, 2017). Engaged employees are motivated, enthusiastic, and passionate about their work, and they feel a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their job and the company. Employee engagement is important because it has a direct impact on the productivity, efficiency, and profitability of an organization (Kahn, 2022). Engaged employees are more likely to be satisfied with their work, to remain loyal to their employer, to be more innovative and creative, and to provide better customer service.

There are several factors that contribute to employee engagement, including clear communication, recognition and rewards, opportunities for growth and development, a positive work environment, and a sense of purpose and meaning in the work being done (Hayday et al., 2021; Kahn, 2022; Saks, 2020). Organizations can improve employee engagement by implementing strategies such as regular feedback and communication, promoting work-life balance, providing opportunities for training and development, and creating a positive and inclusive workplace culture (Kahn, 2022; Reio & Shuck, 2017).

Lack of employee engagement can have a significant negative impact on an organization's productivity, efficiency, and bottom line (J. Cho et al., 2024). When employees are disengaged, they are more likely to be apathetic, unmotivated, and unproductive, which can lead to lower quality work, increased errors, and decreased innovation (Adams & Freedman, 2017; Atiku et al., 2024). There are several possible causes of low employee engagement, including poor communication, lack of recognition and rewards, limited opportunities for growth and development, inadequate work-life balance, and a negative work environment (Bakker, 2020; Mihail, 2019). Other factors that can contribute to disengagement include unclear expectations, poor leadership, lack of trust, and feelings of disconnection from the organization's purpose and values (Bakker, 2020). To address low employee engagement, organizational leaders need to take a comprehensive approach that involves understanding the underlying causes and implementing effective strategies to address the causes (Adams & Freedman, 2017). Addressing low employee engagement may include regular feedback and communication, creating a positive and inclusive workplace culture, providing opportunities for training and development, offering competitive compensation and benefits, and recognizing and rewarding employees for their contributions (Hayday et al., 2021). By taking these steps, organizations can improve employee engagement, which can lead to a more motivated and productive workforce, better organizational performance, and higher levels of customer satisfaction.

Employee engagement is a critical factor in organizational success, and research has identified various strategies for promoting employee engagement. Bakker (2017) proposed organizations adopt strategic and proactive approaches to employee engagement, emphasizing the importance of job resources, leadership, and employee well-being. Chai and Raman (2018) found that transformational leadership was positively related to employee engagement, and that this relationship was mediated by structural empowerment. Alarifi et al. (2019) conducted a field study of Saudi Arabian organizations and found that training and development had a positive impact on employee engagement. Crawford et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of job demands and resources and determined that job resources were more strongly related to employee engagement and less strongly related to burnout. Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2021) investigated the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between affective commitment and employee engagement. Finally, Hur et al. (2022) examined the role of employee empowerment and customer service climate in the relationship between servant leadership and employee engagement. Overall, these studies suggest that employee engagement can be promoted through a variety of approaches, including effective leadership, job resources, training and development, and well-being initiatives.

Employee engagement has become a popular topic in organizational research and practice in recent years. Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of employee engagement on organizational outcomes, including increased productivity, profitability, and customer satisfaction, as well as reduced absenteeism and turnover (Alarifi et al., 2019; Bakker, 2017; Chai & Raman, 2018). Conversely, disengaged employees are more likely to experience burnout, stress, and health problems, which can negatively affect their work and the organization (Bakker, 2020). Despite the growing interest in employee engagement, there is still much debate and research needed to better understand this complex phenomenon. Some researchers argue that the concept of employee engagement is too broad and lacks a clear definition, while others suggest that the relationship between engagement and organizational outcomes is not always straightforward and may be influenced by various contextual factors. While research has demonstrated the many benefits of employee engagement, ongoing studies continue to explore its complexities, emphasizing the need for organizations to adopt tailored, evidence-based strategies to foster and sustain high levels of engagement.

Organizational Performance

Organizational performance reflects how effectively and efficiently an organization achieves its goals, and it plays a critical role in driving long-term success, competitiveness, and sustainability. Organizational performance refers to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of an organization in achieving its goals and objectives (Chang & Lee, 2022). It encompasses various aspects of an organization's operations, such as productivity, profitability, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, innovation, and strategic alignment (Chang & Lee, 2022). Business leaders often use a combination of financial and non-financial metrics to measure organizational performance. Financial metrics include revenue, profit margin, return on investment, and cash flow, while non-financial metrics can include customer satisfaction, employee turnover rate, and time-to-market for new products. Factors that can influence organizational performance include leadership, organizational culture, employee skills and motivation, technology, and external factors such as economic conditions and competition (Armstrong, 2014; Hitt et al., 2017). Effective performance management and continuous improvement efforts can help organizations enhance their overall performance over time (Krishnan & Subramanian, 2019).

Organizational performance is crucial for achieving organizational goals and objectives. It is closely linked to financial success, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and innovation. A high level of performance ensures that the organization is meeting its targets and objectives, which can help to increase competitiveness and profitability (Chun et al., 2017). Employees feel more motivated, engaged, and satisfied with their work, leading to improved retention rates and reduced turnover costs when an organization is performing well (Goyal et al., 2021). Similarly, a high level of performance can provide the resources and incentives needed to invest in research and development, leading to the creation of new products, services, and processes (R. Johnson et al., 2023). Overall, achieving high organizational performance is critical for long-term success and competitiveness in today's dynamic business environment.

There is a strong relationship between organizational performance and other organizational outcomes, such as employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and innovation. Research has consistently shown that organizations with higher levels of performance in these areas tend to perform better financially (Arain et al., 2019). For example, when employees are satisfied with their work and feel engaged, they are more likely to be productive and provide high-quality customer service, which can lead to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty (Ang & Bian, 2017); in turn, resulting in increased revenues and profits for the organization. Similarly, when organizations invest in innovation, leaders can create new products, services, and processes that meet the evolving needs and preferences of their customers (Bashir et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2018). Meeting the needs and preferences of the customers can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty, leading to increased revenues and profits (Huo et al., 2023).

Organizational performance can also impact employee retention rates. When employees are satisfied with their work and feel engaged, employees are more likely to stay with the organization, reducing the costs and disruption associated with turnover

(Ang & Bian, 2017; Yang et al., 2018). Overall, the relationship between organizational performance and other organizational outcomes is complex and multi-faceted. Achieving high levels of performance requires a focus on multiple areas, including employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and innovation. By investing in these areas, organizations can enhance their overall performance and competitiveness in the long run.

Improving organizational performance requires a multifaceted approach that addresses different areas of the organization. Organizational leaders can use several strategies to enhance their performance, including goal setting, performance management, employee engagement, process improvement, innovation, strategic alignment, customer focus, and data-driven decision-making (Langley et al., 2017). By setting clear and specific goals, using effective performance management practices, creating a positive work environment that fosters employee engagement, continuously improving processes, fostering a culture of innovation, ensuring strategic alignment, prioritizing customer satisfaction, and using data to inform decision-making, organizational leaders can improve their overall performance and competitiveness (Bos-Nehles et al., 2019; Kebaili & Othman, 2023; S. Kim, 2018). These strategies can lead to better outcomes for employees, customers, and shareholders, ultimately contributing to the long-term success of the organization. Organizational leaders can enhance overall performance and establish a position for enduring success in an increasingly competitive environment by adopting a comprehensive approach that addresses leadership, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, innovation, and strategic alignment.

Employee Turnover

Employee turnover, the rate at which employees leave and are replaced, is a critical workforce metric that directly impacts organizational costs, productivity, and long-term success. Employee turnover refers to the rate at which employees leave a company and are replaced by new hires (Y. Li & Shen, 2019). It is a measure of the number or percentage of employees who leave a company over a certain period of time (Leana & Pil, 2020). Turnover can be voluntary, such as when an employee chooses to leave, or involuntary, such as when an employee is terminated. High turnover rates can be costly for companies, as they can result in increased recruitment and training costs, decreased productivity, and a loss of institutional knowledge. Therefore, many organizational leaders strive to keep their turnover rates as low as possible by creating a positive work environment, offering competitive compensation and benefits, and providing opportunities for career growth and development (Bhatnagar, 2021).

Poor management, job dissatisfaction, and a lack of career opportunities are some of the most common causes of employee turnover (Aslam & Cheema, 2022). A negative or toxic organizational culture can also lead to high turnover rates. Additionally, changes in personal circumstances, industry trends, and demographic factors may influence employee turnover. To address high turnover, organizational leaders must develop effective retention strategies that consider their unique circumstances and address the underlying causes of turnover.

Organizations can implement several retention strategies to reduce employee turnover and improve retention rates. First, they can provide competitive compensation and benefits packages, including healthcare benefits, retirement plans, and performance-based bonuses (Bratton & Gold, 2018; Tsai & Wu, 2017). Additionally, organizations can offer opportunities for career development and advancement, such as job shadowing, mentorship programs, and tuition reimbursement. Creating a positive work environment through initiatives such as employee recognition programs, team-building activities, and a focus on work-life balance can also improve employee retention (Garg & Rastogi, 2019). Finally, effective management practices, such as providing regular feedback, clear communication, and opportunities for employees to contribute to decision-making, can improve job satisfaction and reduce turnover rates (Bhatnagar, 2020). Organizational leaders can foster a positive work environment, improve employee loyalty, and enhance overall organizational performance by understanding the causes of turnover and implementing targeted retention strategies.

Transition

In Section 1, I established the foundation of this study by presenting the background of the problem, the problem statement and purpose statement, the research question, and interview questions. Additionally, I addressed the conceptual frameworks for grounding the strategies in implementing change management and human resources managers' involvement in the implementation process. In Section 1, I discussed alternative models that could have been applicable to explore the strategies human resources managers use to successfully engage employees during change management before defining the three key terms used in the study. The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the research were presented before, the study's potential significance and potential for positive social change impact.

In Section 2, I discuss the research process, including ethical considerations, the role of the researcher, the selection process and identification of participants, and the research methods and design used for data collection. Finally, in Section 3, I will outline the findings of this research effort. In Section 3, I will present study findings relative to professional practice, the implications for social change, recommendations for implementing change management strategies to effectively engage employees, and opportunities for future research.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I provide a restatement of the purpose of the pragmatic inquiry. Next, I discuss the role of the researcher, participant selection process, the research method and design, and population and sampling. In Section 2, I detail the ethicality of the research, data collection techniques, organization, and the analysis of the information gleaned from research participants. The reliability and validity of the research are discussed in Section 2.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore the strategies human resources managers use to improve employee engagement during change management. The targeted population consisted of human resources leaders of manufacturing companies in the southeast region of the state of Georgia. The implications for a positive social change included the provision of knowledge to human resources managers to implement effective change management strategies that engaged employees and decreased employee turnover. Social entrepreneurship removes societal problems in the community and creates social change (Ambad, 2022). Through effective employee engagement, employees gain a sense of ownership in the organization and are committed to corporate social responsibility efforts and making a change in the community (J. Kim & M. Kim, 2021).

Role of the Researcher

The role of a researcher in the data collection process is crucial. That role directly influences the quality and reliability of the research findings (Yin, 2018). The researcher is responsible for planning, implementing, and overseeing data collection activities in a systematic and ethical manner (Abildgaard et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). The researcher must design the data collection methodology by selecting appropriate data collection methods, such as surveys, interviews, experiments, observations, or archival research, based on the research objectives and questions (Peterson, 2019; Yin, 2018). Data collection instruments, such as questionnaires or interview guides, need to be crafted to effectively gather necessary information (Berge et al., 2024). Another responsibility is defining the study sample by deciding on the target population and selecting a sample from that population (Duggal et al., 2023). The sample must contain a population representative and relevant to the research questions (Kamal, 2019).

Ethical considerations are an important aspect of the role of the researcher. I must adhere to ethical principles when collecting data. Researchers and scholars adhere ethical principles when collecting data such as obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring their privacy and confidentiality, and minimizing any harm or discomfort (Halkoaho et al., 2020; Husband, 2020). The researcher is responsible for collecting and managing data. Data are collected by administering surveys, conducting interviews, making observations, or using other relevant methods, ensuring data quality and reliability by following standardized procedures and minimizing biases (Hendricksen et al., 2021; Yin, 2018). Researchers must organize and manage the collected data, which may involve data entry, coding, and cleaning to prepare the data for analysis (Hendricksen et al., 2021). While data analysis is a distinct step, the way data is collected can impact the analysis; therefore, the researcher must ensure that the data collected is suitable for the analytical methods being used (Hendricksen et al., 2021; Kamal, 2019). The role of a researcher in the data collection process involves a combination of skills, including research design, communication, ethics, and attention to detail. The quality and validity of the data collected significantly influence the credibility of the research and the conclusions drawn from the research.

As a human resources professional, a passion exists for the research topic because of the motivation to gain an understanding of the relationship between change management and employee engagement. No preexisting relationships between myself and the research participants existed. Establishing rapport and trust with research participants is important because data collection and the quality of research is enhanced (Yin, 2018). I established trust with research participants by clearly explaining the purpose of the research, how the data will be used, and potential risks or benefits.

A researcher's role related to ethics and *The Belmont Report* protocol involves ensuring the ethical treatment of human subjects in research. *The Belmont Report*, issued by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare outlined the fundamental principles for ethical research involving human subjects (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). The researcher must respect the autonomy and dignity of individuals participating in research (Beauchamp, 2020), including obtaining informed consent, ensuring that participants understand the research and their rights, and protecting vulnerable populations (Anabo et al., 2019; Brothers et al., 2019). The researcher must maximize potential benefits for participants while minimizing harm (Beauchamp, 2020), which involves designing studies to provide valuable insights and mitigating risks to the extent possible (Anabo et al., 2019). Researchers and scholars must ensure that the benefits and burdens of research are distributed fairly by avoiding exploitation, considering the selection of participants, and providing equitable access to research opportunities (Brothers et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). I played a crucial role in upholding these ethical principles by designing a study that adhered to these guidelines, sought approval from the institutional review board (IRB), and monitored the welfare of research participants throughout the study. Adherence to *The Belmont Report* principles is essential for maintaining the integrity and ethical standards of scientific research involving human subjects.

Researchers must actively mitigate bias and avoid interpreting data through their own personal lens to ensure the credibility and integrity of research. Researchers must mitigate bias and avoid viewing data through a personal perspective to maintain the integrity and objectivity of the study (Connolly et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Failure to mitigate bias in research has negative consequences including unreliable results, issues of credibility, ethical concerns, and loss of objectivity (Bergen & Labonte, 2020; Yin, 2018). Many strategies exist that the researcher can use to mitigate bias and avoid viewing data through a personal perspective (Akhter et al., 2023). The strategies I used were reflexivity and member checking. Researchers can enhance the trustworthiness and validity of their findings, ensuring that the study reflects participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's own biases by employing strategies such as reflexivity and member checking.

I maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process to document and critically examine my personal biases. Reflexivity is a strategy in which the researcher begins by acknowledging self-biases and assumptions by reflecting on background, experiences, and values that might influence perspective (Dodgson, 2019; Kahlke et al., 2023). Member checking involves engaging with research participants to ensure that the perspectives are accurately represented by asking research participants to review the findings and interpretations to confirm that their viewpoints were understood correctly (Amin et al., 2020; Motulsky, 2021). I conducted member checking by sharing summarized findings with selected participants, gathering their feedback on accuracy and alignment with their experiences, incorporating necessary revisions, and seeking final validation to enhance the credibility of the research.

I used the interview protocol approved by Walden University's IRB (see Appendix). An interview protocol is a fundamental tool for collecting rich and meaningful data while ensuring consistency and reliability in the interview process (Braaten et al., 2020). The rationale for using an interview protocol includes consistency, standardization, transparency, efficiency, and legal and ethical compliance (Beresford et al., 2021). Researchers must ensure that all participants are asked the same set of questions or topics to promote consistency in data collection (Jimenez & Orozco, 2021). An interview protocol is used to maintain uniformity in the interview process, reducing the risk of researcher bias, and ensuring comparability of responses (Becker et al., 2023). Researchers use an interview protocol to keep the interview on track by guiding the conversation toward the research objectives and key themes. In addition, an interview protocol is used to streamline the interview process, making the process more time-efficient and allowing for a better use of resources (Becker et al., 2023; Braaten et al., 2020).

Participants

The purpose of the research effort was to explore the strategies human resources managers use to improve employee engagement during change management. Insights and experiences of the human resources manager participants contributed to the value of the study. Qualitative research is characterized through understanding and exploring the experiences, perspectives, and meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to a particular phenomenon (Fischer & Guzel, 2023; Nassaji, 2020; Yin, 2018). Researchers and scholars carefully select participants for quality and relevance of the research findings (Adkins et al., 2020). Participant selection in qualitative research is about gathering diverse and relevant perspectives to address research questions effectively (Nassaji, 2020; Slettebo, 2021). I targeted four participants who were human resources managers who were or previously employed in manufacturing companies within the southeast region of Georgia. The participants met the three eligibility criteria. The first criteria was that participants were full-time human resources managers in a manufacturing company that underwent some type of change such as acquisition or merger, implementation of new technology, leadership changes, expansion, regulatory and compliance changes, and supply chain adjustments. The second was that the human resources managers are knowledgeable of change management and employee engagement. The last criterion was that participants must have experience implementing strategies to improve employee engagement.

I am a member of the Society of Human Resource Management's Central Savannah River Area chapter. I used the member directory to identify eligible participants. I emailed the identified human resources managers outlining the purpose of the inquiry and inviting their participation. Emailing the purpose of the study is important because it ensures participants fully understand the study's goals, helping to make an informed decision about participating (Carter et al., 2021). Interviews were conducted using the Zoom interactive internet platform. The advantage of using Zoom for participant interviews is researchers are allowed to conduct face-to-face conversations regardless of geographic location, providing flexibility, reducing travel costs, and enabling features such as recording and screen sharing for enhanced data collection (Gonzalez Montaner et al., 2021). During the Zoom sessions, the data collection procedures were elucidated and each participant completed and signed a consent form, affirming willingness to partake in the study.

Although there are many strategies for establishing a working relationship with the research participants, the strategies I used included clear communication, establishing trust, exhibiting empathy and respect, assuring confidentiality and privacy, and showing appreciation and recognition. Researchers establish a positive and productive working relationship with research participants to ensure the success and ethical conduct of any research study (Beazer et al., 2020; Evered & Whitney, 2022). Scholars and researchers must communicate the purpose of the study, the scope of participation, any potential risks or benefits, and the rights of the participants (Cook et al., 2020). In addition, researchers and scholars ensure all parties avoid jargon and use language that is accessible and easy to understand is crucial. Scholars and researchers should consider treating all participants with empathy and respect involves recognizing their autonomy and valuing their contributions to the study (Cook et al., 2020). Next, I actively listened to concerns, addressed all issues and questions, and acknowledged the experiences and perspectives of the participants that contributed to a successful research effort. Researchers must establish trust by being honest, reliable, and consistent throughout interactions with the participants to encourage the participants to be open and honest in all interactions

(Kinsella & Thambinathan, 2021). Following through on commitments such as providing updates on the study's progress and responding promptly to requests for information enables participants' trust (Kinsella & Thambinathan, 2021). Assuring participants of the confidentiality and privacy of their information and data collected (Beazer et al., 2020) and taking steps to protect their confidentiality throughout the research process is necessary. Showing appreciation and gratitude to the participants for their time, effort, and contributions makes participants feel valued. Establishing a positive and respectful working relationship with participants, fostering trust, cooperation, and mutual respect throughout the research process can be achieved by implementing these strategies (Humphreys et al., 2021).

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The qualitative method of research was the research method used for the inquiry. Qualitative research is a method of inquiry used in various academic disciplines and fields. Additionally, qualitative researchers focus on understanding phenomena through non-numerical data such as words, observations, and narratives (Bhangu et al., 2023). Qualitative researchers seek to uncover the deeper meanings, patterns, and interpretations behind human behaviors, experiences, and social interactions (Bhakoo et al., 2022; Maslakci & Surucu, 2020). Qualitative research methods include techniques such as interviews, focus groups, participant observation, content analysis, and case studies (Denny & Weckesser, 2022). Qualitative research often involves the collection and analysis of textual, visual, or audio data, which are then interpreted through thematic analysis or other qualitative analytical approaches (Goldsmith, 2021). Quantitative researchers seek information using numerical data and statistical analysis (Goldfarb et al., 2021). Researchers use the mixed methods approach when combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem (Schoonenboom, 2024).

Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena that may be difficult to quantify or measure using quantitative methods alone. Qualitative researchers prioritize the perspectives and voices of participants, allowing them to express their experiences, opinions, and interpretations in their own words (Gonzalez et al., 2020). Through qualitative research, researchers can uncover unique insights and understandings that may not emerge through quantitative methods alone.

Research Design

For this study, I considered ethnography, phenomenology, pragmatic inquiry, and case study. Research design is the overall strategy or plan that outlines how researchers intend to address their research questions or objectives Researchers use designs to encompass the framework for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data in a systematic and rigorous manner (Blankenagel & Hunziker, 2021). Moreover, researchers use design as a guide to make decisions about methods, techniques, and procedures to ensure the validity and reliability of their findings (Blankenagel & Hunziker, 2021).

Pragmatic inquiry was the selected research design used for the study. Pragmatic inquiry, also known as pragmatic research, is a research approach used to emphasize practicality and real-world application of findings (Ormerod, 2021). Additionally, pragmatic inquiry researchers address practical problems or issues by employing a flexible and adaptive methodology that draws from various research traditions (Cordeiro

& Kelly, 2020; R. Lee et al., 2021). Pragmatic inquiry begins with identifying a specific problem or issue in the real world that needs resolution or improvement (Cordeiro & Kelly, 2020). A problem-oriented focus could ensure the research remains relevant and applicable. The goal of pragmatic inquiry is to produce practical outcomes that address the identified problem or issue (Barker & Pistrang, 2021). Study outcomes could include recommendations for practice, policy implications, or innovations that contribute to positive change in the real world (den Hond & Simpson, 2022). Overall, pragmatic inquiry researchers seek flexible and action-oriented approach to research that prioritizes practical relevance and real-world impact. Pragmatic researchers can potentially generate meaningful insights and contribute to solving complex problems in various domains by integrating diverse perspectives and methodologies.

Other research designs were considered for the study. Ethnography involves immersive fieldwork to understand the culture and practices of a particular group or community (Jerolmack et al., 2021). I did not select the ethnography design since I did not focus on solely describing cultural practices problems (Barker & Pistrang, 2021; Jerolmack et al., 2021). Phenomenological researchers aim to explore individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Gallagher, 2022). I did not select a phenomenological design since I incorporated a wider range of perspectives with an emphasis on practical implications and solutions. Case study design is a research approach that involves an in-depth, contextual analysis of a specific individual, group, organization, or event to explore complex phenomena within real-life settings (Bulut et al., 2024). I did not select case study because the design is limited to an analysis of a single case.

Data saturation is a crucial concept in qualitative research, especially in studies where the goal is to achieve a deep understanding of a specific problem. Tight (2023) explained that data saturation occurs when collecting additional data no longer leads to new information or insights, indicating that theoretical saturation has been reached. I used thematic data saturation. Thematic data saturation occurs where no new themes or sub-themes emerge from the data, indicating that the analysis has reached a point of saturation and that further data collection is unlikely to yield significantly different insights (Sebele-Mpofu & Serpa, 2020). Additionally, I used documentation and transparency to ensure data saturation. Researchers and scholars document the process of data collection and analysis thoroughly to ensure transparency and reproducibility. The documentation of the data collection process and analysis enables other researchers to assess the rigor of the study and the extent to which data saturation has been achieved (Aldaihani & Islam, 2022).

Population and Sampling

The sample for the pragmatic inquiry included five human resources managers from manufacturing companies in the southeast region of Georgia with experience in change management and employee engagement. Selecting a sample size for qualitative research involves several considerations to ensure the study provides meaningful insights while also being feasible within practical constraints. The goal of qualitative research is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied (Bridier & Casteel, 2021). Qualitative researchers determine sample size based on several factors such as the research question and objectives, resources and feasibility, quality over quantity, and ethical considerations (Bridier & Casteel, 2021; Lakens, 2022). The nature and scope of the research question guide the sample size. If the research question is broad and complex, a larger sample size might be necessary to capture the diversity of perspectives or experiences (Lakens, 2022). Practical constraints, such as time, budget, and access to participants, influence sample size decisions. Researchers must balance the desire for a comprehensive sample with logistical considerations. In qualitative research, the focus is on depth rather than breadth. A smaller sample size with rich, detailed data may be more valuable than a larger sample with superficial insights (Andrade, 2020). Researchers must ensure that their sample size is sufficient to address the research question ethically and responsibly, without unduly burdening participants or compromising their anonymity or confidentiality (Subedi, 2021).

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants for the study. Purposeful sampling is a technique used in qualitative research to select participants or cases deliberately based on specific criteria relevant to the research question or objectives (Staller, 2021). Additionally, purposeful sampling involves selecting participants who can provide rich and meaningful data related to the research topic (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). Researchers select participants based on specific criteria that are essential to the research question (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). The criteria for participants included the following: (a) full-time human resources manager in a manufacturing company that experienced change, (b) knowledge of change management and employee engagement, and (c) experience implementing strategies to improve employee engagement.

Data saturation is typically achieved when no new themes, concepts, or information emerge from the data analysis, indicating that the researcher has reached a point of saturation (Mwita, 2022a). The number of participants needed to reach data saturation in a qualitative study can vary depending on several factors, including the complexity of the research topic, the richness of the data collected, the variability among participants, and the depth of analysis desired (Afful et al., 2021; Mthuli et al., 2022; Mwita, 2022a). A fixed number of participants that universally ensures data saturation does not exist because qualitative research aims for depth rather than breadth (Howell et al., 2024). Some qualitative researchers suggest starting with a smaller sample size, such as 4-6 participants, and then assessing saturation as data collection and analysis progress; however, in certain cases, data saturation may require more participants (R. Lee et al., 2021). Researchers must continuously assess data saturation throughout the study and to consider factors such as complexity, diversity of perspectives, and the specific aims of the research when determining the adequacy of the sample size (Aguboshim, 2021). Qualitative research often involves an iterative process, and researchers may revisit data collection and analysis if saturation is not initially achieved. I continued data collection and analysis iteratively until no new themes, concepts, or information emerged.

The interview setting significantly impacts the quality, depth, and richness of data collected in qualitative research. Researchers can enhance the validity and reliability of their findings and ultimately contribute to a more robust understanding of the research topic by carefully considering and optimizing the interview setting (Jain, 2021). Researchers who create a comfortable and safe environment for participants foster trust and encourage them to share openly. A relaxed setting facilitates more candid responses, allowing researchers to delve deeper into participants' perspectives and experiences (Tavory, 2020). Researchers use the interview setting to control various environmental factors that could influence the process, such as noise levels, interruptions, and privacy, helping researchers to maintain consistency across interviews and ensure that participants can focus on the discussion without distractions (Langley & Meziani, 2020; Taherdoost, 2021). The interview setting should adhere to ethical guidelines, such as ensuring confidentiality and privacy for participants (Borges da Matta Souza & Taquette, 2022). I prioritized the well-being and dignity of participants throughout the research process.

A Zoom video conferencing platform was selected to reach participants who were geographically dispersed. Researchers who conduct interviews via video conferencing platforms expand the pool of potential participants and enable researchers to access diverse perspectives without the limitations of physical proximity (Khan & MacEachen, 2022). Both researchers and participants benefit from the convenience of conducting interviews remotely because remote interviews offer greater flexibility, reduce travel costs and time, increase accessibility for diverse populations, and allow for a more comfortable and convenient environment, potentially enhancing the quality and depth of responses (de Villiers et al., 2022). Participants can join the interview from the comfort of their own homes or offices, eliminating the need for travel time and expenses. Researchers also save time and resources by conducting interviews without the logistical challenges of arranging in-person meetings. Conducting interviews remotely can ensure the safety and health of both researchers and participants by minimizing physical contact, particularly relevant in situations similar to the COVID-19 pandemic (de Villiers et al., 2022; Hoffman et al., 2020). Additionally, virtual interviews enhance accessibility for individuals with mobility issues or other disabilities, as they can participate from a location that suits their needs (Gonzalez Montaner et al., 2021).

Ethical Research

Researchers must ensure research is ethical. Ethical research is essential for the advancement of knowledge and upholding fundamental principles of fairness, respect, and social responsibility in the pursuit of scientific inquiry (Borges da Matta Souza & Taquette, 2022; Erickson & Murdock, 2023). Researchers should adhere to ethical guidelines, regulations, and professional standards relevant to include obtaining appropriate approval from the IRB prior to conducting research studies, following established research protocols, and maintaining the confidentiality of research data (Drolet et al., 2023). Ethical researchers ensure participants are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness by obtaining informed consent, protecting privacy and confidentiality, and minimizing any potential harm or discomfort (Dlabolova et al., 2021). The process of informed consent in research involves ensuring that individuals are fully informed about the nature, purpose, risks, and potential benefits of participating in a research study, and that they voluntarily agree to participate based on this (Bromwich & Millum, 2021).

All participants signed an informed consent summarizing the key information about the inquiry. The consent form included details such as the inquiry's purpose, procedures, risks and benefits, confidentiality assurances, voluntary nature of participation, contact information for the researcher. Klykken (2022) emphasized participants should sign consent forms to ensure they fully understand the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and their rights before agreeing to participate. Researches and scholars use the consent process tp uphold ethical research standards, protects participant autonomy, ensures voluntary participation, and provides legal documentation of informed consent (Klykken, 2022). Participants could withdraw from the interview session at any time without facing any negative consequences, verbally or via email. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw at any time without penalty during the consent process. All data collected retained will remain in a password-protected lock box and destroyed 5 years after the CAO approval date.

To maintain the integrity of the inquiry, I did not offer incentives. A common practice that can serve several purposes is providing incentives to participants in research studies. However, the decision to offer incentives should be carefully considered and balanced with ethical principles (Barry et al., 2022). Researchers should also consider the potential impact of incentives on the validity of the study results. While incentives can help recruit and retain participants, incentives may also attract individuals who are primarily motivated by the rewards rather than the research itself (K. Abbas et al., 2022).

I obtained ethical approval from Walden University’s IRB before conducting research to ensure the ethical protection of the participants. The Walden University’s IRB approval number is 09-03-24-0674657. Measures were taken to protect participants' confidentiality and privacy throughout the research process. Researchers and scholars should use pseudonymous identifiers when collecting and storing data (Florea & Florea, 2020). The pseudonyms I used for this study were P1, P2, P3, and P4. I stored all data collected securely and access to identifiable information is limited. Dlabolova et al. (2021) noted all researchers should treat participants with respect, fairness, and dignity, regardless of their background, characteristics, or beliefs. I avoided any form of discrimination, coercion, or exploitation in interactions with participants; the goal was to create a supportive and inclusive research environment. Research practices were continuously monitored to ensure that ethical standards were upheld throughout the inquiry. I monitored the research impact on participants and the community and was ready to adjust or seek guidance if ethical issues emerged.

Data Collection Instruments

Researchers must ensure the appropriate instruments are used to collect data. Data collection instruments are crucial components in research and analysis across various fields because the instruments serve as the means through which researchers gather information, discover answers to research questions, test hypotheses, and make informed decisions (Jain, 2021). Well-designed data collection instruments ensure that the data collected accurately represent the phenomena being studied because accuracy is essential for drawing valid conclusions and making reliable predictions (Hejsalem-Brahmi et al., 2023). Instruments help maintain consistency in data collection procedures, ensuring that data are collected in a standardized manner across different respondents, time periods, or research settings (Taherdoost, 2021). Consistent data collection facilitates comparisons and increases the reliability of findings. Effective instruments are tailored to the specific research objectives and the characteristics of the target population, including relevant questions or measures that capture the information needed to address research questions or objectives (Mwita, 2022b).

I used interview questions as the primary data collection instrument for the pragmatic inquiry. The researcher takes on the role of an interviewer or moderator who guides the conversation, asks questions, and probes for deeper insights in interviews and focus groups (Robinson, 2023). Researcher’s communication skills, interviewing techniques, and ability to establish rapport with participants significantly influence the quality and depth of the data collected (Wa-Mbaleka, 2020). I collected data through semistructured interviews via Zoom. Semistructured interviews are a qualitative research method that combines aspects of both structured and unstructured interviews (Tavory, 2020). In semistructured interviews, the interviewer has a set of predetermined questions or topics to guide the conversation, but also the flexibility to explore topics in more depth or to pursue unexpected avenues of inquiry based on the respondent's answers (Husband, 2020; Tavory, 2020). Moreover, semistructured interviews prioritize the participants' perspectives and allow for expression of thoughts, experiences, and opinions, fostering rich, qualitative data and understanding the nuances of participants' experiences (Monday, 2020).

Methodological triangulation is used to corroborate findings from different sources or methods, so researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Farquhar et al., 2020; Morgan, 2022). Data source triangulation involves using multiple sources of data to study the same phenomenon to include using data from interviews, observations, documents, or archival records (Natow, 2020). Researchers can cross-check information and verify the accuracy of findings by triangulating data from multiple sources. In addition to the interviews, I collected data from publicly available documents and interview sessions to provide insight into employee engagement.

The interview protocol (see Appendix) was followed during the interviews. Each participant was asked ten open-ended questions along with probing questions if necessary to obtain more in-depth information. Researchers use open-ended questions to allow participants to elaborate on thoughts and experiences, facilitating a more comprehensive exploration of the subject matter, enabling researchers to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, and dynamics that may not be apparent through closed-ended questions (Artino & LaDonna, 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2020). Open-ended questions also allow researchers to adapt the questions based on the flow of conversation, the responses of the participants, and any emerging themes or insights.

After the interviews, I summarized the participant responses and incorporated member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of the interviews. Member checking, also known as respondent validation or participant validation, is a qualitative research technique used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of findings by involving participants in the validation process (C. Johnson & Rose, 2020; Motulsky, 2021). Researchers demonstrate transparency, accountability, and respect for participants' voices by involving participants in the validation process (Nassaji, 2020). A summary of the participants’ responses was emailed to each participant requesting accuracy verification. Each participant had 3 days to complete the verification and respond via email.

Data Collection Technique

Semistructured interviews were the primary data collection technique because the interviews are considered most appropriate for qualitative studies because of their flexibility and ability to gather in-depth, rich data while still providing some structure to the interview process. Gonzalez et al. (2020) posited participant engagement could increase because semistructured interviews involve open-ended questions and encourage participants to share their thoughts and experiences. Participants felt more comfortable expressing themselves when allowed to elaborate on their responses which led to richer data. In addition, researchers can capture the context surrounding participants' responses by asking follow-up questions to clarify responses, explore underlying reasons or motivations, and gain a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, or environmental factors influencing participants' perspectives (Aguinis & Solarino, 2021).

Semistructured interviews can be conducted in several ways, each tailored to the specific needs of the research study and the preferences of the researcher. Some common approaches to conducting semistructured interviews include face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and video conferencing interviews (Englander et al., 2022). Interviews for the pragmatic inquiry were conducted via Zoom, a video conferencing platform. The steps outlined in the interview protocol (see Appendix) were followed to ensure consistency and enhance reliability and validity.

Semistructured interviews present a range of advantages and disadvantages for researchers and practitioners. On the positive side, there is a level of flexibility that structured interviews lack, allowing interviewers to delve deeper into topics based on respondents' answers (Tavory, 2020). Flexibility often leads to a more profound understanding of participants' perspectives, experiences, and attitudes. Moreover, semistructured interviews can be personalized to each respondent, fostering engagement and yielding rich qualitative data (Alamri, 2019). Participants could potentially feel more comfortable expressing themselves freely, enhancing the depth and authenticity of their responses. The benefits come with trade-offs. Semistructured interviews can seem time-consuming to conduct and analyze because of the open-ended nature, requiring careful interpretation and analysis (Englander et al., 2022). Additionally, there is a risk of subjectivity and interviewer bias, as interpretations rely heavily on the interviewer's judgment (Kaliber, 2019). The lack of standardization in questioning and data collection across different interviewers or sessions can also pose challenges. Despite these drawbacks, semistructured interviews remain a valuable method for gathering in-depth qualitative data when executed with care and attention to methodological rigor.

After analyzing the data collected from interviews, I interpreted the data to derive themes and patterns, forming the basis for member checking. Motulsky (2021) suggested researchers utilize member checking to validate participants' responses. A summary of the interpreted data, highlighting key themes and findings was created. Next, I contacted each participant for the member checking process. Participants were provided with a summary of the interpreted data and asked to review and provide feedback on the data's accuracy, completeness, and relevance.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization techniques are beneficial for managing and analyzing the rich, unstructured data typically collected through methods such as interviews, observations, and open-ended surveys. Moser and Williams (2019) recommended researchers to utilize techniques that manage data in a way that facilitates efficient storage, retrieval, and analysis. Study interviews were recorded using the audio recording capability in the Zoom platform. A reflective journal was used to document thoughts, feelings, observations, and insights throughout the research process. Gemilang et al. (2021) suggested researchers use a reflective journal to capture immediate reactions, insights, and interpretations while engaging with qualitative data to include thoughts about interesting patterns, unexpected findings, or emerging themes. Researchers typically use a reflective journal to document the rationale behind methodological decisions, such as sampling strategies, data collection techniques, and analytic approaches, helping to ensure transparency and rigor throughout the research process (Edwards, 2023). In addition, reflective journal entries can serve as a resource for interpreting qualitative data by providing context and context for analysis (Karcher et al., 2024). Researchers can refer to the journal to recall initial impressions and insights when interpreting findings or identifying key themes (Kahlke et al., 2023). I used reflective journaling to document my thoughts, observations, and insights throughout the research process, allowing me to critically assess my biases, refine my approach, and enhance the depth of my analysis. Reflective journaling helped me ensure transparency and reflexivity, strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness of my findings.

Prior to commencing interviews, participants agreed to the informed consent. Next, I provided summary transcripts using a transcription software. Microsoft Word was used to facilitate the coding, organization, and sorting of transcribed data. Subsequently, common themes were recognized. Common themes are crucial to safeguard the confidentiality of participants' identities and uphold ethical standards in qualitative research and to ensure participants' identities are not linked to the participants’ responses or data in any way (Hwang & Kang, 2023). P1, P2, P3, and P4 participant codes were used for the participants instead of real names in transcripts and publications. Raw data such as consent forms, physical transcripts, organizational documents, and reflective journals were locked in a safe in my digital files and recordings will be securely stored in a password-protected file on a computer for 5 years post-CAO approval, after which all data will be permanently erased and destroyed.

Data Analysis

Researchers are responsible for planning the data analysis process, including deciding on the approach and the software or tools to use. Data analysis in qualitative research involves the process of systematically examining and interpreting qualitative data to identify meaningful patterns, themes, and insights (Y. Cho et al., 2020). Methodological data triangulation was the data analysis process used for the research design. Methodological data triangulation is a specific form of triangulation used in research, particularly in qualitative research by involving the use of multiple data sources, methods, or theories to study the same phenomenon (Campbell et al., 2020; Natow, 2020). Researchers can cross-validate findings and enhance the credibility and reliability of the research by collecting data from different sources or using different methods (Dzwigol, 2022). Researchers and scholars use methodological data triangulation to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. Different data sources or methods may reveal different aspects or dimensions of the phenomenon, leading to a more nuanced and complete analysis (Aguzzoli et al., 2020). In addition, using multiple data sources or methods can help mitigate the impact of bias. Researchers can identify and account for potential biases in their analysis by comparing data from different sources or methods (Sridharan, 2021). In addition to the interviews, policy manuals, production reports, attendance reports, and other documents that provide insight into employee engagement were used to triangulate the data.

I selected Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six step thematic analysis to analyze the data for the pragmatic inquiry. The six steps are familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Before following Braun and Clarke's approach, I compiled and organized all data. Compiling data helps researchers organize the vast amount of information collected during the research process, making the data easier to manage and work with during analysis (Bogumil et al., 2024). Data were more accessible for analysis through compilation. With all the data in one place, researchers can potentially retrieve specific information when needed (Bogumil et al., 2024). I summarized the raw interview data and collated into a database.

The first step was familiarizing with the data. I immersed in the data by reading and rereading transcripts, interview notes, and textual data. I became deeply familiar with the content and identified potential patterns through data immersion. At this stage, researchers often engage in transcription if needed and begin making informal notes about key ideas or recurring topics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used the initial observations and reflections to guide further analysis.

Next, codes were initially generated. The summarized interview responses were categorized by emerging themes and coded. Coding in qualitative research is the process of categorizing and labeling data to identify themes, concepts, or patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding is a crucial step in the data analysis process that helps researchers organize and make sense of the data collected (G. Lee, 2021). Scholars can complete coding manually or using software. NVivo provides a range of tools and features to facilitate the coding, categorization, and visualization of qualitative data, such as interviews, surveys, focus groups, and other textual or multimedia sources (Alam, 2021; Allsop et al., 2022). I used NVivo 15 to assist in organizing, analyzing, and deriving insights from the data.

The search for themes stage involves looking for patterns among the codes to identify potential themes. Codes are grouped, connections between them are established, and preliminary themes are formed in this stage (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes should be internally coherent, meaningfully distinct from one another, and relevant to the research question (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2021). I identified key themes which were connected to the research questions. The findings were compared to existing theories and models to determine if the findings support, refute, or extend existing knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2017).

Reviewing themes was the next stage after searching for themes. Researchers refine themes to ensure there is an accurate representation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I reviewed the themes in two phases. I checked to see if the themes aligned the coded extracts in the first phase and I checked for consistency across the entire dataset in the second phase. Some themes needed to be merged, split, or discarded, ensuring that themes accurately reflect the richness of the data while maintaining clarity and coherence (Braun & Clarke, 2017).

The next step was to define and name the themes. Researchers define and name them to clarify their meaning once themes are finalized (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Defining and naming themes involves identifying the essence of each theme and how it contributes to the overall understanding of the research question (Dey & Mishra, 2022). Each theme should be distinct yet interconnected to the broader narrative of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2017). At this stage, I wrote detailed descriptions and select representative quotes from the dataset to illustrate each theme effectively.

Producing the report was the last step in Braun and Clarke's six step thematic analysis. Producing the report involves writing a detailed report that presents the themes, supported by qualitative evidence (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The report should provide a clear and compelling narrative that explains the significance of the findings. The analysis should be linked to existing literature and the research question, demonstrating how the study contributes to broader knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2017). Transparency in the analytical process is essential to ensure credibility and trustworthiness (Adamson & Scantlebury, 2024). All participants were provided with a summary of the findings after the pragmatic inquiry was completed.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency, dependability, and repeatability of findings (Yin, 2018). Reliability is one way researchers ensure the inquiry was conducted again under similar conditions, similar results would yield (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). Establishing reliability in qualitative research involves several strategies to ensure the consistency and dependability of the findings. One key approach is prolonged engagement because spending extended time with the participants can help build rapport and understanding, leading to more reliable data (Hamilton, 2020). Other key approaches that ensure reliability are triangulation, member checking, reflexivity, and consistent methodology (Taherdoost, 2021). Dependability in qualitative research refers to the stability and consistency of the research findings over time and across different conditions (Akhter et al., 2023). Dependability is closely related to the concept of reliability and is about ensuring that the findings are consistent and can be trusted (Janis, 2022). Establishing dependability is crucial for ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the research.

Member checking and methodological data triangulation were used to establish dependability of the inquiry. Member checking is a valuable technique in qualitative research for establishing dependability by ensuring that the findings are accurate, credible, and reflective of the participants' perspectives and experiences (Arikan et al., 2021; Motulsky, 2021). Methodological data triangulation allows researchers to cross-validate their findings by comparing results from different methods or sources (Dzwigol, 2022). Consistent findings across different methods or sources enhance the dependability of the results.

Validity

The integrity of this research study was maintained by implementing multiple approaches to ensure credibility, confirmability, transferability, and data saturation in the research. Validity refers to the extent to which the study accurately captures the phenomena it is investigating (C. Johnson & Rose, 2020). Unlike quantitative research, where validity often refers to the accuracy of measurements or the extent to which a study measures what it claims to measure, in qualitative research, validity is more about the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Maslakci & Surucu, 2020; Maxwell, 2021). Validity also refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts or populations (Almeida et al., 2020).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the trustworthiness or believability of the findings (Closa, 2021). Credibility is established when the study's findings accurately represent the experiences or perspectives of the participants (Sebar et al., 2020). Credibility is crucial because qualitative research often deals with subjective interpretations and experiences, emphasizing the importance that the findings are demonstrated to be valid and reliable (Akhter et al., 2023). Methodological data triangulation and member checking were used to ensure the credibility of the inquiry. Methodological data triangulation is a powerful tool in qualitative research for ensuring credibility by strengthening the validity and reliability of the findings using multiple converging sources or methods (Arikan et al., 2021). Member checking ensures credibility by validating the accuracy, trustworthiness, and relevance of the findings through feedback from the participants (Amin et al., 2020).

Transferability

Transferability for the pragmatic inquiry was established through the explanation of the research process, the purposeful sampling of selecting participants, and the descriptions of the geographic location, data analysis approach, and eligibility criteria. Transferability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied or transferred to other contexts or settings (Makel et al., 2022). Tuval-Mashiach (2021) explained transferability is related to the concept of generalizability in quantitative research, but in qualitative research, the goal is not to generalize findings to a larger population but rather to explore the depth and nuances of a particular phenomenon in a specific context. Researchers provide detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and methods used to enhance transferability (Hays & McKibben, 2021). Researchers also use purposive sampling to select participants who can provide rich and diverse perspectives on the topic ((Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Additionally, researchers may use thick description, which involves providing rich, detailed descriptions of the data and the context in which it was collected, to help readers understand the context and make judgments about the applicability of the findings to other contexts (Amin et al., 2020; Levitt, 2021).

Confirmability

Confirmability is closely related to the validity of the research findings. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings of a study are shaped by the participants and the context, rather than by the researcher's biases, motivations, or preconceptions (Megheirkouni & Moir, 2023). Confirmability is one of the criteria used to assess the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research. Confirmability ensures that the findings are not unduly influenced by the researcher’s biases, increasing the validity of the research, increasing the likelihood that the findings accurately reflect the phenomena under study (Byram, 2022; Toyon, 2021).

Confirmability for the pragmatic inquiry was established through methodological data triangulation and member checking. Methodological data triangulation established confirmability using data collected through interviews and publicly accessible company documents to validate the findings (Campbell et al., 2020). Researchers can reduce the impact of individual biases by triangulating data. Researchers can also ensure confirmability through an audit trail by maintaining a detailed record of all decisions made during the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation, to allow for transparency and accountability (Toyon, 2021).

Data Saturation

Data saturation in the pragmatic inquiry was ensured by the continuation of interviews until no new themes emerged from the data. In addition, a saturation grid was maintained to track the emergence of themes across interviews to help identify when no new information or themes are emerging. Data saturation in qualitative research refers to the point when no new information or themes emerge from the data (Mwita, 2022a). Data saturation is reached when enough data is collected to thoroughly understand the phenomenon under study (Howell et al., 2024). Data saturation is important in inquiries where the goal is to achieve a deep understanding of a specific topic or to develop theories or hypotheses (M. Chen et al., 2020). Once data saturation is attained, collecting more data is unlikely to provide additional insights and may be considered unnecessary (Sebele-Mpofu & Serpa, 2020).

Transition and Summary

Section 2 began with a restatement of the purpose of the inquiry. A thorough discussion covered the research process, ethical considerations, the researcher's role, participant selection and identification, as well as the research methods and design for data collection. Additionally, in Section 2, I discussed how I ensured reliability and, data collection instruments and techniques used, and how I organized and analyzed the data. In Section 3, I summarize the research findings and their application to professional practice. Additionally, the implications for social change, recommendations for implementing effective change management strategies to engage employees, and potential avenues for future research are discussed.

Section 3: Application for Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

In Section 3, I explain the study's purpose and present the findings to address the main research question. I present how leaders can apply the findings in professional contexts and their implications for social change. I also provide recommendations for actions and future research and share personal reflections on the study. The section concludes with a closing statement that summarizes the significance of the study.

The purpose of this pragmatic inquiry was to explore the strategies human resources managers use to improve employee engagement. Data were collected from five human resources professionals using semistructured interviews that revealed key themes highlighting critical factors that influence engagement. Nine themes were identified through thematic analysis: (a) communication and transparency, (b) employee involvement, (c) leadership presence and visibility, (d) sense of purpose and organizational alignment, (e) recognition and reward systems, (f) cultural challenges during change, (g) training and development, (h) feedback and listening, and (i) trust and psychological safety. Each of the themes interrelated with and reinforced aspects of employee engagement during organizational change.

Presentation of Findings

The overarching research question I desired to solve was: What change management strategies do human resources managers use to improve employee engagement? I collected data from five human resources managers, publicly accessible organizational documents, and member checking to answer the question. Table 1 shows the number of times each theme was mentioned across all five interviews.

Table 1

Frequency of Themes

Themes	Number of occurrences in responses
Communication & Transparency	18
Employee Involvement	14
Leadership Presence & Visibility	13
Sense of Purpose & Organizational Alignment	12
Recognition & Reward Systems	9
Cultural Challenges During Change	5
Training & Development	8
Feedback & Listening	11
Trust & Psychological Safety	10

Communication and Transparency

One of the most prominent themes identified in this study was the importance of communication and transparency in enhancing employee engagement during change. All five participants emphasized that clear, honest, and consistent communication fosters trust and reduces uncertainty among employees. For instance, Participant 2 explained, “You have to be able to establish that line of communication where employees feel comfortable coming to you… not necessarily during challenging times, but also during good times.” Participant 5 similarly noted, “With communication, they respond positively and they appreciate being kept in the loop of the changes that are happening.” These statements underscore how consistent communication not only keeps employees informed but also creates a sense of psychological safety and trust, both of which are crucial during times of transition. Employees are more likely to remain engaged and supportive of organizational goals when they feel valued and included through transparent dialogue. These findings are strongly supported by recent research, in which Pratama et al. (2022) confirmed that effective communication and leadership support are critical for maintaining high levels of employee engagement throughout organizational transitions. The findings also align with conclusions in the literature suggesting that communication serves as a cornerstone of effective change management and contributes to psychological safety in the workplace (Effendi et al., 2025). Transparent communication builds a strong platform of trust that supports further engagement strategies such as employee involvement and leadership presence.

Employee Involvement

Employee involvement emerged as another dominant theme in promoting employee engagement during organizational change. Participants consistently noted that employees are more likely to support change when they are involved early in the process and given opportunities to provide feedback. Participant 2 referenced using the ADKAR model to engage employees in decision-making, stating, “They understand why a change is necessary.” Similarly, Participant 5 emphasized, “Getting them as involved as possible, as soon as possible… and allowing them to provide feedback when necessary.” These accounts illustrate how early and meaningful involvement fosters ownership and reduces resistance to change. When employees are treated as partners in the change process, they are more likely to embrace transformation efforts and contribute positively to outcomes (Bah et al., 2024). These findings align with conclusions drawn by Kebede and Wang

(2020) who emphasized participatory change processes as a means to empower employees and enhance organizational transformation efforts. Early involvement lays the groundwork for employee ownership and amplifies the impact of leadership behaviors that model and reinforce change.

Leadership Presence and Visibility

Leadership presence and visibility were identified as essential factors for building trust and modeling the behaviors expected during change. Participants emphasized that when leaders are physically present and approachable, they foster a culture of accountability and engagement. Participant 2 stated, “I believe in something called leadership by walking around. I can’t just sit in my office.” Similarly, Participant 5 remarked, “Be the employee that you expect them to be,” emphasizing the importance of modeling the behaviors and values expected from staff. Participant 1 shared that during high-impact change efforts, “leaders who made time to be on the floor, answering questions, made the transition less stressful,” while Participant 3 noted that employees “respond better when they see leadership involved, not just hearing from them in meetings.” Participant 4 echoed this sentiment, stating, “It’s hard to build trust when leadership is distant. You need to see them and feel their presence to believe in the change.” These perspectives collectively highlight the role of leadership presence not only in symbolic terms but as a functional necessity for building engagement and trust. Organizational leaders who engage directly with employees actively model adaptability and commitment, encouraging continued employee engagement throughout the change process (Vedula, 2025). These findings are consistent with conclusions drawn in existing literature, which highlight the role of leadership behavior in sustaining engagement through visibility, modeling, and relational practices (Shi & Zhou, 2025). Leadership visibility strengthens trust, promotes alignment, and helps embed engagement strategies into the organization's daily culture.

Sense of Purpose and Organizational Alignment

A strong sense of purpose and alignment with organizational values emerged as a critical driver of employee engagement. Participants noted that employees are more motivated and committed when they understand how their roles contribute to the organization’s broader mission. Participant 2 described engagement as creating “an environment where employees feel they are part of an organization… they have a sense of belonging.” Participant 4 similarly stated that engagement means being “genuinely invested in the company’s mission and goals… where employees feel like their contributions matter.” Participant 1 emphasized the importance of connecting employees’ day-to-day responsibilities to the organization’s objectives, stating, “People want to know how what they do fits into the bigger picture, it makes them feel like their work has purpose.” Participant 3 reinforced this notion by explaining, “If employees can’t connect the dots between their role and the company’s mission, they disengage over time. Purpose is what keeps them showing up with intent.” These perspectives suggest that when employees find personal meaning in their work and feel connected to the organization’s goals, they are more likely to demonstrate loyalty, initiative, and emotional investment. Purpose-driven environments foster a sense of belonging and align employee behavior with organizational success (Maheshwari, 2024). This theme aligns with findings in existing research, in which Koszela and Ludwikowska (2025) identify meaningful work and value alignment as key predictors of engagement and long-term organizational commitment. Purpose-driven engagement encourages emotional investment and aligns individual roles with broader organizational goals, enhancing the impact of recognition and reward strategies.

Recognition and Reward Systems

Recognition and reward systems were identified as effective mechanisms for reinforcing employee engagement and morale. Participants emphasized the importance of acknowledging both major and minor contributions. Participant 5 explained, “You have to acknowledge employee contributions, whether they're big or small, because it boosts morale.” Participant 1 added, “We do service awards and celebrate milestones like safety achievements.” These insights highlight how consistent recognition reinforces desired behaviors, builds confidence, and validates employee efforts. When employees feel seen and appreciated, they are more likely to remain engaged and continue performing at a high level (Abdul-Azeez et al., 2024). The findings reflect conclusions in the engagement literature, in which KM et al. (2025) highlight the motivational power of timely and meaningful recognition in fostering employee satisfaction and sustained performance. Evolving recognition strategies must balance external rewards with intrinsic motivators to sustain engagement in a purpose-driven workforce.

Cultural Challenges

Cultural challenges, especially during mergers and acquisitions (M&A), were identified as significant barriers to employee engagement during organizational change. Participants described difficulties in aligning differing organizational cultures, which often led to confusion, resistance, and decreased morale. Participant 1 shared, “We were merging union and non-union cultures… the policies didn’t translate well. It caused confusion and resistance." Participant 5 similarly stated, "Mergers and acquisitions… led to uncertainty and negatively affected morale." These reflections illustrate how misalignment in values, norms, and policies between merging organizations can undermine trust and stability. Employees may struggle to adapt without intentional cultural integration, impairing their engagement and increasing resistance to change (Fridan & Maamari, 2024). These findings suggest the need for deliberate, strategic approaches to cultural integration during large-scale transitions, reinforcing the importance of addressing cultural dynamics as part of effective change management. Addressing cultural barriers through strategic integration is essential to reducing resistance and maintaining employee trust during structural change (Soliz, 2025).

Training and Development

Training and development were identified as essential strategies for preparing employees to successfully adapt to organizational change. Participants emphasized the value of providing both technical and interpersonal skill development to support employees during transitions. Participant 3 explained, "We do training on soft and hard skills. You have to know your audience." Participant 5 added, "Development opportunities work if employees have control over their work… it builds ownership." These comments highlight the role of continuous learning in fostering employee confidence, adaptability, and engagement. When employees receive targeted development opportunities and feel empowered to apply what they've learned, they are more likely to take ownership of their roles and embrace change (Abdul-Azeez et al., 2024). The findings align with conclusions drawn in existing research, in which al-Rubaei et al. (2024) indicate that well-designed training programs enhance employee engagement by equipping individuals with the tools and knowledge needed to navigate change effectively. Organizational leaders who invest in development equip employees to navigate change with confidence, supporting long-term engagement and adaptability.

Feedback and Listening

Feedback and listening strategies were recognized as critical for building trust and demonstrating organizational responsiveness during change. Participants emphasized that actively soliciting and acting on employee feedback shows that their voices are valued. Participant 1 stated, "We do employee surveys, but we also do outreach… and develop plans to address what came out of them." Participant 5 warned against impersonal approaches, noting, "If the initiative is too impersonal… it won't mean anything to them. You have to know your employees." These insights illustrate that engagement is strengthened when employees feel heard and see tangible responses to their input. Generic or surface-level initiatives may fall flat, but personalized, action-oriented feedback systems foster a culture of trust and mutual respect (Lubis, 2024). The findings align with scholarly recommendations on best practices in employee engagement, in which Davis and Van der Heijden (2023) emphasize feedback loops as a means to bridge the gap between leadership intent and employee experience. Intentional listening and feedback practices help close the gap between leadership vision and employee experience, reinforcing trust and long-term engagement.

Trust and Psychological Safety

Trust and psychological safety emerged as foundational elements for sustaining employee engagement during periods of organizational uncertainty. Participants explained that employees are more engaged when they feel safe expressing concerns and trust leadership to be transparent and supportive. Participant 4 shared, "Withholding information until the last minute damaged trust and morale." Participant 5 added, "Inconsistent recognition made employees feel unappreciated… and over time, they lost motivation." These reflections demonstrate how breaches in trust or inconsistent leadership behavior can erode morale and diminish engagement. Conversely, environments that foster psychological safety, where employees feel respected, heard, and valued, encourage higher levels of motivation and performance (AlMunthiri et al., 2024). The findings are consistent with Amy Edmondson's (2018) theory of psychological safety and its documented relationship to engagement and performance. Trust and psychological safety are the cornerstones of all engagement efforts, shaping how employees respond to communication, leadership, recognition, and change.

The themes identified in this study collectively highlight the critical role of leadership, communication, employee involvement, and trust in navigating organizational change. The findings are consistent with Kotter's (1996) change management model, which emphasizes leadership visibility, communication, and stakeholder engagement as key to successful transformation. Additionally, Edmondson's (2018) psychological safety framework was reflected in the recurring emphasis on trust and supportive environments. The convergence of insights from all five participants demonstrates the interconnectedness of these strategies and their cumulative impact on employee engagement. Each theme contributes to a broader understanding of how human resources professionals can lead change in a way that resonates with employees and fosters long-term commitment. The consistency of responses across participants suggests data saturation was achieved, establishing a strong foundation for drawing conclusions and offering evidence-based recommendations for human resources-led change initiatives (Howell et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings offer a theoretically grounded and empirically supported framework for human resources practitioners to implement strategic, engagement-focused change initiatives that align with best practices in organizational development.

Findings in Relation to Literature

The findings of this study both confirm and extend the current body of knowledge on employee engagement during organizational change. In Section 3, I offer a comparative analysis of the themes that emerged from the data, aligning them with recent peer-reviewed literature to include studies published after the initial proposal stage and identifies areas where this research contributes new insights or challenges existing assumptions.

The theme of employee involvement in the change process closely aligns with existing studies. Participants noted that employees who were involved early and provided opportunities to give feedback were more likely to demonstrate commitment and ownership of the change. This observation is consistent with findings from Ramos-Macaes and Roman-Portas (2022), emphasizing that participatory decision-making is a primary driver of employee engagement during organizational transformation.

My findings also extend the literature on leadership presence and visibility. While previous research broadly acknowledged the importance of leadership support, the participants in this study emphasized the specific impact of leaders being physically present, approachable, and actively engaged in the daily experiences of employees. The behaviors were seen as essential to fostering trust, accountability, and connection, adding a new dimension to the understanding of effective leadership in times of change and suggesting that visibility and modeling of expected behaviors are just as important as strategic oversight.

In the context of organizational culture, particularly during M&A, the participants described how misaligned policies and communication breakdowns led to resistance and disengagement. While Agarwal et al. (2025) have documented the complexity of cultural integration, the detailed examples provided by participants illustrate the practical consequences of inadequate communication and inconsistent practices, reinforcing the need for customized cultural strategies.

Recognition and reward systems also emerged as effective engagement mechanisms in this study; however, they were juxtaposed with newer research suggesting a shift toward intrinsic motivators. Participants in this study viewed recognition, through awards, celebrations, and acknowledgments, as a key engagement strategy. However, newer research, including commentary from C. Costa et al. (2024), suggests that meaningful work and purpose-driven leadership may be more effective than traditional recognition programs in sustaining engagement, implying that while recognition remains valuable, organizations must also prioritize intrinsic motivators to drive long-term commitment.

New literature has emerged emphasizing the role of positive psychological capital (PsyCap). PsyCap is a construct that includes hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism in enhancing employee adaptability during change (Cao et al., 2024). Employees with higher levels of PsyCap are better positioned to engage with change initiatives and recover from setbacks (Avey & Holley, 2024). The insight aligns with my findings related to training and development and suggesting that organizations should expand their focus to include psychological resource-building, not just technical skill enhancement (Naim & Peethambaran, 2024).

The theme of leadership presence also intersects with recent studies on wellness and work-life balance. Bello et al. (2024) and Faridz et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of leaders modeling healthy boundaries and simplifying processes to enhance employee well-being. These practices, reflected in participants' descriptions of effective leadership, reinforce the importance of holistic engagement strategies that consider emotional and mental health.

In the results of this study, I confirmed several well-established elements in the literature, particularly regarding communication, involvement, and trust. At the same time, my current understanding of the themes was extended by offering richer insights into leadership presence and cultural dynamics. The areas of contrast, such as the evolving role of recognition, point to the need for balanced engagement strategies that incorporate both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. In this study, I offered a more holistic framework for how human resource leaders can effectively engage employees during organizational change by integrating findings from newer research on PsyCap and wellness.

Conceptual Frameworks

The findings of this study align with and offer practical application of the two conceptual frameworks that guided the research: John Kotter's (1996) eight-step change management model and Frederick Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory. Both frameworks provide insight into the mechanisms through which human resources professionals can manage change effectively while enhancing employee engagement.

Kotter's (1996) eight-step model includes: (1) establishing a sense of urgency, (2) forming a guiding coalition, (3) creating a vision for change, (4) communicating the vision, (5) empowering others to act, (6) generating short-term wins, (7) consolidating gains, and (8) anchoring new approaches into the culture. My findings demonstrate alignment with several of these steps. The emphasis on communication and transparency from all participants supports Kotter's fourth step, communicating the vision. Participants described consistent, honest communication as critical for maintaining trust and minimizing resistance. As Participant 5 noted, "With communication, they respond positively and they appreciate being kept in the loop of the changes that are happening." This type of communication is essential for building urgency, support, and buy-in.

The theme of employee involvement also aligns with Kotter's fifth step, empowering others to act on the vision. Participants shared that engaging employees early and encouraging feedback increased commitment to change. Organizational leaders can reduce barriers and foster shared ownership of the change process by involving employees in planning and decision-making (Kotter, 1996). Participants also emphasized the importance of leadership presence and visibility, which reflects Kotter's first two steps: establishing a sense of urgency and building a guiding coalition. Leaders who are visible and approachable help to rally teams around a shared goal, serve as change champions, and reinforce accountability across the organization. Finally, the recognition of short-term wins and milestones, such as service awards and team accomplishments, supports Kotter's sixth step, generating short-term wins. Participant 1 described how celebrating achievements such as safety milestones helped to maintain momentum and motivate employees during prolonged change efforts.

Herzberg's (1959) theory posited that two sets of factors influence employee satisfaction: motivators, which lead to engagement and satisfaction, and hygiene factors, which, if absent, lead to dissatisfaction but do not necessarily motivate (Herzberg, 1959; Kuo et al., 2020). The findings of this study offer a real-world application of this framework in the context of organizational change.

The theme of recognition and reward systems directly reflects Herzberg's (1959) motivators. Participants consistently identified the value of acknowledging employee contributions. Participant 5 emphasized, "You have to acknowledge employee contributions, whether they're big or small, because it boosts morale." These intrinsic motivators foster engagement by enhancing employees' sense of achievement and belonging. Simultaneously, communication, fairness, and job security, which emerged as foundational elements of trust, represent Herzberg's hygiene factors. For example, when communication was poor or inconsistent, participants reported that employees felt anxious, disengaged, or resistant to change. Participant 4 shared, "Withholding information until the last minute damaged trust and morale." These findings demonstrate that while good communication may not directly motivate, its absence can create dissatisfaction which is consistent with Herzberg's assumptions. The study also suggests that professional development and autonomy are motivating factors, consistent with Herzberg's classification of growth opportunities as intrinsic drivers of satisfaction. Participant 5's remark that "development opportunities work if employees have control over their work" illustrates how the opportunity to grow and have input into one's role contributes to meaningful engagement.

Together, Kotter's (1996) and Herzberg's (1959) models offer a strong conceptual lens through which to interpret these findings. Kotter's framework helped explain the process of managing change, while Herzberg's theory clarified the content of what employees need to remain engaged throughout that process. The intersection of these two frameworks suggests that successful change initiatives require both strategic execution and attention to the human elements of motivation and satisfaction. Organizational leaders can apply the principles of both Kotter and Herzberg to create a work environment that supports both individual engagement and organizational transformation by integrating clear communication, early involvement, leadership presence, recognition, and opportunities for growth.

Literature on Effective Business Practice

The results of this study offer valuable contributions to the broader literature on effective business practices, particularly in the context of change management and employee engagement. Several findings align with well-established business principles, whereas others offer expanded perspectives or suggest areas where traditional practices may need re-evaluation.

The emphasis on clear and transparent communication throughout the interviews supports well-documented best practices in business leadership. Scholars and practitioners agree that effective communication is essential for aligning teams, managing expectations, and minimizing resistance to change (Allam et al., 2024). In this study, participants described communication not as a one-time event but as a continuous, two-way process that establishes trust and psychological safety, both of which are recognized in the literature as foundational to organizational performance (Edmondson, 2018).

The findings reinforce the value of employee involvement and empowerment, echoing recent shifts in business thinking toward more participatory management styles. In contrast to top-down decision-making, involving employees in shaping change initiatives has been shown to improve engagement, innovation, and execution (Atiku et al., 2024). Participants in this study confirmed that early involvement and feedback mechanisms were critical to employee buy-in. The findings are consistent with the principles of agile leadership and lean management, which emphasize iterative feedback, collaboration, and responsiveness to employee input (Ajewumi & Omachi, 2024).

Another significant theme that aligns with emerging business practices is leadership presence and visibility. Participants described leaders who were physically present, approachable, and actively involved in daily operations as more effective in sustaining employee engagement. This aligns with growing emphasis in the literature on emotional intelligence in leadership, which includes self-awareness, empathy, and the ability to build trust-based relationships (McAdoo, 2024). Effective business leaders are increasingly expected to model these competencies, particularly during times of uncertainty and transition.

Findings related to recognition and reward systems confirm widely accepted business practices concerning employee retention and motivation. Many human resources leaders implement recognition programs to boost morale and reinforce desired behaviors (Celestin et al., 2024). However, the findings also challenge the notion that recognition alone is sufficient. Although participants viewed recognition as beneficial, they also emphasized the need for meaningful, personalized, and consistent feedback, suggesting that one-size-fits-all reward systems may no longer be sufficient in diverse and dynamic work environments.

An area where the findings challenge conventional business practices relates to M&A. Although M&A are often pursued for strategic growth, the cultural integration process is frequently underemphasized in business planning. Participants in this study identified cultural misalignment, inconsistent communication, and legacy system conflicts as major threats to employee engagement. The insights underscore arguments presented in a growing body of literature that cultural due diligence is just as critical as financial analysis during M&A planning (Tarawneh, 2025).

Findings regarding training, professional development, and adaptability align with the literature advocating for continuous learning cultures. Organizational leaders who invest in both technical and interpersonal skills are better positioned to respond to disruption and change (Mosteanu, 2024). The research supports that notion by demonstrating that training not only equips employees with tools but also communicates a sense of value and long-term investment, resulting in the enhancement of engagement and loyalty.

Overall, this study affirms that employee engagement is not a peripheral concern but a core component of effective business practice. The ability to engage, motivate, and retain employees through change is directly tied to performance, innovation, and sustainability. The findings of the pragmatic inquiry align with recent shifts in business thinking that prioritize employee experience as a strategic asset (Kozak et al., 2025). The themes identified in this study are consistent with, and in some cases extend, the current understanding of effective business practice, reinforcing the importance of communication, involvement, leadership visibility, recognition, and development, which are all key elements in high-performing organizations. At the same time, the study challenges organizations to reconsider the adequacy of traditional recognition systems and to invest more seriously in cultural alignment during structural transitions such as M&A. In doing so, this research contributes meaningful insights to the evolving landscape of employee engagement and change leadership in contemporary business environments.

Application to Professional Practice

The findings of this study have significant implications for the professional practice of business, particularly in the fields of human resource management, change leadership, and organizational development. As organizations continue to navigate rapid technological advances, evolving workforce expectations, and increasingly competitive environments, the ability to effectively engage employees during change has become a cornerstone of sustainable business success (Das Gupta et al., 2024). The findings from this study offer evidence-based insights that support both the theoretical underpinnings and practical application of employee engagement strategies within real-world business settings.

First, the emphasis on communication and transparency has direct relevance to professional business practice. Consistent with leading frameworks in change management and employee relations, this study confirms that transparent communication fosters trust and minimizes uncertainty, two factors that are essential for maintaining productivity and morale during organizational transitions (Badrinarayanan, 2024; M. Ali, 2023). For human resources practitioners and business leaders, this means that communication must be treated as an intentional, strategic function, not merely a support activity. Practitioners should be equipped with tools to craft and deliver timely, clear messages, supported by feedback mechanisms that allow employees to feel heard and valued (Khokhar et al., 2023).

The theme of employee involvement underscores the need for participatory leadership approaches. Organizational leaders that actively engage employees in planning and implementing change efforts are more likely to see higher levels of buy-in, innovation, and performance (Hubbart, 2023). This finding supports the shift in modern business practice from hierarchical, directive leadership models to more inclusive, collaborative approaches. Managers and executives should consider co-creation of solutions with employees through focus groups, change committees, or innovation labs to foster ownership and reduce resistance.

Another critical contribution to professional practice is the finding related to leadership visibility and presence. While business literature often highlights the strategic functions of leadership, this study reinforces the importance of relational leadership in fostering engagement. Leader behaviors such as physical presence, approachability, and emotional intelligence have direct implications for leadership development programs, highlighting the need to emphasize not only technical competencies and strategic thinking but also interpersonal communication, active listening, and role modeling (B. Costa et al., 2024).

The study’s findings on recognition and reward systems offer practical guidance for talent management professionals seeking to enhance employee motivation and engagement. While participants acknowledged that traditional recognition methods such as awards and public acknowledgments remain in use, they emphasized that personalized, consistent, and value-driven recognition has a more lasting impact on employee morale. These insights indicate that recognition efforts must go beyond generic programs. Recognition must be tailored to individual preferences, aligned with organizational values, and consistently applied to be effective. When employees feel genuinely appreciated in ways that resonate with them, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and stay committed to the organization. As such, organizational leaders should critically assess whether recognition practices meet the diverse needs of the workforce and intentionally cultivate a culture of appreciation that supports long-term engagement.

The study also contributes to professional practice by highlighting the importance of cultural integration during organizational change, particularly in the context of M&A. In many business settings, financial and operational considerations dominate M&A planning, while cultural factors are overlooked (Durand et al., 2024). However, this research demonstrates that failure to address cultural compatibility and internal communication can jeopardize employee engagement and organizational cohesion. Therefore, business leaders and consultants involved in M&A processes should incorporate cultural assessments and engagement strategies as part of their integration plans.

Furthermore, the relevance of training and development emerged as a critical enabler of engagement and adaptability. Organizational leaders who prioritize workforce development not only build skills but also signal investment in employee success, aligning with emerging business models that view human capital as a long-term asset rather than a transactional cost (Baruch et al., 2023). Learning and development initiatives should be aligned with change objectives and customized to meet the specific needs of different employee groups to maximize effectiveness.

Finally, the findings reinforce the growing understanding in business practice that employee engagement is not just a human resources function, it is a strategic imperative. Engaged employees are more productive, resilient, and innovative (Cai et al., 2024). As a result, organizational leaders that institutionalize engagement through leadership behaviors, organizational culture, and business systems are better positioned to achieve competitive advantage and long-term success.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study have the potential to contribute meaningfully to positive social change by informing tangible improvements at multiple levels, including individuals, organizations, institutions, and society at large. At the heart of the research is the notion that employee engagement is not only a driver of organizational performance but also a catalyst for more inclusive, equitable, and humane work environments. As such, the implications of this study extend beyond business operations and into the broader social fabric where work, well-being, and identity intersect.

At the individual level, the results highlight how effective change management practices, particularly transparent communication, employee involvement, and leadership visibility create environments where employees feel valued, heard, and secure. These factors are fundamental to fostering psychological safety, which in turn enhances well-being, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy (Gan & Kee, 2024). Employees thrive professionally and personally when they are empowered and supported through change.

This contributes to a healthier, more resilient workforce and supports the long-term personal development of individuals.

The implementation of the strategies identified in this study can lead to more inclusive and collaborative cultures. A sense of ownership and belonging is cultivated when participation, feedback, and recognition is encouraged among employees (Bhattacharya et al., 2023). Human resources managers who institutionalize these behaviors not only improve engagement and retention, but also set new standards for workplace equity and respect. The shift from top-down management to participatory leadership models has the potential to humanize organizational culture, improve decision-making, and increase trust across hierarchical boundaries (Kummelstedt, 2023).

At the institutional level, particularly in sectors that undergo frequent restructuring, mergers, or technological disruption, the findings can inform policies and frameworks that prioritize employee voice during transitions. Institutional leaders who embrace employee-centered change strategies are more likely to maintain stability, ethical integrity, and social responsibility during times of transformation (A. Abbas et al., 2023), encouraging the development of best practices that can be replicated across industries, also contributing to more sustainable institutional ecosystems.

Culturally, the study underscores the value of inclusive leadership and recognition of diverse employee experiences, especially in change contexts. Organizational leaders can help shift workplace culture toward greater accountability and compassion by elevating practices that prioritize empathy, presence, and transparency. The cultural changes have broader implications for how people relate to authority, engage in conflict resolution, and contribute to group success in various social settings.

At the societal level, promoting engagement through equitable and inclusive change management practices can influence how ethical leadership, community responsibility, and support for employee well-being can be modeled. Organizational leaders who treat employees with dignity and involve them in shaping the future set a precedent for other sectors, contributing to a societal shift toward more participatory, ethical, and human-centered organizations (Ashraf et al., 2024). Workplaces are becoming more diverse and intergenerational, requiring systems that recognize and respect a wide range of needs, values, and motivations.

Ultimately, the findings of this study support a broader vision of social change through organizational transformation. Employees contribute to a more equitable, responsive, and humane society when they are engaged as valued stakeholders in change (Cai et al., 2024). Human resources leaders can help bridge the gap between business success and social progress, ensuring that the pursuit of performance never comes at the cost of human dignity, by embedding the principles of transparency, inclusion, and recognition into everyday business practices.

Recommendations for Action

The findings of this study support a series of targeted recommendations designed to improve employee engagement through effective change management. These recommendations flow logically from the study's conclusions and provide clear, actionable guidance for organizational leaders, human resource professionals, change consultants, and policy makers. First, the data strongly suggest that transparent and continuous communication must be prioritized during organizational transitions. Leaders should move beyond transactional announcements and instead establish a two-way dialogue with employees, using consistent messaging and multiple communication channels to share updates, solicit feedback, and respond to concerns. The strategy not only increases clarity but also builds the trust and psychological safety necessary for sustained engagement.

Second, organizations should actively involve employees in the planning and execution of change initiatives. Organizational leaders and human resources professionals are encouraged to foster participatory processes that empower employees to co-create solutions and voice their input rather than approaching change through top-down directives (M. Kang & Moon, 2024). Strategies such as employee focus groups, cross-functional change committees, and feedback integration into decision-making processes can enhance a sense of ownership and reduce resistance. In addition, leadership visibility and presence must be emphasized. Leaders who are approachable, emotionally intelligent, and physically engaged with employees were described by participants as central to maintaining morale and commitment during change. Leadership development programs should therefore integrate competencies related to relational leadership, trust-building, and empathy.

Moreover, recognition and reward systems should be redesigned to reflect diverse employee needs and motivations. Findings suggest that personalized, consistent, and meaningful recognition is more effective than generic programs. Recognition efforts must highlight both individual and team contributions and ensure that acknowledgment is tied to organizational values and goals. Cultural assessment and alignment must be included as a formal component of the change process for organizations undergoing mergers or structural transformation. Business leaders should evaluate cultural compatibility and proactively address potential issues to support integration and engagement. Additionally, professional development strategies should go beyond traditional training and focus on building PsyCap. Programs that support employee resilience, optimism, and adaptability can increase engagement and reduce burnout during times of uncertainty (Arbet et al., 2025).

The implications of these findings are especially relevant for human resources professionals, executive leaders, change management consultants, and training and development practitioners as they are stakeholders in key positions to implement evidence-based practices that enhance engagement, performance, and retention. The results should be disseminated through a variety of academic and professional outlets to maximize the practical utility of this research to include peer-reviewed journals in human resource management and organizational behavior, conference presentations at events such as Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) and the Organization Development (OD) Network, and internal training sessions within organizations. Additionally, sharing findings through professional webinars, podcasts, and practitioner-oriented articles will help bridge the gap between academic research and day to day business operations. Organizational leaders can foster more engaged, resilient, and adaptable workforces by applying the strategies supported in this study, ultimately contributing to improved business performance and workplace culture.

Recommendations for Further Research

Several recommendations for further research are warranted to advance understanding and enhance the applicability of change management strategies that improve employee engagement in professional business settings. One of the primary limitations of this study was the potential for participant bias, which may have influenced the way human resources managers responded to interview questions. Future researchers could mitigate this limitation by incorporating triangulated data sources, such as employee engagement survey results, leadership assessments, or observational data. Employing a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative interviews with quantitative metrics could enhance objectivity (Dahler-Larsen, 2022) and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of engagement strategies during organizational change.

Additionally, the scope of this study was limited to the perspectives of human resources managers, which provided valuable but narrowly focused insights. Future studies should incorporate perspectives from a broader range of organizational stakeholders, including operational managers, frontline employees, executives, and middle managers to develop a more holistic view of engagement practices. Comparing experiences across different roles and hierarchical levels would reveal potential gaps or consistencies in how engagement strategies are understood and applied throughout the organization.

This study was also geographically restricted to southeast Georgia, which may limit the transferability of findings to other regions with different organizational cultures, economic conditions, or workforce demographics. Future research should include participants from diverse geographical areas, industries, and organizational sizes to enhance generalizability and uncover context-specific variables that influence engagement outcomes. Expanding the regional scope would also allow researchers to examine whether cultural or economic differences affect how engagement strategies are received and implemented during change initiatives.

The small sample size was another acknowledged limitation, which restricted the representativeness of the findings. Future studies should aim for larger and more varied samples of human resources professionals and business leaders to strengthen the reliability of findings and ensure that a broader range of experiences and insights are captured. Researchers may also consider longitudinal study designs, which follow participants over the course of a change initiative to examine the evolution and long-term impact of engagement strategies. Longitudinal data can offer more nuanced insights into how employees respond to change over time and how leadership approaches may need to adapt at various stages of transformation.

Addressing these limitations in future research will contribute to a deeper and more robust understanding of how organizations can effectively engage their workforce during periods of change. Future studies can further inform best practices in business and support the development of more resilient, inclusive, and high-performing organizational cultures by expanding the methodological scope, diversifying participant perspectives, and extending geographical and temporal parameters.

Reflections

Engaging in the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) Doctoral Study process has been professionally transformative and personally enlightening. I have grown not only as a scholar but also as a more thoughtful, strategic, and self-aware change agent through the development and execution of this study. Entering the research process, I held a strong belief that change is inevitable in every aspect of business, and that organizations must embrace it with intentionality. That belief deepened into a broader understanding of the mechanisms, challenges, and human experiences that shape successful change. This study affirmed for me that professionals, especially those in leadership or human resources roles, must possess the skills to not only manage change, but to maneuver through it with adaptability, empathy, and strategy. The connection I developed with change management as both a conceptual framework and a practical necessity has reinforced my commitment to leading with agility and purpose.

Throughout the study, I became increasingly aware of the importance of remaining impartial and reflective during the data collection process. As a practitioner who is passionate about organizational development and employee engagement, I was mindful of my own values and the potential influence they could have on participant interactions. It was essential for me to approach each interview with neutrality, allowing participants to freely share their experiences without leading questions or interpretive bias. I adopted a posture of active listening, asking open-ended, clarifying questions while ensuring that my own perspectives did not color the data. This discipline not only preserved the integrity of the research but also helped me refine my interviewing skills and deepen my understanding of qualitative methodology.

One of the most meaningful aspects of this study was the discovery that data saturation had not been achieved after the initial four interviews. Although each interview was rich in insight, I recognized recurring gaps in topics that required further exploration. As a result, I conducted a fifth interview and reconnected with the original four participants to follow up on key themes that had not been fully addressed, sharpening my analytical lens and reinforcing the iterative nature of qualitative research. It reminded me that rigor in research demands flexibility and a commitment to pursuing depth over convenience. The follow-up process also provided additional opportunities to strengthen rapport with participants and ensure that their perspectives were accurately and thoroughly represented.

In completing this study, my thinking has evolved significantly. I have gained a greater appreciation for the complexities of organizational change and the emotional and cultural dimensions that accompany it. I now understand that effective change management is not merely about executing plans, but about engaging people, navigating resistance, and cultivating trust. I am leaving this process with a stronger foundation as a researcher, a deeper empathy as a leader, and a renewed drive to help organizations build adaptive, people-centered change strategies. My experience has truly positioned me to continue my professional journey as both a scholar and a catalyst for meaningful organizational transformation.

Conclusion

This study explored the change management strategies human resources managers use to improve employee engagement during organizational change, offering meaningful insights into both theory and practice. The findings demonstrated that effective communication, early employee involvement, leadership visibility, recognition, and cultural sensitivity are critical components of successful engagement. Grounded in Kotter's (1996) change model and Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory, the results underscore the importance of aligning leadership behaviors and organizational systems with the human aspects of change. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on employee engagement by providing evidence-based recommendations that are both actionable and adaptable across a variety of organizational contexts. As businesses continue to evolve, the ability to lead change with empathy, clarity, and inclusiveness will distinguish those organizations that thrive from those that struggle. The take-home message is clear: engaging employees during change is not optional, it is essential. Human resources professionals that embed engagement into their change processes will not only improve performance and retention but also foster cultures that are resilient, inclusive, and equipped for long-term success.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Introduce the Interview and Set the Stage

Hello, my name is Whitney Sims, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Walden University.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview.

The purpose of this interview is to explore how organizational leaders apply change management strategies to improve employee engagement and financial performance.

Your insights and experiences as a leader are valuable to this research, and I appreciate your willingness to share.

I have prepared eleven questions that I will ask you, and I encourage you to answer based on your personal experience and professional knowledge. If anything is unclear, feel free to ask for clarification.

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

During the Interview

Watch for nonverbal cues to assess comfort and engagement.

Paraphrase participant responses to confirm understanding.

Ask follow-up probing questions if clarification or further detail is needed.

Interview Questions

1. What are the important factors of employee engagement?
2. What does employee engagement mean to you?
3. What impact does employee engagement have on employees?
4. What change management strategies are you using to engage your employees?
5. What change management strategies are you using to improve financial performance?

6. What strategy did you find worked best to improve employee engagement?
7. What strategies had the least impact on employee engagement?
8. What strategy did you find lowered employee morale?
9. How did your employees respond to each strategy used?
10. What are the financial results of the change management strategies used?
11. Would you like to contribute anything that we might not have covered in the previous questions?

Wrap Up

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your insights are an integral part of my research, and I sincerely appreciate your time and valuable contributions.

Member Checking

To ensure accuracy and reflect your views correctly, I will follow up with you within one week to review a summary of your responses. This will give you the opportunity to confirm my interpretation and provide any additional clarification if needed. Thank you again for your time and expertise.