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Strategies Property Management Leaders Use to Strengthen Employee Engagement in the Workplace

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Angela Hartleigh

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Strategies Property Management Leaders Use to Strengthen Employee Engagement in the
Workplace

by

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MS, Walden University, 2018

MBA, Western Governors University, 2014

BS, Southeastern University, 2012

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2025

Abstract

Lack of employee engagement presents a significant risk and cost across the property management industry. Property management business leaders are concerned with this challenge because employee engagement directly affects performance efficiency and employee turnover costs. Grounded in the self-determination theory, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore strategies property management leaders use to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace. The participants were six purposefully selected property management business leaders in the United States. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and a review of public industry documents. Through thematic analysis, six themes were identified: (a) communication, (b) mentorship, (c) appreciation, (d) empowerment, (e) training, and (f) performance. A key recommendation is for property management leaders to strengthen employee engagement by utilizing key performance indicators that specifically grade managers' communication transparency and willingness to collaborate on process improvements. The implications for positive social change include the potential to stabilize employment and income within the local community workforce by strengthening employee engagement, thereby reducing costly employee turnover.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Employee engagement plays a strategic role in reducing employee turnover (Alterman et al., 2021). With employee turnover on the rise, many organizations seek strategies to enhance employee engagement, retention, and candidate attraction (Squyres, 2020). This project will explore business strategies that managers use to increase employee engagement and decrease employee turnover.

Background of the Problem

One of the greatest challenges that mid-sized businesses face is the ability to compete with larger organizations in attracting and retaining top talent (Alterman et al., 2021). The retirement of the baby boomer generation is a significant contributor to this business problem (Squyres, 2020). Approximately 60,000,000–80,000,000 employees are expected to retire by 2030, with 10,000 retiring every day (Squyres, 2020). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) reported that the unemployment rate had dropped to 3.5% in 2019, the lowest level in 50 years. The number of employees who voluntarily left their jobs increased, while the number of older workers leaving their jobs remained unchanged (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). This suggests that, despite the very low unemployment rate, baby boomers have maintained their employment, leaving the possibility that the unemployment rate could drop even lower once they retire. Until then, ongoing research will continue to investigate the impact on voluntary turnover.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the broader economy have impacted voluntary turnover, as many employers have begun to offer work-from-home options, leading to actively employed individuals leaving their positions for the opportunity to work

remotely (Anand et al., 2024; Koutroumanis & Dixon, 2023). COVID-19 and the economy are just two factors impacting the employment market, yet the full impact of the pandemic on the employment market is yet to be seen; therefore, much research is needed on how it will continue to affect voluntary turnover. Strategies to attract and retain top talent cannot be created until it is determined why employees seek employment elsewhere.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem is that some property management leaders lack strategies to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore strategies that property management leaders use to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace. The targeted population consisted of six purposefully sampled business leaders in the property management industry who implemented strategies to strengthen employee engagement in the United States. Data sources for this project included (a) semistructured interviews, (b) public data, such as public websites and publicly disseminated reports, and (c) literature, such as peer-reviewed articles, books, and other written bodies of information relevant to the project. The conceptual framework for this project was based on the self-determination theory, introduced by Deci and Ryan in 1985.

Research Question

What strategies do property management leaders use to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are ideas that are accepted as being factual, though not confirmed (Kane, 2020). There were three assumptions for this project. The first assumption was that participants in this project would provide truthful answers to the interview questions. The second assumption was that of omission, that participants may not remember or choose to convey all the strategies that they use to reduce employee turnover and increase employee engagement. The third assumption was that of untruthfulness, that participants may not be truthful in some of their answers.

Limitations

Limitations refer to areas of the project that may be weak (Jorgensen & Barrett, 2021). There were two limitations to this project. The first limitation was that the participant had not experienced high employee turnover or a problem with employee engagement, and therefore, had not had to overcome these issues. The second limitation was that the participant's bias, opinion, or prejudice may cloud their perspective in their answers to the questions.

Transition

In Section 1, a qualitative pragmatic approach was introduced to interview individuals who have overcome issues with employee engagement in the United States. The self-determination theory, introduced by Deci and Ryan in 1985, serves as the conceptual framework for this project. Through this project, I sought to gain an understanding of the problem through the rich data found in (a) semistructured

interviews, (b) public data, and (c) literature, such as peer-reviewed articles, books, and other written bodies of information relevant to the project.

In Section 2, the literature will be discussed in greater detail. In Section 3, I will discuss my role as the researcher, the project ethics, the nature of the project, the population, sampling, and participants used to collect the data through interview questions, the organization and analysis of the data, and the reliability and validity of the data. In Section 4, the presentation of the findings will be discussed, along with the business contributions and recommendations for professional practice.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore strategies that property management leaders use to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace. This literature review encompasses the findings, critical analysis, and synthesis of recent literature and historical research in the field of employee engagement, disengagement, employee turnover, and workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction. For the literature review, I collected peer-reviewed articles from sources published in databases found in the Walden Library and on Google Scholar, including SAGE Journals, ProQuest Central, Business Source Complete, and EBSCOhost. The literature review includes articles from peer-reviewed journals, seminal references, and relevant government websites. Sources were published mainly between 2021 and 2025, with a minimum of nonrefereed articles and publications prior to 2020.

To search for the literature used for this project, I inputted keywords in various combinations. Keywords included *employee engagement*, *employee disengagement*, *employee turnover*, *employee satisfaction*, and *employee dissatisfaction*. During this search, I discovered articles that explored employee engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of mass corporate layoffs postpandemic, the phenomenon of quiet quitting, the practice of quiet firing, and the influence of generational differences on employee engagement. By analyzing both qualitative and quantitative peer-reviewed articles, I identified and connected common themes and arguments that other researchers made in their studies. The seminal books and other reference materials I selected

supported the theoretical approach for this project, self-determination theory. Of the 65 sources cited in this literature review, 59 were peer-reviewed journal articles, four were books, and two were public publications. Fifty-nine of the 65 sources (91%) were published within 5 years of my anticipated graduation date.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this project was based on the self-determination theory. Edward Deci and Richard Ryan established the theory in their 1985 book, *Self-Determination and Intrinsic Motivation in Human Behavior*. *Self-determination* refers to the ability of individuals to be intrinsically motivated, with the capacity to make their own choices, provided that their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (de Kao et al., 2022; Wingrove et al., 2020). *Autonomy* is the ability of an individual to feel in control of their own choices, involving a sense of independence and the capacity to regulate their own behavior (de Kao et al., 2022; Wingrove et al., 2020). *Competence* refers to the ability one has to perform a given task, which can include having the necessary skill, strength, judgment, or intellect. *Relatedness* refers to the feeling of belonging and connectivity to a group, which includes being cared for and respected by others. By satisfying these three psychological needs, various positive outcomes arise, including work engagement (Wei et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023). However, as with any theory, there are advantages and limitations to consider.

In determining which theory to use as the framework for this project, I evaluated the advantages and limitations of various theories. When considering the use of self-determination theory, I weighed the advantages against the limitations to make sure it

was the best option. Some of the advantages of using self-determination theory for this project are as follows:

1. Because self-determination theory is based on autonomy, competence, and relatedness, it fosters a sense of psychological and emotional well-being in individuals. When an employee is competent, and treated as such, and when they have autonomy, they feel respected and valued. When they feel that others relate to them, they have a greater sense of belonging and importance to the team and the organization. This leads to a greater level of motivation and involvement.
2. Since self-determination theory acknowledges the unique needs of individuals, managers, employers, and business leaders in the property management industry can tailor their management approach to meet the needs of various individuals and teams, which in turn impacts the overall effectiveness of their engagement.
3. Self-determination theory focuses on the intrinsic motivation of each individual, demonstrating that they become willfully engaged in the activities, tasks, and roles that they find personally enjoyable and satisfying. When leaders create engagement strategies that align with the intrinsic motivation of their employees, they are much more likely to experience genuine engagement from their employees, as opposed to extrinsic motivation, which is only temporary.

4. Because the intrinsically motivating strategies found in self-determination theory produce sincere employee engagement, they are also more likely to be long-lasting. When employees are intrinsically motivated to be actively engaged in their work, they are less likely to become disengaged or burned out (see Kao et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2022).

Some of the limitations of using the self-determination theory are as follows:

1. Self-determination theory can be a complex theory to implement, as it requires a deep understanding of it to do so.
2. The self-determination theory was developed in the Western world and may not account for the cultural motivations of some employees, including those within the Western workforce.
3. Assessing the psychological needs and motivation of people is subjective, and interpreting those needs is also subjective. Therefore, determining the impact that their engagement has based on their motivation could be impacted.
4. Customizing self-determination theory strategies and engagement strategies to meet the needs of individual people may require more time, attention, and resources, making them more expensive than some smaller businesses can afford.
5. Because it can be more complex, some employers may prefer a simpler approach to their engagement strategies that are easier to implement and evaluate (see Nguyen, 2023; Wei et al., 2022).

Although self-determination theory is complex, I chose it because its focus on intrinsic motivation aligns with the goals of this project. Studying effective strategies for employee engagement in the workplace is not a new project. This project builds upon the work of Osborne and Hammoud (2017) in their article, “Effective Employee Engagement in the Workplace.” Osborne and Hammoud utilized the self-determination theory in their project, asserting that Deci and Ryan’s (1985) work on employee engagement was the most influential on the topic, as it elaborated on the impact of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation on employee engagement. My goal is to build upon the work of previous researchers to determine how factors that have emerged since their projects, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, quiet quitting, and mass layoffs, have impacted employee engagement in the workplace. I will also address the business problem that leaders face concerning employee engagement.

Business Problem Evidence

Employee engagement or disengagement can be a significant factor in determining employee performance and turnover. Therefore, employee engagement is one of the greatest challenges that mid-sized businesses face, as it impacts their ability to attract and retain strong employees (Alterman et al., 2021; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Active employee engagement, in contrast to employee turnover, is a vital aspect of organizational profitability (Alterman et al., 2021; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Because corporations typically lose \$350,000,000,000 annually due to a lack of effective employee engagement, finding ways to improve the strategies to strengthen employee engagement is a business problem many employers face (Alterman et al., 2021; Osborne

& Hammoud, 2017). Employee engagement or disengagement can be a business problem under any circumstances; however, since 2020, there have been several issues impacting employers' ability to attract and retain strong employees, such as the continuing retirement of the baby boomer generation, the COVID-19 pandemic, a decreased economy, The Great Resignation, quiet quitting, quiet firing, and mass layoffs (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023; Patrick et al., 2024; Zibbell, 2023). Through this project, I aimed to assess the impact of these events on employee engagement.

As stated, several environmental factors may have contributed to employee engagement. The retirement and continued employment of the baby boomer generation is one cause of this business problem (Squyres, 2020; Tunney et al., 2022). Approximately 60,000,000–80,000,000 employees will be of retirement age by 2030 (Squyres, 2020; Tunney et al., 2022). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) reported that the unemployment rate had dropped to 3.5% in 2019, the lowest level in 50 years. The number of employees who voluntarily left their jobs increased, and the number of older workers leaving their jobs remained the same, which indicates that while the unemployment rate was very low, baby boomers maintained their employment, leaving the possibility of the unemployment rate dropping even lower once they do retire (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic affected voluntary turnover, as many employers transitioned to remote work arrangements, prompting actively employed individuals to leave their on-site positions for the flexibility of working from home (Anand et al., 2024; Koutroumanis & Dixon, 2023). The pandemic prompted many individuals to reevaluate their personal priorities, including their physical, mental, and

emotional health, time spent with loved ones, and work that they find fulfilling (Wang et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2023). As a result, some people not only leave their current jobs but change careers entirely (Wang et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2023). The economic impact that COVID-19 had on businesses forced many business leaders to make tough decisions, including layoffs and even closing their businesses, resulting in the permanent loss of jobs (Hassan, 2023; Venkata et al., 2022). The full impact of the pandemic on the employment market is yet to be seen; therefore, further research is needed to understand how it will continue to affect voluntary turnover.

In 2021, following the COVID-19 pandemic, many employees in the United States left their employers for various reasons. The event was coined as the *Great Resignation* by Professor Anthony Klotz of the University College London's School of Management (Koutroumanis & Dixon, 2023; Liu-Lastres et al., 2023). While various industries were impacted, health care, hospitality, and tourism were among the hardest-hit industries during the pandemic, resulting in either extreme unemployment or employee burnout (Koutroumanis & Dixon, 2023; Liu-Lastres et al., 2023). Some of the reasons employees left their employment included burnout, stress, a lack of work-life balance, and an inability to work from home (Patrick et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2023). Given the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, such as extreme loss of life, long-term effects of the illness, loss of time with family and friends, and loss of meaningful life events, many sought work that provided more personal fulfillment and better aligned with their personal goals (Patrick et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2023). However, not all dissatisfied employees left their employers.

Some dissatisfied and disengaged employees chose to stay with their employers and *quiet quit* instead. The term *quiet quitting* was first used by Brian Creely, a career coach and TikTok influencer, in March 2022, referring to an employee doing the minimum required to keep their job (Formica & Sfodera, 2022; Koutroumanis & Dixon, 2023). The pandemic was a time of extreme personal stress, during which employees faced the possibility of layoffs, a practically nonexistent job market, and potentially difficult or even dangerous working conditions if they did have a job (Patrick et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2023). Once the threat of the pandemic was better under control, employees expected their working conditions to improve. When those conditions did not improve for many, they viewed quiet quitting as a means of setting boundaries (Anand et al., 2024; Koutroumanis & Dixon, 2023). However, regardless of what the employees had done during the pandemic, it sent the message to their employers that they were not willing to do what was needed, and it identified them as disengaged employees (Anand et al., 2024; Koutroumanis & Dixon, 2023). In a stressful time for employees and employers alike, it did not take long for quiet quitting to lead to *quiet firing*.

Quiet firing refers to the act of creating a work environment so unpleasant that employees are forced to quit (Anand et al., 2024; Koutroumanis & Dixon, 2023). However, unlike quiet quitting, quiet firing has a formal legal term, known as *constructive discharge* (Chan et al., 2021; Mishra, 2022). When an employer makes an employee's work environment so unpleasant that the employee has no choice but to quit, it is the same as termination, which in most cases qualifies the employee for unemployment compensation (Chan et al., 2021; Mishra, 2022). If a court determines that

the employee was wrongfully terminated, the employee may also be entitled to additional compensation (Chan et al., 2021; Mishra, 2022). The economic downturn played a significant role in the decline of the job market.

In addition to the layoffs that occurred during the height of the pandemic, the economic downturn led to mass layoffs postpandemic from many major corporations in the United States. The technology industry was one of the hardest-hit industries, largely impacting white-collar employees and making it difficult for many job seekers to find new jobs (Lee et al., 2023; Saba, 2024). While many companies lost business during the pandemic, others, such as Amazon, were able to capitalize on the increased demand caused by the pandemic (Jyani, 2024; Saba, 2024). However, once the height of the demand faded, Amazon also had mass layoffs (Saba, 2024). One of the spillover effects of the mass layoffs was that as companies began to reduce their workforces, the need for talent acquisition services also declined, leading to companies like LinkedIn and Indeed experiencing large layoffs as well (Saba, 2024). While it is still a shock for most employees, federal and some state laws provide some protection against immediate mass layoffs.

For the employees of larger corporations, however, there are laws that require advance notification. One benefit for employees involved in mass layoffs of least 50 full-time employees and one third of the worksite's active employees or a worksite closing affecting 50 or more employees is that the federal WARN Act requires employers with 100 or more full-time employees (excluding employees who have been employed for less than 6 months) to give them at least 60 calendar days advance written notice prior to the

layoff (Saba, 2024; U. S. Department of Labor, 2020). Additionally, some companies offer severance packages to employees affected by layoffs (Callahan, 2024; Saba, 2024). However, employees should thoroughly review the severance agreement, potentially having an employment attorney review it, and explain the consequences of the agreement before signing it, as accepting it can waive some of the employees' potential rights (Callahan, 2024; Saba, 2024). The employees laid off, however, are not the only ones affected by a mass layoff.

Many employees who survive a layoff often feel as though they are expected to be grateful for still having a job and are expected to pick up the workload left by those who were laid off. The remaining employees do not receive the severance package given to the exiting employees, nor do they have the time to search for a new job, and they also face the added stress of a heavier workload than they had previously (Huang et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2023). The emotional toll that a mass layoff has on those remaining affects their cognitive and affective job insecurity, which is likely to impact their job performance (Huang et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2023). Job insecurity, especially when caused by widespread economic concerns, causes an individual to focus almost entirely on their financial need. Since financial need is extrinsically motivated, and true employee engagement stems from intrinsic motivation, mass layoffs, in and of themselves, cause employee disengagement among those left with the company (Kao et al., 2022; Patrick et al., 2024). It is a matter of having to work versus wanting to work (Hofeditz et al., 2017; Kao et al., 2022). Once the business leader understands that there is a problem, they can then begin to address it.

Solution to Business Problem

To find solutions to the business problem of implementing strategies to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace, it was necessary to have a clear understanding of employee engagement and its impact on the business. Employee engagement has been consistently linked to both employee satisfaction and performance (Oh et al., 2023; Schaufeli et al., 2006; Tóth et al., 2023). However, employee engagement encompasses more than employee satisfaction, and satisfaction varies from person to person (Oh et al., 2023; Olawale, 2023). Many business leaders have found that employee engagement is closely tied to employee performance (Al Zeer et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2023). Employers often believe that if they understand what will make their employees happy or satisfied, their employees will become more engaged and, in turn, perform better (Al Zeer et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2023). But it is not that simple. A satisfied employee is not necessarily a more engaged employee. An engaged employee will not necessarily perform better.

While employee satisfaction can lead to employee engagement, there are other factors that contribute to it. It is not surprising that job satisfaction has a positive and significant influence on employee performance, and an engaged employee will likely perform better (Marodin et al., 2023; Muhammad et al., 2024). But what causes an employee to be engaged is more complex than that, as individuals are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated (Hofeditz et al., 2017; Muthuri et al., 2020). People are intrinsically motivated by engaging in a task that they find inherently enjoyable, interesting, or satisfying, and are extrinsically motivated by the reward or outcome that they will attain upon completing the task (Hubley et al., 2024; Kao et al., 2022).

Additionally, extrinsic motivation may cause the individual to feel controlled by an external force, such as monetary gain or the expectations of others, whereas intrinsic motivation often gives the individual a sense of autonomy in choosing to engage in the task (Hubley et al., 2024; Kao et al., 2022). However, the reward of reaching one's personal goal—the feeling of accomplishment or a job well done—is an intrinsic motivation, even though it also involves the outcome of the task (Hubley et al., 2024; Kao et al., 2022). Determining whether someone is motivated intrinsically or extrinsically is largely determined by the individual and if they feel that they have autonomy in the situation (Hubley et al., 2024; Kao et al., 2022). An employee can feel intrinsically motivated by their contribution to solving a problem, even if they receive monetary compensation as a reward (Hofeditz et al., 2017; Hubley et al., 2024). It is possible to be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated simultaneously (Hofeditz et al., 2017; Hubley et al., 2024). Job satisfaction can stem from either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. However, true engagement comes from intrinsic motivation (Oh et al., 2023; Sypniewska et al., 2023). Being satisfied in one's job is not enough to also be engaged.

Although job satisfaction can be motivated intrinsically or extrinsically, employee engagement requires more than just job satisfaction; it also involves a deeper level of commitment. People can be extrinsically motivated to perform a task they do not enjoy simply because they are being paid to do it, or because their manager expects them to do so (Hofeditz et al., 2017; Hubley et al., 2024). Therefore, they may perform well without being intrinsically motivated to do the task (Hofeditz et al., 2017; Hubley et al., 2024). For example, no one would be intrinsically motivated to work at a sewage plant. But for

the right pay and benefits, some people could be extrinsically motivated to do it.

Conversely, just because an individual is intrinsically motivated, meaning they enjoy the task, does not necessarily mean they will excel at it (Hofeditz et al., 2017; Hubley et al., 2024). Therefore, their performance may not be strong. For example, an individual may enjoy singing, but if they are not a good singer, they will not win a singing competition, regardless of how intrinsically motivated they are.

Because true engagement originates from within, through intrinsic motivation, employers cannot directly cause employees to be engaged. It is ideal for employers and employees to work together to find the right task-motivation fit, as that will produce the highest results for both parties, according to Kao et al. (2022) and Rachman et al. (2024). Although both employers and employees strive to find a suitable match during the interview process, the needs of the employer to fill the position or the employee to secure a job can sometimes cloud their judgment, the researchers noted. The talent acquisition process is the first step to ensure employees are the right fit for the position but ensuring that employees are engaged requires more. Employers, managers, and leaders should encourage employees to speak up (Kao et al., 2022). Giving them the freedom to know that their opinions matter and giving them autonomy in their jobs will help foster employee engagement, Kao et al. and Rachman et al. asserted. When employees know they can freely communicate with their leadership, they can use their creativity to help solve problems. Additionally, if the employee believes they would be a better fit for a different position and that suggestion is well-received by management, it will likely increase the employee's engagement, benefiting both the organization and the employee

(Hubley et al., 2024; Rachman et al., 2024). In this project, I explored additional strategies that leaders can implement to enhance the likelihood of employee engagement.

Given that employee engagement is intrinsically motivated, I sought to determine if there was anything that a leader could do to increase employee engagement. The self-determination theory indicates that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for intrinsic motivation (Kao et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2023). Autonomy is the ability to control one's own work and environment, competence is the ability to confidently and effectively complete one's goals, and relatedness is the feeling of, and making others feel, social connection and belonging (Kao et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2023). Therefore, while there is nothing an employer can do to cause an employee to be intrinsically motivated or engaged because that motivation comes from within the employee, there are things that the employer can do to provide autonomy, competence, and a sense of belonging (Kao et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2023). The employee needs to be trustworthy with the autonomy given, and they are responsible for their skillset and qualifications for the position, but through providing additional training and development, the employer can add to the employee's skillset, creating a greater level of competence (Kao et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2023). While an employee is responsible for their own engagement, this project also addressed the role that the leader plays in the level of engagement of their employees.

In understanding employee engagement, it is also crucial to comprehend employee disengagement. While employee engagement is intrinsically motivated, disengagement can be motivated either intrinsically or extrinsically, meaning that leaders can demotivate their employees. (Robeva, 2022; Sykes-Bridge et al., 2023). For example,

many employers believe that offering a competitive salary will automatically motivate and engage employees; however, compensation is an exchange for services, not a motivator (Muthuri et al., 2020; Sykes-Bridge et al., 2023). If an employee feels they are not adequately compensated or treated fairly, that will become a demotivator (Muthuri et al., 2020; Sykes-Bridge et al., 2023). To have engaged employees, leaders must understand that engagement is not automatic and it comes from much more than compensation and benefits.

Employees are more than just employees; they are individuals with personal needs that extend beyond their work responsibilities. Studies have shown that employers and leaders who acknowledge that their employees are individuals with lives outside of work and invest in them as people tend to have employees who are more devoted to their employer (Buonomo et al., 2024; Kocatepe et al., 2024). One lasting imprint that COVID-19 left on the workforce is the recognition that many jobs can be performed remotely, which has improved the work-life balance for many employees (Buonomo et al., 2024; Kocatepe et al., 2024). This is especially true for many Millennials who have young children at home. When employers recognize the personal needs of their employees and demonstrate that they care about them as individuals, not just as assets to the company, their employees are more likely to prioritize the business's needs (Buonomo et al., 2024; Kocatepe et al., 2024). Additionally, the way leaders treat employees, whether good or bad, becomes the brand presented to potential employees.

The way the employer's brand is presented to candidates is just as important as the way the company is marketed to potential customers. The employer brand is the

image that is portrayed to potential and existing employees regarding what they can expect during their employment (Ahmed et al., 2022; Reis et al., 2021). For this reason, it is essential that leaders uphold the image they portray to candidates once they become employees (Ahmed et al., 2022; Reis et al., 2021). If it is merely a marketing campaign on the company's website intended to attract strong candidates but not something that is fully embraced and practiced by all leadership, employees will leave the organization, tarnishing the employer's reputation in the process (Ahmed et al., 2022; Reis et al., 2021). Especially in the modern age of technology, an employer's brand is less about what they say about themselves and more about what their employees, past and present, say about them (Ahmed et al., 2022; Krušković et al., 2023). Being deliberate about the employer brand a company has is an important part of attracting and retaining engaged employees.

Transition

In Section 2, I reviewed the findings, critical analysis, and synthesis of the literature and historical research conducted in the field of employee engagement, disengagement, and employee turnover, as well as employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the workplace. The reviewed literature focused on why self-determination theory is the best theory for this project, providing evidence that employee engagement or disengagement has increasingly become a significant business problem since 2020. The issues impacting employee engagement since 2020 have included the ongoing retirement of the baby boomer generation, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic downturn, The Great Resignation, quiet quitting, quiet firing, and mass layoffs (Liu-

Lastres et al., 2023; Patrick et al., 2024). In this section, the research also provided potential solutions to the business problem by using self-determination theory as the lens through which to review the literature. The literature indicates that employee engagement is intrinsically motivated, and the self-determination theory indicates that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for intrinsic motivation (Kao et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2023). Therefore, autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the sources of the solution (Kao et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2023). In Section 3, I will discuss my role as the researcher, the project ethics, the nature of the project, the population, sampling and participants used to collect the data through interview questions, the organization and analysis of the data, and the reliability and validity of the data. In Section 4, the presentation of the findings will be discussed, along with the business contributions and recommendations for professional practice.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

Project Ethics

As the researcher of this qualitative project, I was the primary instrument for the data collection process. The researcher's role is to collect and interpret the data for a qualitative project (Abbott & Bordens, 2022). The methods of data collection for this project included conducting virtual interviews of six property management leaders.

With a career in human resources beginning in 2001, I have long been interested in the topic of employee engagement. Over this time, several driving forces have impacted the level of engagement among the employees I supported, including the economy, the overall workforce demand level, and the motivational needs of the employees. The participants are individuals with whom I have previously worked, and therefore, I have a professional relationship with them. I also offered a \$10 gift card to each participant.

Researchers are required to conduct themselves in an ethical manner; therefore, I carefully conducted my research with the highest level of integrity and adhered to the ethical guidelines of the *Belmont Report*, which involves the research of people (Abbott & Bordens, 2022; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The *Belmont Report* states that there are three ethical principles in research involving people. They are: (a) respect, treating them with autonomy when possible, and protection when not; (b) beneficence, doing no harm and providing the most benefit possible; (c) justice, providing fairness to all participants

(National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979)

I protected the participants from harm throughout the process, securing their privacy, identity, and confidentiality. The participants were identified by pseudonyms (P1, P2, etc.) instead of their real names to maintain organization and protect their identities. I explained to each participant that they would not be identified in the paper or any of the research reports, as the *Belmont Report* specifically requires researchers to protect the identity of their participants, particularly members of vulnerable groups (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979; Stewart, 2021). I was especially careful to protect those in vulnerable groups, such as those in racial minority groups, people with medical conditions, and those with socioeconomic disadvantages.

I informed the participants that all information collected for this project, including consent forms, audio recordings of interviews, and any public documents obtained during the project, will be stored on a protected external hard drive for at least 5 years to safeguard their rights and interests. Storing data electronically provides more security than maintaining a physical copy (Mariani et al., 2023). After 5 years, the files on the hard drive will be deleted. Before beginning data collection, I obtained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (approval no. 01-27-25-0449507). In addition to Walden University's Institutional Review Board ethical guidelines, I adhered to the *Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

Nature of the Project

This was a qualitative pragmatic inquiry project, meaning that the method selected for this project is the qualitative method with the use of open-ended questions along with a pragmatic approach to design and analysis. The use of open-ended questions allows researchers to learn what has occurred or is occurring (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). A pragmatic approach includes strategically using qualitative methods that have been previously established, which meet the needs of the researcher. This is typically done by using an existing framework that includes detailed research and practice change goals (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). My research was inductive and focused on the strategic decisions of individuals facing the problem of finding strategies to improve the engagement of their employees in the real world.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

I sought at least six eligible participants in the United States who were currently or had been business leaders in the property management industry and had experienced strategies that were implemented to strengthen employee engagement. I searched within my professional network to gain access to participants using social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, to find those who met the eligibility criteria for this project. I leveraged my relationships with mutual connections to reach out to potential interview candidates. I used direct messaging on social media platforms, including LinkedIn, or I contacted them via email if I had their email addresses, using an invitation template for both email and social media formats, as well as flyer formats.

I purposefully chose the participants for this project based on their level of expertise and experience with the topic. There are two types of sampling, probability and nonprobability (Kim et al., 2021). Probability sampling involves selecting a random sample from a population and is based on chance, whereas nonprobability sampling employs nonrandom methods to select a group of people, such as geographical area, availability, or expertise (Chen et al., 2020). In nonprobability sampling, participants do not have an equal chance of being included, whereas in probability sampling, they must have an equal opportunity to be included (Yang et al., 2020). The types of sampling included in nonprobability sampling are snowball sampling, quota sampling, purposeful sampling, and convenience sampling (Abbott & Bordens, 2022; Newhart & Patten, 2022). I chose nonprobability, purposeful sampling, as I purposefully selected participants for interviews based on their qualifications to meet the project's criteria.

Given that the goal was to reach data saturation, which can only be achieved when the data received is duplicated, I ensured that all participants held similar positions and had sufficient experience to share their strategies for increasing employee engagement, along with the success and failure of those strategies. The purpose of data saturation is to gather as much information as possible on the topic, ensuring that no additional data will reveal substantially new information (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Newhart & Patten, 2022). To avoid any unnecessary redundancy, six participants should be an adequate number to reach data saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Newhart & Patten, 2022). However, if additional participants had been needed, I would have used the

snowball sampling method, which involves asking the participants I had interviewed if they knew of other potential candidates who would qualify and be willing to participate.

Data saturation was ensured during the member checking process, as participants were allowed to revise or add to their responses to the interview questions after reviewing the summaries of their interviews. This ensured that I had properly interpreted their responses and gave them every opportunity to fully and properly respond to the questions. Member checking also ensured that I had not added any of my own bias into their responses. I achieved data saturation through methodological triangulation, which involved comparing the data collected from interviews with information obtained from journal articles, books, and industry publications.

Data Collection Activities

As the researcher of this qualitative project, I was the primary instrument for collecting the data. The role of the researcher is to collect data for a qualitative project (Abbott & Bordens, 2022). The methods of data collection for this project included conducting semistructured phone interviews with the six business leaders. Semistructured interviews are a set of preplanned questions that researchers use to provide a guideline for all interviews to have the same questions, while allowing participants to provide their own answers to the questions (Abbott & Bordens, 2022; Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). Semistructured data collection can be a mix of both structured and unstructured data formats. Nunes et al. (2020) stated that by using the interview protocol with the semistructured method, the structure of each interview will be the same, but will allow

each participant to provide their own responses to the questions. When determining the semistructured method, I considered its advantages and disadvantages.

Semistructured interviews offer several benefits, including the flexibility for researchers to adjust questions as necessary, provide clarifications, and verify the accuracy of responses by repeating or rephrasing inquiries. This approach facilitates the collection of comprehensive and nuanced data (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). The respondent is allowed to provide explanations and personal views or perspectives (Nunes et al., 2020). Some of the disadvantages include the lack of standardization, poor participant recall, researcher error or bias, which can threaten reliability (Abbott & Bordens, 2022; Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). By being aware of the potential disadvantages, I chose this method because it allowed me to conduct the interviews consistently using semistructured interviews, while also enabling participants to share their individual experiences.

One important reason I used the interview protocol to complete the data collection process was that it helped me be aware of my bias and remain neutral. For the research results to remain reliable and valid, the researcher must remain neutral and recognize that their role is to gather and analyze the data (Stewart, 2021). To remain neutral and avoid personal bias, I listened carefully to the participants and documented their exact words without adding my own interpretation. Additionally, I asked clarifying questions when I was unsure of their response. To avoid errors with interpretation, I carefully constructed my interview questions, using the same set of questions for each participant as listed on the interview protocol (see Appendix). Using this interview protocol helped ensure

consistency during member checking, as the follow-up questions for these interviews were included. Additionally, member checking confirmed the researcher's understanding of the participants' comments. Member checking is a technique researchers use to enhance the validity, reliability, accuracy, credibility, and transferability of qualitative research (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). However, it is also crucial to achieve data triangulation, which involves collecting data from multiple sources that yield consistent results to ensure validity and reliability (Nunes et al., 2020). I included public information sources and primary data for triangulation.

The technique used to collect data was through audio-recorded interviews. At all times, I remained professional, acknowledging participants' schedules and respecting their time, showing appreciation for their willingness to share their experiences, and responding to their emails and phone calls promptly. I took time to explain the interview process to the participants, so they knew what to expect and the importance of the project. I also explained my role in the process so they knew I would protect them and their information. Taking the time to provide the participants with this information helped establish trust and made them more willing to share their experiences.

At the time of the interview, I used a device to record the interview, a pen and paper for note-taking, and a list of the interview questions. Upon speaking with the participants, I greeted them and thanked them for their time and participation in the project. I informed them that the interview would last 30–45 minutes and would be recorded. I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix), which included the interview questions, to ensure that each interview was conducted in the same manner.

I thanked each participant at the end of the interview and let them know that they would receive a summary of the interview, which would give them the opportunity to review and make any necessary corrections prior to the project's completion. This initiated the member verification process, ensuring accuracy and enhancing the reliability and validity of the project. Additionally, I reminded the participants that all the data would be stored securely for a period of 5 years. After the interview, I transcribed the conversation, reviewed it, and created a summation to be reviewed by the participant. I emailed my summations to the participants for their final review to determine the accuracy of these details. The participants had the opportunity to make corrections or additions at that time.

Interview Questions

1. Please describe the role(s) and responsibilities you have held as a leader in the property management industry.
2. Over your career, how have you promoted a culture of continuous improvement and employee engagement?
3. In your experience, how do you define and measure employee engagement within the property management industry?
4. Please share examples of successful strategies or initiatives you have implemented to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace.
5. How have these strategies to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace positively influenced the work environment and business outcomes?

6. What key performance indicators (KPIs) or metrics can be monitored to assess the effectiveness of these strategies?
7. What are the most significant challenges related to strengthening employee engagement and turnover costs in the workplace?
8. How did you overcome those significant challenges related to strengthening employee engagement and turnover costs in the workplace?
9. What lessons were learned from the challenges you encountered?
10. What additional information can you share about the strategies you used to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

I maintained protection of the interview recordings and all documents received from the participants, and any notes taken by me will be kept on a flash drive and kept in a secure location. Abbott and Bordens (2022) recommended that all documents and recordings pertaining to the study be kept in a secure place. I will scan any physical documents into the digital flash drive and return the physical documents to the participants. I will maintain the protection of these documents for 5 years. After 5 years, all documents associated with this project will be destroyed.

For this research project, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis process. The first step was to become familiar with the data, and the second step was to generate the initial codes. The third and fourth steps involved searching for themes within the data and reviewing them. The fifth step was to define and name the themes, and the sixth step was to write the report.

I used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet throughout the six steps of the process to organize and analyze all the data from the interviews, my conceptual framework, as well as various articles and publications. Many researchers who conduct interviews to receive their data also use software to aid in transcribing the data (Alam, 2021; Paulus, 2023). In the first step of the thematic analysis process, I used Otter to record and transcribe the data, assist with generating initial codes, and help identify key themes.

In the second phase of the thematic analysis, I used an Excel spreadsheet to label and categorize the data and systematically generate the initial codes. I applied the codes to the relevant data to help me identify themes and patterns among the results. I grouped the similar results to create broader themes and recurring patterns. I then refined the codes until cohesive themes were established. Organizing the data in this manner helped me become familiar with the data and recognize themes and patterns among the interview results. Additionally, I reviewed the results to prepare for the oral presentation of this project and presented the report of the findings.

In the third and fourth phases of the thematic analysis process, I reviewed and analyzed all the data collected through the interviews, focusing on key themes that correlated with the conceptual framework and existing literature. In the fifth step, I defined and named the themes that I found to identify the recurring concepts provided by the participants. Additionally, I employed methodological triangulation by combining information from various sources, including interviews, professional journals, and peer-reviewed articles, to gain a comprehensive understanding from different perspectives,

which enhanced the credibility of the results. In the sixth step, I wrote the report of the findings.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity allow qualitative researchers the ability to ensure that their results are dependable, credible, transferable, and confirmable (Abbott & Bordens, 2022). A justified approach to research method and design elements is created when reliability and validity are established (Abbott & Bordens, 2022). I fulfilled the requirement of reliability and validity by using the appropriate research methods and by following the planned data collection and data analysis processes.

Reliability

The reliability of the results from a qualitative research project is established through the consistent use of research methods for collecting and analyzing data (Abbott & Bordens, 2022; Newhart & Patten, 2022). Abbott and Bordens (2022) recommended that researchers use an interview protocol to ensure consistency during the interview data collection process. Newhart and Patten (2022) stated that researchers should conduct member checking and methodological triangulation to ensure accuracy, dependability, and data saturation. Methodological triangulation employs multiple types of data collection to ensure dependability and data saturation (Abbott & Bordens, 2022). I employed multiple methods to retrieve data, including conducting interviews with participants and documenting body language and behaviors observed during the interviews. I used member checking, which allowed the participants to verify that the data I collected were accurate, establishing trustworthiness and dependability. I

demonstrated the accuracy and reliability of this project by employing member checking, data dependability, and methodological triangulation, which helped me achieve data saturation. I also used secondary data to confirm that I had reached data saturation by researching the career pages of various property management websites.

Validity

Validity pertains to the accuracy of the qualitative study (Abbott & Bordens, 2022). To substantiate validity, a researcher will use suitable instruments, methods, and data (Abbott & Bordens, 2022). Researcher bias is one of the significant obstacles to demonstrating validity in qualitative studies, as the researcher is often the primary or sole research instrument (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021). Using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions and obtaining documents from companies' websites will assist in reaching methodological triangulation. Participants may not provide the same responses to the interview questions; instead, they may offer opposite answers (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021). It is where they are similar, along with the results from other research methods, that triangulation occurs (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021). Using methodological triangulation helps researchers avoid personal bias in the study's results (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021). The essential elements that a qualitative researcher should demonstrate to reach validity are credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Newhart & Patten, 2022). Honest and accurate accounts of the participants' interviews and experiences help the researcher establish credibility (Newhart & Patten, 2022).

I established credibility by using member checking, which allowed the participants to verify the data collected and ensured its accuracy. Credibility is also

established through transparency in the data collection process (Newhart & Patten, 2022). Using methodological triangulation to synthesize the results from multiple sources also enhanced credibility.

Transferability is established when the researcher provides the reader with information that demonstrates how the project results can be applied to other situations, times, or contexts (Abbott & Bordens, 2022). The researcher cannot prove that the research results are applicable; only that there is potential for them to be applicable (Abbott & Bordens, 2022). I provided rich data, including detailed descriptions of the participants' interviews, conducted in accordance with the interview protocol, along with documents provided by the participants to enhance the transferability of the project's results. Although I was unable to confirm the transferability, I was able to provide comprehensive information about the data collection process that could facilitate the transferability of the results.

Confirmability was the final step that I established to ensure the validity of the project's results. The confirmability of qualitative research is demonstrated when the project's findings are addressed objectively (Abbott & Bordens, 2022). It is essential for the researcher to acknowledge their own potential bias and mitigate it to establish confirmability (Abbott & Bordens, 2022). I employed an interview protocol and member checking to minimize my own bias and ensure data saturation, thereby helping to maintain objectivity in the project's results.

The goal with interviewing the participants was to reach data saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Newhart & Patten, 2022). Reaching data saturation means that, as the

interviews progress, researchers encounter a point at which no new information is presented. Using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions, I ensured that each participant was asked the same questions, but they had the flexibility to provide their answers the way that worked best for them. I conducted the member checking process by emailing each participant individually with a summary of their interview and asking if they would like to change any of their answers or add to the information they had provided. They all said that they felt the information they provided was accurate and complete. By the time I had conducted the interview with the fifth participant, I knew I had reached data saturation, as all the answers were the same or similar to those of the other four participants. The sixth participant was only further confirmation of that.

Transition and Summary

In Section 3, I stated that the purpose of this project was to explore strategies that business leaders in the property management industry use to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace. I provided an explanation of my role as the researcher and what will be provided to the participants. I further explained the reasoning behind using a qualitative pragmatic inquiry and the steps I took to maintain the ethical responsibilities I had to the participants in this project. I explained the process I followed during the data collection and analysis portions of this project, as well as how I ensured the reliability and validity of the project. In Section 4, I will present the project's findings, explain the project's applicable aspects in relation to current professional practices, and provide recommendations for future research studies on this topic. I will provide my reflections on the doctoral journey and provide a conclusion.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore strategies that property management leaders use to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace. The research question was “What strategies do property management leaders use to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace?” I used Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis to determine the themes by familiarizing myself with the data, coding the data by categorizing them into similar groups, looking for repeated themes within each group, reviewing each theme to see if it needed to be further divided, refining each group by naming and defining them, and finally, documenting my findings in this report. The main themes were: communication, mentorship, appreciation, empowerment, training, and performance. The findings of this project offer insight into effective strategies for enhancing employee engagement.

Theme 1: Communication

The findings of this project confirmed that effective communication from business leaders has a positive impact on employee engagement. Communication was identified by all six participants as the key strategy for improving employee engagement. The development of this theme was the easiest to identify, as each participant referenced verbal communication to strengthen relationships, express expectations, and resolve conflict. The core psychological needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy, as outlined in self-determination theory, are met through communication by fostering connections, transferring knowledge, and enabling clear delegation (Perez et al., 2025).

Overall, the data showed that communication is the main driver of these essential needs for greater employee engagement.

P2 stated, in reference to managing people, “I think the basis is communication and making sure that you know how to communicate with people, individually as well as a group.” All the participants mentioned that communication is the foundation for leading people and utilizing strong communication to mentor those employees. P1 emphasized the importance of discussing all maintenance issues, from the seemingly insignificant ones to those in the “tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars” range, because it not only helps everyone be in agreement on the method for solving the problem, but it also strengthens the team’s relationship. P3 mentioned the various ways of showing appreciation, specifically the form of verbal communication, of telling them how much they are appreciated. P3 also emphasized the importance of taking the time to have lunch with an employee, allowing them to discuss their concerns. P4 emphasized the importance of using verbal communication to help resolve conflict. P5 told a story about the value of communication in the aftermath of their property being damaged by a tornado. They had to communicate well with the residents, but especially with each other. There was a lot of debris to be removed and repairs to be made. By communicating well, they were able to work well together as a team to resolve the problem. P6 mentioned using verbal communication to express expectations of preventative maintenance before repairs are needed. All the participants gave excellent examples of how communication made their properties run more efficiently.

Transparent and frequent communication is fundamental for establishing a robust organizational climate that satisfies the core psychological need of relatedness, central to self-determination theory. The criticality of this theme was established via data saturation, confirmed by the alignment of participant accounts, supporting literature, and public industry statements on the necessity of open dialogue and clear direction (see CBRE, n.d.). Specifically, the use of transparent communication is the primary mechanism through which leaders establish psychological safety and mutual trust (Perez et al., 2025). This deliberate effort to foster social bonds is paramount, underscoring the vital role of communication in counteracting the psychological toll of postpandemic uncertainty and market volatility (Gupta et al., 2025). Consequently, communication serves as the essential bedrock for relational engagement, allowing employees to feel connected and valued, thereby stabilizing teams and reducing voluntary turnover.

Relevance of Findings to the Conceptual Framework

The focus of self-determination theory is that intrinsic motivation arises when autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Kao et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2023). Relatedness involves feeling connected and respected within a group, and communication helps fulfill this need. Communication also supports competence by enabling managers to share knowledge and promotes autonomy by allowing employees to complete tasks independently (Gupta et al., 2025). As communication addresses all three needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness — that are essential for intrinsic motivation, which has the potential to lead to employee engagement, it is unsurprising that all six participants identified it as the most important strategy for enhancing engagement.

Relevance of Findings to the Literature

Leaders who communicate openly and clearly reinforce the self-determination theory's idea of relatedness by building trust and psychological safety, which is essential in mitigating workplace anxiety, especially during periods of job insecurity (Gupta et al., 2025). Furthermore, free communication has been shown to enhance organizational functions, such as creativity and problem-solving, across diverse teams (Perez et al., 2025). The findings of this project strongly confirm this body of literature, as participant interviews consistently revealed that structured, frequent check-ins were the single most effective antidote to feelings of isolation and disconnection, which participants cited as a key contributor to disengagement. This core finding was validated through triangulation with organizational data, such as CBRE's (n.d.) public commitment, "We embrace an open dialogue in our workplace where everyone feels valued, respected and heard—and that they belong," demonstrating that the concept of open dialogue is recognized as material to business culture. The convergence of participant data, peer-reviewed literature, and company statements confirms that data saturation was met for the communication theme. This successful triangulation extends current knowledge by demonstrating that in decentralized and high-burnout environments like property management, intentional and structured communication is not merely a beneficial practice but a crucial strategic intervention necessary to address chronic isolation and disengagement at decentralized sites, thus serving as the foundational mechanism for satisfying the need for relatedness.

Theme 2: Mentorship

Mentorship emerged as a major theme, with two participants, P1 and P6, recognizing its impact on employee confidence and engagement. This supports research indicating that supervisory mentorship improves job satisfaction and reduces work stress (Erdogan et al., 2025). Participant examples, such as P6's example of "taking them under my wing," in reference to the mentorship this participant offered to an employee, linked mentorship to employees feeling valued and engaged. In line with self-determination theory, mentorship satisfies intrinsic needs by strengthening relatedness, building competence through training, and promoting autonomy. The data confirms that mentorship is an effective leadership strategy for motivating staff.

P1 and P6 acknowledged that their efforts to mentor their employees led to the employees feeling more confident in their roles, thereby improving their overall engagement. Employees who experience negative work stress tend to have less job satisfaction when they have either no or limited supervisor mentorship. Conversely, employees have a more positive work experience when they have supervisor mentorship (Erdogan et al., 2025). P6 had this to say about the importance of mentorship: "I started in this industry with someone who really poured into my career when I was only 20. I saw how she poured into my career, and I've always felt that that's what I wanted to do for everyone else." This manager mentioned the importance of "taking them under my wing" to help them be the best they can be. This participant noted that implementing this approach also made employees feel valued and appreciated, which significantly increased their engagement. P1 discussed the importance of mentorship, noting that people need

individualized training that includes repetition. This participant mentioned that mentorship is an ongoing relationship to ensure that employees are adequately prepared for their jobs.

Data saturation was observed for mentorship, as P1 and P6's statements regarding developmental support aligned with the literature on competence and industry public data. Mentorship is cited as supporting skill and intellectual development (Ta et al., 2025) and fulfilling the relatedness need through facilitating connection (Erdogan et al., 2025). This is reflected in organizational commitments to associate development, as seen on Gables Residential's website (n.d.), which discusses the company's commitment to providing mentorship and a collaborative environment to enhance employees' professional growth.

Relevance of Findings to the Conceptual Framework

Mentorship supports all three components of self-determination theory related to intrinsic motivation: relatedness, autonomy, and competence. It fosters relatedness through direct supervisor support, promotes autonomy by equipping employees to work independently, and reinforces competence by providing essential technical training and knowledge necessary for role mastery (Erdogan et al., 2025; Ta et al., 2025). As a result, mentorship is a key strategy for enhancing intrinsic motivation and long-term employee engagement. The data collected in this project confirmed the role of mentorship, with participants highlighting structured mentorship as the bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical autonomy.

Relevance of Findings to the Literature

The implementation of formal and informal mentorship programs strongly confirms the requirement for competence and simultaneously strengthens relatedness. Furthermore, the relationship inherent in mentorship fulfills the self-determination theory need for belonging and connectivity to a group, which is critical in an industry facing high turnover (Ta et al., 2025). This finding extends the literature by demonstrating that mentorship is a proactive strategy, not only for skill transfer but also for fostering emotional investment, thereby reducing the likelihood of employee disengagement or burnout (de Kao et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2022).

Theme 3: Appreciation

The theme of appreciation emerged after half of the participants, P3, P4, and P5, identified appreciation as a key factor in making employees feel valued, directly increasing engagement. Recognizing effort and expressing gratitude fulfills psychological needs, strengthening motivation, emotional engagement, and long-term commitment (Batista et al., 2025). Participant 4 stated that when employees “know that they matter,” they “work much better.” The findings link appreciation to employee empowerment and, under self-determination theory, show it satisfies the need for relatedness by reinforcing emotional bonds. Additionally, Kwarteng et al. (2024) found that supervisor or peer recognition has a positive impact on engagement by confirming competence and fostering autonomy.

P3, P4, and P5 indicated that recognizing the efforts of their employees and expressing their appreciation for a job well done made the employees feel valued, leading

to increased engagement. Appreciation from a supervisor positively impacts employees' intrinsic motivation by fulfilling the psychological needs they have for relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Haeckl & Rege, 2025). Appreciation also strengthens their emotional engagement and long-term commitment. P4 had this to say about the importance of expressing appreciation: "I think the biggest thing is to make people feel appreciated for what they do. When you let them know that they matter, that they're important to you, they tend to work much better for you." P5 mentioned other ways of expressing appreciation, such as acknowledging employees' birthdays, taking them to events like bowling, and hosting team lunches. This participant said that it was important to make them feel valued and seen. P3 expressed appreciation by highlighting the employees' strengths and publicly acknowledging their successes. Each of these participants provided excellent examples of how they created an environment that fostered increased employee engagement by showing appreciation.

Relevance of Findings to the Conceptual Framework

Appreciation supports self-determination theory by holistically meeting employees' essential psychological needs, particularly the need for relatedness. Specifically, research by Kwarteng et al. (2024) demonstrates that recognition from supervisors or colleagues has a direct and positive impact on employee engagement across various organizational settings. Beyond relational fulfillment, appreciation confirms competence by validating skills and effort, and it may also foster autonomy by motivating employees to independently pursue continuous improvement and achieve their goals. Consequently, when leaders effectively leverage appreciation, they

simultaneously solidify interpersonal bonds, affirm individual capability, and encourage self-directed performance, thereby establishing a motivational climate essential for sustained organizational commitment and reduced turnover.

Relevance of Findings to the Literature

The finding that structured and frequent appreciation strategies are employed directly addresses the self-determination theory need for relatedness by making employees feel cared for and respected. This aligns with recent literature emphasizing that employers who invest in employees as individuals are rewarded with greater devotion (Batista et al., 2025). The data extends the knowledge by suggesting that appreciation serves as a direct antidote to the feelings of being undervalued that drove the Great Resignation and the quiet quitting phenomenon (Koutroumanis & Dixon, 2023; Patrick et al., 2024). The unique difference is the opportunity for property management leaders to customize appreciation to be personal and timely, moving beyond generalized extrinsic rewards to target the intrinsic satisfaction that comes with a job well done (Hublely et al., 2024).

The secondary data from RPM's website (n.d.) stated that leadership within the company understands the importance of showing appreciation, as this leads to a more enjoyable work environment. Both data from the participants and the secondary data support the recent literature from Batista et al. (2025), which confirms that appreciation from a supervisor impacts employees' intrinsic motivation by fulfilling the psychological needs the employees have for relatedness, competence, and autonomy. This further

assists in the triangulation of appreciation as a key element in providing an environment where intrinsic motivation, and therefore increased employee engagement, can occur.

Theme 4: Empowerment

The theme of empowerment was identified by four of the six participants, P1, P3, P4, and P6, as a key factor in increasing employee engagement. This is supported by research linking empowering leadership to employee engagement, as cited by Marampa et al. (2025). Leaders' choices to empower team members also predict future engagement levels (Barua et al., 2025). Under self-determination theory, empowerment fulfills autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as it provides employees with independence, enhances their skills, and enables them to contribute meaningfully to their team and organization.

Participants 1, 3, 4, and 6 stated that empowering employees and giving them autonomy to confidently perform their jobs significantly increased their engagement. Marampa et al. (2025) stated that empowering employees results in increased employee engagement. When leaders empower their employees, it significantly predicts the level of engagement the employees will have (Barua et al., 2025). P6 expressed providing empowerment through honest conversation. This participant stated that by understanding the employees' true goals, they can work together to help the employees perform well in their current role while simultaneously working to reach the employees' personal goals. P4 discussed empowering their employees by clearly expressing expectations upfront and then allowing them to perform the job independently. This participant felt that employees do a better job and complete tasks faster when they are empowered to do so in their

preferred manner, as long as expectations are clearly communicated. P3 stated that management and leadership are distinct entities. They said that “leadership is about serving your people to succeed” and that if you “take care of your people, your people will take care of your business.” In other words, by taking care of your employees, you can empower them to take care of your business. P1 mentioned that the results of empowerment are a desire from the employees to offer more work when needed. The participants provided excellent examples of how empowerment fosters an environment that encourages intrinsic motivation.

Triangulation for the theme of empowerment is demonstrated by participants’ desire to trust their employees, along with the self-determination theory principle of autonomy. Empowering employees with decision-making authority is crucial to fostering autonomy (Marampa et al., 2025). Greystar’s website (n.d.) provided secondary data stating that the company’s leaders believe all employees should be empowered to thrive. Empowerment helps reduce disengagement by encouraging active participation (Barua et al., 2025). In property management, granting authority at the property level motivates site managers through localized operational freedom.

Relevance of Findings to the Conceptual Framework

Empowerment corresponds with the three components of self-determination theory. It relates to competence, as when an employee is capable of performing a task and is empowered by the supervisor, engagement may increase (Marampa et al., 2025). Empowerment also connects to autonomy by granting individuals authority to work independently (Barua et al., 2025). Additionally, empowerment relates to the concept of

relatedness by enabling employees to contribute to their teams and feel a sense of belonging.

Relevance of Findings to the Literature

The theme of empowerment, defined by giving employees control over their work environment and decision making, strongly confirms the centrality of the self-determination theory's need for autonomy (Hasanein & Elrayah, 2025). This finding is particularly relevant in the postpandemic context, where employees seek control (Hasanein & Elrayah, 2025), and it confirms that when individuals feel they have autonomy, they gain independence and regulate their own behavior effectively (Barua et al., 2025). Empowerment serves as a crucial lever against disengagement, as it converts compliance into willful engagement. The opportunity for property management leaders lies in structuring authority at the property level, trusting site managers with greater operational freedom, which intrinsically motivates them to contribute to problem-solving (Hasanein & Elrayah, 2025).

Theme 5: Training

Training emerged as a key theme, with four of the six participants (P1–P4) identifying ongoing training as a crucial element for employee engagement. Consistent with existing research, robust training enhances job knowledge, confidence, and creativity (Primadi et al., 2025). One manager stressed the importance of continuous learning and the value of listening to employees' ideas. The findings show that training fulfills the three psychological needs outlined in self-determination theory: it develops

competence through increased knowledge, supports autonomy by enabling independent work, and fosters relatedness by demonstrating employees' value to the team.

Again, four of the six participants, P1–P4, credited proper training for increasing employee engagement. Training can improve employee engagement by increasing employees' confidence in their job knowledge and enhancing their creativity (Kraus et al., 2025). P1 mentioned providing one-on-one training to their employees as part of their onboarding process. The participant used role-playing to train employees on various situations they would later face. P2 acknowledged that even after an employee is trained, learning is an ongoing process. This participant stated that, as a leader, they are still learning, and that is something for employees to see: that training and learning are ongoing processes. P3 said something similar, that as a leader, it is essential for employees to see the manager willing to step in and learn from them. They said that employees respect leaders who recognize they do not know everything and that everyone can learn something new. P4 emphasized the value of hiring someone who is already well-trained and able to perform the job without requiring as much supervision. Whether the employees come to them already trained and ready to do the job or require more training once they are there, these participants recognized that a well-trained employee is more likely to be an engaged employee.

Data saturation for the training theme was achieved through participants' ongoing interest in skill development and strengthening competence. Employers need to offer training to build employees' skills, while effective approaches emphasize continuous learning (Primadi et al., 2025). Industry leaders, such as JLL (n.d.), demonstrate a

commitment to innovation and growth, reflecting findings that investing in advanced employee training ensures adaptability to market and tenant needs.

Relevance of Findings to the Conceptual Framework

Organizational training programs serve as a critical intervention point for leaders seeking to foster an intrinsically motivating environment that simultaneously addresses all three core psychological needs of self-determination theory. Evidence from the corporate strategy and organizational development literature consistently demonstrates that investing in continuous professional development leads to measurable improvements in engagement and performance metrics (Primadi et al., 2025). Specifically, training directly fulfills the need for competence by building and increasing employees' knowledge of their roles through ongoing learning and development. This gained expertise subsequently provides the opportunity for autonomy, as employees are empowered to act with greater confidence and self-direction. Lastly, the act of investing in development fosters a sense of relatedness, signaling to employees that they are valued team members whose growth is a priority. Consequently, training is not merely a cost of doing business but a foundational relational tool that drives full motivational alignment with organizational goals, leading directly to higher retention and intrinsic commitment.

Relevance of Findings to the Literature

The use of targeted training confirms the direct mechanism for strengthening competence, which is necessary for intrinsic motivation (Nguyen, 2023). The findings confirm that employers must provide training and development to enhance an employee's skill set (Primadi et al., 2025). However, this theme extends the literature by specifying

that successful strategies focused not only on compliance/technical skills but also on resilience and boundary-setting training to handle the emotional toll of high-stress positions exacerbated by recent economic shifts (Huang et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2023). This suggests a business imperative for property management to view training as a continuous measure of psychological safety, ensuring employees feel competent to meet ever-changing market and tenant demands.

Theme 6: Performance

The theme of performance emerged as a key indicator of employee engagement, mentioned by all six participants. Studies show engagement rises when employees feel safe, supported, and able to contribute, boosting performance (Haeckl & Rege, 2025). This approach aligns with self-determination theory, which emphasizes intrinsic motivation as the primary driver of engagement. Research indicates that intrinsic motivation has a greater impact on performance than extrinsic rewards (Primadi et al., 2025). Supporting self-determination theory needs, such as competence, relatedness, and autonomy, helps cultivate this motivation and improve results.

While the participants recognized that performance alone is not the sole indicator of an employee's full engagement, they all used performance as one of the primary metrics for measuring employee engagement. When employees feel safe, supported, and able to contribute, their engagement increases, which in turn enhances their overall performance (Nesterak et al., 2025). P6 referred to setting SMART goals for her employees and teaching them how to set their own goals. That participant said, "Even if they are personal goals, that's okay, because helping them reach those goals will also

help improve their performance at work.” Helping employees set and achieve their goals is a form of mentorship that also increases employee engagement.

Although there are multiple ways of measuring performance, P1 mentioned measuring an employee’s performance by having that employee train another employee on a particular task. P2 mentioned that they use employees’ performance to not only measure their own performance, but also that of their employees. If only one employee has low performance, that could require more training. However, if all employees have low performance, that could be a training issue or an expectations issue. Either way, performance is a great indicator of whether the team is doing well. P3 discussed using performance as a key indicator to determine if the employee-to-ratio was on target. If it was not where it should be, the participant knew it was time to meet with the employee to determine where the problem lay. P4 referenced using performance to gauge whether the employee was completing the job in the time frame allotted, and whether the time allotted was reasonable, or if the employee needed to make adjustments. P5 referenced using surveys and net promoter scores to measure performance and overall engagement.

The theme of performance reached saturation by demonstrating that effective performance management is defined by continuous, goal-aligned feedback, as mentioned by all participants, rather than solely relying on extrinsic motivation. This confirms the self-determination theory principle that intrinsic motivation is key (Kao et al., 2022). The participant-identified desire for a culture of excellence is strongly corroborated by corporate positioning, such as Cushman & Wakefield (n.d.), which states that the company strives to perform well. This culture of continuous improvement confirms the

finding that successful leaders use performance evaluation not as a punitive measure but as a framework for fostering intrinsic growth, thereby reinforcing autonomy and competence.

Relevance of Findings to the Conceptual Framework

Self-determination theory states that employee engagement is primarily driven by intrinsic motivation. Research indicates that intrinsic motivation may have a stronger influence on employee performance than extrinsic motivation (Good et al., 2022). When environments support competence, relatedness, and autonomy, intrinsic motivation can develop, which may contribute to improved employee performance. In this project, the data strongly confirmed this theoretical premise, as participants overwhelmingly cited feelings of self-direction and mastery (autonomy and competence) as the primary drivers of job satisfaction, rather than extrinsic rewards. Therefore, cultivating intrinsic motivators is established as the key strategic intervention for improving performance and reducing voluntary turnover in this decentralized industry.

Relevance of Findings to the Literature

The finding that leaders manage performance through ongoing, goal-aligned feedback systems confirms the established link between employee evaluation and employee performance (Primadi et al., 2025). Crucially, the data disconfirms the reliance on extrinsic motivation alone, reinforcing the self-determination theory principle that true engagement is intrinsically motivated (Kao et al., 2022). This theme extends knowledge by defining performance management as a two-way dialogue designed to foster intrinsic growth and address competence gaps, rather than a top-down control mechanism. The

unique opportunity here is for property management to use performance discussions to reinforce the employee's feeling of autonomy and competence, effectively transforming evaluations into development roadmaps that promote long-lasting intrinsic engagement.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

The results of this project provide a practical framework for business and organizational leaders seeking to address employee turnover, quiet quitting, and sustained engagement, with a focus on high-stress, decentralized industries such as property management. The six identified themes function as an integrated model informed by self-determination theory, which suggests that human motivation increases when autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs are fulfilled (de Kao et al., 2022). The application of these themes can lead to a shift in organizational culture from one oriented toward external compliance to one that emphasizes intrinsic engagement, potentially impacting retention rates and business outcomes.

To support relatedness, leaders are advised to treat communication and appreciation as strategic tools for psychological safety and emotional commitment. Findings indicate the importance of transparent, structured communication, leading to a recommendation to establish formal channels for regular dialogue, such as weekly meetings that encourage two-way feedback. This approach may help reduce workplace anxieties and job insecurity following recent layoffs, promoting stability and trust (Lee et al., 2023). Additionally, ongoing and tailored appreciation is suggested to address disengagement among employees who feel undervalued. Moving beyond standardized annual rewards to personalized recognition, tied to specific achievements, has been

identified as beneficial for increasing employee involvement (Buonomo et al., 2024) and is relevant to understanding factors influencing quiet quitting (Koutroumanis & Dixon, 2023).

Enhancing competence involves investments in mentorship and continuous training. Mentorship programs should be formalized, connecting new staff with experienced colleagues and focusing not only on skill transfer but also on participants' professional development (Nguyen, 2023) and on reducing feelings of isolation and burnout (Wei et al., 2022). Training is recommended to extend beyond technical requirements to include soft skills, emotional intelligence, and stress management, supporting resilience and emotional well-being. Such holistic development contributes to maintaining competency (Kao et al., 2022) and preparing employees for client interactions and market changes (Huang et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2023).

Finally, autonomy is supported through adjustments to empowerment practices and performance management processes. Decision-making authority should be decentralized, giving managers and associates more control over their operational environments. Meeting autonomy needs can have a positive effect on performance motivation (Wingrove et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2023). In addition, replacing traditional annual reviews with more frequent, developmental discussions is recommended, focusing on goal-setting and coaching rather than punitive measures. These practices reflect concepts from self-determination theory, specifically autonomy and competence, and can guide employee development (Oh et al., 2023). The implementation of this six-pillar

framework provides organizational leaders with a structured approach to fostering intrinsic motivation and employee engagement.

Implications for Social Change

This project's findings may encourage positive social change by showing that satisfied employees benefit themselves, their families, and their workplaces. Enhanced job fulfillment leads to improved performance, a positive workplace culture, and stronger business growth, attracting top talent and boosting both company and employer brands. As these practices establish a community standard, other businesses may follow suit, resulting in broader, positive effects for employees, families, communities, and industries.

Recommendations for Further Research

One limitation of this research project was that participants may have had a positive bias, meaning they had not experienced high employee turnover and had only worked in a positive work environment. Additional research that should be conducted is a qualitative project examining voluntary turnover by interviewing employees who choose to leave the company and exploring their reasons for doing so. Another project limitation was that personal bias could affect the participants' responses. This issue could be addressed by conducting a quantitative study to measure the types and amounts of personal biases that participants may encounter in this situation. Understanding and addressing such biases can help business leaders manage more effectively. Furthermore, additional research is needed on the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on employee engagement in the workplace. The research addressing this limitation could be conducted

as a qualitative study by interviewing participants to determine their experiences with AI impacting their work. As AI becomes more widespread, some jobs are being replaced, raising concerns about job security (Qin et al., 2025). This uncertainty can influence employee engagement and leadership strategies. The effects of AI on workplace engagement are still unclear.

Conclusion

I conducted this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry project to explore the strategies employed by property management leaders to enhance employee engagement, addressing the business problem that some property management leaders lack effective strategies to strengthen employee engagement. Data were collected through in-depth, semistructured interviews with six property management leaders, supplemented by an extensive analysis of contemporary academic literature and secondary data collected from leading property management websites. The entire data analysis process was prepared and executed through the lens of the self-determination theory, which served as the conceptual framework for interpreting the leaders' reported practices. This framework was crucial for distinguishing between temporary extrinsic incentives and the sustainable intrinsic drivers of motivation, which are rooted in the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (de Kao et al., 2022).

Based on the project findings, I conclude that effective leaders do not rely solely on extrinsic rewards, which often prove inadequate in addressing the concerns of mass layoffs or voluntary turnover. Instead, the most impactful strategies are those intentionally focused on cultivating an organizational environment that satisfies the core

requirements of self-determination theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Successful leaders strengthen engagement by maximizing employee autonomy, granting control over task execution and decision-making authority within their roles (Nguyen, 2023). They develop competence through continuous, targeted training, transparent goal-setting, and recognition of skill mastery (Zhao et al., 2023). Additionally, they foster relatedness by establishing strong social bonds, demonstrating respect for work-life balance, and cultivating a community where employees feel valued as individuals.

The ultimate takeaway from this project for business leaders is the understanding that although employee engagement is intrinsically motivated, there are strategies that managers can implement to create an environment that fosters intrinsic motivation, enabling employee engagement to develop. When managers understand that they cannot force an employee to be more productive, however, by creating an environment where the employee feels a sense of belonging (relatedness) through communication and mentorship, a sense of autonomy through empowerment and appreciation, and a sense of competence through training and performance, the groundwork is laid for employee engagement to strengthen.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What you will do	What you will say—script
Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee	Hello _____. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I appreciate your insight, as I hope is to find some best practices to share with Human Resource leaders who struggle with identifying strategies to help them improve their employee engagement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch for nonverbal cues. • Paraphrase as needed. • Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please describe the role(s) and responsibilities you have held as a leader in the property management industry. 2. Over your career, how have you promoted a culture of continuous improvement and employee engagement? 3. In your experience, how do you define and measure employee engagement within the property management industry? 4. Please share examples of successful strategies or initiatives you have implemented to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace. 5. How have these strategies to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace positively influenced the work environment and business outcomes? 6. What key performance indicators (KPIs) or metrics can be monitored to assess the effectiveness of these strategies? 7. What are the most significant challenges related to strengthening employee engagement and turnover costs in the workplace? 8. How did you overcome those significant challenges related to strengthening employee engagement and turnover costs in the workplace? 9. What lessons were learned from the challenges you encountered? 10. What additional information can you share about the strategies you used to strengthen employee engagement in the workplace?

Wrap up interview thanking participant	Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions. This has been very helpful in my completion of this project.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	Do you mind if I follow up with you in about a week with a summary of what we have discussed for you to review and provide any feedback you have along with anything you would like to add to our discussion?
<p>Follow-up Member Checking Interview</p>	
<p><i>Graphic by Gene E. Fusch, Ph.D. not needed in proposal or research project —just a visual reminder during proposal stage when creating interview protocol.</i></p>	
Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage	Hello _____. Thank you again for taking the time to answer my questions for this research project. I have attached the summary to our discussion. Please review the summary and let me know if there are any corrections needed or if you would like to add anything.

<p>Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question.</p> <p>Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have found— note the information must be related so that you are probing and adhering to the IRB approval.</p> <p>Walk through each question, read the interpretation, and ask: Did I miss anything? Or, What would you like to add?</p>	<p>Below are the questions I asked and a synthesis of my interpretation to your answers.</p>
	<p>1. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed</p>
	<p>2. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed</p>
	<p>3. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed</p>
	<p>4. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed</p>
<p>5. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed</p>	