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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Alicia Hart

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Exploring the Influence of Management Communication Behaviors on Employee Engagement

by

Alicia Janee Hart

MBA, Strayer University, 2010

BS, Hampton University, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

April 2016

Abstract

An engaged workforce can increase organizational productivity and decrease employee turnover. Current research on employee engagement exists, yet little research exists on how the communication behaviors of management affect employee engagement. Guided by the conceptual framework of systems theory and communications theory, an exploration of the influence of management communication behaviors on employee engagement was conducted. A descriptive research design helped explore the influence of management communication behaviors on employee engagement within local, government entities of the Tidewater, Virginia, area. Data included semistructured interviews with 23 participants (11 managers and 12 employees). Data analysis occurred using the modified van Kaam method, which resulted in 4 emergent themes including (a) open, respectful, and transparent communication; (b) positive communication promoted an engaged workforce; (c) favorable communication increased engagement; and (d) negative communication decreased engagement. The results of the study may contribute to positive social change by providing managers a tool to reduce turnover in organizations, which, in turn, may lower the local unemployment rate. Indicators of economic cycles with low rates of unemployment include greater economic activity, stronger demand for workers, and a higher demand for goods and services. A lower unemployment rate may lessen the overall burden on government and society.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my mother, for her unwavering love, guidance and encouragement without which I could not have achieved this goal.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank God, for without His guidance I would not have been able to complete this journey. I would like to thank my parents, Elton and Julie Gibbs and Anthony Hart for instilling the importance of education in my heart from a young age. I would also like to thank the Walden University faculty and staff for all of the support offered to me during this process. I would like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Anne Davis; the positive and continual feedback allowed me to finish this study without much frustration.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Organizational leaders identified employee engagement as a primary concern for organizational leadership (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; Harter & Blacksmith, 2010; Saks, 2006). Researchers in the field of worker engagement have identified communication, primarily between manager and employee, as a primary driver of employee engagement (Gerst, 2013). From a business perspective, a direct relationship between managerial communication and employee engagement may exist, as well as a need for leaders to understand if leadership communication behaviors may optimize employee engagement. In the study, I explored how leadership communication affected employee engagement.

Background of the Problem

Business leaders identified improving employee engagement within organizations as a central priority in leadership (Christian et al., 2011). Well-organized communications systems contribute to employee satisfaction and engagement within organizations (Aburge, 2011). Managers should communicate effectively with their subordinates; however, many workers do not believe their direct supervisors are effective communicators (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012). A lack of productive communication in the manager-employee relationship can lead to low employee engagement and thus affect organizational success and sustainability (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012). The ability to lead and inspire employees to accomplish organizational objectives is a facet of managerial communication (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012). For this reason, organizational

leaders should pay close attention to managerial communication behaviors, styles, and delivery and their effects on worker engagement.

Problem Statement

The inability among managerial staff to establish a connection with their workforce through effective communication can lead to organizational chaos, low productivity, and decreased profitability (Bisel, Messersmith, & Kelley, 2012). Organizational leaders who focus on soft skills, including communication, enjoy 85% higher profits compared with those in firms who are least effective at communicating with their employees (Robles, 2012). The general business problem was that a lack of effective managerial communication deterred organizational profit and created an environment of mistrust between the workforce and management (Timmins, 2011). The specific business problem was that managers often lack skills or strategies for effective communication behaviors with employees, which may ultimately improve employee engagement and organizational productivity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore the effective communication behaviors that managers use to improve employee engagement and organizational productivity. Data collection included 23 semistructured interviews with open-ended questions among 11 managers and 12 nonmanagerial employees from local government public entities in the Tidewater, Virginia, area. The 11 managerial interviews consisted of those in a midlevel managerial capacity; entry level managers and senior management personnel were not included. This population was appropriate for

research pertaining to managerial communication and employee engagement due to their experience with managerial communication and their ability to discuss their experiences surrounding the effect of communication on their organizations.

The results from this study may influence social change by giving business leaders insight into how effective communication practices between managers and their subordinates may improve overall employee engagement and thus increase organizational productivity. The findings from this study may also provide business leaders with examples of strategies that may prevent an adverse shift in organizational climate due to poor communication behaviors.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative, descriptive approach when conducting this study. The descriptive ideal involved detailing the human experience pertaining to a phenomenon from the view of the participant (Bickman & Rog, 1998). In quantitative methodology, measurements of variables occur so that the quantitative data can be analyzed using statistical procedures and means (Yin, 2014). Quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study because I did not test an experimental hypothesis. Mixed-methods research methodology was not appropriate for this study because it combined both qualitative and quantitative forms (Golicic & Davis, 2012). I was seeking to understand the phenomenon of employee engagement and leadership communication. Because I did not use the quantitative method in any form in this research, a mixed methods was not the appropriate method for my research question.

As indicated by Bickman and Rog (1998), the central benefit of the descriptive research design is that it allows researchers to interview a subject about experiences in their natural environment. A descriptive research design was appropriate because the focus of this study was on the experiences and perceptions of participants regarding communications occurring in an organizational setting. I considered using a phenomenological design for this study because phenomenology allows researchers to explore how individuals construct meaning concerning events, in a time-bound manner in a particular social context (Yin, 2014). I chose not to use a phenomenological design because the focus of the study was not on a particular phenomenon but rather on the ongoing phenomenon of communication behavior. I considered a case study design for this study but opted not to use this design. A case is an object studied for a specific reason that is peculiar or particular (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Although a case study design could have worked for this study, I chose not to use a case study design due to documented concerns regarding credibility within qualitative research (Hyett et al., 2014). Grounded theory design is among the most frequently used designs within qualitative research (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). My decision not to use grounded theory design in the study centered on the fact that generating a theory was not the principal aim of my research. Narrative design focuses on studying an individual and collecting data through stories, which creates a story about the individual's experience and the meaning he or she attributes to them (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). I did not use narrative design in the study because I did not want to focus on a sole individual's experience.

Research Question

Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) stated that the point of the central research question is to narrow the purpose to a number of questions within the study. The goal of this research was to determine how the use of effective communication behaviors by organizational leadership affects employee engagement. Hence, the central research question for this study was: What communication behaviors do managers use with their employees to improve employee engagement and productivity?

Interview Questions

The data collection technique for the study was an interview. I used the interview questions to collect the data needed to answer the research question. I used two sets of questions: one for employees and one for managers. The interview questions are below, as well as in Appendix A:

Employee Questions

1. Based on your personal experiences, how do you think employees within your organization communicate effectively?
2. Based on your personal experiences, how would you describe effective communication between an employee and their immediate supervisor within your organization?
3. How has positive communication between you and your immediate supervisor affected your engagement at work? Please provide an example.
4. Does increased communication and/or interaction with your immediate supervisor influence your engagement at work? How?

5. What other ways has communication with your supervisor affected your engagement at work?

Manager Questions

1. Based on your personal experiences, how do you think employees within your organization communicate effectively?
2. Based on your personal experiences, how would you describe effective communication between a manager and their employee(s) within your organization?
3. How has positive communication between you and your employee(s) affected your engagement at work? Please provide an example.
4. Does increased communication and/or interaction with your employee(s) influence your engagement at work? How?
5. What other ways has communication with your employee(s) affected your engagement at work?

Conceptual Framework

The theories relevant to this study were systems theory and communications theory. Systems theory is an alternative approach to (a) understanding, (b) planning, and (c) managing organizations (Ingram, 2013). Systems theory can provide a new perspective for approaching employee engagement through effective communication, offering managers the opportunity to understand the significance of communication on overall employee engagement. Communications theory follows the idea that human behavior connects to heredity and the environment, which includes (a) past experiences,

(b) present circumstances, and (c) future expectations of all the parties involved in information transfer (Duncan, 1973).

von Bertalanffy created general systems theory in 1936, and it was originally intended for the science field; since then, the theory evolved and became relevant to other disciplines (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). von Bertalanffy was both reacting against reductionism and trying to breathe life into the unity of science (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). He emphasized that real systems are open to, and network with, their environments and that real systems can attain qualitatively novel properties through materialization, resulting in continual evolution (von Bertalanffy, 1950).

Systems theory was applicable to this study of managerial communication techniques and employee engagement because organizational success depends on (a) synergy, (b) interrelations, and (c) codependence between different subsystems (von Bertalanffy, 1950). One of the most important elements of an organization, employees compose a vital subsystem that drives organizational success (Ingram, 2013). In this study, the two relevant subsystems were managers and the workforce. The ideas of systems theory that were relevant to the study were (a) leadership communication is integral to employee engagement and (b) employee/manager relations are a vital component of an organizational entity (Ingram, 2013).

Communications theory embraces the thought that the environmental context within which a message is sent and received can significantly influence the fidelity of communication (Duncan, 1973). In any human communication system, forces emerge that inhibit effective meaning transfer (Duncan, 1973). Within a communication system,

mutual understanding is key (Duncan, 1973). Duncan carefully observed that mutual understanding means that an individual responds to communication in a manner relative to his ends. Therefore, when employees and managers understand each other they respond to one another in a more productive, collaborative manner (Duncan, 1973).

Operational Definitions

The definitions provided below ensure the reader has a precise understanding of the context of the terms within the study, avoiding any confusion with any term definitions in other scholarly works.

Communication. Garcia (2012) defined *communication* as an act of will directed toward an existing entity that reacts. Effective communication is intended, goal-oriented, and coherent (Garcia, 2012).

Communication competence. Keyton et al. (2013) defined *communication competence* as communication effectiveness within an organizational setting.

Engagement. Mone, Eisinger, Guggenheim, Price, and Stine (2011) defined *engagement* as an employee's sense of reason and focused energy which is evident to others through the efforts of personal initiative, flexibility, and diligence directed toward the organization's goals.

Employee. Rodell et al. (2016) defined *employee* based on the Internal Revenue Service's terms and definitions. Rodell et al. classified employees in two ways; common-law and statutory employee. A common-law employee is any individual who performs services for an employer and controls the completion date of the activity (Rodell et al., 2016). A statutory employee is any officer of an organization or any

person who, under the usual common law rules used to determine the employer-employee relationship, has the status of an employee (Rodell et al., 2016). For the purposes of this study, the statutory employee definition was appropriate.

Manager. Boykins, Campbell, Moore, and Nayyar (2013) defined *manager* as an individual who implements the management process. Boykins et al. (2013) noted that a manager is one who builds a rapport with employees, promotes teamwork, and has the desire to further organizational goals.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

An assumption is a fact considered true but not verified (Martin & Parmar, 2012). There were three assumptions with this study:

1. All interview participants will be open and honest in their responses to the questions asked (Anyan, 2013).
2. The interview questions are relevant for this study and participant responses should provide the necessary information needed to answer the research question posed.
3. The sample population selected for this study will provide information via the interview relevant to the study topic and contribute to the overall business knowledge of this topic.

Limitations

Potential weaknesses in the study are limitations (Yeatman, Trinitapoli, & Hayford, 2013). There were two limitations in this study:

1. The sample population interviewed will be limited to those who respond to the interview request.
2. The validity of the findings relies upon the responses received during the interview process.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the bounds or scope of the study (Thomas, Silverman, & Nelson, 2015). There were two delimitations within this study.

1. The scope of the study is limited to the Tidewater, Virginia, area. Tidewater includes the cities of Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Suffolk, Portsmouth, and Virginia Beach, Virginia.
2. The boundaries of the study include interviewing those in managerial and subordinate nonmanagerial capacities.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

My intent was to produce insight on how effective communication behaviors of managers within an organization can affect employee engagement, in addition to positively affecting overall organizational climate and organizational productivity. The results of the study may contribute to improved communication practices within organizations, particularly between subordinates and the managers to whom they report. The results of the study revealed how communication affects the manager-employee relationship, which in turn may influence overall organizational performance. If the participant responses demonstrate a connection between managerial communication and

employee engagement, organizations may make the decision to focus more attention and training on the topic of managerial communication.

Business leaders may gain insight regarding the influence of communication behaviors, both effective and ineffective, on overall employee engagement. The application of beneficial business lessons may occur when business leaders gain an understanding of how managerial communication affects employee engagement. This understanding, in turn, could lead to improved employee engagement and a more productive organization as a whole.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of the doctoral study have the potential to influence social change. A productive organization may contribute further to society in a positive manner. If employees engage in their work, turnover within an organization may decrease (Siddiqi, 2013). Lower turnover in organizations may lower the national unemployment rate; as employees perform better, a reduction in turnover (voluntary or involuntary) may occur. A lower unemployment rate may lessen the overall burden on government and society.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The research question for this study was: How do effective managerial communication techniques contribute to employee engagement within an organization? Employee engagement remains a critical concern for organizations, and thus organizational leaders are under increasing pressure to ensure their workforce remains engaged (Kapoor & Meachem, 2012). Managers face the challenge of keeping their employees engaged using effective communication techniques.

The purpose of this literature review was to provide an overview of relevant studies addressing (a) managerial communication, (b) communication theories, and (c) employee engagement. I used journal articles, books, and other scholarly sources within this study, with 85% of the 175 total sources published between 2012 and 2016. In addition, 91% of the 175 total sources are peer-reviewed. Of the total 175 total sources, I used 77 sources within the literature review, of which 71 (92.2%) were peer-reviewed articles and 69 (89.6%) were published between 2012 and 2016. In addition, the literature review included four seminal sources (5%) and two non-peer-reviewed articles (2.5%). I accessed source information through the Walden University library (using databases such as ProQuest and EBSCOhost), as well as from Google Scholar and other university library sources. While conducting the search for peer-reviewed sources, I used the terms *communication*, *employee engagement*, *communication theories*, *communication techniques*, *managerial communication*, and *organizational communication*.

I focused the literature review on two main themes: (a) managerial communication, and (b) employee engagement. The first section includes an overview of managerial communication. This section covers the (a) importance of managerial communication within organizations, (b) various managerial communication techniques, and (c) managerial communication with employees. A review of employee engagement (to include factors of engagement) occurs in the second section. This section includes studies that delve into (a) employee engagement within organizations, (b) what causes employees to disengage, and (c) how communication plays a role in overall engagement.

Theories

The two theories that I used as a foundation for this study relating to managerial communication were systems theory and communications theory. von Bertalanffy (1950) was the creator of systems theory and stressed that real systems work in conjunction with their surroundings. In addition, von Bertalanffy noted systems could attain qualitatively original properties through materialization, resulting in continual evolution. Rather than reducing an entity to the properties of its parts or essentials, systems theory focuses on the collection of and relations between the parts that attach them into a whole (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). Mulej et al. (2004) suggested that there are seven principles of systems theory thinking relevant to organizations. The seven principles include (a) interdependence; (b) relations; (c) openness; (d) interconnectedness; (e) complexity; (f) attractors; and (g) synergy, system, and synthesis.

Buble (2012) noted that interdependence related to the various systems within an organization that can work autonomously to complete a task. Buble stated that the ability for departments to work together toward a common goal was the foremost aspect of the principle of relations. When an organization allows employees to express suggestions and viewpoints, openness and interconnectedness occur (Mulej et al., 2004). Mulej et al. mentioned that the complicated decisions organizations make at times referred to the complexity of the organization. Attractors are any influential force within the organization (Mulej et al., 2004). When relations between groups within an organization lead to new ideas and momentum, there is evidence of synergy, systems, and synthesis

(Mulej et al., 2004). Mulej et al. explained that the seven principles allows for a holistic view of systems thinking, which previous authors had not noted.

Duncan (1973) asserted that communications theory embraces the notion that the environmental context within which a message is delivered and received can have significant influences on the fidelity of communication. Ludwig et al. (2014) furthered research on communication theory with the discussion of communication accommodation. Ludwig et al. explained that that during communication, individuals will try to accommodate or change their style of speaking to others. Change of communication style is accomplished in two ways: divergence and convergence. Groups who identify strongly with their race or ethnicity frequently use divergence to highlight group identity. Convergence occurs when there is a strong need for social acceptance, frequently from powerless individuals. Within organizations, individuals will often practice convergence rather than divergence (Ludwig et al., 2014).

In contrast to the concepts of divergence or convergence with regard to communication, Ng and Feldman (2013) discussed symbolic interaction in regards to communication theory. Ng and Feldman suggested that individuals are motivated to act based on the meanings they assign to (a) others, (b) things, and (c) occurrences. Further, meaning includes the language that people use both with (a) friends and family, (b) colleagues, and (c) in private thought (Ng & Feldman, 2013). Ng and Feldman concluded that language and communication allow people to develop a sense of self and to interact with others in the community.

Managerial Communication

Communication is woven into the fabric of most organizational structures. Within an organization, communication is a primary component of organizational success (Emanoil, Ramona, & Lucia, 2013). Members of an organization spend the bulk of their time communicating with one another; this is particularly true of manager and subordinate communication (Emanoil et al., 2013). Further, communication within an organization is a network activity. Hossain, Murshed, and Uddin (2013) contended that an organizational communication system is a professional set of relationships between individuals within an organization. The flow of organizational information creates various types of communicative relationships among the participating entities (Hossain et al., 2013). The communication relationships eventually create an overall pattern within the organization (Hossain et al., 2013).

Understanding the effect that managerial communication has on employee engagement is paramount to organizational success, as a breakdown in communication can lead to reduced productivity throughout the organization (Bisel et al., 2012). However, Emanoil et al. (2013) indicated that not all companies have fully understood the role of communication, being that managers tend to focus on obtaining immediate profit rather than on other aspects of a successful organization, such as the influence of communication on employee performance and engagement.

Voinea, Busu, Opran, and Vladutescu (2015) stated that managerial communication is not only the art of conveying and understanding information but also the art of allowing employees to understand management decisions that propel employees

to meet organizational objectives. Mahajan, Bishop, and Scott (2012) agreed with Voinea et al. (2015), and defined *top management communication* as the extent of lucidity and wholeness in the messages sent by organizational leadership to employees. Employee involvement is the level to which employees supply significant inputs into company choices (Mahajan et al., 2012). Mahajan et al. theorized that organizational leadership communication and employee contribution are useful in synchronizing employee efforts and in encouraging employees to achieve organizational objectives.

Whereas Mahajan et al. (2012) viewed communication as a managerial responsibility, Uusi-Rauva and Nurkka (2010) discussed communication with employees as a corporate responsibility. Uusi-Rauva and Nurkka outlined the types of internal messages pertaining to a company's environment-related corporate social responsibility (CSR) that would be most effectual in engaging employees. Uusi-Rauva and Nurkka studied how environmentally active employees are internal communicators, used to spread environmental activity within the organization. Uusi-Rauva and Nurkka noted the importance of assisting managers with understanding how they can communicate effectively to encourage all employees to consider the environment in their jobs. Adleman (2012) completed a study pertaining to communication in an attempt to understand specific chief executive officer (CEO) communication behaviors and actions in relation to promoting upward employee communication. Although CEOs differ from frontline managers, they often set the tone for managerial communication within an organization (Adleman, 2012). Adleman described the act of encouraging communication within the work environment as beneficial to organizational culture.

An aspect of encouraging effective managerial communication is to ensure that communication flows correctly throughout the organization (Deepa & Karthikeyan, 2012). A central component of directing employees is communication methodology and strategy used within an organization (Deepa & Karthikeyan, 2012). Deepa and Karthikeyan (2012) researched best practices needed to achieve long-term success within an organization. The primary responsibility of managerial communication is to (a) improve, (b) connect, and (c) direct the capacity and energy of their employees toward worthy and valuable ends (Deepa & Karthikeyan, 2012). Daniela (2013) defined *internal communication* as the communication stream between individuals within the boundaries of an organization. Daniela stated that effective managerial communication in conjunction with efficient management practices provided a level of safety in any domain of activity within an organization. Organizational communication is not visible outside of the ranks of management yet represents a fundamental component of organizational success (Daniela, 2013). The lack of communication can lead to changes in organizational management on one hand and, on the other, the lack of skills and organizational culture regarding these components invalidates the communication process (Daniela, 2013).

In agreement with Daniela's (2013) research, Polito (2013) also stressed the importance of effective communication during difficult conversations. Polito mentioned that an interest and need exists to improve the skills of conducting difficult conversations in the workplace. Theories and strategies abound, yet none seems to have found the magic formula with universal appeal and success. Polito stated that best practices and

evidence-based management guide organizations to the decision that quality improvement dictates effective communication, even when difficult. Polito noted that mastering the skills of conducting difficult conversations is critical to keeping lines of communication open and productive. Polito concluded that communication between managers and employees that is successful might help to avert confrontation through employee (a) engagement, (b) commitment, and (c) appropriate corresponding behavior. Riddell (2013) varied slightly from Polito's opinion regarding conducting difficult conversations. Whereas Polito expressed the thought that best practices contributed to success when delivering a challenging message, Riddell suggested that despite how well crafted the message may seem, the conversation will only be well received by an engaged workforce.

Iyer and Israel (2012) expressed that managerial communication tends to be more noticeable during times of crisis. Iyer and Israel investigated the role communication satisfaction has on overall employee engagement. The frame of reference used involves communication techniques used during crises, such as the recent global recession. Iyer and Israel examined various components of organizational communication and how those elements influence factors of employee engagement. Iyer and Israel concluded that organization communication has a positive effect on overall employee engagement. Lowe (2012) furthered the discussion of the connection between organizational communication and employee engagement. Lowe asserted that human resources departments increasingly use organizational communication as a metric in measuring employee engagement, evidence that communication is a factor of employee engagement.

Grandien and Johanson (2012) investigated the development and growth of the communication management purpose in organizations in relation to the concept of institutionalization. The role of communication by executives and managers fluctuates between organizations and can change within an organization (Grandien & Johanson, 2012). Grandien and Johanson conceptualized institutionalization of communication management as a process and developed a speculative framework that integrated significant factors that influenced and standardized the process. The factors that Grandien and Johanson studied included (a) organizational structure, (b) social capital, and (c) perceptions of the management profession. Grandien and Johanson concluded that the institutionalization of the communication process within organizations influences the development of the managerial communication process. Einwiller and Boenjik (2012) supported the findings of Grandien and Johanson, explaining that organizations whose leadership encourages communication management are more successful in the communications realm than organizations that do not support communication management.

Managerial Communication Behaviors

There are various communication behaviors that managers may use when (a) directing, (b) counseling, and (c) encouraging employees (Dasgupta, Suar, & Singh, 2013). Dasgupta et al. mentioned that the behavior used by management may play a critical role in the supervisor-employee relationship, to include possibly affecting the engagement level of the employee. I reviewed managerial communication behaviors commonly used in organizations in the next section.

Business leaders place value on communication behaviors used in managerial communication (Kirzinger, Weber, & Johnson, 2012). Kirzinger et al. found that the communication behaviors of leaders acted as a predictor of management decisions and actions. Hassan and Hatmaker (2012) investigated managerial communication behavior and the manager-subordinate relationship. The manager-subordinate communication relationship is a function of the quantity and quality of interactions examined in terms of communication constructs (Hassan & Hatmaker, 2012). Hassan & Hatmaker concluded that using effective managerial communication behaviors with employees creates a harmonious working relationship.

Miller (2013) reviewed the role organizational demographics played in managerial communication behavior. Miller discussed how evolving demographics within an organization could change managerial communication behavior. Changing demographics result in (a) a multi-cultural workforce, (b) employees with the increasing responsibility of caring for aging family members, and (c) employees with varied sexual orientations, races, ages, and genders (Miller, 2013). All of the noted changes force managers to find ways to communicate the organizational message in such a way that all employees can understand and relate to the message (Miller, 2013).

Smith (2012) discussed communication behaviors that are useful in the organizational setting, to include those from a managerial perspective. Smith documented information on integrated communication management from its existing debates on definitions and models to research-based understanding of how integration functions. Smith also investigated how communication management works at an

organization with a high level of incorporation. Smith sought to provide insights for communication managers on implementing thriving integrated communication programs. Smith conducted a qualitative single case study of an ideal company case of integrated communication, using three data sources: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Smith elaborated that communication integration, from the standpoint of managerial communication, operates naturally through cross-functional connections and knowledge sharing, and utilizes an open company structure in which integration occurs organically.

Waldeck, Durante, Helmuth, and Marcia (2012) continued the conversation of communication behaviors managers use that leads to organizational success. Waldeck et al. (2012) identified six core competencies for effective communication to include (a) relational and interpersonal skills, (b) mediated communication skills, (c) intergroup communication competence, (d) ability to communicate with enthusiasm, (e) nonverbal communication skills, and (f) speaking and listening skills.

Kiyomiya (2012) examined aspects of the method and approach of honest leadership communication. Kiyomiya noted that organizational deception allowed an organization to (a) conceal, (b) manipulate, and (c) distort information. Kiyomiya stressed the importance of managers being forthright when communicating instead of employing deceptive techniques. Managers should use the communication techniques of being (a) clear, (b) concise, (c) honest, and (d) consistent in daily interactions with employees (Kiyomiya, 2012). In addition, Men (2012) mentioned that employees preferred face-to-face, personal communication. Employees favored the in-person

communication channel due to the belief that deceit or honesty becomes evident during face-to-face communication (Men, 2012).

Burris (2012) investigated the connection between managerial response to personnel who voiced concerns and the type of voice exhibited by the employee. Burris defined voice as whether or not employees selected to express opinions in a challenging or supportive manner. Burris stated that managers had a tendency to categorize employees who spoke in a challenging manner as bad performers who put their needs above the goals of the organization. Burris also described that managers felt the opposite regarding employees who spoke in a supportive tone while expressing ideas to management. Burris concluded when a manager is aware of employee voice, managers can further shape effective communication behaviors. Burris, Detert, & Romney (2013) also expressed the importance of employee voice within an organization. Burris, Detert, & Romney (2013) indicated that an employer, in exchange for granting workers the opportunity to use employee voice, can engage employees by facilitating better communication between management and staff. Grant (2013) continued the conversation on the connection between management communication and employee voice. Grant asserted that intense emotions such as (a) frustration, (b) anger, and (c) dissatisfaction often drive employees to use their voice. Yet the very emotions that spur employees to express voice may compromise the ability to do so constructively, preventing managers from reacting favorably (Grant, 2013).

Managerial Interpersonal Skills

A manager's interpersonal skills also play an integral part of communication behaviors. Khan and Ahmad (2012) analyzed managerial interpersonal skills (ability to motivate, communicate, and build a team) and their effectiveness at different levels of management. Khan and Ahmad found that a manager's ability to motivate employees via communication is a vital interpersonal skill. Continuing the discussion of interpersonal skills, Robles (2012) investigated the importance of soft skills in leadership, to include communication. Robles discussed the point that soft skills are internal qualities, better known as people skills, and personal attributes that an individual possesses. Organizational leaders consider soft skills an attribute in job applicants, particularly those within the realm of management (Robles, 2012). Robles identified these top 10 soft skills as essential to business executives. Robles concluded that (a) integrity, (b) communication, (c) courtesy, (d) responsibility, (e) social skills, (f) positive attitude, (g) professionalism, (h) flexibility, (i) teamwork, and (j) work ethic were the top 10 desired soft skills in managerial employees.

The effectiveness of managerial communication behaviors within an organization may be a component of overall organizational well-being. Kyriazis, Couchman, and Johnson (2012) investigated the psychosocial antecedents of communication, trust, and relationship effectiveness. Kyriazis et al. conducted research on the connection between how managers communicate new product development projects to staff members and the effect on overall organizational effectiveness. Kyriazis et al. indicated that communicators must develop individual knowledge and skills to be efficient in

contributing to organizational effectiveness. Lee (2012) provided a similar viewpoint regarding communication and the assessment made that communication techniques are an aspect of organizational success. Lee noted that with successful organizational communication, company performance increased as employees willingly adapted to organizational changes.

Hamdi and Rajablu (2012) focused on the function of supervisor-worker communication and leadership style on organizational commitment of nursing personnel in the selected hospital. A total of 134 members of nursing staff of a major hospital in Tehran, Iran completed a questionnaire on communication and leadership style (Hamdi & Rajablu, 2012). Hamdi and Rajablu mentioned a noteworthy contribution of communication exchange in effective commitment, considering that mutual communication showed a significant contribution in affective commitment. Hamdi and Rajablu concluded that shaping managerial communication techniques include the consideration given to the importance of communication with subordinates and the overall quality of leadership within the organization.

Crisis Communication Behaviors

Managerial communication behaviors are evident in times of crisis (Creelman, 2012). Creelman researched best methods of how to compose and communicate negative messages within an organization. Creelman mentioned that a debate revolves around whether or not to use a direct or indirect approach when having to deliver bad news to employees and stakeholders. Many managers favored an indirect approach, wanting to streamline the information before giving a message to the masses (Creelman, 2012).

Garcia (2012), in agreement with Creelman, elaborated on how managers can use their communication behaviors to plan for a desired reaction out of their employees. Garcia investigated the effect of open communication with employees, specifically in times of crises.

When organization leadership fails to communicate properly with employees, especially in times of crises or disaster, there are consequences that often are irreversible. Garcia (2012) referred to communication as a discipline organizational leadership masters to avoid the perils of poor interaction between company leadership and subordinate employees. Garcia concluded that effective communication behaviors include learning two critical skills; (a) gaining current and thorough knowledge of the intended audience (i.e., employees), and (b) understanding how to deliver the message to achieve the desired reaction.

Mazzei and Ravanzzani (2011) examined the success of in-house organizational communication during a calamity by reviewing how Italian companies communicated to employees during the 2008–2009 international financial crises. Mazzei and Ravanzzani used interviews with business communication leaders and employees and drew data from two participant groups and a survey involving internal communicators. Mazzei and Ravanzzani indicated a missing connection between what organizational leaders meant to communicate and what employees perceived. For example, communication managers (a) designed excellent communication strategies, (b) made extensive use of authorized instruments, and (c) depicted the crisis as an opening to increased success. Mazzei and Ravanzzani concluded that effective managerial communication behaviors include sound

listening skills and the delivery of a clear message that the audience can understand. Furthering the position of Mazzei and Ravanzzani, Veil and Husted (2012) expanded upon crises communication behaviors. Communication with (a) compassion, (b) honesty, (c) candor, and (d) openness are all best practices effective managers utilize when delivering messages during a crisis.

Employee Engagement

Sharma and Kaur (2014) described employee engagement as an approach to organizational success. Sharma and Kaur explained how employee engagement (a) contributed to organizational performance, (b) improved profitability, (c) led to customer satisfaction, (d) allowed employees to make a noteworthy contribution to the organization, and (e) improved long-term financial performance of an organization. Church (2013) asserted that employee engagement is the *Holy Grail* of organizational success and for this reason should be a priority for managers. Human capital is an asset, as employee effort and performance determine business success (Handa & Gulati, 2014). Situational and personal antecedents influence an individual's performance in the workplace; as a result, managers need to understand the forces behind employee engagement (Handa & Gulati, 2014).

Ho, Wong, and Lee (2011) explained that an employee has to possess two types of passions for full work engagement; harmonious passion and obsessive passion. Ho et al. further detailed that passion is a strong inclination towards an activity that employees find significant. Berens (2013) noted three elements of employee engagement; (a) management understood what mattered most to employees, (b) an awareness of what

created positive employee engagement, and (c) the ability for an organization to see the big picture in regards to keeping employees engaged. Sahoo and Mishra (2012) described employee engagement as the primary concept for understanding and improving individual and organizational performance. Employee engagement is vital because organizations are demanding more from their workers than ever before (Sahoo & Mishra, 2012). Sahoo and Mishra stated that the ability to keep workers engaged is a facet of organizational success. Sahoo and Mishra discussed that there is limited academic literature on the subject, and as a result, insufficient knowledge about how management influences employee engagement.

Carter and Baghurst (2014) contended that an attitude of servant leadership affected employee engagement. Carter and Baghurst noted that servant leadership is a leadership philosophy pertaining to the concerns of (a) ethics, (b) customer experience, and (c) employee engagement while creating a unique organizational culture where leaders and employees collaborate to reach organizational goals without positional or authoritative power. With employees viewed as one of the greatest assets of organizations, maintaining loyal, productive employees while balancing profits becomes a challenge for leaders, and drives the need to understand employee engagement drivers (Carter & Baghurst, 2014). Transformational leadership is another leadership philosophy that influences employee engagement (Perko, Kinnunen, & Feldt, 2014). A high level of transformational leadership was associated with elevated levels of employee self-efficacy and perceived meaningfulness of the work, in turn improving employee engagement (Perko et al., 2014). Tuss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, and Delbridge (2013) argued that there

are three stages of employee engagement. The three phases discussed by Tuss et al. (2013) were (a) vigor, (b) dedication, and (c) absorption.

Tillott, Walsh, and Moxham (2013) characterized engagement by (a) energy, (b) involvement, and (c) positive attitude in the workplace. Men (2014) noted that highly engaged employees (a) attempt optimal output daily, (b) put organizational interests first, (c) offer innovative ideas and suggestions, (d) eagerly contribute to the organization, and (e) find joy in work. To the contrary, disengaged employees (a) complete the minimum amount of work to stay employed, (b) are resistant to change, (c) allow negative attitudes to infiltrate the organization, and (d) view work as a chore (Men, 2012). Pater and Lewis (2012) further discussed disengaged employees as those who passively withdraw from work and display active resistance to new ideas.

Mone, Eisinger, Guggenheim, Price, and Stine (2011) investigated if performance management improved employee engagement. There are five major activities within performance management that promote the engagement of employees (Mone et al., 2011). These activities included (a) setting clear performance goals, (b) continual communication and feedback from organizational leaders, (c) the completion of appraisals, (d) managing employee development, and (e) the formation of trust within the organization. Delving deeper into employee engagement, Karanges, Beatson, Johnston, and Lings (2014) opined that employee engagement relates to (a) higher productivity, (b) lower attrition, and (c) enhanced organizational repute. While drivers of employee engagement consist of (a) apparent support, (b) job characteristics, and (c) value equivalence, managerial communication appears to influence both the process and

preservation of employee engagement efforts. Communication is an integral part of the performance of employees (Karanges et al., 2014). Aguinis, Gottfredson, and Joo (2012) proposed a need for fundamental change in performance management perception. Aguinis et al. mentioned that rather than attempting to improve the effectiveness of performance management by changing features of the formal system (e.g., steps, tools, and processes), increased focus should be placed on improving manager–employee communication and aspects of the manager–employee relationship that are foundational for effective performance management.

Aburge (2011) stated that businesses increasing depend on communications for their success since a well-organized communication system stimulates worker satisfaction in organizations. Aburge examined three Ghanaian organizations in the private sector using a quantitative survey of 90 respondents to gain information. Aburge concluded that there was a significant relationship between efficient organizational communication and employee satisfaction and engagement. Sinha (2012) expanded upon Aburge's position relating to the importance of communication within an organization. Sinha explained that good and effective communication is essential for managing business relations. Business communication not only involves communicating with external entities, but also with the human capital within the organization.

Aburge (2011) also mentioned that organizational communication has a positive effect on employee performance. Employees preferred good leadership communication behavior because it increased personal productivity in the workplace (Aburge, 2011). Aburge concluded that organizations in the business sector will achieve their objectives if

they pay proper attention to the communication processes through efficient organizational communication in the workplace. Harrison (2012) agreed with Aburge's assessment and discussed the significance of communication in persuading employees to become engaged in work. Harrison made the connection between managerial communication and engagement, stating that managers must keep the lines of communication open with employees at all times. Harrison asserted that listening to and implementing employee feedback is a facet of maintaining an engaged workforce.

Wang and Hsieh (2013) examined the effect of genuine managerial leadership on employee engagement via employee trust. Wang and Hsieh collected data from employees within the top 1,000 manufacturing companies in Taiwan. The results of the investigation displayed consistency between manager's words and actions. When employees felt an established trust with management, the willingness to communicate was greater and engagement increased (Wang & Hsieh, 2013). Organizational controls further facilitate employee trust within an organization (Joy & Poonamallee, 2014). Well-implemented control systems within an organization encourage employee trust whereas inconsistent, overly rigid, or untrustworthy communication behavior can undermine employee trust in the organization (Joy & Poonamallee, 2014).

Memon, Salleh, Baharom, and Harun (2014) discussed the role of the organizational environment on employee engagement. Memon et al. opined that both the employee and organizational environment could significantly affect an individual's behaviors and thus organizational outcomes. Memon et al. noted that employee-organization fit acted as a predictor of job satisfaction and organizational commitment,

mediated by employee engagement. Cardus (2013) reviewed five levers that contributed to higher employee engagement. Cardus explained that employee engagement does not fall on the employee alone but is a systems solution. The five levers to improve engagement Cardus presented are (a) competent leaders, (b) broad goals established within context, (c) objective measures of progress and regress, (d) necessary resources to complete the job, and (e) sufficient autonomy to complete the best work possible.

Russ (2012) researched the relationship between communication apprehension and learning preferences within an organizational setting. Russ found a significant correlation between organizational personnel's high communication apprehension and a distinct preference for the reflective observation-learning mode. Employees have very diverse learning styles and assimilation of those styles within an organizational setting can be difficult (Russ, 2012). Russ concluded that communication apprehension negatively affects an employee's professional development and workplace effectiveness. Byrne, Flood, and Shanahan (2012) complimented Russ's research on communication apprehension. Byrne et al. discussed communication apprehension as a significant factor that prohibits a person from willingly being able to communicate. Communication apprehension is a contributor to poor communication skills within an organization (Byrne et al., 2012).

Welch (2011) investigated the evolution of employee engagement and the role of communication in enhancing employee engagement. Welch divided the stages of engagement evolution as (a) the pre-wave era (pre-1990s), (b) wave 1 (1990-1999), (c) wave 2 (2000-2005), and (d) wave 3 (2006-2010). Welch indicated each stage shows

progression in the research behind communication and employee engagement. Welch detailed that there is a connection between employee engagement and managerial communication, and thus the communications discipline needs more research. Furthering the research conducted by Welch, Sarangi and Srivastava (2012) provided insight on how communication affects employee engagement and organizational success. Sarangi and Srivastava detailed that engaged employee's drive company profitability and contributed to an overall calm organizational climate. Drivers of employee engagement include organizational culture and communication strategies (Sarangi & Srivastava, 2012). Sarangi and Srivastava found that the role of managerial communication is a significant predictor of employee engagement. In agreement with Sarangi and Srivastava, He, Zhu, and Zheng (2014) also noted that employee engagement was a predictor of organizational success. He, Zhu, and Zheng stated that employee engagement was a significant factor in organizational performance. Low employee engagement is a challenge for organizations, as employee engagement has a direct effect on organizational outcomes and performance (He, Zhu, & Zheng, 2014). He, Zhu, and Zheng implied that changes made to management practices to increase employee satisfaction might increase business-unit outcomes, including profit.

Shuck and Reio (2013) discussed how poor workforce engagement could be detrimental to organizations and overall organizational productivity. Shuck and Reio stated that low employee engagement could lead to a decrease in employee well-being and productivity, which in turn can negatively influence an organization. Yong, Nasterback, Pluto, Lang, and Oberlinner (2013) researched work related stress among

employees within organizations to discern the effect of work-related stress in business entities. Yong et al. (2013) stated that workplace stress can influence employee productivity through increased absenteeism due to ill health or presenteeism, which is when an employee is present at work but with reduced productivity. Presenteeism imposed a direct economic cost on employers (Yong et al., 2013). Furthermore, a negative association between job-related stress and work ability occurred in diverse occupational groups, along with having a significant predictive value for disability and early retirement (Yong et al., 2013).

Prottas (2013) expanded upon research of work stress and engagement. Prottas hypothesized that employee perception of their manager's behavior would have an effect on overall engagement. Using data from the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce, Prottas investigated reports by workers of moral anguish and their thoughts of their manager's behavioral integrity (BI). Prottas stated that BI positively relates to job satisfaction, job engagement, health, and life satisfaction and unconstructively to stress, retention likelihood, and work-to-family conflict while moral distress inversely relates to those outcomes. Prottas concluded the magnitudes of relationships with job satisfaction, job engagement, and life satisfaction was more significant with BI than with moral distress.

Day (2011) examined the effect of open communication regarding employee pay on overall pay satisfaction. Day hypothesized that the relationships linking pay communication and pay satisfaction are present because fairness perceptions mediate the relationship between pay and communication. According to Day, pay communiqué is of

significance to the leadership of public division organizations, where many aspects of the compensation scheme are in the public domain and lead to misunderstandings without adequate communication. Day explained that employees who work for organizations without proper communication are less likely to remain engaged in daily work. Complementing Day's communication research, Fulmer and Gelfand (2012) investigated the relationship between organizational communication and trust. In particular, Fulmer and Gelfand examined the importance of trust across multiple organizational levels. Organizational communication and trust served as a linchpin for (a) negotiation, (b) leadership practices, (c) team processes, (d) human resource management, (e) organizational change, and (f) strategic alliances (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012).

Sahoo and Mishra (2012) investigated the employee experience at Pennsylvania State University and created a framework of what motivates employee engagement. The framework included factors of employee engagement such as (a) commitment, (b) organizational behavior, and (c) motivation. Sahoo and Mishra found that effects of high employee engagement included (a) increased trust within the firm, (b) a sense of loyalty to the organization, and (c) and commitment in regards to company goals. Michel, Wayne, and Liao (2015) discussed organization factors that affect employee engagement, the main purpose being to establish the condition of employee engagement and the factors that act as a hindrance to better employee engagement. Michel et al. substantiated that there are several obstacles to improved employee engagement. Some of the hindrances include organizational infrastructure, multidimensional discussions, managerial communication and personal relations with corporate office employees,

review of appropriate support, orientation through induction programs, and inadequate interaction with peers from other locations/offices (Michel et al., 2015).

Kassing, Piemonte, Goman, and Mitchell (2012) examined how dissent expression linked to employees' self-reports of work engagement and plan to resign. Kassing et al. discovered that employees who expressed opposition or displeasure at the job were more likely to leave than employees who did not express dissent at the workplace. Kassing et al. voiced that resistance expression related to both workers job engagement and their overall intention to quit from their current position. Kassing et al. also stated that there was an inherent difference between dissent expressed to supervisors and coworkers associated with work engagement versus dissent shown to non-management groups associated with intention to leave. Additional analysis revealed that for managers, work engagement was primarily a function of refraining from expressing disagreement (Kassing, Piemonte, Goman, & Mitchell, 2012).

A question raised by the business world is how to measure employee engagement. Gerst (2013) mentioned that the United States currently spends more than $720 million annually to improve employee engagement. Gerst stated that a number of organizations will view, and at times purchase, research regarding the means of measuring employee engagement. Gerst discussed that some of the research obtained by the organizations is not scientifically valid research. Gerst indicated that organizations should ensure that the research collected is valid and is not a marketing tool used to promote a new training product or service. Gerst mentioned that an organization must

understand the measurement tool used to gauge employee engagement to make sound decisions pertaining to engagement.

The literature review covered relevant current and past studies on the topics of managerial communication and employee engagement. Topics discussed included (a) managerial communication, (b) managerial communication behaviors, (c) managerial interpersonal skills, (d) crises communication behaviors, and (e) employee engagement. In addition, included in the literature review were systems theory and communications theory. The literature review provided the basis for emphasis on managerial communication behaviors within an organization to increase employee engagement. Managerial communication (a) style, (b) delivery, and (c) behaviors that are effective may have an effect on the productivity of employees, and thus an effect on an organization as a whole.

Transition

In Section 1, I introduced the subject of managerial communication and the possible effect on employee engagement. Section 1 included a discussion of the general and specific business problems of the study. Provided in Section 1 was (a) the nature of the study, (b) definitions of key terms, and (c) potential business and social implications. Section 1 concluded with a review of the literature.

In Section 2, I lay out the procedures for conducting the study. Within Section 2, I review the purpose statement and discussed (a) the role of the researcher, (b) participants, (c) research methodology and design, (d) population and sampling, (e) ethical research, (f) data collection ,and (g) reliability and validity. In Section 3, I discuss

(a) findings of the study, (b) application to professional practice, (c) implications for social change, (d) recommendations for action, (e) recommendations for further study, and (f) reflections.

Section 2: The Project

I employed a qualitative methodology, using an interview as the research instrument, to investigate the stated research question. The selection of the qualitative methodology was due to my desire to understand the learned experiences of the participants.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore effective communication behaviors managers use to improve employee engagement and organizational productivity. Data collection included 23 semistructured interviews using open-ended questions conducted with managers and nonmanagerial employees from local government public entities in the Tidewater, Virginia, area. This population was appropriate for research pertaining to managerial communication behaviors and employee engagement due to their personal experiences with managerial communication and their ability to discuss their experiences surrounding the effect of communication on their organization. In addition, the diverse sample provided various perspectives.

The results from this study may influence social change by giving business leaders insight into how effective communication behaviors between managers and their subordinates may improve overall employee engagement and thus increase organizational productivity. The findings from this study may also provide business leaders with examples of strategies that may prevent an adverse shift in organizational climate due to poor communication behaviors.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, my responsibility included creating the questions used for the participant interviews. I requested participation from those in subordinate positions and managerial capacities in public industry to complete an interview for the study. I also conducted the interviews, in person, with all participants; analyzing the data obtained from the interviews and interpreting the results. Interviews provided the data needed to answer the research question because the interview question structure gauged the participant's experience. Marshall and Rossman (2015) stated that a researcher must identify any bias, including background and values, which have the potential to shape interpretations during research collection. Analyzing the results included (a) compiling and transcribing all interviews, (b) deducing the similarities and differences between the interviews, and (c) using the interview data to identify themes regarding managerial communication techniques and employee engagement within an organization. The final responsibility as the researcher was ensuring that I met ethical considerations when completing the research (Belmont Report, 1979). Respect for human participants incorporates two ethical convictions; treat individuals as autonomous agents and those with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection (Belmont Report, 1979). I conducted my research in accordance with the guidelines of the Belmont Report.

As the researcher, I completed a thorough exploration to create a meaningful contribution to business literature, particularly in the area of managerial communication. As someone who has worked in both employee and managerial capacities, my connection

to the topic is my career within the public sector. My home is near the location of the study, which was another connection to the geographic location of the participants.

Participants

Participants from the Tidewater area of Virginia completed interviews for the doctoral study. Tidewater consists of seven major cities: Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach. The most important distinction among sampling schemes may be if a researcher intentionally selects a design-based sample prior to data collection (selective) or leaves sample selection to be shaped primarily by the data collection process (purposive) (Roy et al., 2015). I used a nonrandom, purposive participant selection technique to choose participants who met the study criteria and embodied the core population intended for the research. Participant selection should have clear reasoning and achieve a specific purpose related to the research question, leading some to describe qualitative methods as purposive (Cleary et al., 2014).

I recruited participants using social media (i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram). Two of the selected sites, Facebook and LinkedIn, had pages geared towards organizations and businesses which made it easier to find participants within the study parameters. I made a total of three posts, one for each social media site. The social media posts indicated the (a) study topic and instructional review board approval number, (b) participant requirements, and (c) my contact information. Marshall and Rossman (2015) indicated that a decisively selected sample allows the researcher to support the research problem and question. The total population for the research was approximately

250 individuals who were managers and nonmanagerial employees, working for a local city government organization.

Each participant had to have at least 1 year working experience within a public, local government organization in the Tidewater area. In addition to the general participant requirements, all managerial participants had to directly supervise a minimum of five employees and have a minimum of 3 years' experience in a managerial capacity. O'Reilly and Parker (2012) recommended minimizing sample size in qualitative research based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study and stakeholder interest. The principle of data saturation entails bringing new participants continually into the study until the data set is absolute, as indicated by data duplication or redundancy (Marshall et al., 2013). Saturation occurs when the researcher collects data to the point of diminishing returns (Walker, 2012). Estimating adequate sample size directly relates to the concept of saturation (Marshall et al., 2013). For descriptive research studies, ranges for the number of participants include approximately six to 10 participants (Smith, 2012). I interviewed 23 participants.

As discussed by Rowley (2012), a researcher should refrain from using information that could identify a participant. All interviewee personal and identifying information was confidential and inaccessible to the public to protect the participant and encouraged transparency and honesty during the interviews. All interview responses were confidential to the public to promote openness during the interview and to reassure the participant that participation in the study would not have a negative effect on their professional lives (Rowley, 2012). I recorded via digital recorder and stored all data on

my personal computer for a minimum of 5 years. Destruction of data occurs after 5 years (Cridland et al., 2015). The computer is password protected and kept in my possession. Use of participant identifying information on interview transcripts may jeopardize confidentiality (Morse & Coulehan, 2015). To protect the confidentiality of participants, I did not include the use of participant names on the interview transcripts or use in any part of the study. Prior to the interview, participants received, reviewed, and signed a consent form to participate. Tracking of consent occurred in an Excel spreadsheet. At the conclusion of the study, participants received a one-page summary of the study results.

Research Method and Design

The methods and designs selected for research were critical to research results. The selected research method and design ultimately influenced research findings and created a relationship between studies (Mercieca & Mercieca, 2013). Researchers who use quantitative research methods can measure data objectively to examine a predetermined hypothesis (Hartas, 2015). Qualitative analysis involves collecting data in the natural verbal or written form, gaining a high level of insight into how individuals make sense of events and experiences (Hartas, 2015).

Research Method

Of the three research methodologies accepted by most researchers (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods), I selected the qualitative methodology for this study. Van Maanen (1979) encouraged researchers to use qualitative methodology as a source of insight into organizational phenomena. Qualitative methodology applies to the social

sciences, such as business (Bluhm, Harman, Lee, & Mitchell, 2011). Researchers use the qualitative methodology to investigate topics that are more expressive in nature. Bluhm et al. surmised that qualitative research focuses on words and observations to express reality and attempts to describe people in innate situations. Sallee and Flood (2013) stated that one of the primary strengths of qualitative research is the focus on context; researchers have the ability to develop an understanding of context and how individuals behave in natural settings when obtaining data. I focused on business content, centered on managerial/employee communication. Managerial/employee interaction, particularly communication, occurs in a natural, everyday setting and thus researched using the qualitative method. Based on the topic of the study, the qualitative method was the selected approach for this research.

Quantitative is the oldest and the most identifiable methodology within the research field, used to explain relationships (Wisdom, Cavaleri, Onwuegbuzie, & Green, 2012). Researchers who employ quantitative methodology use specific theories as a point of reference to observe specific phenomena (Wisdom et al., 2012). The use of empirical observation falsifies the constructed hypotheses (Wisdom et al., 2012). Being that the research I conducted focused on understanding a phenomenon and the personal lived experiences of the participants; I did not believe quantitative research was the best approach to use for the study topic. The third methodology, mixed methods, is a combination of both the quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study (Venkatesh et al., 2013). The central premise of relying on mixed methods is the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches may provide a better understanding of phenomena

and relationships than either approach alone (Molina-Azorin et al., 2014). Mixed methods was not the preferred approach for my research because of the quantitative element used within this methodology.

I applied the qualitative method to the topic of effective managerial communication behaviors and employee engagement primarily because I believed quantifying the effect of managerial communication on employee engagement may be difficult. When individuals speak of the unique value of qualitative research methodology, they often name the capability to develop awareness into how people understand and make sense of their worlds (Tracy, 2013). Khan (2014) explained that the qualitative research method is flexible and allows the researcher to work with a more open structure. I noted that there were four distinct advantages to using the qualitative method for the doctoral study. Bluhm et al. (2011) discussed benefits of the qualitative research method. One advantage is the data obtained from participant's centers on that individual's personal experiences (Bluhm et al., 2011). Another advantage of using a qualitative method is that a researcher can study a limited number of cases in depth concurrently, which is essential to those who are completing the research (Bluhm et al., 2011). The ability to describe complex phenomena is also an advantage to using the qualitative research method (Bluhm et al., 2011). A final advantage is collecting data in naturalistic settings, such as personal interviews and discussions (Bluhm et al., 2011). For the research, I focused on the participant's personal experiences and wanted to describe complex phenomena; thus, the advantages mentioned applied to my study.

The qualitative method is not without disadvantages. Data analysis can be time-consuming when using the qualitative method, and there is a chance that personal biases of the researcher can negatively affect the research (Bluhm et al., 2011). I understood the disadvantages of the qualitative method and was conscious of the disadvantages while completing the research.

Research Design

Qualitative designs include (a) ethnography, (b) narrative, (c) grounded theory, (d) phenomenological studies, and (e) descriptive research/case study (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Yin (2014) explained that the research design determines the direction of the research. Research designs vary, and each has advantages and disadvantages; the choice of research design depends on the purpose of the study and the nature of the research (Fletcher & Conley, 2013). I used a descriptive research design in the study.

Ethnography has increased in popularity within the research realm and within organizational studies (Cayla & Arnould, 2013). Ethnographic design involves extensive fieldwork and applies in a variety of public settings that allow for direct observations of the activities of the group being studied (Moustakas, 1994). I did not plan to complete direct observations of the study participants; direct observation is difficult and requires repeated access to an organization over time (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, ethnographic design is not a fitting design for the research.

Grounded theory design is a frequently used qualitative method in the social sciences (Johnson, 2015). A researcher using grounded theory design focuses on unraveling elements of a particular experience (Moustakas, 1994). While I was interested

in the aspects of managerial communication and employee engagement, the primary focus of the study was not to discover the components of a particular experience but rather to understand the experience. For this reason, I did not employ grounded theory design.

Case study design occurs in various disciplines and may consist of quantitative or qualitative data; case study design is the examination of phenomena in a natural setting (Taylor, Dossick, & Garvin, 2011). Sangster-Gormley (2013) described case study research as the assemblage and presentation of thorough unstructured data gathered from various sources to better understand specific groups, people, societies, or organizations. Case study observations equate to qualitative research; however, researchers from social science disciplines have shown that case studies are often mixed methods projects with both qualitative and quantitative aspects (Taylor et al., 2011). Taylor, Dossick, and Garvin (2011) said data for a case study might come from (a) fieldwork, (b) archived records, (c) verbal reports, or (d) direct observation. Herreid, Schiller, Herreid, and Wright (2012) furthered the observation of Taylor et al. (2011) by stating true-to-form case study design includes (a) adherence to experimental design, (b) executing tests, (c) honoring evidence, (d) examination of assumptions, and (e) questioning of conclusions. I did not view the participants in a natural setting (i.e., office environment), and thus did not believe the case study design was suitable for the research.

Employing a narrative research design indicates the desire to understand the human experience through interpreting accounts of qualitative research data (Hays & Wood, 2011). Narrative design is reminiscent of storytelling, whereas the goal is sharing

and organizing knowledge and experience (Schmidt, 2014). Culturally, individuals use narratives to (a) learn, (b) understand, and (c) communicate (Schmidt, 2014). With the narrative design, the meaning of the research comes from the story (Hays & Wood, 2011). Charmaz and McMullen (2011) described narrative design as a mode of qualitative inquiry informed by narrative theory as opposed to other qualitative designs researchers may use to explore narrative data but not from a narrative perspective. Thus, narrative design is an attempt to extrapolate meaning from a story and to comprehend the human experience (Charmaz & McMullen, 2011). The goal of the study was to understand the participants' lived experiences, not to extract the meaning of the research from the stories told. Thus, I did not employ the narrative research design.

The phenomenological design involves explaining the human experience regarding a phenomenon from the view of the participant (Zivkovic, 2012). Researchers who use the phenomenological design are interested in the individual experiences of people (Khan, Kolts, Thase, Krishnan, & Brown, 2015). The focal point of a phenomenological study are people who work in like environments or share similar experiences to discover commonalities among the group (Zivkovic, 2012). Researchers using phenomenological design seek the essence of the phenomenon or experience being investigated (Moustakas, 1994). I did not plan to research a specific phenomenon and thus did not use the phenomenological design in this study.

The descriptive research design involves collecting information without manipulating the environment (Bickman & Rog, 1998). Descriptive research is an approach to research that is not quantitatively experimental (Hall & Jurow, 2015).

Descriptive research can provide information about the naturally occurring behavior, attitudes, or other characteristics of a particular subject or group (Giorgi, 2012). Descriptive research design may involve one-time interaction with groups of participants or may follow participants over time; research instruments can include surveys or interviews (Bickman & Rog, 1998). By selecting the descriptive research design, I explored the ongoing relationship between communication behaviors and employee engagement within an organization.

Population and Sampling

The basis of population selection for this research was participant work experience, participant access, and geographic convenience to the researcher and consisted of those living in the Tidewater area of Virginia. All individuals participating in this study met the following criteria: (a) adult full-time employee, (b) had been with their current employer for at least 1 year, (c) employed by a public, government organization in the Tidewater area, and (d) work full-time. Managers participating in this study met the following criteria: must have directly supervised a minimum of five employees and have a minimum of 3 years' experience in a managerial capacity. The subsystem of managers and nonmanagement employees within an organization aligned with systems theory by offering an individual work product or service to their respective employer, which in turn supports the community where the employer is located. The subsystem of managers and nonmanagement employees within an organization aligned with communications theory due to a need for mutual understanding in communication among both groups to effectively complete their jobs.

I employed a nonrandom, purposive participant sampling method to choose participants who met the study criteria and represented the population intended for the research. As noted by Cleary, Horsfall, and Hayter (2014), participant selection should have clear reasoning and realize a specific purpose related to the research question. Purposeful participant selection assisted me in addressing the research question (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). For descriptive research studies, sample size range includes approximately 6 to 10 participants (Smith, 2012). To help ensure depth of information, I used a sample size of a minimum of 20 participants.

While there seemed to be no concrete way to justify sample size within qualitative research (Marshall et al., 2013), I believed that a minimum of 20 semistructured interviews with open-ended questions would provide the needed information for a sound study. Saturation determined how many participants I interviewed. Reaching saturation occurs after review of questions and no new concepts or themes emerge in subsequent interviews (Trotter, 2012). I anticipated reaching saturation by the time I interviewed the 20th participant, but did not reach saturation until interviewing 23 participants. Expected return or reward for participation affects the response rate of potential participants (Evangelista, Poon, & Albaum, 2012). People participate in research based on (a) the perceived cost associated with participation, (b) the award or reward for participation, and (c) the belief that completion of participation leads to the receipt of any associated rewards (Evangelista et al., 2012). Due in part to participation parameters, only 35 individuals responded to the interview request.

There are seven cities located in the Tidewater, Virginia, area. For the purpose of this study, I focused on local government entities within the Tidewater area. The population consisted of managerial employees and subordinates that worked for two local government bodies in the Tidewater area. The two local government entities have a total population of approximately 250 potential participants. I based my estimate of this population on information that is publicly available on these government websites. Each individual received a cover letter explaining the purpose and background of the study and the consent form. Once a participant provided consent, scheduling of the interview occurred. The number of participants considered necessary for a qualitative study does not have to be as large as the sample needed for a quantitative study, as there tends to be a deeper level of understanding required for a qualitative investigation (Polkinghorne, 2005).

All participant information remained confidential; however, I knew the identities of the participants because I arranged and conducted the interviews. Researchers use codes that identify individual participants as a confidentiality measure (Morse & Coulehan, 2015). The participants received a number at the beginning of the process and only used the number to identify himself or herself on the audio recording; this process allowed me to maintain confidentiality of the research participants. I asked each participant five open-ended interview questions (Appendix A); 11 participants responded to the questions designated for managers and 12 participants responded to the questions designated for nonmanagement employees. Each participant responded to all interview questions asked. At the conclusion of each interview, I played back the audio recording

and reviewed each response with the participant for validation and accuracy of intended meaning. I closed each interview by thanking the participant for their time and willingness to participate in the research study. Destruction of raw data occurs after 5 years.

Ethical Research

Researchers note the importance of consideration of ethics within an exploratory study. Ethics is the continual development of a system of values and high principles that inform and guide an individual's activity and the activity of an institution as a corporate soul (Gabriele, 2012). Gabriele (2012) noted that ethics is as much about who a person is, as it is about what an individual does. In this sense, ethics in research is critical especially when one considers appreciably the power of research to touch the lives of individuals and the world in which we live. Ethical guidelines and codes of conduct adopted by professional researchers include (a) rules, (b) duties, and (c) responsibilities (Resnick, 2012). I kept all ethical considerations in mind while completing this study. Protecting all research participants was essential to the integrity of ethical research and was the protocol when obtaining data (Resnick, 2012). Keeping all research participant information confidential from the public was the primary ethical consideration (Siedman, 1977).

As the researcher, I used safeguards to protect the confidentiality of participants. I used an alphanumerical system when identifying participants to eliminate the use of names while tracking the data for the study with each participant receiving a unique alphanumeric identifier. The alphanumeric code assigned to each participant was a

safeguard. Codes that identify each participant have meaning for the researcher only during analysis (Morse & Coulehan, 2015). Upon completion of data analysis, removal of participant codes from all subsequent writings may lessen the chance of a reader linking participant data through a participant code (Morse & Coulehan, 2014). Another example of a safeguard was the alphanumerical assignment key securely stored on a password-protected computer owned by the researcher. A password-protected computer will house data for 5 years.

Participants want reassurance of confidentiality in the research process (Siedman, 1977). I did not request the names of the organization, supervisors, or employees related to particular experiences when completing the interviews with participants. This practice reinforced confidentiality (Siedman, 1977). I collected participant signatures on the informed consent agreement prior to holding the interview. Participants read the informed consent agreement; participant signature indicated approval. I tracked consent via an Excel spreadsheet, displaying the participant number and date of consent. Participant honesty increases when the researcher is the sole person who knows their identity (Gloe et al., 2013). Participants would be more willing to be forthright, open, and honest with their interview responses if they knew that I was the only one who knew their identity.

Privacy relates to confidentiality, mainly with regard to possible harming of research participants (Heffetz & Ligett, 2014). While I did not foresee the need to gather personal data, if the need to obtain personal details arose, collection of the information would occur with (a) high sensitivity, (b) offering enough rationalization for the use of

the information, and (c) addressing the right to informed consent. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time for any reason; the procedures for withdrawal were in the Informed Consent document. None of the participants withdrew from the study. There were no incentives given for participation in the study.

Data Collection Instruments

The use of data collection instruments give the researcher a tool to gather useful information to understand and process observed results (Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013). I chose an interview as the instrument to collect data for the study because my focus was on obtaining data on the personal experiences of each participant. Researchers commonly use interviews to collect data within qualitative research (Copeland & Agosto, 2012). The interview technique is one of the universal ways to collect data in the qualitative research process because the interview provides an opportunity for the researcher to collect meaningful data (Dubé, Schinke, Strasser, & Lightfoot, 2014). The interview included five open-ended questions that varied slightly based on the position held by the participant (manager or employee).

An interview is an in-person attempt to acquire reliable and valid data in the form of verbal responses from one or more participants (Englander, 2012). The roles of the interviewer and participant are structured or change continually in the interview process (Doody & Noonan, 2013). I used the interview as a tool to measure concepts of (a) effective managerial communication, (b) factors of engagement, (c) ways to improve communication, and (d) individual importance placed on communication within the workplace. Raw data from the interview will be available upon request from the

researcher. The interview length allowed the collection of data in the allotted 45-minute period. Interview length can have an effect on the quality of responses, and thus interviewers who are cognizant of keeping interviews shorter tend to receive more sound data (McGonagle, Brown, & Schoeni, 2015). I used alphanumerical codes to identify participant responses to maintain confidentiality of the participants. Located in the top right hand corner of the interview form was the alphanumerical code. All participants received and signed a copy of the informed consent form and a copy of the interview questions at the beginning of the interview.

Using an interview as the data collection instrument is appropriate due to the qualitative, descriptive nature of the research (Wright & Ogbuehi, 2014). I was aware that participating in interviews could be stressful for the participant. In the cases where participants know all study details, the actual interview may give rise to unanticipated negative emotions that even the most sensitive questioning on the part of the interviewer cannot adequately prevent (Englander, 2012). As the interviewer, my responsibility lay in creating or maintaining a calm atmosphere that placed the interview participants at ease; genuine recognition and appreciation expressed to the participant for participating in the interview often sets the tone for positive interaction (Ratley, 2013). I explained the entire interview process, including the steps taken to protect participant identity. Appendix A contains the interview questions.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection instrument I used was an interview. As the researcher, I had the ability to observe the verbal and non-verbal behavior of the participants. The ability

to observe both nonverbal and verbal behavior of participants is an advantage to using an interview for data collection (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The interview consisted of five open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth responses as part of the descriptive research design (Moustakas, 1994). Rubin and Rubin (2012) discussed that since the researcher pursues a constant line of inquiry, the stream of questions in an interview should follow a fluid design rather than rigid design. Rubin and Rubin also mentioned that the researcher should evaluate collected data and repeatedly question events and facts discussed during the interview. I used the recommendation of Rubin and Rubin in the study.

I obtained a list of possible participants from the recruitment efforts noted earlier within the study. I scheduled interviews with individuals who responded to my requests for participants and who meet the criteria for the study, which included (a) adult full-time employee, (b) had been with their current employer for at least 1 year, and (c) the type of organization the participant worked for. For managerial participants, the criteria included minimum of 3 years supervisory experience and currently supervised at least five employees. I selected 23 participants with a purposive, nonrandom sampling technique and completed the interviews.

Participant responses provided perspective into managerial/employee communication as it related to employee engagement. The interviews occurred face-to-face and entailed using open-ended interview questions. The researcher should demonstrate gratitude to each participant (Yin, 2014). The interview ended with a statement of gratitude, thanking the participant for their time. Providing participants with

options regarding meeting date and time may increase the likelihood of participation (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The interviewee had the option to complete the interview on a Wednesday, Saturday, or Sunday of a selected week; this allowed the participant to plan the interview around their work schedule. Researchers may have to employ creative strategies to protect participant identity (Mneimneh et al., 2013). The interview occurred in a private room within a library located centrally within the Tidewater, Virginia, area. The location of the private room (a) provided privacy, as it was away from the main entrance, (b) had blinds that can be closed, and (c) had a door that can be locked to prevent unauthorized access during the interview process.

The interview process did not exceed 45 minutes, which I verified by completing a pilot test of the interview questions with colleagues as suggested in Wahyuni's (2012) research. Pilot testing is a small-scale trial where a select number of participants vet interview questions and comment on the mechanics of the interview (Wahyuni, 2012). The participants point out any problems with the interview questions or instances where questions are not clear (Wahyuni, 2012). The length of the interview in qualitative research should not extend beyond an hour, where possible to ensure that the interviewee remains engaged (Dubé et al., 2014). I planned to extend the interview in the case that I did not receive answers to all interview questions within the allotted time frame. A researcher can review interview responses as needed if responses are audio-recorded (Stavros & Westberg, 2009). I recorded all responses gathered during the interview. If a participant objected to audio recording of the interview session, I would have notated the interview responses by hand and had the participant sign the notation. Listed in Appendix

A are the interview questions. Journal writing is a heuristic tool for a researcher (Hoover & Morrow, 2015). A researcher may discover or learn new concepts when reviewing the notes within the journal (Hoover & Morrow, 2015). I kept a journal when conducting the interviews as a way to note elements of non-verbal communication and for personal reflection. Epoche was used in the data collection process.

I completed member checking during the coding process to verify the accuracy of the information obtained during the interview process. Member checking is a quality control process in qualitative research during the course of conducting the study because participants have the chance to review their statements for accuracy (Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checking involves inviting interview participants to review their responses for accuracy and intended meaning (Morse & Coulehan, 2015). At the conclusion of the interview, I replayed the audio recording and had the participant verify accuracy of the responses. The participants either agreed or disagreed that the summaries reflected their views, feelings, and experiences, and if accuracy and completeness were affirmed, then the study is said to have credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of member checking assists with the reliability and dependability of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that member checking is a technique that consists of repeatedly verifying with participant's (a) the researcher's data, (b) analytic categories, (c) understanding, and (d) conclusions.

The concept of epoche, also known as bracketing, is when the researcher refrains from personal opinion to view the phenomenon without prejudice and predetermined ideas (Moustakas, 1994). Overgaard (2015) stated that epoche, in the purest form, is

when the researcher purifies an experience of assumptions inherent in the experience. Epoche should begin as a self-reflective process, preparing for data analysis and phenomenological reduction (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Phenomenological reduction does not conclude the epoche process; the researcher has to make an effort to eliminate the thought of past experiences, thoughts, preferences, and emotions to receive the phenomenon in an unadulterated form (Moustakas, 1994). While this was not a phenomenological study, many of the techniques espoused by Moustakas worked within a qualitative descriptive study.

Data Organization Technique

I organized data in two ways. All interviews were audio recorded, ensuring an accurate record of the interview (Stavros & Westberg, 2009). As suggested by Stavros and Westberg (2009), I recorded all data and information gathered during the interview. Recording the interviews ensured that I had an accurate record of the interview. Researchers may have to employ unique strategies to maintain participant confidentiality (Mneimneh et al., 2013). Saving the transcribed answers to the interview questions on a password-protected USB flash drive protected confidentiality of the participant, as I was the only person with access to the USB flash drive. I will delete the transcribed interviews by destroying the flash drive after 5 years. Next, I transcribed the interviews by code and date of the interview. Interview transcription of verbal interviews includes (a) reduction, (b) interpretation, and (c) representation to make the text meaningful (Elo et al., 2014). For confidentiality purposes, each participant received a unique code; this

code consisted of the letter M for managers and E for employees, followed by a two-digit number.

I took notes during each interview as a means of keeping my thoughts organized and notating any item that required further clarification from the participant. Note taking during the interview process can help facilitate analysis (Muswazi & Nhamo, 2013). In note taking, the researcher makes note of phrases or words participants use that add detail to the interview (Leech, Collins, & Onwuegbuzie, 2014). Detailed, handwritten notes covered words or phrases that piqued my interest during the interview or areas where details were missing. Note taking during the interview process also served as a way to determine if bias existed on the part of the researcher. Draper and Swift (2011) recommended for the researcher to keep notes of personal feelings and ideas during the interview process; after the interviews are completed, the researcher can review the notes to see if their thoughts created bias in the interview process. I kept all handwritten interview notes and journal notes in a locked file cabinet within my home.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurs as an explicit step in conceptually interpreting the data set as a whole, using specific analytic strategies to transform raw data into an original and coherent depiction of the research subject (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013). The data analysis process consisted of detailed and consistent procedures involving organized steps to ensure the validity and reliability of results. The first step entailed the organization and preparation of the data for research analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The second step was a complete review of all collected data; this

process allowed for the explanation of findings and provided opportunities to filter out data that did not pertain to the research question or overall purpose of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The third step was the commencement of the coding process, which allowed segmentation of the data to begin (Yin, 2014). The interview questions are below, as well as in Appendix A:

Employee Questions

1. Based on your personal experiences, how do you think employees within your organization communicate effectively?
2. Based on your personal experiences, how would you describe effective communication between an employee and their immediate supervisor within your organization?
3. How has positive communication between you and your immediate supervisor affected your engagement at work? Please provide an example.
4. Does increased communication and/or interaction with your immediate supervisor influence your engagement at work? How?
5. What other ways has communication with your supervisor affected your engagement at work?

Manager Questions

1. Based on your personal experiences, how do you think employees within your organization communicate effectively?

2. Based on your personal experiences, how would you describe effective communication between a manager and their employee(s) within your organization?
3. How has positive communication between you and your employee(s) affected your engagement at work? Please provide an example.
4. Does increased communication and/or interaction with your employee(s) influence your engagement at work? How?
5. What other ways has communication with your employee(s) affected your engagement at work?

A code in qualitative inquiry is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative for a portion of language-based or visual data (Smith & Firth, 2011). The data can consist of (a) interview transcripts, (b) participant observation field notes, (c) journals, and (d) documents (Smith & Firth, 2011). Yin (2014) noted researchers have three choices regarding coding generation: develop codes before the data collection process and fit data to the codes; formulate codes based only on the emerging data generated; use a combination of predetermined and emerging codes. Once I completed the collection of the interview data, I employed the modified van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Using a descriptive research design for this study, it was appropriate to use the van Kaam method for data analysis. Moustakas (1994) explained that the primary source of knowledge is an individual's perceptions. Moustakas presented a phenomenological analysis model that focused on four elements to include epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and

synthesis of meanings and essences. This technique can add value within a qualitative descriptive study.

The concept of epoche, also known as bracketing, is when the researcher refrains from personal judgment to view the phenomenon without bias and preconceived notions (Moustakas, 1994). Overgaard (2015) stated that epoche occurs when the researcher purifies assumptions inherent in the experience. Researchers should begin the concept of epoche as a self-reflective process, preparing for data analysis and phenomenological reduction (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Phenomenological reduction is not the end of the epoche process; the researcher has to make a conscious effort to remove the thought of previous experiences, perceptions, preferences, and feelings to receive the phenomenon in a pure form (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological reduction includes the concept of bracketing, which is the process of placing factors at the heart of the study into brackets while setting other elements aside (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) explained that bracketing enables the research process to remain embedded in the research questions, exclusively reflecting the topic under investigation. When completing data analysis, I used the epoche process. I bracketed terms and factors from the completed interviews while setting other items from the interviews aside.

The second process in phenomenological reduction is horizontalizing, where the researcher handles collected data with identical value, lists the data, and segments data into germane groups (Moustakas, 1994). In the horizontalizing process, the researcher reviews and examines all participant responses as potentially relevant (Bernauer, 2015). Moustakas explained that removing data deemed immaterial to the research topic allows

for only the textual meanings and static elements of the phenomenon remain. Moustakas mentioned that phenomenological reduction is a practice where the researcher consciously views the phenomena as phenomena all while intentionally listening to understand the fundamental worth of events. The process of imaginative variation follows phenomenological reduction; the use of imaginative variation provides a means of expanding on the themes revealed to build detail of the experience for the reader (Koch, Niesz, & McCarthy, 2013). Discovery of fundamental concepts occurs by using the process of imaginative variation; thus, the researcher can attempt to answer how the phenomenon came to be (Moustakas, 1994). Intuitive integration is the final step in phenomenological analysis (Moustakas, 1994). The process of intuitive integration allows the researcher to combine individual textual and structural descriptions into a sole description, capturing the experiences of the participants in regards to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I used horizontalizing within the data analysis process. I viewed all participant answers given as potentially relevant to the research question asked.

I anticipated the collection of thick, rich responses from participant interviews. The NVivo10™ qualitative analysis software program helped me manage data coding, storage, and analysis of data for this study. One of the main advantages of the program was the ability to assist with the coding of data. The NVivo 10™ software allowed me to perform content analysis and discover themes and patterns within the interviews. I used the NVivo10™ qualitative analysis software program to (a) organize data, (b) manage ideas, (c) query data, and (d) report data in a concise and controlled manner (Guangming, Wenjuan, & Jinjin, 2014). Interview responses from the 23 participants, which were

representative of managers and employees within local public government entities, served as the data for the study.

A form of qualitative data analysis is the modified van Kaam process (Moustakas, 1994). The modified van Kaam process is a seven-step methodology used in data analysis (Wertz, 2015). I incorporated the seven-step modified van Kaam process in data analysis. The first step in the modified van Kaam process was to list every expression relevant to the experience and develop preliminary groupings (Wertz, 2015). In the second step, I reduced and eliminated groupings by testing each expression for three requirements; (a) did the expression hold a moment of the experience that is required, (b) was there a possibility to abstract and label the moment, and (c) removal of any expressions that failed to meet the two noted requirements (Moustakas, 1994).

Step three in the process was to cluster and thematize invariant constituents by thematic label (Polkinghorne, 2005). In the fourth step, final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application occurred. Included in step four was a validation process in which (a) invariant constituents were confirmed, (b) themes were expressed clearly in the transcription, (c) themes were verified as compatible, and (d) themes that were not explicit or compatible were deleted (Moustakas, 1994). The fifth step involved the construction of an individual textural description of the experience for every participant (Moustakas, 1994). In the sixth step, construction of an individual structural description of the experience for each participant occurred (Moustakas, 1994). The final step of the process entailed the construction of a textural-structural description of the meanings of the experience that included the invariant constituents and themes

(Moustakas, 1994). By using the modified van Kaam seven-step process, I hoped to explain the essences and lived experiences of the participants in the study.

Reliability and Validity

Using reliability and validity strategies within the research study ensured the results were trustworthy (Wahyuni, 2012). When completing qualitative research, quality and trustworthiness were instrumental in demonstrating the reliability and validity of the study (Tracy, 2013). Reliability measures the consistency of the researcher's approach across varied research studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Documentation and following research protocol was essential when substantiating the reliability and validity of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). In qualitative research, the concepts of (a) credibility, (b) transferability, and (c) dependability all play a part in establishing the reliability and validity of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Establishing credibility occurs when the results of the research are believable by the study participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The degree of generalization or transfers with study results to other contexts is transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers should account for the ever-changing context of research, which describes dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Reliability

Accurately documenting the procedures used in the study was fundamental to establish reliability (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Developing and refining research protocol was significant in strengthening research reliability (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Yin (2014) stipulated researchers should attempt to eliminate mistakes in the data

transcription process and should repeatedly check for code drift during the research process to ensure code consistency. I compared the audio recordings to the transcribed interview notes to ensure the accuracy of data. Al-Yateem (2012) noted the question development process could lack consistency between the research questions and the response to such questions.

Limitations of language, scales, associations, and subject knowledge by the participant, could lead to erroneous findings (Al-Yateem, 2012). Clear and concise interview questions helped to improve the reliability of responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Employing the use of probing and follow-up questions ensured the full understanding of participant responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In addition, the use of member checking strengthened reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability within a research study involves a degree of neutrality regarding the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). I completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application, which entailed a description of the research steps taken from the beginning of the research project to the development and reporting of findings. Completing and submitting the application for review was fundamental in establishing confirmability as the application assisted in creating an audit trail. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) provided an external audit of the data collection procedures. An external audit is an integral step in confirming the dependability of the study (Elo et al., 2014). Through using these strategies, the reliability of findings in this study should improve.

Validity

In qualitative research, credibility corresponds to internal validity, and transferability corresponds to external validity (Tracy, 2013). Establishing mechanisms to ensure the validity of research was essential to producing research findings and conclusions that are both legitimate and actionable (Stavros & Westberg, 2009). By incorporating validity strengthening strategies in the research process, the validity should improve (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Yin (2014) noted qualitative validity entails checking for accuracy of results throughout the research process. Using several strategies can strengthen the validity of the results, as each strategy is effectual regarding different aspects of research (Yin, 2014). The use of clear and concise language in interviewing increases validity (Yin, 2014). To increase validity, I used clear and concise words while presenting interview questions. Ensuring that the researcher has eliminated any potential bias is another step that can strengthen internal validity. Internal validity is the equivalent of credibility when conducting research (Yin, 2014). Marshall and Rossman (2015) stipulated researchers should clarify their backgrounds to elucidate to readers possible bias concerning interpretations of the data, which I did by indicating I was an executive manager for a local government entity and that I lived in the Tidewater area.

Qualitative research involves exploring how participants attach meaning to actions, events, or processes in a natural setting, therefore, interview questions should be clear to the participants (Hermanowicz, 2013). As a validation step, I completed member checking during the coding process to verify the accuracy of the information obtained during the interview process. Member checking strengthens the credibility of a study.

Yin (2014) noted qualitative generalization entails the researcher generalizing data into a broader theory. Accomplishing transferability occurs due to the precise layout of research procedures and identification of research participants (Elo et al., 2014). Using a precise layout of the research procedures and identifying the research participants enables a reader to make an independent determination about the transferability of the findings; it is up to the reader to determine the generalizability of the study (Elo et al., 2014). Validity and reliability are accomplished when a researcher completes steps to ensure credibility and trustworthiness is apparent in study results (Tracy, 2013). By completing all of the items noted in this section, I ensured that the validity and reliability of the research lent credibility and a sense of trustworthiness to the research.

Transition and Summary

Within Section 2, a detailed review of the research methodology occurred, to include the choice to use a descriptive research design for the study. Section 2 also included the process for participant selection, instrumentation and data collection, and the data analysis process. Section 3 included a report and description of the results of the study. I concluded Section 3 by presenting a summary of the findings resulting from my analysis. Areas for future research are within Section 3.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore effective communication behaviors managers use to improve employee engagement and organizational productivity. The inability of managerial staff to establish a connection with their workforce through use of effective communication can lead to organizational chaos, low productivity, and decreased profitability (Bisel et al., 2012). Organizations that focus on soft skills, including communication, enjoy 85% higher profits compared with firms that are least effective at communicating with their employees (Robles, 2012).

I conducted semistructured interviews with 23 participants who worked for local government entities in the Tidewater, Virginia, area. I asked the participants open-ended interview questions and allowed for an exchange of their perceptions and relevant experiences (Bjerregaard, 2011). After achieving saturation, I entered the data into the NVivo10™ qualitative analysis software program used for data analysis. Using the modified van Kaam method of data analysis, the following emergent themes were: (a) openness, respect, and transparency when communicating a message; (b) positive communication promoted an engaged workforce; (c) favorable communication increases engagement for both the manager and employee; and (d) unproductive communication decreases engagement for both the manager and employee.

Presentation of the Findings

I used participant interviews to obtain the data needed for this study. The data collected answered the following overarching research question: What communication

behaviors do managers use with their employees to improve employee engagement and productivity?

The data obtained for this study was via participant interviews. The data reached saturation when the interview responses became repetitive and no additional pertinent information came from participant interviews (Walker, 2012). I reached saturation after the 23rd participant interview. The first theme that emerged was openness, transparency, and respect when communicating a message from a manager to an employee. The second emergent was positive communication affects workforce engagement. The third emergent was favorable communication increases engagement for both the manager and employee. The fourth emergent theme was that unproductive communication decreases engagement for both the manager and employee. The noted themes were in alignment with the conceptual framework used for this study, which included systems theory and communications theory.

Due to the open-ended nature of the interview questions, participants were able to respond with varied levels of detail. When responding to the first question, each participant alluded to the organization type that classified his or her employer (i.e., public school system or local city government). Of the 11 managers who participated, six worked for a public school system in the Tidewater area and five worked for a local city government in the Tidewater area (see Table 1). Of the 12 nonmanagers that participated, five worked for a public school system in the Tidewater area and seven worked for a local city government in the Tidewater area (see Table 1).

Table 1

Professional Affiliations of Participants

Participant type	Organization type	Number	% of total
All	Local government entity	23	100
Manager	Public school system	6	26
Manager	City government	5	22
Employee	Public school system	5	22
Employee	City government	7	30

Emergent Theme 1: Open, Respectful, and Transparent Communication

Participant responses to the first and second interview questions were similar in spite of working for different government entities. Responses to Interview Questions 1 and 2 contributed to this theme. Employee Participant 2 stated, "Transparency in communication is essential to trusting not only the message but also in trusting my manager." Employee Participant 9 expressed, "I appreciate managers who are open when communicating with employees. I define open as not withholding information from employees." Manager Participant 4 stated, "I hate it when communication is condescending. I truly embrace respectful communication." He noted that respect in communication should flow both ways but should start with the manager, as the manager should lead by example. The data aligned with Kiyomiya's (2012) findings that stressed the importance of managers being forthright when communicating instead of employing deceptive techniques. Kiyomiya noted that managers should use the communication techniques of being (a) clear, (b) concise, (c) honest, and (d) consistent in daily interactions with employees.

When responding to the first and second interview questions, 22 participants used the terms *open*, *transparent*, and *respectful* in their answers. Based on the context of the interview responses, each term had an implied definition. The participants who responded with the terminology *open, transparent*, and *respectful* specified their thoughts on each term in the responses. When participants used the term *open* communication, the implied meaning was communication where all parties were able to express thoughts and ideas. *Transparent* communication implied giving the information others need to know what is occurring and to avoid surprises. Both transparent and open communication reduces uncertainty for employees (Homburg, Klarmann, & Staritz, 2012). *Respectful* communication implied providing undivided attention when another is speaking and confirming assumptions to avoid misunderstandings. When communication is respectful, there becomes an increased ability to manage conflict and stress (Moreland & Apker, 2015). Table 2 represents participant responses on effective organizational communication.

Table 2

Effective Organizational Communication

Participant type	Participant answers	Number	Total
Manager	Open communication	5	45%
Manager	Transparent communication	3	27%
Manager	Respectful communication	2	18%
Manager	Fair communication	1	9%
Employee	Open communication	7	58%

Employee	Transparent communication	4	33%
Employee	Respectful communication	1	8%

Emergent Theme 2: Positive Communication Promotes an Engaged Workforce

Participant answers to the third and fourth interview questions were similar. The theme of positive communication increasing work engagement (from both the employee and manager perspective) emerged from this set of questions. Welch (2011) detailed how employees felt more engaged with daily work assignments when communication efforts from direct managers were positive. Some of the participants were able to provide specifics as to how favorable communication promoted happiness and increased their engagement within the workplace. Employee Participant 9 stated, "Talking to my supervisor in a productive way lessened stress and made me want to do a better job overall." Manager Participant 7 noted, "Positive communication with my employees brings a certain synergy to the workplace and boosts my confidence as a team leader."

Other participants were unable to provide specifics but simply noted they believed more involved with organizational goals when communication was fruitful. The data aligned with the findings of Karanges, Beatson, Johnston, and Lings (2014). Karanges et al. noted that while drivers of employee engagement consist of (a) apparent support, (b) job characteristics, and (c) value equivalence, managerial communication appears to influence both the process and preservation of employee engagement efforts. Overall, the authors concluded that communication is an integral part of the performance of employees (Karanges et al., 2014). Managers who are good communicators hold a powerful position within an organization (Welch, 2011). Managers with sound

communication skills can influence the employee output as well as engage direct reports in an enlightened way (Welch, 2011). Table 3 represents participant responses on the effect positive communication had on work engagement.

Table 3

Positive Communication Effect on Work Engagement

Participant type	Participant answers	Number	Total
Manager	Engagement increased	9	82%
Manager	Engagement decreased	0	0%
Manager	Engagement unchanged	2	18%
Employee	Engagement increased	10	83%
Employee	Engagement decreased	0	0%
Employee	Engagement unchanged	2	17%

Emergent Theme 3: Favorable Communication Increases Engagement

Participant responses to the fifth question were similar across participant type. From the employee participant perspective, nine participants noted that positive communication with their supervisor increased overall desire to serve the respective agency. Employee Participant 11 said, “I enjoy my workplace so much more when I have a good relationship with my supervisor, part of that relationship being a great communication dynamic.” Employee Participant 5 specifically stated, “I experienced an increased desire to engage at work due to a great communication rapport with my immediate supervisor.”

From the managerial participant perspective, productive communication with employees positively affected engagement. Eight of the managerial participants felt

better connected to their employees and workplace when communication was constructive, which increased their overall work engagement. Manager Participant 2 stated, "I am truly encouraged when I have a good, productive conversation with an employee that I supervise." Manager Participant 7 noted, "I tend to believe that I connect more with my employees through productive communication."

The response from nine of employee participants aligns with the data of Ho, Wong, and Lee (2011). Ho, Wong, and Lee explained that an employee has to possess two types of passions for full work engagement; harmonious passion and obsessive passion. Ho et al. further detailed that passion is a strong inclination towards an activity that employees find significant; once an employee identifies a passion or attainable goal within their work program, engagement increases. Perrewé, Hochwarter, Ferris, McAllister, and Harris (2014) described a passionate employee as one emotionally committed to their work and their organization. The participant responses also aligned with the description noted by Perrewé et al. (2014). Nine employee participants demonstrated passion for work engagement when responses implied that they felt an increased desire to serve their respective agency. Table 4 represents participant responses on how positive communication affects work engagement.

Table 4

Ways Positive Communication Affects Work Engagement

Participant type	Participant answers	Number	Total
Manager	Better connected to employees/workplace	8	73%
Manager	No additional effect	3	27%

Employee	Increased desire to serve agency	9	75%
Employee	No additional effect	3	25%

Emergent Theme 4: Negative Communication Decreases Engagement

The fifth question also revealed the fourth emergent theme. Counterproductive or strained communication with his or her supervisor made most employee participants disconnected from their work program and influenced performance negatively. Employee Participant 6 described an experience with a manager who used condescending language and tone when speaking with employees. The participant continued to note, "I strongly disliked working with this supervisor and overtime became withdrawn from my work assignments." Employee Participant 10 stated, "I had numerous arguments with my immediate manager due to communication differences that made me purposely compromise project deadlines." The employee responses to this question aligned with the research of Men (2014). Men stated that disengaged employees (a) complete the minimum amount of work to stay employed, (b) are resistant to change, (c) allow negative attitudes to infiltrate the organization, and (d) view work as a chore. Employee participant responses indicated a resistance to change and only wanting to complete the minimum amount of work. In addition, there was an indication that employees became withdrawn from the work program when disengaged. Pater and Lewis (2012) further elaborated that disengaged employees as those who passively withdraw from work and display active resistance to new ideas.

Managerial participants questioned their managerial efficacy when communication with employees was combative or ill received, which had a damaging

effect on work engagement. Seven manager participants alluded to feeling a sense of defeat when unable to connect with employees when communicating. Manager Participant 10 specifically recalled an instance where an employee, frustrated by what they considered a lack of direction on her part, had cursed her out. Manager Participant 10 stated, "The employee in question said I didn't give her clear direction on a task. When I asked her to explain what she meant, she hurled curse words at me. Needless to say, our communication stopped immediately."

Seven of the managerial participant responses mimicked the data of Khan and Ahmad (2012). Khan and Ahmad analyzed managerial interpersonal skills (ability to motivate, communicate, and build a team) and their effectiveness at different levels of management. Khan and Ahmad found that a manager's capability to motivate employees via communication is a vital interpersonal skill. Additionally, Howard (2015) elaborated on interpersonal skills within the workplace. Howard noted that interpersonal skills are the tools individuals use to relate and communicate with colleagues in an organizational environment. Robles (2012) discussed soft skills as being an internal quality that an individual possesses. When managers were unable to communicate with employees effectively, they began to question their interpersonal skills. Table 5 represents participant responses on how negative or unproductive communication affects work engagement.

Table 5

Effects of Negative Communication on Work Engagement

Participant type	Participant answers	Number	Total

Manager	Question managerial efficacy/interpersonal skills	7	63%
Manager	No additional effect	4	36%
Employee	Negatively affects work performance	11	92%
Employee	No additional effect	1	8%

The emergent themes from the data analysis aligned with systems theory and communications theory as detailed in the conceptual framework. Systems theory in relation to organizational success is dependent upon (a) synergy, (b) interrelations, and (c) co-dependence between different subsystems (von Bertalanffy, 1950). Instead of reducing an entity to the properties of its parts or essentials, systems theory focuses on the collection of and relations between the parts that attach them into a whole (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). Employees encompass a vital subsystem within an organization that promotes organizational success (Ingram, 2013). In this study, the two relevant subsystems were managers and the employee workforce. The results of the study are in concert with systems theory in that (a) leadership communication is integral to employee engagement and (b) employee/manager relations are an important component of an organizational entity (Ingram, 2013).

The results of the study also aligned with communications theory. The focal point of communications theory is the transmission of information between people (Bannerman & Haggart, 2015). With communications theory, the environmental context message delivery can have an effect on the fidelity of communication (Duncan, 1973). Within a communication system, shared understanding is fundamental to success (Duncan, 1973). Duncan (1973) detailed that communal understanding means that an individual reacts to

communication in a manner relative to his ends. Therefore, when employees and managers understand each other they respond to one another in a more productive, collaborative manner (Duncan, 1973). Further, Ng and Feldman (2013) concluded that language and communication allow people to develop a sense of self and to interact with others in the community.

Applications to Professional Practice

A number of variables play a part in establishing and maintaining effective communication between manager and employee, which in turn influences employee engagement. Understanding the mutual expectation of positive and productive communication exchange between manager and employee may improve overall engagement as well as employee retention. Twenty-two of the participants stated that (a) openness, respect, and transparency are needed when communicating a message; (b) positive communication promoted an engaged workforce; and (c) favorable communication increases engagement for both the manager and employee, significantly improving worker engagement. Eighteen participants also noted that unproductive communication decreases engagement for both the manager and employee. This study will add to the existing body of knowledge on employee engagement factors and provides organizations with resources to use to develop and train managers on effective communication strategies.

I identified common variables that contribute to effective communication and employee engagement. The first common variable was communication that was open, respectful, and transparent. The second common variable was the connection between

effective communication and an engaged workforce. The third common variable was increased engagement was due in part to favorable communication. Organizational leaders may use the findings (a) in meetings, (b) presentations, or (c) other training efforts to encourage management communication practices that positively affect employee engagement. Based on the findings of the study, management communication practices that increase employee engagement were (a) honest communication, (b) open communication, (c) transparent communication, and (d) positive communication.

Managers can use the findings from this study to develop and reinforce communication strategies that improve the dynamic between managers and employees. For example, executives might gear management training toward communication styles and how each style influences employee engagement. Conversely, executives may also choose to develop training on least effective communication styles and how those styles decrease employee engagement. Developing communication strategies that positively affect employee engagement could lead to better organizational productivity and less employee turnover.

Organizational leaders might use the findings from this study to create management training and strategies that improve employee engagement, in turn minimizing employee turnover. Embedding positive communication strategies in the organizational employee retention plan may keep productive employees from leaving the company. When an organization's employees are productive, organizational success may improve.

Implications for Social Change

The results of the study could facilitate a constructive change within organizations by creating awareness around communication strategies employed by management that, in turn, could influence employee engagement. A productive organization may contribute to society in a positive manner; for instance, educated students are an output of a well-managed school division which should affect society positively (Merrifield, 2013). If employees are engaged in their work, turnover within an organization may decrease (Siddiqi, 2013). Lower turnover in organizations may lower the national unemployment rate; as employees perform better, a reduction in turnover may occur.

A lower unemployment rate may lessen the overall burden on government and society as a whole. In economic cycles where there are low rates of unemployment there is (a) greater economic activity, (b) stronger demand for workers, and (c) a higher demand for goods and services (Shimer, 2012). Employees tend to earn higher wages and gain more economic power. They also have more taxable income, which means more revenue for state and federal governments (Shimer, 2012). Understanding the contribution of an engaged workforce on society as a whole may influence organizations to place more emphasis on improving and maintaining employee engagement.

Recommendations for Action

The findings within the study could assist organizations with implementation of effective management communication strategies. Organizations need to understand the connection between effective communication and employee engagement. Understanding the influence managerial communication has on employee engagement affects

organizational success, as a breakdown in communication can lead to reduced productivity throughout the organization (Bisel et al., 2012). An organization may run the risk of losing qualified employees if managers are unable to communicate a message in a favorable way.

I recommend that organizations use the findings to train managers on effective communication strategies. For instance, organizations might mandate a communication training course for all newly hired managers focusing solely on favorable communication strategies when supervising employees. The communication strategies should focus on improving the communication relationship between managers and employees. Improving the communication dynamic between managers and employees can improve work processes, strengthen manager-employee relationships, and reinforce the idea that management cares about promoting a positive dynamic between supervisors and employees (Welch, 2011).

I recommend distributing and sharing study findings at business management, academic, and professional conferences. I also recommend sharing research findings within academic research journals, organizations, and publications such as Academy of Management Journal and Journal of Business Ethics. Executives and managers attend professional seminars and read academic journals and publications. By sharing the study findings in the manners suggested, the likelihood of reaching an intended management audience might be increased.

The findings of this study may apply to various types of organizations; organizations may use this study improve managerial communication strategies and

employee engagement. Specifically, organizations could use study findings to train management staff on favorable communication strategies and techniques. By focusing on communication training, organizations may in turn increase overall employee engagement.

Recommendations for Further Research

There was a limited amount of research on managerial communication strategies that organizations could employee to positively affect employee engagement. There is a need to conduct studies in the United States on managerial communication strategies and the overall effect on employee engagement. More specifically, I suggest additional investigation on how positive communication between a manager and employee increases managerial work engagement. The research results indicated that the managerial participants felt more engaged in their work when message delivery was successful. Increasing awareness on this subject may provide organizations with the resources needed to improve management communication strategies along with improving employee engagement.

I recommend additional research within organizations or industries that report low employee engagement among staff members. Although I conducted research on public, government agencies, I suggest conducting research on both public and private organizations to see if communication strategies differ between industry types. I suggest using the descriptive research design with an interview as the data collection instrument. Interviewing individuals on their personal, lived experiences adds a unique perspective to the data.

I also encourage further study on communication vocal tone and employee receptivity to managerial directives. I believe these topics are natural counterparts to managerial communication. Conducting a descriptive research study on these topics may provide organizations with additional resources to improve employee engagement. These types of studies may significantly contribute to the literature on employee engagement factors and organizational processes.

Reflections

Completing the Doctorate of Business Administration Doctoral Study process was a great learning experience for me. I have gained more insight into the manager-employee dynamic, specifically pertaining to the importance of communication between managers and the workforce. Throughout the process, I diligently attempted to minimize error and bias. Following the interview protocol and mitigating bias were of utmost importance in this process. I facilitated a state of epoche during the interviews and made sure that I did not personally know any of the participants. The intent of the research was to explore the lived experiences of managers and non-management employees who work for a local, government entity in the Tidewater, Virginia, area to gauge perceptions of effective communication and the effect on employee engagement. The research process was a backdrop and foundation of the issue from multiple perspectives. When collecting the data, the participants and I conversed by means of open-ended interview questions. The participants answered all questions without hesitation and with an eagerness to share their personal experiences on the subject.

During the course of the interviews, I realized the importance of the manager-employee communication dynamic and how that dynamic influences employee engagement from both ends of the spectrum. Employee participants were concerned about the transparency of messages that come from management and the disrespectful manner in which management communicated certain messages. Management participants were concerned that failed communication was an indication that they possessed poor soft skills. Overall, the common need for respect and openness when communicating reverberated through the majority of interviews completed.

As someone who has been both an employee and manager, I can relate to the concerns noted on both ends of the participant spectrum. As an employee, I was sensitive to the communication style of my immediate supervisor. As a manager, I am cognizant of the way that I deliver messages to my employees. The major change in my thinking after completing the study is the fact that organizations should focus more on training managers on effective communication strategies while stressing to employees the importance of receptiveness when management is delivering a message.

Summary and Study Conclusions

The purpose for this qualitative descriptive study was to explore effective communication behaviors managers use to improve employee engagement and organizational productivity. I collected data using semistructured interviews as the collection tool. I interviewed 23 participants to obtain data for the study. Saturation occurs when the researcher collects data to the point of diminishing returns (Walker,

2012). I reached saturation when the data became repetitive and without the addition of new information.

Upon completion of coding and analysis of the data, four main themes became evident. I connected each emergent theme back to the literature, existing body of knowledge, general systems theory, and communications theory. My findings of the study clearly suggested that the themes of (a) openness, respect and transparency when a message is being communicated; (b) positive communication promoted an engaged workforce; (c) favorable communication increases engagement for both the manager and employee; and (d) unproductive communication decreases engagement for both the manager and employee may assist organizations in developing communication strategies that positively affect employee engagement leading to better organizational productivity and less employee turnover.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Employee Questions

1. Based on your personal experiences, how do you think employees within your organization communicate effectively?
2. Based on your personal experiences, how would you describe effective communication between an employee and their immediate supervisor within your organization?
3. How has positive communication between you and your immediate supervisor affected your engagement at work? Please provide an example.
4. Does increased communication and/or interaction with your immediate supervisor influence your engagement at work? How?
5. What other ways has communication with your supervisor affected your engagement at work?

Manager Questions

1. Based on your personal experiences, how do you think employees within your organization communicate effectively?
2. Based on your personal experiences, how would you describe effective communication between a manager and their employee(s) within your organization?
3. How has positive communication between you and your employee(s) affected your engagement at work? Please provide an example.

4. Does increased communication and/or interaction with your employee(s) influence your engagement at work? How?
5. What other ways has communication with your employee(s) affected your engagement at work?