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Postmerger Strategies Healthcare Business Leaders Use to Influence Employee Engagement and Satisfaction

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MBA, American Intercontinental University, 2008

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) are a growing phenomenon in the business world as companies are expanding their market share to compete globally. At some point, 1 out of 3 workers will be involved in an M&A. Guided by the social exchange theory, the purpose of this descriptive case study was to explore the satisfaction and engagement strategies of 8 health care leaders who had successfully implemented an M&A. The study population consisted of 4 leader and 4 nonleader employees employed at a healthcare facility in the North Central United States. All employees had been employed at the facility prior to and after the M&A and were current employees at the time of the study. Data were collected though audio-recorded, semistructured interviews as well as document review of company materials such as the employee handbook, mission, and vision. Once data were transcribed, the transcript review was completed by the participants to ensure accuracy. Data were coded and analyzed to reveal 5 themes or strategies: more frequent and transparent communication, intentional and structured leadership, increased trust and emotional engagement, increased focus on human resources, and positive corporate culture. Postmerger, these leaders had implemented changes regarding the corporate belief structure, advocated increased communication and teamwork, and promoted open and direct communication among staff and leadership. These findings may promote positive social change by increasing satisfaction and engagement in the healthcare employees at this facility, who may in turn provide better care to patients.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to those who have supported me along the way. It has been an interesting journey filled with highs and lows. Many thanks to my husband, my family and friends, and the goof troop. Nicole, you have been my one true ally throughout this process. Without all of you and your support, this journey would have been nearly impossible. Thank you.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Mergers and acquisitions (M&As) are a growing phenomenon in the business world, as organizations continue to merge to increase market share and efficiency (Mantere, Schildt, & Sillince, 2012). Although M&As are on the rise, the success rate is not. M&As have a high failure rate and there has been little improvement since 1983 (Larhiri & Narayanan, 2013). Many researchers have studied the financial side of M&As; but, there is limited research about the human side of M&As (Marks & Mirvas, 2011). Along with M&As come culture changes, increased stress, and unknown variables that have the potential to create conflict for employees (Drori, Wrzesniewski, & Ellis, 2011). The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive case study was to explore strategies healthcare business leaders use to influence the engagement and satisfaction of employees, postmerger. The results of the study can be used to assist healthcare leaders with increased employee engagement and satisfaction in future M&As.

Background of the Problem

Mergers and acquisitions (M&As) are becoming increasingly common for organizations in the United States (Mantere et al., 2012). Since the introduction of the Affordable Care Act, the number of healthcare M&As has doubled (Lineen, 2014). The number of M&As continues to increase; however, the success rate of M&As does not (Gomes, Angwin, Weber, & Tarba, 2012).

Researchers have been exploring the reasons why M&As fail for over 30 years, but findings have been inconclusive (Lahiri & Narayanan, 2013). Many of the previous researchers have examined the financial side of M&As when seeking answers regarding

why M&As fail (Chen & Krauskopf, 2013). Researchers also recommended studying the human side of mergers (Cho, Lee, & Kim, 2014). The human side of mergers has been cited as the primary reason for M&A failure; however, little literature exists in this area (Kemel & Shahid, 2012). Postmerger cultural integration is a critical component for the success or failure of an M&A (Lee, Kim, Kim, Kwon, & Cho, 2013). Many variables, such as the merging of organizational culture and leadership, influence employee engagement and satisfaction during times of change, such as an M&A (Vancea, 2011).

Problem Statement

One out of every three employees will take part in a merger and acquisition (M&A) at some point in their career (Marmenout, 2011). M&As are generally not successful, with a failure rate of more than 50% (Rouzies, 2011), and reduced employee morale, engagement, and satisfaction contribute to 50% of the M&A failures (Kemel & Shahid, 2012). The general business problem is that M&As often influence employee outcomes (e.g., engagement, satisfaction). The specific business problem is some healthcare business leaders lack postmerger strategies that influence the engagement and satisfaction of employees.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive case study was to explore postmerger strategies healthcare business leaders use to influence the engagement and satisfaction of employees. The target population was comprised of employees at one medical facility in the North Central region of the United States who were employed with the organization prior to and postmerger. This case study included interviews with two different

populations as well as document review of company materials and web information. The implications for positive social change include the potential to assist healthcare leaders with employee engagement and increased satisfaction in future M&As.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative approach was the most appropriate for this study. Qualitative researchers capture life as it is lived, focusing on subjects in their own settings (Dworkin, 2012). Dworkin (2012) stated that qualitative research is about the human experience and is flexible. I studied employees in their own work environment. When a researcher is exploring a complex issue and is looking to uncover the perceptions or experiences, a qualitative study is best suited for collecting these data (Yin, 2014). A quantitative study was considered, but was rejected because I was not measuring variables or using experimentation (Hoare & Hoe, 2013). When a researcher seeks to explore the causal factors of variables regarding a phenomenon, quantitative research is a good fit (Sergi & Hallin, 2011).

Specifically, I conducted a qualitative, descriptive case study. Yin (2014) stated that case studies are best when a *how* or *why* question is asked. Yin also stated that when using a case study, the purpose is to focus on a real-world case. This study involved an M&A in which all employees experienced the same event. I did not manipulate any behaviors by doing an experiment. I collected data from two different groups via interviews, and used existing documents for a deep probe into the question under exploration. Phenomenological and ethnographic designs were also considered, but would not have been effective because I assessed a case rather than a phenomenon

experienced by a group of specific individuals, and did not observe the subjects for long periods of time (Yin, 2014).

Research Question

The central research question is: What strategies do healthcare business leaders use postmerger to influence the engagement and satisfaction of employees?

Interview Questions

1. What job position did you hold during the recent merger?

2. What methods of communication were used to tell you about the merger?

3. How satisfied were you with the communication methods used?

4. What type of expectations did you have about the merger? Such as job influence or changes in corporate culture?

5. How do you believe those expectations were met postmerger?

6. How would you describe employee engagement prior to the merger? On a scale of 1-10, 10 is most engaged, what would you choose? Why?

7. How would you describe employee engagement postmerger? On a scale of 1-10, 10 is most engaged, what would you choose? Why?

8. How would you describe your satisfaction as an employee premerger to postmerger? On a scale of 1-10, 10 is most satisfied, what would you choose? Why?

9. If there were any changes to employee engagement and satisfaction, what do you think caused that?

10. Do you think that the performance has gone up, down, or stayed the same since the merger? Why?

11. Can you tell me anything else about the recent merger that would be helpful for my study?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework grounding this study was the social exchange theory (SET). Homans, Thibaut, Kelley, and Blau are credited with the development of the SET (Emerson, 1976). Homans began the effort in 1958, was followed in 1959 by Thibaut and Kelley, and in 1979, Blau furthered developed the theory. The SET brought together sociology, social psychology, and anthropology to explain how people work together for a mutual benefit (Homans, 1958). The behavior of one person will influence the behavior of another person as each considers the cost versus the reward ratio (Homans, 1958).

Social exchange theory is a useful theory when studying workplace behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Using SET can help explore employee engagement issues in the workplace (Slack, Corlett, & Morris, 2015). When employees receive a high level of social exchange, they will exhibit high levels of positive outcomes (Buiter & Harris, 2013). During an M&A, there may be varying levels of communication and expectations. How employees perceive these changes will affect the outcomes of their behaviors. When employees believe that they are a good fit to the organization's values they are more likely to be more engaged and satisfied with their job (Memon, Salleh, Baharom, & Harun, 2014).

Definition of Terms

Acquisition: The definition of acquisition is when one organization acquires a large enough quantity of the shares of another company to gain ownership (Filho, 2014).

Corporate culture: The definition of corporate culture is a set of rules and beliefs that employees understand and use to respond to various situations (Clarke & Salleh, 2011).

Employee engagement: The definition of employee engagement is the employee's emotional commitment to the company and its goals (Abraham, 2012).

Integration: Integration is defined as the combining of more than one entity to work together (Chen & Krauskopf, 2013).

Merger: A merger is when two companies become one entity and assets, liabilities, and corporate cultures are combined (Filho, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

An assumption is something taken for granted, and not testable (Nenty, 2009). In this study, I assumed that the participants answered questions honestly and that the participants willingly talked openly about the subject of M &As. Another assumption was that the documents and materials I reviewed such as website, mission and vision, and employee handbook were reliable and valid.

Limitations

Limitations are unavoidable or uncontrollable factors or weaknesses that can limit or affect the study design and findings (Nenty, 2009). Also, respondents might have had

bias toward the healthcare organization. Generalizability is not applicable because this study is limited to one healthcare facility. Transferability may also be limited, as the results from this study may not be the same for another organization.

During the interviews, I was physically present, which could affect the participant's responses by creating reflexivity (see Yin, 2014). The merger occurred in the past, so the participants were recalling retrospective data. Another limitation may be that the leadership staff might have shown bias toward the M&A process because of their position as the implementation leaders.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries a researcher sets to create the focus of the study (Alina, Matis, & Oriol, 2012). In this study, I focused on the employee side of the M&A, and did not include any financial information. The four leadership employees who I interviewed, as well as the four nonleadership participants, included employees who have been with the organization prior to and after the merger. Data included documents provided by the company (including an employee handbook) as well as any information that the company presents on its website that alludes to the culture (e.g., mission and vision).

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

This study has value to business because it may assist with the efficacy of future healthcare M&As, and potentially M&As in general. Gaining an understanding of healthcare worker's perceptions and experiences post M&A might allow leaders to make

positive changes toward future M&As. The data collected from this study will contribute to professional application because it may assist with the creation of a more engaged workforce, both in healthcare and beyond.

There is a consensus among researchers that M&As are on the rise (Weber, Belkin, & Tarba, 2011; Weber & Drori, 2011). M&As are occurring at faster rates, which puts more pressure on leadership and employees (Weber & Fried, 2011). The human component contributes to a large portion of postmerger failure (Lundqvist, 2012; Marks & Mirvis, 2011). The human side of mergers needs to researched more in depth (Edwards & Edwards, 2013). The data collected from this study will begin the journey into the employee side of M&As.

Implications for Social Change

The results of the study may provide leaders with additional information on how to successfully merge two organizations, as well as two organizational cultures. If leaders are able to extend focus to factors that influence employee engagement and satisfaction during and M&A such as leadership, communication, and culture this engagement would lead to a more satisfied workforce. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase job satisfaction and engagement for healthcare workers. In addition to these potential increases in job satisfaction and engagement comes the potential for increased quality of care for patients in the population at large.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The following literature review contains material from various sources of literature related to M&As and culture. I conducted reviews of articles from peer-

reviewed journals, books, reports, and periodicals. Specifically, the material reviewed is related to M&As, employee engagement, corporate culture, and employee satisfaction. In the review of literature, I provided an understanding of what issues might arise during a healthcare M&A, and the influences that may result in lowered employee engagement and satisfaction.

I organized this review into eight categories and nine subcategories. The main categories are SET, mergers and acquisitions, employee, employee engagement, employee satisfaction, organizational culture, leadership, and communication. The subcategories for M&As are downfall, and integration. Subcategories for employee are, turnover, employee perceptions, psychological influence, and trust. Employee engagement has the subcategories of leadership, and increasing engagement. The category of employee satisfaction had one subcategory of stress. The categories of social exchange theory, organizational culture, leadership, and communication do not have subcategories.

For this study, I used several sources and searches. The majority of the searches were done through the Walden University Library. The main databases used were: ABI/INFORM Global database, Business Source Complete, ProQuest database, SAGE Premier, and Google Scholar. Keyword searches included the following words in various combinations; *merger, acquisition, healthcare, employee engagement, employee, employee performance, employee satisfaction, integration, change, organizational change, postmerger, social exchange theory, turnover, perceptions, organizational culture, corporate culture, communication,* and *strategic change.* The literature review

contains 69 different resources. Of the 69 resources, 63 were published within 5 years of anticipated program completion. The six resources that were older than 5 years were used for the purpose of seminal research regarding SET. Furthermore, of the 69 total resources used, 67 are from peer-reviewed sources, which meets the 85% rule.

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore what strategies that healthcare business leaders use that may influence the satisfaction and employee engagement of employees working in the healthcare field, after a merger. The data was collected in the North Central region of the United States. The analyzed data will then be used to assist healthcare leaders increase employee satisfaction and engagement in future M&As.

The purpose of this literature review was to analyze a variety of sources to provide a thorough understanding of the existing literature and framework. The literature review includes the needed topic support and adds knowledge on the topic (e.g., Rowley, 2012). A literature review can also assist with avoiding duplication of existing research and shift focus to recommendations for future research (Rhoades, 2011).

Conceptual Framework: Social Exchange Theory

The conceptual framework grounding this study is the social exchange theory (SET). Homans, Thibaut, Kelley, and Blau are credited with being the major developers of the SET (Emerson, 1976). Emerson also assisted with furthering the development of the theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2007). Many researchers have continued work on this theory including Cropanzano and Mitchell.

Homans (1958) began the SET effort in 1958, based on small group research done by Georg Simmel. Homans was a self-proclaimed psychological reductionist who wanted to learn more about what people in small groups of two or more people do to influence each other. Homans focused on small groups of two or three people basing ideas on elementary social behavior.

Homans (1958) indicated that people's interactions entailed an exchange of material and nonmaterial goods and suggested that a theory bringing sociology closer to economics would be useful to describe social exchange. When two people interact with one another, they are engaged in an exchange. Researchers suggested that the *nongoods* transactions might be more influential than the physical transactions (Homans, 1958). How an individual reacts to the other's behavior was the area of Homans interest. Homans proposed that two people engaged in an exchange also have costs associated with the exchange. How they determine the values of the costs is how decisions are made (Homans, 1958). Homans indicated that when someone gets an excess of one value they would most likely not value it as much in the future and react differently to certain situations.

Homans (1958) discussed cohesiveness as what attracts people to a group, as well as approval, or a reinforcing activity. When members of a group have a positive exchange, they are more likely to increase the number of interactions with that group and its members. Conformers and deviants were two types of group members examined. *Conformers* tend to follow the norm and not cause waves in a group, whereas the *deviants* have behavior that is not found valuable among group members. The group

members will try to change the deviant's behavior and the deviant will have a low sociometric place (Homans, 1958).

Homans (1958) recommended the conduction of more studies to find a connection between real life and experimentation. The researcher proposed the theory that social behavior is an exchange. Social behavior can be an exchange of material or nonmaterial goods. When someone is a participant in an exchange, he or she will give something in an exchange at a cost to themselves, but may also receive a reward in return (Homans, 1958). Homans (1974) described three propositions regarding human behavior. *The success proposition;* when a person is involved in a positive exchange, the more likely they will repeat that action again. *The stimulus proposition;* If in a past experience a stimuli has been rewarded for a particular action, and in a future situation similar stimuli are present, the person is more likely to perform the action in a similar way. *The deprivation-satiation proposition;* the more often that someone is getting a reward for something, the less valuable the reward will be in the future (Homans, 1974).

That exchange participant is also trying to obtain the maximum reward for themselves, and desires to be the most profitable within the group (Homans, 1958). Homans (1974) added the *value proposition;* the more valuable the reward, the more likely that the person will perform the action again. The SET brings together sociology, social psychology, and anthropology to explain how people work together for a mutual benefit (Homans, 1958). The behavior of one person will influence the behavior of another person as each considers the cost versus the reward ratio (Homans, 1958). Homans relied heavily on distributive justice.

The work of Thibaut and Kelley strengthened the general exchange approach work that Homans began (Emerson, 1976). Thibaut and Kelley took a different approach than Homans by trying to understand psychological concepts first, heading upward to the dyad, and finally upward to the small group (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Thibaut and Kelley did not believe that SET was a theory, but instead was a reference where many theories could live (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Thibaut and Kelley explored exchange patterns (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The researchers studied the idea of reciprocal interdependence, and explored exchange sequence patterns (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

Blau (1964) further developed the social exchange theory in 1964 by calling out Homan's conflicting tendencies, and implications for social change. When Blau began working on this, the concept of general approach started to be taken seriously, as he was the third researcher to further investigate this theory (Emerson, 1976). Blau was different from the previous researchers and stayed away from focusing on psychology. Blau thought this could create blinders and important parts of social exchange could be missed (Emerson, 1976). Blau had a slightly more economic view, and as a utilitarian, Blau viewed the participant as forward looking. The participant would anticipate what the reward would be, and choose the action that would provide the maximum benefit. There are two types of social exchange; economic and social. Economic exchange occurs when there is an agreement implemented for economic gain, such as an employment contract. The social exchange is not agreed upon in advance, and is implicit (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011; Slack et al., 2015).

Blau asserted that trust is of importance in social exchange (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011). One of the most basic ways that humans interact is mutual reciprocation (Lee, Capella, Taylor, Luo, & Gabler, 2014). Blau (1964) further discussed social exchange, and the process of distributive justice. Blau summarized distributive justice as the cost of investment versus the returns received for that investment. To put it simply, a positive action will lead to a positive reaction, and vice versa (Lee et al., 2014). Blau added on to Homans' ideas by suggesting that the norms created by society influence what is deemed an acceptable return on an investment (Blau, 1964). These norms are considered the links for indirect exchange. Blau also indicated that cost benefit might rely somewhat on scarcity of that benefit. Blau stated that the rule of justice is a social norm that was withheld by Homans. Blau is credited with looking at the theory from a microeconomic lens, and was focused more heavily on the economic analysis side (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011; Emerson, 1976).

Emerson (1976) continued to expand on SET. Emerson looked at the work of Homans, Blau, Thibaut, and Kelley and found similarities and differences. Within SET, rules evolve over time. The participants involved in the exchange must abide by the rules of exchange. The rules become the guidelines of exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2007). Emerson (1969) came up with productive exchange to explain group problem solving, corporate groups, and division of labor. Another area that Emerson expanded upon is the examination of relationships between exchanges and the connections made that affect the network structure (Emerson, 1976). Homans, Thibaut, Kelley, Blau, Emerson, Cropanzano, Mitchell, and many others have built the SET from the ground up.

The social exchange theory has grown in popularity, and is used to study workplace behavior and employee engagement (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Slack et al., 2014).

Social exchange theory is a very useful theory for studying workplace behavior and employee engagement (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Slack et al., 2014). Using SET can help explore and explain relationships between individuals, and employee engagement issues in the workplace (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Lee et al., 2014: Slack, et al., 2015). SET involves reciprocation among parties (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; & Gruman & Saks, 2011). When employees receive a high level of social exchange, they will exhibit high levels of positive outcomes (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Buiter & Harris, 2013). Within the SET, relationships will grow and develop. Loyalty and commitment will expand as long as certain unspoken rules are met (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Lee et al., 2014). These unspoken rules include the aforementioned reciprocity, which means that an employee will react to the actions of the other employee or employer (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Lee et al., 2014). Employees are looking for the cost vs benefit when making decisions (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Lee et al., 2014). During an M&A, there may be varying levels of communication and expectations. How employees perceive these changes will affect the outcomes of their behaviors.

Good communication about an M&A is considered interactional fairness and is well perceived by employees (Buiter & Harris, 2013). When employees think that they are a good fit to the organization's values they are more likely to be more engaged and satisfied with their job (Memon et al., 2014). If an employee believes that the value of his

or her membership to the organization is high, they will show an increased commitment to that organization (Slack et al., 2015). The resources that the employee receives will be valued high or low by the employee, and they will base their level of engagement on that, showing a reciprocal relationship (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). When an employee thinks they are psychologically fulfilled they are going to show more engagement toward the organization (Gruman & Saks, 2011).

Several theories have been used to discuss the human side of mergers: anxiety, social identity, acculturation, role conflict, job characteristic, and organizational justice theory (Marmenout, 2011). Social identity theory is a way to understand cultural differences (Weber & Drori, 2011). When employees identify with an organization, they are more likely to have less conflict, higher job satisfaction, and more motivation (Joseph, 2014).

Social identity theory has been used to examine identity issues during an M&A (Joseph, 2014). Positive organizational identity is essential for postmerger integration (Joseph, 2014). Social categorization theory coincides with social identity theory. This theory examines how people identify with themselves while being a part of something larger such as a group. Social categorization is how the individual sees himself or herself belonging (Rouzies, 2011). When an M&A occurs, the individuals have to reorganize themselves into a new group. How someone identifies with the original organization, opportunity perceptions, and sense of belongingness will influence the level of identification (Rouzies, 2011).

Cording, Harrison, Hoskisson, and Jonsen (2014) discussed the stakeholder theory and how it follows alongside M&As and employee satisfaction. Within the stakeholder theory, what influences one stakeholder will influence other stakeholders. This theory focuses on the immediate influence the employee has on the customer or other stakeholders. Over and under-promising consumers and employees will lead to negative consequences during an M&A. This has shown lowered productivity (Cording, Harrison, Hoskisson, & Johnson, 2014). The lowered productivity will go on to affect the stakeholders. There were many good options for theory choice. SET was the best fit for this study. Within an M&A employees are undergoing several changes. How they are alerted to these changes and believe they are treated during this time is a close fit to SET.

Mergers and Acquisitions

Leaders of organizations may pursue growth internally or externally. Internal growth will take longer than external growth, as the organization must use their own resources. One form of external growth is through M&As (Filho, 2014). M&A is a general term used to define the joining of two organizations. Usually, a merger is the combination of two organizations, which creates one new organizations, whereas an acquisition is the joining of two organizations where no new organization is formed (Marks & Mirvas, 2011). In some situations, a combination of the two is used to move more quickly (Marks & Mirvas, 2011). The position within the structure of the deal will determine who is the acquired or acquiring party (Marmenout, 2011).

Growth. M&As are a growing phenomenon in the business world (Mantere et al., 2012; Marmenout, 2011). A consensus exists among researchers that M&As are on the

rise (Weber, Belkin, & Tarba, 2011; Weber & Drori, 2011). Lineen (2014) asserted that

hospital M&As doubled between 2009 and 2012. This dramatic increase in healthcare

M&As began around the time of Affordable Care Act implementation (Lineen, 2014;

McCue, Thompson, & Tae Hyun 2015). Some of the increase in healthcare M&As is

because of the higher level of reimbursement standards, as well as need for increased

efficiency (McCue et al., 2015). Filho (2014) asserted that the United States is the front

runner in healthcare M&As. Other countries such as Brazil are also beginning to follow

the healthcare M&A trend.

This faster rate of M&A occurrence puts more pressure on management and

employees (Weber & Fried, 2011). Mergers and acquisitions are one way organizations

gain market share, increase performance, and stay ahead of competition (Brueller,

Carmeli, & Drori, 2014; Buiter & Harris, 2013; Rogan & Sorenson, 2014). M&As are

also a leading strategy when an organization wants to compete globally. This technique

will increase market share and customer reach, and will help to attain goals quicker

(Lahiri & Narayanan, 2013; Marks & Mirvis, 2011; Vazirani & Mohapatra, 2012).

M&As are used to reduce the number of competitors (Rogan & Sorenson, 2014).

Healthcare M&As are also used for coordination of care, risk assumption, and best

practice implementation (Filho, 2014). Filho suggested that other reasons that healthcare

organizations merge are to increase market share, add new technologies, and expand into

other geographic areas.

Downfall. Even with this increase in occurrence, M&As have a high failure rate

(Gomes et al., 2012; Teerikangas, Very, & Pisano, 2011; Vasilaki, 2011). Researchers

have asserted that M&As have been found to negatively affect employee performance and shareholders values (Rogan & Sorenson, 2014). Researchers (e.g., Lahiri & Narayanan, 2013; Marks & Mirvis, 2011) agree that among the past 30 years of research there is little improvement in the success rate of M&As. Many M&As fail, yet the main reason why is yet to be found. Many of the previous findings on M&A failure have been contradictory (Weber, Tarba, & Reichel, 2011). Researchers found that M&A execution is an important part of failure or success (Marks & Mirvas, 2011).

During an M&A, complex problems and difficulties often arise (Brueller et al., 2014). Many leaders do not properly prepare for the integration of cultures and processes (Rogan & Sorenson, 2014). Merger syndrome is a factor that influences the failure of M&As (Marks & Mirvas, 2011). Merger syndrome can produce worst case scenario thinking and reduces productivity (Marks & Mirvas, 2011).

Researchers asserted that failure to integrate the two merging organizations properly contributes to postmerger failure (Edwards & Edwards, 2013). Poor integration increases staff turnover as well as lowers employee's job performance (Edwards & Edwards, 2013). Little research is available about the negotiation phase of the M&A (Weber, Belkin, & Tarba, 2011).

Merger of equals means that both sides of the merger will receive equivalent resources, responsibilities, and role sharing (Drori et al., 2011). Within a merger of equals, distributive equality or integrative equality are typically expected. When both of the merging parties are given identical tools, distributive equality is shown. However, if one party is given more in one area and less in another, and the other party is vice versa,

integrative equality is shown (Drori et al., 2011). Leadership may have a difficult time maintaining equality during a merger of equals, and this can cause harm to the M&A (Drori et al., 2011).

Cultural differences is one area that can cause issues within a merger of equals (Drori et al., 2011). During an M&A, equality can cause turmoil and become a liability (Drori et al., 2011). Healthcare organizations should consider culture, brand, operations, and physicians when merging. The merging of these particulars should be outlined prior to consolidation

Change is becoming normal in the business world, and viewing the transitions through the employee's lens can be beneficial to an organization going through an M&A (Buiter & Harris, 2013). Researchers suggested that more attention be given to the human side of M&As (Marks & Mirvas, 2011). One in three people will experience an M&A as an employee, so the influence is large. Many times, when M&As are focused primarily on financials over any other component, there may be issues with underestimating resources as well as additional integration issues (Marks & Mirvas, 2011).

M&As are known to create anxiety and stress among employees. This in turn leads to a higher turnover rate, decreased employee commitment, and lowered employee satisfaction (Buiter & Harris, 2013). Execution is a primary issue with M&As. Researchers claimed that transition burnout negatively affects M&A success (Marks & Mirvas, 2011). Burn out is found when prolonged stressors exist on the job. Transition burnout causes emotional and physical exhaustion (Marks & Mirvas, 2011). Researchers proposed that the integration process is a component of the M&A (Cording et al., 2014).

Integration

The reasons why M&As fail are still poorly understood, and it is suggested that researchers should focus on premerger and postmerger variables together (Bauer & Matzler, 2014; Stahl et al., 2013). Previous researchers have looked at premerger, or postmerger, but few have put the entire process together to find the variables (Gomes et al., 2013). Although a premerger is managed well, it does not mean that the postmerger will be successful (Lundqvist, 2011). Other researchers theorize that pre- and post-integration have equal importance (Gomes et al., 2013). Filho (2014) noted that three out of five healthcare organizations do not integrate properly.

There is a growing interest in postmerger integration during the M&A process. Some researchers argued that post integration is the most important part of the integration, and should be the primary focus (Vasilaki, 2011; Weber & Fried, 2011). Postmerger integration poses many challenges to leadership, as several organizational changes occur simultaneously (Monin, Noorderhaven, Vaara, & Kroon, 2012). Some researchers argued that postmerger integration and organizational integration are two of the most important parts of the integration process (Lee et al., 2013).

Many researchers agreed that integration is a key to a successful M&A (Vancea, 2011). The degree of integration, depth and pace of integration, are found to influence the success rate of M&As (Lee et al., 2013). When forming integration teams from both sides of a merger, teams should be able to work together, and attention is paid to culture clashes (Marks & Mirvas, 2011). Researchers have asserted that the value creation happens postmerger, and is of the most value to strategy and finances (Vasilaki, 2011;

Weber & Fried, 2011).Within the postmerger process, varying degrees of integration

exist. Researchers have recommended studying mergers 3-7 years post completion to

arrive at the best understanding of the entire integration process (Vasilaki, 2011).

Employee

Much of the current M&A literature focuses on financials (Chen & Krauskopf,

2013). Financials are difficult to understand without factoring in the employees that work

there (Cho et al., 2014). Some researchers theorized that the employee factor accounts for

the main cause of M&A failure (Kemel & Shahid, 2012; Lundqvist, 2012; Marks &

Mirvis, 2011). The human side of mergers needs to be looked into more deeply, and the

employee studied more closely (Marmenout, 2011; Melkonian et al., 2011; Stahl et al.,

2013; Weber & Drori, 2011).

Vancea (2011) determined that during integration, employees, and culture are

important factors that determine an M&As success or failure. Employees play large roles

when a substantial change occurs such as an M&A, and can largely influence success or

failure of the M&A (Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012). M&As can have negative effects on

employees such as anxiety, increased stress, commitment, satisfaction, and identification

issues (Buiter & Harris, 2013; Melkonian et al., 2011).

Stress can present decision making issues, as well as ethical dilemmas (Selart &

Johansen, 2011). The stress from an M&A puts additional pressure and demands on

leadership and staff. Leaders may be faced with terminating employees during an M&A,

which also leads to an increased level of stress (Selart & Johansen, 2011). Researchers

have theorized that when the acquiring company has employee friendly practices, there

will be a reduction in transition resistance from employees (Ertugral, 2013). Employees may also experience a sense of loss postmerger (Kemel & Shahid, 2012). This can cause the employees to become psychologically disturbed, which leads to work inefficiency and increased turnover. The first 100 days postmerger is when the employees will be the most uncomfortable about job changes and eliminations (Kemel & Shahid, 2012).

Turnover. With M&As comes an increase in layoffs and turnover among employees, which can negatively influence the integration process (Buiter & Harris, 2013; Melkonian et al., 2011). Increased turnover among leadership is also seen postmerger (Krug, Wright, & Kroll, 2014). During M&As, the top management is usually occupied by the acquiring organization (Gombola & Marciukaityte, 2013). Organizations on average lose one quarter of their leaders within the first year postmerger, and 60% within five years postmerger (Krug et al., 2014). A couple of reasons that this occurs is to minimize resistance, lower communication problems, and decrease uncertainty while establishing control (Krug et al., 2014).

When a leader views the M&A as detrimental to their career, or a lowering of their job status, the likelihood that they will depart the organization increases (Krug et al., 2014). During an M&A leaders tend to worry about termination, loss of status and decision making ability, as well as loss of autonomy (Krug et al., 2014). Higher leadership turnover postmerger has a negative influence on the postmerger performance of the organization (Krug et al., 2014). Cho, Lee, and Kim (2014) explained that it is beneficial to retain leadership staff with higher tenure to increase M&A success.

Researchers noted that 25% of top employees leave an organization within 90 days postmerger (Galpin, Whitington, & Maellaro, 2012).

Organizations that lose key staff during an M&A are less likely to realize M&A success (Galpin et al., 2012). Many employees leave because of lack of communication and uncertainty about the changes during an M&A. Others leave because of a loss of autonomy and status (Galpin et al., 2012). Leaders should try to retain as many staff as possible for a smooth knowledge transfer, as well as maintaining the health of the organization (Lee et al., 2013; Marmenout, 2011). An increased level of turnover will also consume a large quantity of resources and time (Krug et al., 2014). Employee's cooperation in an M&A is essential for M&A success as employees are valuable resources (Melkonian et al., 2011). A perceived sincere integration can positively influence employee turnover rates during an M&A (Lee et al., 2013). Committed employees will reduce the risk of turnover (Ertugrul, 2013). Providing employees with benefits, and allowing them to assist with decision making will decrease days missed and increase employee commitment to the organization (Ertugrul, 2013).

Employees may experience a sense of loss and neglect postmerger (Rogan & Sorenson, 2014). They may become psychologically disturbed, which leads to work inefficiency and increased turnover (Rogan & Sorenson, 2014). Relative deprivation occurs during postmerger integration when employees begin to experience the loss from organizational change; loss can cause employees to become very sensitive (Lee et al., 2013).

During an M&A employees become worried about losses they may encounter such as lessened rewards and benefits, as well as job changes (Lee et al., 2013). The employees will compare themselves to others, and believe that they are in a worse position, which can turn into relative deprivation (Lee et al., 2013). Relative deprivation leads to a lowered organizational commitment as well as lowered employee engagement (Cho et al., 2014).

When leadership is open and communicates changes honestly with staff, relative deprivation will decrease (Lee et al., 2013). Lee et al. (2013) explained that sincerity is a primary component of postmerger integration and employee satisfaction. Relative deprivation during M&As is directly related to turnover (Cho et al., 2014). If an employee can identify with the merged organization, they are less likely to leave (Cho et al., 2014).

Low employee morale during mergers can have a detrimental effect on postmerger performance (Marmenout, 2011). Others believe that loss of autonomy postmerger will have a negative influence on M&A performance (Weber, Belkin, & Tarba, 2011). Yet some researchers noted that organizational justice is an important component of postmerger success (Monin et al., 2013). Postmerger success must include employee cooperation (Melkonian et al., 2011). Many factors may influence employee behavior and performance postmerger.

Employee perceptions. Specifically, employee's perceptions can influence employee's reactions during M&As (Marmenout, 2011). Collective rumination is an example of this, and describes how some employees react during an M&A (Marmenout,

2011). During an M&A, employees are uncertain of the changes occurring and are unaware of how to react. If the leadership is not giving proper guidance, and allowing transparency, the employees will look elsewhere for support (Marmenout, 2011). When employees are unsure of how to react, they look to their peers for their reactions (Marmenout, 2011). Employees look to their peers for discussions, viewpoints, and exchange of information. This process is peer interaction, and provides the employees with a much needed social support system (Marmenout, 2011).

During an M&A, it is important for leaders to communicate upcoming changes clearly and early in the process. Communication of expectations and goals is also beneficial when trying to increase employee awareness during an M&A (Ertugrul, 2013). Ertugrul (2013) indicated that leaders should not make promises to employees that they cannot uphold, as this creates turmoil. Employees need their leaders' support during times of change and will look to them for guidance (Sharif & Scandura, 2014). Leading in an ethical way is important when gaining trust of employees (Sharif & Scandura, 2014).

Employees tend to focus on what their outcomes will be, compared to the outcomes of those around them (Lee et al., 2013). When there is a substantial change such as an M&A, and employees are experiencing stress and other negative emotions, those emotions can spread to others rapidly (Marmenout, 2011). This rapid transfer of emotion is usually negative.

Organizational justice also plays an important role in postmerger integration. To perceive justice, employees would like to believe that there is equality and not a

dominating organization (Monin et al., 2012). To reduce confusion and increase the perception of organizational justice, employees should be made aware of changes that will be taking place postmerger (Monin et al., 2012). Distributive justice plays an important role in M&As. When important resources are distributed among parties, employees involved want to ensure the fairness of distribution (Monin et al., 2012).

      Psychological/emotional influence. Peer interaction can create a sense of psychological safety for employees. This sense of psychological safety can also be false. There is a limited amount of information that gets passed around within the peer group. This limited amount of information leads group members to create their own conclusions, thus the creation of rumors appear (Marmenout, 2011). This confusion can create dysfunction and conflict among groups (Marmenout, 2011). When an M&A is announced to employees, they will discuss this change with their peers. If the employees have not been previously made aware of the changes, this exchange will present increased feelings of negativity than before the peer discussions (Marmenout, 2011).

      During an M&A, many rapid changes are occurring and relative deprivation can occur. Staff may be worried about the consequences of change (Lee et al., 2013). Employee reactions evolve over time. The human side of mergers has been researched with three perspectives; psychological, social, and cultural (Marmenout, 2011). The psychological perspective looks at the individual employee and how they are affected by the M&A in areas of stress, coping, and commitment. The social perspective looks at the group and the effect of status, and group dynamics. The cultural perspective looks at the entire organization and looks at culture clashes (Marmenout, 2011). Employees play a

strong role in an M&A and are an important consideration to make during M&As (Melkonian et al., 2011).

For leadership to create a positive change regarding collective rumination and peer interaction, leadership should stay focused. There is no way to completely avoid these trouble areas; however, positive influence is possible (Marmenout, 2011). Working with staff on possible solutions to problems can create a sense of control for the employees; this method creates positive psychological outcomes and empowerment for employees (Marmenout, 2011). When leadership has yet to determine the upcoming changes, but collective rumination is occurring they can create a distraction. The distraction may be focus on a different area, employee development, or physical exercise programs. This distraction takes away focus from the upcoming changes (Marmenout, 2011). A third option for leadership is open and transparent communication (Marmenout, 2011). Marmenout explained that transparent communication helps to diffuse rumors caused by collective rumination as well as increasing trust.

Trust. Organizational authenticity is beneficial when performing postmerger integration (Cording et al., 2014). Leadership should not over or under promise employees during an M&A. Over and under promising will only decrease organizational authenticity (Cording et al., 2014). Employee trust is also a critical part of postmerger integration. When an M&A occurs, an amount of uncertainty exists among employees. They experience vulnerability. The trust that they once had can become impaired. This mistrust leads to decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover rates postmerger (Cording et al., 2014). When employees believe that an M&A is fair they will be more

willing to cooperate and commit (Drori et al., 2011). If there is proof of distributive and procedural justice the employees will be more engaged based on fairness and equality (Drori et al., 2011). However, during M&As distributive justice is not sustainable as many postmerger dynamics are involved (Drori et al., 2011).

Researchers indicated that M&As failure may be caused from human uncertainty issues (Rouzies, 2011). Lack of commitment to the integration process may come from psychological attachment issues. Employees may also have feelings of uncertainty and identity threat (Rouzies, 2011). Belonging to the larger organization may create identification with the merger, however belonging to the larger organization was only found to be important at the beginning of a merger. Later in the merger, interaction intensity is of higher importance (Rouzies, 2011). Researchers recommended that managers spend time communicating teamwork and goals to staff to develop a sense of belonging (Rouzies, 2011).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is how emotionally connected and invested employees are toward the organization and their goals (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014; Serrano & Reichard, 2011). The amount of dedication and motivation employees have toward their job is also a part of employee engagement (Bakker, 2014). Bakker theorized that vigor, dedication, and absorption are critical components of employee engagement. When employees show vigor, they are excited about their job and want to be at work, as their job has meaning for them (Bakker, 2014). Employees experiencing absorption will

concentrate well, whereas dedication encompasses a general attitude about the employees job (Bakker, 2014).

Employees enjoy working in positive environments. Lack of engagement is common among employees and has become an important research topic (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Engaged employees are critical to the success of an M&A (Galpin, Whittington, & Maellaro, 2012). Employee engagement is directly connected to financial success or failure of the M&A (Galpin et al., 2012). Researchers asserted that engaged employees are considered a competitive advantage to the organization they are employed (Galpin et al., 2012).

During an M&A, disengaged employees will have decreased productivity, safety, and provide decreased customer service (Galpin et al., 2012). Researchers have discovered that only one quarter of U.S. employees are engaged in their jobs, and this lack of engagement has a financial influence on companies to the tune of $250- $350 billion dollars a year (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Serrano and Reichard summarized Schaufeli's revision of Mashlach's approach to employee engagement. The three components described to employee engagement were vigor, absorption, and dedication (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Vigor represents the employee's dedication to continue working on projects even when challenges are present. Absorption is when the employee is fully engrossed in what they are doing and lose concept of time, and is considered the optimal experience. Dedication relates to the inspiration and pride an engaged employee experiences (Serrano & Reichard, 2011).

Loyalty and productivity increase when employees are engaged (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Employee engagement creates increased performance, job satisfaction & commitment, a sense of well-being, and increased profitability (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). When employees are engaged, the customers also have an increased level of satisfaction and loyalty (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Researchers discovered that when employees are engaged, the company incurred five times less safety risks (Serrano & Reichard, 2011).

There are not only benefits to the organization when employees are engaged, but also to the employees themselves. Researchers suggested that engaged employees have health benefits and a sense of satisfaction (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Keeping employees engaged, and reengaging them during the M&A process will increase job satisfaction and decrease turnover rates (Galpin et al., 2012)

Leader influence. Engaged employees are more likely to remain loyal, speak in a positive manner about the organization, and be high performers (Mishra et al., 2014). Leadership is a very important factor when considering employee engagement (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Leaders can influence employees in various ways. Effective leaders are able to create a satisfied and engaged workplace as well as organizational structure (Nieberding, 2014).

Front line supervisors have a large influence on employee engagement. When the front line supervisor gives a high level of support to their employees, the employees are more engaged (Mishra et al., 2014). Open communication from supervisors that is consistent creates a higher level of employee engagement (Mishra et al., 2014).

Information sharing and radical transparency between leadership and subordinates makes the employee feel as though they belong and trust (Mishra et al., 2014). Engaged employees are known to create positive relationships internally as well as externally (Mishra et al., 2014).

Increased employee engagement has been found when leaders offer autonomy, rewards, and promote thinking outside of the box (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Centralization, decentralization, chain of command, and specializations are areas leaders should focus on to create a more engaged workforce (Nieberding, 2014). A transformational leadership style has also been found to be the most effective when vying for optimistic employees (Serrano & Reichard, 2011).

Increasing engagement. For employees to experience engagement, the environment must be created by the leadership. When work is motivating and meaningful, employees tend to become more engaged. Motivating and meaningful work can be found by creating a vision for employees to follow and become motivated by. The vision should be very clear so that the vision is easily understood (Serrano & Reichard, 2011).

Work should be altered so that the employees view it as worthwhile and meaningful. The employees will want to work harder because they know they are valued and are working toward the betterment of the organization (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Increasing resources and job redesign are other ways to increase employee engagement (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Researchers (e.g., Bakker, 2014) suggested that providing

employees with the correct resources is the most important part of increasing employee engagement.

Leadership should ensure that the proper people are in the right jobs. Giving employees explanations of their roles with clear expectations and rewards for work done increases engagement (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Consistent feedback, coaching, autonomy, and access to information are also essential tools for increased employee engagement (Bakker, 2014; Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Employee coaching is most effective when the coaching is specific to each employee's needs. Researchers determined that proper coaching could lead to increased skills and engagement (Serrano & Reichard, 2011).

Feedback in the form of formal reviews, as well as informal discussions are the recommendation of researchers (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). This method increases job clarity, goals, and increased engagement (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Another important aspect of employee engagement is recognition. Leadership should provide a clear path to reward and recognition. Recognition supports positive behavior and shows appreciation for work done (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). This also allows other employees to see what behavior leadership is looking for (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Allowing employees to participate in applicable decision making also leads to increased employee engagement (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Researchers asserted that employee engagement spreads among teams (Serrano & Reichard, 2011).

Employee Satisfaction

M&As are known to affect employee satisfaction, commitment, and identification (Buiter & Harris, 2013). Employee satisfaction is the level of enjoyment and satisfaction an employee has within their job (Marmenout, 2011). To increase satisfaction and alleviate anxiety, the employees must have positive merger perceptions (Buiter & Harris, 2013). Conflict within groups may pose a challenge to employee satisfaction, and may also create a lowered performance (Marmenout, 2011). When considering an M&A, the two involved organizations should have a detailed plan for their operations strategy and appoint an integration team to ensure the plan is followed. This will give the employees clarity of expectations and timelines of when events will occur (Marks & Mirvas, 2011).

Stress. There is much employee uncertainty and anxiety postmerger (Buiter & Harris, 2013). Researchers reported that increased workplace stress leads to a reduction in job performance as well as physical ailments (Spurgeon, Mazelan, & Barwell, 2012). Lack of concentration, depression, anxiety, and insomnia are a few of the psychological stress symptoms (Spurgeon et al., 2012). Fifteen percent of occupational health claims in the United States are linked to stress at work, and stress related absences are estimated at 60% of all employee absences (Spurgeon et al., 2012).

When leadership shows transparency and a higher level of interaction with employees during an M&A the employees will have reduced uncertainty levels, which creates satisfaction, and higher levels of performance (Buiter & Harris, 2013). M&As are difficult to implement, and important to remember not to alienate the employees involved (Schilling, Werr, Gand, & Sardas, 2012). Employees have a heightened sense of

vulnerability during an M&A. They pay additional attention to given cues. Their reactions to these cues may decrease their own satisfaction, but also decrease how customers and other stakeholders are treated (Cording et al., 2014). Employees involved with changes are more satisfied. Inviting the employees to meetings where change is discussed, and allowing them to have a voice creates satisfaction (Sharif & Scandura, 2014).

Many M&As will require some restructuring of positions to create the highest level of efficiency, this can be stressful for employees (Clarke & Salleh, 2011). Advance communication of restructuring changes is important to create trust. If employees view new job structures and appointment of new positions as unfair, they will be dissatisfied and deal with a loss of organizational identity (Clarke & Salleh, 2011). Explanations of hiring processes for new positions will help to eradicate confusion on hiring standards. Employees may feel as if they were demoted, or were treated unfairly after position changes occur (Clarke & Salleh, 2011). If employees suspect that bias was shown during the restructuring process they harbor resentment and other negative emotions (Clarke & Salleh, 2011).

When faced with large organizational changes employee's perceptions of justice will influence their level of cooperation (Melkonian et al., 2011); however, those employees who receive promotions, view their position as improved, or believe they have received fair treatment, will have higher levels of job satisfaction (Clarke & Salleh, 2011; Melkonian et al., 2011). When a larger and smaller organization are merging, researchers have found that the larger organization is favored (Clarke & Salleh, 2011). This merger

creates a sense of bias among members of the smaller organization, which in turn creates resentment and dissatisfaction among employees (Clarke & Salleh, 2011).

Researchers reported that employees from the acquiring company often times cooperate better than employees from the acquired company (Melkonian et al., 2011; Rouzies, 2011). Authentic work is work that employees can identify with, and believe that they are well aligned with their duties, and are able to use their strengths (Kira, Balkin, & San, 2012). When employees are experiencing authentic work they experience a higher level of satisfaction as well has higher performance levels (Kira et al., 2012). When a substantial organizational change occurs, such as an M&A this change can cause a disruption in the authentic work style. The M&A can create inauthenticity by bringing about confusion and uncertainty in relation to future job duties and roles (Kira et al., 2012). Satisfied employees are more likely to continue working for the new firm. Satisfied employees will work harder for the organization and show increased productivity (Ertugrul, 2013). Researchers indicated that recognition, promotions, pay, and job security increase satisfaction (Ertugrul, 2013).

Organizational Culture

M&As often have low performance and is usually attributed to issues involving employees such as low morale, turnover, or culture clashes (Marmenout, 2011). Researchers used the cultural perspective to study the organization as a whole, and found culture clashes to be the main reason for decreased performance in M&As (Clark & Salleh, 2011). When two organizations merge, there is merging of finances and resources to consider, also the merging of different organizational cultures (Clarke & Salleh, 2011).

The combining of two organizational cultures is an essential part of an M&A (Marmenout, 2011). Differing work practice should be considered, as well as many new relationships between staff that can be stressful on employees (Clarke & Salleh, 2011). Culture clash potential can be assessed in advance to determine the degree of differing cultures (Marmenout, 2011). When there is a good cultural fit postmerger, there will be less resistance to the changes within the M&A (Bauer & Matzler, 2014). Collecting data 3-4 years postmerger allows the researcher a better understanding of the time over which cultural integration occurs (Drori et al., 2011).

A large reason that M&As fail is poor cultural integration (Drori et al., 2011; Marmenout, 2011). Corporate culture is the shared beliefs and values among the members of an organization (Clarke & Salleh, 2011). Researchers found that organizations that focus on merging of cultures have a higher success rate (Zuckerman & Golden, 2015). During an M&A, changes will most likely occur in corporate culture, which usually occurs on the acquired side. Company culture becomes neglected when merging, and creates resistance and increases the chances of failure (Marmenout, 2011).

Leadership is usually focused on timelines and finances during an M&A whereas they should keep focused on merging the cultures of the two organizations (Zuckerman & Golden, 2015). When there is a lack of renewed corporate culture, there will be a lack of synergy within; this creates issues for postmerger integration (Chatzkel & Ng, 2013). When two organizations merge, their cultures also merge (Gombola & Marciukaityte, 2013). Integration is essential for a successful M&A to take place (Zuckerman & Golden,

2015). The merging party that is more dominant can be threatening to the less dominant merging party (Drori et al., 2011).

Leadership must be committed in both organizations participating in the M&A for cultures to merge. The leadership on the side of the less dominant party can become conflicted when leadership from the dominant side is making the decisions, which can create a sense of inequality (Drori et al., 2011). When the leaders think that they are not treated fairly this creates conflict and decreased cooperation, which in turn passes on to the employees (Drori et al., 2011). Leadership must learn to resolve culture clashes promptly during an M&A to motivate and guide employees in a positive direction (Drori et al., 2011). Leaders should create a culture that is integrated and maintain cultural equality (Drori et al., 2011). Maintaining premerger identities, acculturation, cultural awareness, and synergy will assist with merging cultures postmerger (Drori et al., 2011).

Post M&A organizational cultural change is traumatic for employees and can cause resistance to cultural change. Communication is an essential part of developing a new culture of change (Erturgal, 2013). Development of an acculturation program may be beneficial when firms are merging to gain trust (Clarke & Salleh, 2011). A culture of trust is important for organizations dealing with change (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Implementation of training programs covering best practices for communication styles is also important.

Leaders should focus on building a culture for work, and their teams, instead of changing to one that already exists for an existing entity (Lundqvist, 2011). Horizontal mergers in particular create challenges among corporate culture. Employees can lose their

organizational identification and experience powerless during this time (Clarke & Salleh, 2011). Employees have an easier time identifying with an organization that mirrors the corporate culture they are used to (Drori et al., 2011). Cultural incompatibility occurs when both cultures disintegrate and a new culture created. This new culture creates a lack of cultural identification as well as stress, and lack of psychological attachment (Clarke & Salleh, 2011; Drori et al., 2011). This lack of psychological attachment creates a lowered organizational trust, lowered commitment, as well as lowered job satisfaction (Clarke & Salleh, 2011).

Leadership

Leadership is fundamental to post integration success (Vasilaki, 2011). Researchers agree that poor leadership leads to less value (Vasilaki, 2011; Teerikangas et al., 2011). During an M&A leadership roles are quite important (Hahm & Jung, 2013). During an M&A there is a large amount of instability and pressures internally as well as externally (Hahm & Jung, 2013). When an organization is experiencing stress or turbulence, researchers recommend a strong, charismatic leader (Hahm & Jung, 2013).

In most M&As there is no value created because of poor leadership during implementation (Vasilaki, 2011). An integration manager can affect the success or failure of an M&A, and can influence the value created and leaked (Terrikangas et al., 2011). M&As are known as large organizational changes which create varied emotions among staff (Clarke & Salleh, 2011). Organizational change influences the employees, as well as affects leadership. Leaders can also experience feelings of anger, fear, loss, stress, and powerlessness during an M&A (Clarke & Salleh, 2011).

Some researchers indicated that leadership style and trust are important components of M&A success or failure (Stahl, Larson, Kremershof, & Sitkin, 2011). Organizational leadership and communication are important factors when considering an M&A (Buiter &Harris, 2013). Perceived sincere integration can positively affect the employee turnover rate during an M&A and increase trust. When employees have lower levels of trust in management this can negatively, influence the sincere integration attempts (Lee et al., 2013).

When moving forward with an M&A, leadership is important (Buiter & Harris, 2013). A need exists to be transparent, open and honest, and reward good behavior. Employees need the necessary tools for success (Bernstein, 2012; Buiter & Harris, 2013). When employees are uncertain about what is going on this uncertainty can cause additional stress. If leadership is open and honest about the upcoming changes, and exhibits consistent communication, the employee is at ease. This leadership openness goes back to the social exchange theory, and how the feeling of reciprocity is important to employees. When the employees believe that the leader is treating them properly, they will increase their performance (Buiter & Harris, 2013). Fairness is also important for employees. When an employee believes he or she is treated fairly, through communication and other avenues, the employee will work harder (Buiter & Harris, 2013). During an M&A there is stress and turbulence, employees expect additional commitment, trust, vision communication, and expertise during this time (Hahn & Jung, 2013).

Communication

Communication is an important part of an M&A. Communication must be proactive (Mishra et al., 2014). Leadership should have a clear vision and communicate that vision across the organization (Buiter & Harris, 2013). Lack of communication can create a negative influence on employee effectiveness (Kemel & Shahid, 2012).

When employees are unsure of what is happening, they will create their own idea of what is happening and share that opinion with others, which is often far from the truth. Researchers recommended a formal communication process for organizations going through an M&A (Ertugral, 2013). First lines of communication should occur early in the M&A process so that everyone is informed of what is going on. Researchers found increased communication, creating trust, removing unpredictability, reducing stress, and increasing morale can all lead to better success during an M&A (Kemel & Shahid, 2012).

Internal communication increases productivity and positivity among staff (Mishra et al., 2014). It also creates trust and increases commitment between leadership and staff (Mishra et al., 2014). Internal communication provides employees with the proper information needed to perform and complete their job duties (Mishra et al., 2014). Especially in a turbulent or changing environment, internal communication is an essential part of relationship building between leadership and staff (Mishra et al., 2014). Face-to-face communication is the most credible style of communicating about an upcoming M&A as the communicators hear verbal cues, but also see visual cues (Galpin et al., 2012; Mishra et al., 2014).

Providing frequent effective communication after the merger announcement, in person, electronically, or in print provides transparency to employees and creates trust (Galpin, 2012). Researchers also recommend informing employees of when they can expect to receive additional communication on the M&A (Galpin, 2012). Providing regular updates on performance, and giving constructive feedback will create an increased sense of belonging to the merged organization postmerger (Galpin et al., 2012). Communication slows among the newly formed teams postmerger, especially when merged organizations are in different cities (Alatta & Sing, 2011). Communication among teams peaks 2 years postmerger (Alatta & Sing, 2011).

Staff communication is important when trying to decrease anxiety and increase involvement. Leaders should expect resistance with an M&A (Lundqvist, 2011). Multiple forms of resistance exist, such as productivity and performance issues, attendance issues, turnover, health problems, and issue with authority (Lundqvist, 2011). Management should be open and honest with their staff to gain trust (Lundqvist, 2011).

M&As usually produce employee uncertainty, and the details of the merger are sometimes withheld from employees which creates confusion. The level of uncertainty from employees will be a large issue during any M&A. Communication must be clear and consistent to lower the level of uncertainty (Buiter & Harris, 2013). Researchers recommended that communication be immediate, consistent, and truthful to alleviate stress and increase trustworthiness (Buiter & Harris, 2013). When there is a high level of communication from leadership, employees will have increased satisfaction (Buiter & Harris, 2013). This good communication will also help to merge the organizational

culture of the two organizations (Buiter & Harris, 2013). The acculturation system can be through good communication with employees. It may also be useful for leaders to acknowledge the stress placed on employees for validation (Buiter & Harris, 2013).

Researchers (Mishra et al., 2014) found that positive work environments usually have good and open communication. Employees who trust their organization agree that there is open and honest internal communication. Internal communication is the communication from leadership to employees, and can increase trust and employee engagement (Mishra et al., 2014). Positive internal communication leads to superior customer service (e.g., Mishra et al., 2014).

Transition and Summary

Section 1 of this study included the background of the study related to the problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, and research question. I also described the conceptual framework, definitions of terms, and the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. This section also included a discussion of the significance of the study, and a literature review.

The focus of the study is to discover what factors may influence the satisfaction and employee engagement levels of employees working in the healthcare field, postmerger. The literature review included discussion on the history of the social exchange theory as well as research implying how the social exchange theory may relate to changes among employees postmerger. The remainder of the literature review was about the (a) mergers and acquisitions, (b) employee, (c) employee engagement, (d) employee satisfaction, (e) organizational culture, (f) leadership, and (g) communication.

In Section 2, I presented the study project and method. There is discussion regarding the researcher and participant, as well as detailed information on the chosen method and design. Population and sampling is in Section 2 along with discussion on ethical research. Data collection technique and analysis are also be included in the section. In Section 3, I described the results and implications. Section 3 includes an introduction that includes the purpose statement. Followed by qualitative presentation of findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for future research, reflections, conclusion, and appendices.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 of this study includes the purpose of the project, role of the researcher, participant information, and detailed description of the selected research method and design. In this section, I also discuss the details of the qualitative population and sampling and ethical research, as well as qualitative data collection instruments, the data collection technique, and the method qualitative data analysis that I used in this study. In this section, I also address confirmability and replicability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive case study was to explore postmerger strategies that healthcare business leaders use to influence the engagement and satisfaction of employees. The target population was comprised of employees at one medical facility in the North Central region of the United States who were employed with the organization prior to and postmerger. The implications for positive social change include the potential to assist healthcare leaders with employee engagement and increased satisfaction in future M&As.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is to conduct quality research and protect the participants (Yin, 2014). The researcher of an effective case study should possess the ability to ask appropriate questions. The researcher should also have a firm grasp on the research, listen to the participants, adapt to a changing environment, and avoid biases (Yin, 2014).

I served as the primary data collector in this study. I collected data in an honest manner to reduce bias (e.g., Yin, 2014). I have worked in healthcare since 2011 as a clinical informatics applications analyst for the revenue cycle and later transitioned to the role of IT applications analyst where I was employed during data collection. While in this role, I have witnessed and participated in the M&A of multiple sites. I conducted research and data collection at a healthcare facility where I was not employed. I did not know any of the interviewees, nor have I had any previous contact with them.

According to the Belmont Report, participants must be treated with respect, as well as shown justice and beneficence (The Belmont Report, 1979). Risk must be minimized, participation in the study be voluntary, and participant identification be kept confidential. I followed the protocols set forth by the Belmont Report when conducting my research.

The reason I chose to do a qualitative study was to find out what factors may influence employee engagement and satisfaction postmerger in a healthcare organization. Although I have been personally involved with M&As, I approached this study with an openness to what I may uncover to decrease bias from a personal lens. A researcher should not be opposed to a finding that they did not expect (Yin, 2014).

Creating and adhering to an interview protocol will ensure a researcher follows the same procedures for each interviewee. Interview protocols guide a researcher through the interview process (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The protocol for this study's interview (see Appendix A) included preinterview dialog, interview questions, concluding remarks,

and prompts during the interview. The same protocol was used for each interview participant.

Participants

The participants for this study were employees working in the selected healthcare facility in the North Central United States. The facility originally opened in 1921, and is equipped to care for 60 patients. They employ approximately 100 staff of healthcare workers and other employees. The facility's director approved the interviewing of their employees and the data collection process, and returned a Letter of Cooperation. The participants were selected through purposeful sampling. To begin the purposeful sampling process, the director sent out an e-mail to staff that included information about the study, selection criteria, and incentive information. In the e-mail send out by the director, I asked interested parties to respond, by e-mail, directly to me by a specified date with their phone number, job title, department, and years of service, if they were interested in participating.

When I received the e-mails from the potential participants, I selected the most appropriate participants for the study. This decision was on the following: Four of the interview participants were in leadership roles (director and above) where they were involved in strategy creation, employed at the facility prior to, and after the M&A. The other four interview participants were employed in nonleadership roles and were employed at the facility prior to and after the M&A, where they would have witnessed the implementation of strategies during the merger. The interviewees were with the organization at the time of interview. If more than eight staff members had been

interested in participating, I would have chosen participants based on department employed. For example, I did not want to study eight participants who worked in the same department.

The recommendation on number of interview participants for qualitative studies is 5-20 (Dworkin, 2012). The goal is to reach saturation. Saturation is reached when there are no longer any new themes or ideas emerging, and a researcher has enough information to recreate the study (Dworkin, 2012). The participants aligned with the research question of what strategies leaders will use in future M&As regarding employee morale, engagement, and satisfaction. I gained saturation by continuing interviews until no new information was found to further the study. When the participants were not adding new details, but rather indicating what previous participants said, that showed that saturation had been reached.

I followed Walden University's IRB process. After getting an approved proposal from my committee, Walden IRB approval, and signed permission from the facility, I worked with the Director to determine the pool of participants for purposeful selection as explained above. Once participants were selected, I e-mailed them the informed consent form (see Appendix B). Informed consent is important so that the participants understand what the research process consists of, as well as what their rights are (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). Once the informed consent forms e-mailed, I called the participants and discussed appropriate times to meet, reviewed the informed consent form, purpose of the study, and conducted research.

Researchers should try to create and maintain relationships with their participants (Swauger, 2011). I made my participants comfortable and let them choose if they want to participate in the study. I also gave them the opportunity to leave the study if they ever were uncomfortable. No participants chose to decline participation or withdraw during the study. This information is outlined in the informed consent agreement. An ethics of care should be practiced with open communication and an equalization of power (Swauger, 2011). I let the participants know verbally what to expect every step of the way and let them know that communication is open.

Research Method and Design

I used a qualitative descriptive case study approach to determine what factors affect employee engagement, satisfaction, and morale postmerger in a healthcare organization. In the following sections, I describe why a qualitative method and descriptive case study design were chosen compared to other methods and designs.

Method

In this study, I used a qualitative research method. The three most common research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative research captures the subjects in their own setting and is flexible (Dworkin, 2012). Qualitative research also allows the researcher to review the participant's perceptions and experiences (Yin, 2014). Qualitative research allows a researcher to gain insight into the views of the participants and what they have experienced (Thyer, 2012). Qualitative research also allows a researcher to understand the participant's reactions to change, and how they respond to certain actions (Thyer, 2012).

Two of the most widely used techniques in qualitative research are interviews and focus groups (Coenen, Stamm, Stucki, & Cieza, 2012). For this study, I conducted interviews of leadership and nonleadership healthcare employees. *How* and *why* questions are typically asked when doing qualitative research (Yin, 2014). These *how* and *why* questions allowed me to collect data from the participant's viewpoint.

Quantitative researchers use surveys, random sampling, and statistics to test theories and hypotheses. Testing is done to examine the relationships between variables chosen by the researcher (Hoare & Hoe, 2013). I did not want to be testing hypotheses or choosing variables that I determine may be appropriate. Instead, I learned from the participants who have gone through the change. Unlike the *how* questions asked in qualitative research, quantitative research asks *how many* or *what* (Hoare & Hoe, 2013).

Mixed methods researchers use a combination of elements from qualitative and quantitative models to achieve results (Hayes, 2013). They use a combination of numerical and subjective data (Hayes, 2013). A mixed method study is used to validate research with two different viewpoints (Luyt, 2012). This type of study is used when working with a large number of participants (Luyt, 2012). I interviewed eight participants, so this type of study was not a good fit. Qualitative and quantitative researchers analyze different data; the mixed methods research style brings them both together to become complimentary (Luyt, 2012). The mixed method methodology can be used when qualitative or quantitative approaches are not sufficient on their own (Hayes, 2013). For this study, the qualitative research method was sufficient, and therefore a mixed methods study was not chosen.

Research Design

Specifically, I used a descriptive, single case study research design. Case studies are best used when *how* or *why* questions are asked (Yin, 2014). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) describes any study that is not experimental as descriptive (IRB, 1993). Case studies can be explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive (Yin, 2014). I did not manipulate any data; the exploratory style was not a good fit. The descriptive case study can be used to describe a phenomenon in the context that it occurred (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It is important to focus on a real-world case when using the case study design (Yin, 2014). Case studies are for studies related to business so the researcher is able to become close to the daily practices of the participants (Moll, 2012). Following the design recommendations of scholars like Yin and Moll, I used a single case study, as I studied one healthcare organization that had gone through an M&A, and all employees interviewed had experienced the same event. In addition, the documents and materials that I selected, for triangulation, helped me to also understand the ideas, policies, and content that the company put forth to employees regarding the new company and new leadership.

Other common research designs often used with a qualitative method are phenomenological and ethnographic. Boddy (2011) stated that ethnographic research is popular with marketing. Ethnographic researchers are able to obtain detailed observations of the subjects on a daily basis in their natural settings (Boddy, 2011). Observations are compiled over an extended period when collecting ethnographic research data (Boddy, 2011).

According to Evans (2012), narrative interviewing takes place with many open-ended discussions. I did not observe individuals in their working environment as the M&A has already occurred. Narrative interviewing was not appropriate for my study. A phenomenological design looks for patterns and relationships among the group that is studied (Reiter, Stewart, & Bruce, 2011). The goal of the phenomenological design is to describe a phenomenon based on participant perspectives (Cassidy, Reynolds, Naylor, & De Souza, 2011). I did not research a phenomenon and therefore a phenomenological design was not the appropriate choice.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study included members of leadership and nonleadership staff who were employed by a healthcare organization in the North Central United States. Participant selection was not based on race, sex, age, or variables other than position title and dates of employment. To be selected for the study, the employees must have been employed by the organization prior to the merger as well as postmerger. Participations had to be employed by the organization at the time of interview. The leaders were selected specifically because they were in organizational positions where they were likely involved in strategy creation during the merger. They were in positions of decision making and authority where their strategies would have been implemented or they would have been responsible for implementing strategies with their employees. Nonleaders were selected because they were workers who would have been the recipients of strategies implemented during the time of the merger.

Four leadership staff and four nonleadership staff were interviewed, face-to-face, and saturation was reached. Face-to-face interviews are used in qualitative research because you are able to establish rapport and see body language (Draper & Swift, 2011). To qualify as *leadership,* the employee must have the title of supervisor, manager, or director. The semistructured interviews took place at the facility in private meeting rooms so that the participant did not have to travel. The environment was comfortable and nonthreatening to the participant. The interviews were held at the convenience of the participant and were scheduled for one hour in length.

The sample size of eight (roughly four in each grouping) is sufficient. Dworkin (2012) stated that the recommended number of interview participants for a qualitative study is 5-20, with a goal of saturation. Saturation is reached when new themes or ideas are no longer emerging, and you have enough information to recreate the study (Dworkin, 2012). The number of interview participants is smaller in qualitative studies compared to quantitative studies because you may also gain information via existing documents, observations, and interviews (Yin, 2014).

In this study, I selected participants based on purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling for this study began with an e-mail sent by the facility's Director to their employees explaining the study and interview process. If the employees were interested in participating, they responded to me via e-mail by the date specified. Once the specified date arrived, e-mails were reviewed, and the participants chosen based on suitability for this study. Four of the interview participants were employed in leadership roles and the

other four interview participants were employed in nonleadership roles. All participants were employed at the facility prior to and after the M&A.

Obtaining a sample that is representative of the population studied is important (Draper & Swift, 2011). Draper and Swift (2011) explained that purposive sampling is best when researchers purposefully chose participants based on their knowledge and use to the study. The participants for this study were based on their experience of an event and exhibit purposeful sampling (Draper & Swift, 2011). Snowball sampling is also used in qualitative research, but was not appropriate for this study. Snowball sampling occurs by chance (Draper & Swift, 2011). With this method, a researcher asks one person to participate and has them give a referral to another participant, and the cycle continues. For this study, I needed to study a particular group so purposive sampling was the best approach.

Ethical Research

For the ethical protection of participants, researchers must gain IRB approval prior to data collection. For this study, I did not gain IRB approval from the interview site, as they do not have an IRB department. When I received permission from Walden's IRB department allowing me to begin data collection, I had the director of the site email the message to the staff enlisting participants. When the participants responded to me and I verified their criteria, I e-mailed them the informed consent form (see Appendix B) for the participants to review. I then called each potential participant and discussed appropriate times to meet, reviewed the informed consent form, reviewed the purpose of the study, and began conducting research.

Informed consent is important so that the participants understand what the research process consists of, as well as what their rights are as participants (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). This research took place with human participants, so it is important to review ethical issues (Mitchell & Wellings, 2013). I have completed the National Institute of Health's web based training course on protecting human participants (see Appendix C).

Full disclosure to the participants is important (Wisdom, Caveleri, Onwuegbuzie, & Green, 2012). The aforementioned informed consent was the first step to establish full disclosure. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants the names of the participants have been masked and an unidentifiable marker used. Participants were assigned an alphanumeric instead of name. Keeping names of participants and organizations confidential helped ensure confidentiality and privacy (Sherrod, 2011).

Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and the participants could have withdrawn at any time. This option was explained in person when the informed consent form was returned prior to the interview (see Appendix B). They could have withdrawn by contacting me via e-mail or phone. A $50 gift card given as compensation for participating in this study, which was also explained to the participant in the informed consent form (see Appendix B). The results gained from their participation in this study allowed their opinions to be recognized in a confidential manner, and possibly assist with future M&As.

To maintain confidentiality and privacy, the data that I collected during the study including consent forms and interview recordings were stored in a lockable file box. The

interview recordings are kept on a password encoded flash drive. The data will remain stored there for a minimum of 5 years to protect the rights of the participants. Upon the completion of the 5 years, the data will be destroyed via shredding and wiping the flash drive files. The Walden IRB approval number for this study was 04-08-16-0476261.

Data Collection

Instruments

As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument. I used semistructured interview questions as an instrument for data collection. According to Petty, Thomson, and Stew (2012), interviews are valuable tools to collect data for research studies. A semistructured interview is a combination of structured and unstructured interviews (Cachia & Millward, 2011). Cachia and Millward indicated that, within a semistrucutred interview, there is a fixed set of questions but additional questions may be added to further explore the subject, and is meant to explore the participant's experiences. The interviews consisted of 11 semistructured open-ended interview questions that relate to the participant's experiences with the M&A (see Appendix D). Again, participants were chosen for their experiences related to strategies used in the M&A. Leaders were selected because they were in positions in which they would have implemented or executed strategies. Nonleaders were recipients or witnesses of the strategies implemented by leadership.

Prior to the interview, I reviewed the material pertaining to the interview so that I was prepared. The interviews were audio recorded so that they could be transcribed post interview. I also took a limited amount of notes during the interview so that I was able to

pay full attention to the participant and their body language. Listening is a critical interviewing skill (Qu & Dumay, 2011). When I transcribed the audio files, I added my notes to assist with data analysis. Proper organization of data can increase the validity and reliability of the study (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Once I transcribed the interviews, they were reviewed and cross-checked with the audio recording to establish credibility. Once that was complete, I had the interviewees review for additional validity and reliability (Hanson, Balmer, & Giardino, 2011). Transcript review ensures that the interviewees acknowledge that their interviews were documented correctly and their experiences portrayed accurately (Hagens, Dobrow, & Chafe, 2009). Validity is important so that the credibility of the data is known (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). In addition to collecting data from interviews, I received the company employee handbook from the director of the facility. I also examined the company website for information on the company in general, their mission statement, vision statement, and other evidence of their culture, communication styles, and strategies that may have been presented in framing the merger.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique that I used for this study was the interview. An interview protocol was followed for the collection of the semistructured interview data (see Appendix A). Interview protocols are important so that the interviewer does not forget any important information (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

The first step in this process was to schedule a time and place to meet with the participant that was convenient for them. I used an available meeting room at the

healthcare facility for convenience to the participants. I obtained permission from the

facility's Director to use the onsite meeting room. The room was private to ensure

confidentiality and privacy. Each interview was scheduled for a 60-minute time period.

The employees were interviewed during non-work times. When the interview began, I

followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A). First was an explanation of the

purpose behind the research. Next, the informed consent form (see Appendix B) was

reviewed, signed, and returned by the participant.

An alphanumeric identifier was assigned to each participant to ensure

confidentiality and will be assigned at this time. The assignment of alphanumeric codes

can achieve confidentiality and privacy for the participant (Gibson, Benson, & Brand,

2013). If the participant was part of the leadership team they have an L for leader in front

of their number, if he or she was a nonleadership member they have E for employee in

front of their number. The numbers were assigned in conjunction with their order

interviewed. The participant identifier was written next to the name on the consent form

for organization.

The audio recording of the interview commenced at this time, and verification

that the recorder is working occurred in between questions. Prior to asking the next

question, I glanced at the recording device and ensured that the minutes were counting

down and the battery had not died. Once the recording device was verified as working, I

begin to ask the interview questions (see Appendix D). A copy of the letter of

cooperation was previously reviewed with the director (see Appendix E). Notes were

taken about body language and to capture the researcher's thoughts and to provide

context for the responses. Probing deeper into questions occurred as needed. Upon

completion of the interview questions, the participants were reminded of contact numbers

in the event that additional questions arise. Once transcripts were completed, transcript

review was done to ensure that the transcribed information was correct and their

experiences were portrayed accurately (Hanson et al., 2011). Transcript review entailed

e-mailing the completed transcripts to the respective interviewee for review. The

interviewees reviewed the transcripts for accuracy, and were able to explain corrections

at this time. All participants confirmed their responses with no recommended changes.

Finally, the participants were thanked for their time.

Every data collection method has advantages and disadvantages. The

semistructured interview is no different. A semistructured interview begins with a few

structured questions but researchers are allowed to expand on them as needed. This

probing allows further discussion on the phenomenon in question (Cachia & Millward,

2011). A disadvantage of the semistructured interview is that some participants may be

reluctant to give in depth information face-to-face if they are shy or hesitant (Yin, 2014).

I did not find this to be the case in this study.

In addition, I read the entire company employee handbook and then prepared it

for upload to NVivo. I also navigated to the company website and read material on the

background of the company, the mission, the vision, and other informational pages that

provided insight into the culture and communication style of leadership—especially

related to the merger. I copied and pasted all of this information into an MS Word

document so that it could be uploaded into NVivo and coded along with the interview data.

Data Organization Techniques

Each participant was given an alphanumeric identifier to ensure confidentiality. The assignment of alphanumeric codes can achieve confidentiality and privacy for the participant (Gibson, et al., 2013). If they were leadership staff, they received an L for leader in front of their number. If they were nonleadership staff, they received an E for employee in front of their number. Numbers were assigned in order of interviews. For example, the first leadership employee interviewed was classified as L1. The interviews were recorded using a Livescribe Echo Smartpen. I chose the Livescribe Echo Smartpen compared to other recording devices because it is able to record and take notes whereas others can only voice record. This recording device allowed the interviews to be played back for transcription. The Livescribe Echo Smartpen's software also assisted with transcription as it can seek out key words. I was also able to speed up or slow down playback of recordings. I also included the electronic versions of the documents for document review (from the handbook and website) along with this material. All electronic files including notes were stored and maintained in folders on a password protected flash drive (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012).

To maintain confidentiality and privacy, the raw data that was collected during the study was stored in a lockable file box. Informed consent forms and interview recordings were also stored in the file box. The box will remain stored in my home office for a minimum of 5 years to protect the rights of the participants. Upon the completion of

the 5 years, the data will be destroyed via shredding and wiping the flash drive files (Fein

& Kulik, 2011).

Data Analysis Technique

The use of open-ended questions during semistructured interviews allows a

researcher to delve deeper into questions (Wilson, 2012). An interview protocol was used

(see Appendix A) during the interviews. I used the interview questions to develop themes

that correspond to the central research question of: What strategies do healthcare business

leaders use postmerger to influence the engagement, and satisfaction of employees?

Triangulation was reached as I reviewed face-to-face semistructured interviews with

leadership staff, nonleadership staff, and conducted a document review (see Walshe,

2011). The documents reviewed along with these interview data consisted of the

company employee handbook and information downloaded from their website. These

additional documents provided insight into company policy and procedures, official

positions and leadership styles, the mission and vision. This type of triangulated

information helped me assess the state of the merger from this third angle. Triangulation

provided a more substantial look into the study, whereas one type of data alone may have

been limiting (Heale & Forbes, 2013).

Data analysis is the process of analyzing the collected data by organizing in a way

that allows the discovery of useful themes and patterns to emerge (Yin, 2014). The

Livescribe Echo Smartpen was used to record the interviews. Upon completion of the

interviews, I used the Livescribe Echo software to upload the recordings to my computer.

I then transcribed the recordings into a Microsoft Word document by typing the recorded

words while playing back the recording. After the recordings were transcribed, I

reviewed each one for errors, and e-mailed a copy to each participant for transcript

review. This transcript review was done to ensure that the correct views were captured

and there were no errors (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Yin (2014)

recommended reading the transcripts multiple times to arrive at a better understanding of

the whole interview. I did this and took notes as I saw emerging words or themes and

highlighted as needed.

Yin (2014) stated that data analysis should consist of data compilation, data

disassembly, reassembling data, data interpretation, and conclusions from the data. The

data compilation occurred as I organized the interviews into transcripts and imported

them into the coding software. Once every participant had responded and informed me

that their interviews were transcribed appropriately, I continued to uncover themes and

code. Once I had read the transcripts multiple times, I uploaded the transcripts from Word

into NVivo version 11. I chose NVivo for my data analysis because it is a user-friendly

program that was recommended by several Walden staff members. A wide variety of

tutorials and user support guides exist for this software making it easier to use. I

compared NVivo to ATLAS.ti prior to making a decision. ATLAS.ti did not appear to

have the support systems I might have needed as a first time user. NVivo allows data to

be imported from other sources. I imported information from a Word document so this

was an important feature. ATLAS.ti stores its data on an external database and there have

been issues with saving. From this information I decided that NVivo was a better fit.

The use of software could assist the researcher with keyword searches,

organization, and coding (Rowley, 2012). After I uploaded the transcripts and documents is when the disassembly of the data began; the coding process is where themes and patterns began to emerge (Yin, 2014). The director of the facility had provided me with the employee handbook, as mentioned. In addition, as mentioned, I had created MS Word documents containing relevant information from the company website. These were uploaded to NVivo along with the transcribed interview documents. I used the autocoding feature of the NVivo software to assist with word frequencies and the emergence of themes and patterns.

Coding helps organize and interpret the data (Carcary, 2011). Once repetitive words were found, notes were created to keep track of each emerging theme and the reassembly of the data occurred. Once I had established codes from keyword searches and the autocoding function, I went through each interview and document again and manually coded the document for the themes and codes that had emerged in the process, just to ensure that each document had been properly coded and that I had not missed anything either during the first read through, and also to ensure that NVivo did not miss anything during the autocoding process.

Yin (2014) stated that normally five to seven themes would emerge in qualitative research. Once I had found codes and themes, conclusions were made about the data collected. The connection of the study, method, and literature is the conceptual framework (Borrego, Foster, & Froyd, 2014). The conceptual framework that grounded this study was the SET. The SET brings together sociology, social psychology, and anthropology to explain how people work together for a mutual benefit (Homans, 1959).

The behavior of one person will influence the behavior of another person as each considers the cost versus the reward ratio (Homans, 1959). The SET can help to explain employee engagement issues that may occur in the workplace (Slack et al., 2015). I will use the SET framework to assist with emerging themes and interpretation of the study's results.

<div align="center">**Reliability and Validity**</div>

Reliability

Reliability and validity refer to the credibility, accuracy, and precision of the research (Street & Ward, 2012). When validity and reliability are shown this demonstrates a good level of rigor. These terms are used more heavily within quantitative research studies, and the meanings do not carry over into qualitative research (Foley & O'Conner, 2013). The tools used to assess the rigor of qualitative research are most commonly *dependability, credibility, transferability*, and *confirmability* (Houghton et al., 2013).

The ability of a researcher to replicate a previous study and find similar results is known as *reliability* (Ali & Yusof, 2011). Reliability will also assure that another researcher could replicate the finding of the original study by following the documented process (Ali & Yusof, 2011). To strengthen the consistency, reliability, and validity within qualitative research the researcher tends to rely on tools such as semistructured interviews and protocols (Foley & O'Conner, 2013). Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, and Pearson (2014) stated that the equivalent of reliability and internal validity within a quantitative study are the same as *credibility* and *dependability* in

qualitative research. In a qualitative study, the researcher is the instrument, who documents the process thoroughly through recordings, notes, and interviews (Ali & Yusof, 2011).

Onwuegbuzie et al. (2012) stated that *dependability* is related to the quality of qualitative research. Upon completion of the interviews, I reviewed the recordings multiple times for errors and information gathering. I then moved on to transcribe the interviews. Upon completion of the transcription, I presented them to the interviewees for their review. They checked for accuracy and confirmation of the interpretation. The participants were asked to return the transcripts with comments within five days of receipt. This process is known as *transcript review*, and is a form of dependability.

Validity

Validity consists of external and internal validity. Internal validity refers to accuracy or quality of the study, and external validity is how well the study can be applied to other settings (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Researchers should achieve both internal and external clarity (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Validity is used to lessen the issues that may influence the outcome of research (Bleijenbergh, Korzilius, & Verschuren, 2011). Validating research creates quality and is considered a strength of qualitative research (Ali & Yusof, 2011). *Dependability, trustworthiness, credibility*, and *transferability* are all areas of validity (Mayer & Boness, 2011).

Credibility is ensuring that the research is believable by the readers and by the participants that provided the data. The readers must determine whether it is a true interpretation of what was said (Munn et al., 2014). Transcript review is one of the best

techniques to show credibility in a qualitative study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I

provided the participants with a copy of their transcripts for review, and ensured that my

interpretations are appropriate. This allowed the participants the ability to verify for

accurateness, and build trust (see Mero-Jaffe, 2011).

I also used methodological triangulation. The use of methodological triangulation

will aid in the validity of a research study (Yin, 2014). Leadership staff and

nonleadership staff were interviewed, and document review was performed to gain

triangulation.

Transferability is described as how easily the research results could be transferred

to another context (Houghton et al., 2013). I thoroughly described the research process

and any assumptions made so that future researchers may use this information. It is at the

discretion of other researchers to determine whether the results are transferable (Marshall

& Rossman, 2016). A high level of detail and explanation created a better level of

transferability (Houghton et al., 2013). Confirmability is another important part of

validity. Confirmability is the accuracy of the data and how well your results could be

confirmed by others (Houghton et al., 2013). I established confirmability by referencing

literature that have had similar results. Livescribe software was also used to assist with

data analysis accuracy.

To reach saturation a large enough sample must be examined, however, not so

large that there is repetition (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Dworkin (2012) stated that the

recommended number of interview participants for a qualitative study is 5-20, with a goal

of saturation. I interviewed eight participants. If saturation had not been reached at that

point, I would have consulted with my chair, and prepared to send an amendment into

IRB for additional participants. Saturation is reached when there are no longer any new

themes or ideas emerging, and you have enough information to recreate the study

(Dworkin, 2012).

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore strategies

healthcare business leaders use to influence the engagement and satisfaction of

employees, postmerger. The results will have the potential to assist healthcare leaders

with employee engagement and increased satisfaction in future M&As. In section 2, I

discussed the purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, methods and design,

as well as sampling. Data collection, organization, and analysis were also covered.

Explanations were also given on instruments, ethical research, reliability, and validity.

Section 3 will include the results of the findings. An overview of the study is provided

along with professional practice applications, implications for social change, reflections,

recommendations for future research and action.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In this section, I present findings and describe results from this study. I begin Section 3 with an introduction addressing the purpose of the study, followed by a presentation of findings. Furthermore, I discuss the potential applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, and reflections.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore strategies healthcare business leaders use to influence the engagement and satisfaction of employees, postmerger. The target population was comprised of employees at one medical facility in the North Central region of the United States who were employed with the organization prior to and postmerger. This case study included interviews with two different populations as well as document review.

I conducted semistructured interviews, 2 years postmerger, with four leadership employees and four nonleadership employees in a healthcare facility in the North Central United States. Each of the participants had been employed at the facility prior to the M&A (for an average of 11 years), were employed there post-M&A, and were all current employees of the healthcare facility. The interviews took place in a private meeting room at the facility and by telephone. Participants responded to questions pertaining to preferred communication style, employee engagement and employee satisfaction. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and then coded. During the coding, five

themes emerged. A review of company documents correlated with the data that was obtained from the interviews.

The themes that emerged were communication, leadership, trust/emotional engagement, resources, and corporate culture. According to the data, employee engagement and satisfaction are linked to these themes. It is important for organizational leaders who are going through M&As to understand this relationship to increase the success rate of M&As.

Presentation of the Findings

In this study, I addressed the central research question: What strategies do healthcare business leaders use postmerger to influence the engagement and satisfaction of employees? I used semistructured interviews consisting of 11 questions and document review (employee handbook and website) to gain triangulation. The participants had all been employed at the facility at the time of the merge, after the merge, and were current employees. The participants were employed in various departments within the healthcare facility.

Interviews were conducted onsite in a private meeting room, and the others via recorded telephone calls. The average interview time was around 30 minutes. After eight interviews, I reached saturation, where no new information emerged (e.g., Dworkin, 2012), and no further interviews were needed. Four leaders and four nonleaders were interviewed.

Once the interviews were completed, I transcribed the recordings and e-mailed the transcripts to the participants for transcript review. Transcript review ensures that the

correct views were captured and no errors were made (Houghton et al., 2013). I allowed

participants 5 days to review and make corrections on the transcripts. After corrections

were made, I uploaded the transcripts in NVivo 11. Once the data were uploaded into

NVivo 11, I used the auto-coding feature to get a better view of each of the interview

questions and their answers. After reviewing each of the interview questions and answers,

I coded the transcript data by creating parent and child nodes. I followed the same

process with the document review materials (handbook and information from the

website) to achieve methodological triangulation.

At this is the point, the themes began to emerge. While coding, five main ideas

emerged. These themes, that emerged as strategies taken by the company postmerger,

were: more frequent, informed, and transparent communication, intentional structured

leadership, increased trust/emotional engagement, increased focus on human resources,

and positive corporate culture.

Strategy 1: More Frequent, Informed, and Transparent Communication

Postmerger, the organization implemented new communication strategies.

Premerger, some of the participants felt that they were not adequately informed about

what was going to take place. Internal communication is known to create trust and

increase commitment between leadership and staff (Mishra et al., 2014). During the

interviews, all of the participant's answers were in agreement with Mishra et al. (2014)

that the organization's leaders should be upfront about any upcoming changes.

Participant 1E stated, "I truly believe that if they are upfront with their employees that

would make a big difference. It would give them the information they need to make the

right choice." Another participant, 1L, stated, "We had a relatively short notice, probably a month."

Participants noted that they were not informed and did not know the truth. Several participants mentioned rumors as one of the forms of communication they received, and that they were in the dark. Participant 1E stated, "It was like rumors, first we heard from other workers and stuff, and then it was like it's going to be in two weeks, and then it didn't happen so we thought someone was just making this up." Another participant, 3E stated, "It was more or less rumors the way I heard it." When a limited amount of information is passed around a peer group, the people in that group will create their own conclusions, which are rumors. This creates a false sense of safety within the group, as well as dysfunction and conflict (Marmenout, 2011). Buiter and Harris (2013) recommended that communication should be immediate, consistent and truthful to decrease stress and increase trust.

Three out of four leaders (75%) mentioned that open and transparent communication is key to a successful M&A. One participant mentioned that monthly meetings to keep everyone informed are helpful. One participant, 4L stated, "We were totally out of the loop, so prior to the transition was very difficult because we had no input and no say." In addition, participants stated that poor communication existed prior to the M&A, and that they felt misled. There was a lack of communication in this facility prior to the M&A. Lack of communication can create lowered employee effectiveness (Kemel & Shahid, 2012). Transparent communication diffuses rumors and creates trust.

One of the strategies that the organization focused on postmerger was clear and consistent communication.

Premerger, several of the participants mentioned that they were upset that they were promised things by leadership that they were not able to follow through with. Participant 1E stated "They promised a lot of things to the group that should have never been promised because they weren't able to honor some of the things." Another participant, 2E stated, "The person in the leadership position promised all kinds of things that they should have never said." Cording et al. (2014) explained that over and under promising during an M&A would decrease organizational authenticity. Promises should not be made to employees unless they will be upheld (Ertugrul, 2013). When promises cannot be upheld, this creates turmoil.

I found that face-to-face communication is the most effective communication style for M&As. This style allows the participant to not only hear verbal cues, but also see cues (Galpin et al., 2014). Interview Question Number 2 in this study was: What methods of communication were used to tell you about the upcoming M&A? The participants in this study indicated that they were told about the M&A through face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, or no communication. The participants stated that, during a face-to-face meeting, employees were able to ask questions and obtain answers at that time. They also mentioned that a large group setting was fine to communicate an M&A or other large organizational change.

It was also noted that it is acceptable for small changes to be communicated via e-mail, however any major change should be communicated in person. Multiple

participants wanted leadership, including board members to become more active in the facility. They would like to see a presence from them, even if it was just to stop and say hello. One of the strategies they used postmerger was a change in board members and the communication style of the board members.

The participants were then asked what their preferred method of communication was. The majority, at 75% stated that they prefer face-to-face communication over other forms of communication such as e-mails, or telephone calls. Table 1 includes the communication methods used for this M&A. Table 2 details the interview results on preferred method of communication.

Table 1

Methods of Communication About the M&A

Participant	Face-to-face	Telephone	None
Leaders	3	1	0
Employees	3	0	1
Total	6	1	1

Table 2

Preferred Method of Communication

Participant	Face-to-face	No Preference	No Response
Leaders	3	1	0

| Employees | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 6 | 1 | 1 |

Strategy 2: Intentional, Structured Leadership

The second strategy that appeared is closely related to communication, and that is intentional, structured leadership. Postmerger, the employees received direction and communication from a new board and leadership who were truthful and transparent. Participants stated, premerger that they were receiving incorrect information from leadership prior to the M&A, which created a sense of mistrust. The employees and leadership participants did not know the expectations and things lacked structure prior to the M&A. This also added to the lack of trust.

Several of the participants mentioned that they received incorrect information prior to the merger. They also stated that limited information was given to them prior to the M&A and that leaders were not very open with this information, which caused turmoil for the participants. This is congruent to what Buiter and Harris (2013) mentioned; when employees are uncertain about what is going to happen this can cause unnecessary stress. When leadership is open and honest with their employees, the employees will be put at ease.

The participants thought that the previous leadership staff was not committed. They recommended that leaders are committed and give 100% to the team. Rogan and Sorenson (2014) asserted that many leaders do not properly prepare for an M&A. Effective leaders can create a satisfied and engaged workplace (Nieberding, 2014).

Strong leaders are an integral role during an M&A as there are various pressures and stress (Hahm & Jung, 2013). Lee et al. (2013) believed that when employees have lower levels of trust with their leadership team this can interfere with integration. The data collected from this study also verifies that information. Ertugrul (2013) asserted that employees look to their leaders for support during times of change.

One of the issues that six out of eight (75%) participants brought up was the board of directors. They were not satisfied with the board prior to the M&A for various reasons. The participants thought that the board of directors was comprised of people who had filled the positions for far too long. They recommended changing the board of directors in a timely manner to prevent stagnancy. One participant, 2E stated, "The board president had been the president for many years, and that is not healthy in an organization." The participants did not believe that the board of directors prior to the M&A was a good working board. L4 indicated that, "The board of directors kept everything to themselves." The employees agreed that the old leadership staff, including the board of directors was never present in the facility. They did not communicate with employees. The new strategy, postmerger, was a change in the board of directors and an open style of leadership and communication.

Interviewees agreed that the employees want to be included and their thoughts and opinions matter. Two participants mentioned that the previous leadership staff was rude and unprofessional at times. Two participants also mentioned that there were unrealistic expectations of employees.

The consensus among the participants was that they liked the leadership staff more postmerger as they were intentional and structured. They have increased communication and the employees are happier andwould like to see the board of directors onsite and more involved at times. One participant stated that they now have positive and supportive leadership that can talk to the staff. Two of the participants mentioned that, after the M&A, things were still not structured and expectations remained unknown. This aligns with Bakker's (2014) theory that giving employees clear expectations, feedback, access to information, and autonomy will increase employee engagement.

Strategy 3: Increased Trust/Emotional Engagement

Trust and emotional engagement comprise the third strategy I discovered. Postmerger, the company made efforts to increase engagement. Premerger, many participants described feeling increased stress and uncertainty during the M&A. Participant 2E said that, "What happened was very very stressful." Another participant, 1L stated, "There was a high level of stress for employees." Seven out of eight (88%) participants stated that the M&A was a very stressful time for them. The changes made things more stressful, along with the lack of communication. The participants felt uniformed and blocked from the truth. One participant mentioned that it was like starting over. Another participant stated that people were guessing what was going to happen next, and that chaos ensued.

Buiter and Harris (2013) argued that M&As are prone to have negative effects on employees in areas such as stress, anxiety, commitment, satisfaction, and identification. This stress puts pressure on the employees and the leadership team. During a large

change such as an M&A employees may experience uncertainty and an increase in stress (Martin & Butler, 2015).

When leadership is transparent and open with their employees, relative deprivation will decrease (Lee et al., 2013). This decrease in relative deprivation has occurred in this facility. One of the participants stated that the M&A was scary and stressful, but is on the upswing. The communication has gotten better. One strategy postmerger was to increase open and honest communication to put employees at ease and decrease stress.

Employees can also experience a feeling of loss postmerger (Kemel & Shahid, 2012). Several of the participants stated that they were concerned about losing their jobs. One mentioned that they never knew what was going on, and that they worried about the possibility of termination on a daily basis. M&As can create psychological disturbances for employees which leads to work inefficiency and increased turnover (Rogan & Sorenson, 2014). Lee et al. (2013) explained that relative deprivation occurs when employees experience loss from organizational change and may make employees sensitive.

During an M&A, many changes occur quickly. One of the participants described this well. The participant stated that at first, they felt a huge loss, then they started to experience hopefulness, this quickly faded to frustration and skepticism about the unknown. The emotions then shifted back to fear and frustration knowing that the large amount of work that had to be done. At the time of the interview, the participant was experiencing a mix of emotions. Participant 1L described this: "First I felt a huge loss,

then it was like feeling hopeful, and then it was frustrating." Staff worry about the

occurring changes, but employee's reactions will evolve over time (Lee et al., 2013).

During the interview the participants were asked about engagement prior to the

M&A versus post-M&A. They were also asked to rate their engagement on a scale of 1-

10, with 10 as the most engaged. The responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Leaders Engagement Level Pre and Post M&A

	Pre-M&A	Post-M&A
L1	7.5	4.5
L2	1	10
L3	10	8
L4	2	8

Note: Numbers were based on 1-10 scale where 10 = *most engaged*.

Table 4

Employees Engagement Level Pre- and Post-M&A

	Pre-M&A	Post-M&A
E1	5	9
E2	7	8
E3	10	10
E4	5	8

Note: Numbers were based on 1-10 scale where 10 = *most engaged*.

When I asked the participants to describe employee engagement premerger, a total of five said engagement increased, two said it decreased, and one said it stayed the same. The breakdown for the leaders is that two thought engagement increased postmerger, and two thought it decreased. Three nonleadership participants thought the engagement had gone up, and one thought it remained the same. Mishra et al. (2014) described employee engagement as how emotionally connected and invested employees are to the organization. Galpin et al. (2012) asserted that engaged employees are a critical component to an M&A.

When I asked nonleadership participants to describe employee engagement premerger, three out of four mentioned that they did not like the rules and guidelines premerger and that it was too restrictive. They also mentioned that they did not believe that there was much trust or support within the organization. The employees were less engaged at that point. When asked about postmerger engagement, the participants stated that they had new leadership, and at the time of the study, they felt safer and like part of a team. The engagement for nonleadership participants went up for three out of four. The other nonleadership participant stated that engagement stayed the same and that they have always been engaged. Cording et al. (2014) argued that when a large change such as an M&A occurs employees experience vulnerability. The trust can become impaired which leads to job dissatisfaction and an unengaged workforce.

When I asked leadership participants to describe engagement premerger to postmerger, there was a split. Two of the leadership participants stated that their engagement was higher prior to the M&A because they had more resources to work with

including better policies and procedures. They felt more committed to the organization at that time and felt that things were running smoothly.

After the M&A, they described the departments as not running as well as they should, and mentioned an increase in turmoil and job duties. They are still committed to the organization, however, less engaged. The other two leaders described increased engagement postmerger. Prior to the merge, they felt that the structure was too restrictive and things were not tailored to the facility's needs. They also thought that they were given minimal communication from the board of directors and were out of the loop.

One leader stated that they were lacking any trust. However, postmerger, the trust was regained and that was partially due to increased communication and a new board of directors. Lightle, Castellano, Baker, and Sweeney (2015) asserted that the board of directors should be involved with increasing employee engagement, as well as verifying the leaderships plans for increasing employee engagement. This increase in engagement coincides with what Mishra et al. (2014) described; employees that experience transparency from leadership makes the employees experience a sense of belonging and creates trust. The lack of trust and communication was mentioned various times over the course of the eight interviews.

Strategy 4: Increased Focus on Human Resources

The fourth strategy that stood out during my data analysis was resources. The strategy that the leadership used, postmerger, was to view staff as valuable resources that need to be retained. Premerger, six out of eight (75%) participants mentioned turnover as a lost resource. One participant stated that many people with longevity had left shortly

after the M&A. Bakker (2014) explained that the most important part of increasing employee engagement is providing employees with the resources that they need to perform their jobs. Of the many resources that the participants mentioned as lacking, the majority of participants mentioned staffing. Edwards and Edwards (2013) argued that poor integration would increase staff turnover. This was true for the healthcare facility where I conducted this research.

A large amount of leadership turnover occurred. On average organizations lose one quarter of their leaders within the first year postmerger. Another participant stated that the nursing department suffered the largest turnover in the facility, citing unrealistic expectations as one of the reasons for the turnover. Yet another participant voiced that employees were leaving because promises were not kept. This high turnover rate confers with Krug et al. (2014) statement that increased turnover in leadership is normally seen postmerger.

One participant stated that the leadership team kept them in the dark because they thought they would quit if they knew what was happening, however, the opposite was true. Employees were leaving because they were kept in the dark and not communicated with. This lack of communication confers with Buiter and Harris's (2013) argument that M&As create stress and anxiety which leads to a higher turnover rate. Ertugral (2013) asserted that leaders should not make promises they cannot keep as this creates turmoil.

This finding also coincides with Kemel and Shahid's (2012) statement that the stress and sense of loss postmerger can create increased turnover rates. Galpin (2012) believed that employees leave organizations during M&As because of uncertainty and

lack of communication. The lack of staff as a resource can also add to the lack of other resources. Krug et al. (2014) argued that a larger staff turnover consumes a large quantity of resources and time. Postmerger, the organization implemented strategies to retain staff and reduce turnover.

Strategy 5: Positive Corporate Culture

Another strategy that emerged less prominently was corporate culture. Postmerger, the organization took steps to create a more positive culture. During the interviews, a few participants mentioned areas of concern regarding corporate culture. Participants in the study felt that the company values prior to the M&A did not always mesh. With the lack of communication prior to the M&A, some worst-case thinking was present. Many unknown variables presented themselves and the employees were nervous about what was going to occur. This created the spread of rumors and inaccurate information. After the merger, this style of thinking has been minimized. Rogan and Sorenson (2014) theorized that many leaders do not prepare for the integration of culture during an M&A.

One participant stated that there is a new way of thinking after the M&A. Another participant shared that the company knew that there would be a change in the corporate belief system and was excited for more flexibility and openness to ideas. A complete change of systems in this facility occurred and it is more important than ever that all teams work together.

While I reviewed the employee handbook for this healthcare facility, I became aware of the fact that the employees were directed to work as a team and help out where

needed. The words *pride* and *satisfaction* were also highlighted. The handbook also included an area where communication is open and direct. The facility's management wanted to create a strategy to maintain a positive work environment. This strategy was congruent to what the participants said about increased satisfaction with their jobs. On the company's website, the mission and vision indicated that they wanted to create an environment where people are valued. They believe in an environment where everyone is treated with respect.

In summary, postmerger, the company implemented five strategies. The first strategy was more frequent, informed, and transparent communication. The company increased communication and made efforts to make communication more direct and open. The second strategy was intentional, structured leadership. Postmerger, the company made leadership more intentional and structured. They even changed their board of directors. The third strategy was increased trust/emotional engagement. This strategy, postmerger, was to increase open and honest communication to put employees at ease and decrease stress. The fourth strategy was increased focus on human resources. This strategy included viewing staff as valuable resources that need to be retained. The fifth strategy was positive corporate culture. The company implemented changes around the corporate belief structure, advocated increased communication and teamwork, and promoted open and direct communication among all staff and leadership.

The Social Exchange

The conceptual framework for this study was the social exchange theory (SET). The social exchange theory describes how people in groups influence one another. Slack

et al. (2015) recommended using SET to study workplace behavior and employee engagement. When people interact with one another that is considered an exchange, and can be comprised of material or nonmaterial goods (Homans, 1958).

There are many exchanges that occur during an M&A or other large organizational change. In this study participants experienced emotional (nonmaterial) and material exchange. The participants discussed the exchange of various resources such as emotions, policies, and leadership. Andrew and Sofian (2012) asserted that when an employee receives a high level of social exchange they exhibit high levels of positive outcomes. The feeling of reciprocity is important, and when they believe they are experiencing fair treatment through communication and others areas they will work harder and become more engaged (Buiter & Harris, 2013). This was the case among these employees.

When the participants viewed the communication and leadership as lacking, they were less engaged and felt less satisfied. Many participants in this study felt that they were uninformed and did not know what was going to happen next, premerger. The majority of participants were unhappy and less engaged. However, when the communication and leadership improved, the participants were more engaged and satisfied. Participant 2L described to me that, "There was no trust before, now the stress left, I can trust my fellow employees and now the trust is back." SET encompasses the reciprocal relationship of resources. Memon et al. (2014) determined that when employees believe they are a good fit to the organization's values they will be more satisfied and engaged.

The participants who were unsatisfied prior to the M&A were unhappy with the communication, leadership, and other relationships. The participants did not believe that they were treated well. Participant 1E also described trust by saying, "There was no trust prior to the merge, nobody trusted them." This in turn created job dissatisfaction and lowered engagement. Postmerger this same employee stated, "There is more satisfaction now, there are more positive people. The departments are getting along." The participants stated that postmerger they were receiving better communication, leadership, and resources, and in turn were experiencing increased engagement and satisfaction. This is congruent with the social exchange theory. The participants that were happy prior to the merge and dissatisfied postmerger experienced the same phenomenon, just in reverse. The results confer with the social exchange theory.

Applications to Professional Practice

The main objective of this study was to determine what factors influence employee engagement and satisfaction during an M&A. Change is becoming quite common in the business world and viewing change through the employee's perspective can be beneficial to an organization's leaders (Buiter & Harris, 2013). The findings acquired from the participant interviews revealed that many participants were not happy with the way the M&A occurred. If organization's leaders consider these findings when going through a large organizational change such as an M&A, they may be able to increase employee engagement and satisfaction and improve business practice. Even if an organization is not going through an M&A they might be able to utilize the information

provided to increase employee engagement and satisfaction as it relates to the social exchange theory.

The five strategies associated with the study were more frequent, informed, and transparent communication, intentional, structured leadership, increased trust/emotional engagement, increased focus on human resources, and positive corporate culture. Lundqvist (2012) noted that the employee factor is the main cause of M&A failure. I wanted to focus on the human side of M&As to contribute to business practice. Most participants indicated that they were most engaged and satisfied when the organization's leaders were transparent and open with communication. When leadership is transparent and open with communication employee satisfaction and engagement will improve (Cho et al., 2014). When leadership is not open with communication employees tend to come up with their own ideas of what is occurring, and this creates chaos.

The participants suggested that the importance of leadership not making promises that they cannot uphold was high. Ertugral (2013) indicated that making promises that are not upheld could create turmoil and distrust. This behavior of distrust also decreases organizational authenticity (Cording et al., 2014). When M&As occur, there is much uncertainty amongst employees and trust can become impaired (Cording et al., 2014). The majority of the participants in this study mentioned that at one point or another, during the M&A they were lacking trust in the organization. This can contribute to M&A failure and decreased engagement.

Employee engagement is important. Keeping employees engaged will not only increase job satisfaction, it will also decrease turnover rates. Some participants mentioned

that turnover was high during the M&A. With M&As comes an increase in employee and leadership turnover (Krug et al., 2014). Galpin (2012) explained that a high leadership turnover postmerger would have a negative influence on organizational performance. A high turnover rate will also consume a large amount of time and resources (Krug et al., 2014). Committed employees reduce the risk of turnover (Ertugrul, 2013). Leadership should try to retain as many staff as possible for the greatest chance at success. This research may help to fill a gap on the human side of M&As in relation to employee engagement and satisfaction.

Implications for Social Change

The prevalence of M&As is high and is increasing at a fast rate (Mantere et al., 2012). The number of M&As continues to rise, however, the success rate does not rise with it (Gomes et al., 2012). The implications for positive social change include strategies to increase employee engagement and satisfaction. The results of this study may assist healthcare and non-healthcare leaders with M&As or large-scale organizational changes. Increased communication, strong leadership, access to resources, and effective planning can lead to a more engaged and satisfied workforce. When employees are satisfied and engaged, they are more likely to provide better customer service and increase patient satisfaction.

Galpin (2012) noted that disengaged employees have decreased productivity, safety, and lowered customer service. When employees are dissatisfied they will decrease how they treat stakeholders and consumers (Cording et al., 2014). In essence, if leadership is more focused on keeping employee engagement and satisfaction up, they

are more likely to see an increase in productivity, patient or customer satisfaction, less turnover, better relationships, and decreased safety issues. The information gained from this study may assist leaders with increasing employee engagement and satisfaction during an M&A, which in turn may lead to an increase in M&A success rates. This information would contribute to more satisfied employees and families, as well as help the local communities and economy as a whole.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore what factors influence employee satisfaction and engagement during an M&A. The findings yielded conclusions from the perspective of healthcare employees regarding employee engagement and satisfaction during an M&A. Leaders of organizations planning on going through an M&A or other large organizational change may benefit from this information. Leaders that are interested in increasing engagement and satisfaction may also benefit from this information. I recommend the following actions based on the results of this study:

- Leaders should communicate openly about any upcoming changes. Leaders should provide immediate, upfront, and truthful information to their employees to reduce stress and gain trust.

- Leaders should not make promises that they are unable to uphold. This will increase organizational authenticity.

- Leaders should practice face-to-face communication when important messages are given. Employees prefer this style of communication.

- Leaders are an integral part of an M&A. An organization should hire and maintain strong leadership to create an engaged worforce.

- During a large organizational change such as an M&A, leadership should work hard to gain the trust of their employees. This will increase satisfaction and engagement.

- Leadership should ensure that their employees have all of the resources that they need to be successful.

The results of this study could be distributed to leaders dealing with organizational change through training or professional publications. The results could also be discussed at various professional conferences, and could also be disseminated through scholarly journals or business journals.

Recommendations for Further Study

A large amount of research about M&As and their financial implications exists; owever, research on the human side of M&As is limited. Continued studies regarding the human side of M&As should be explored to address areas not addressed in the study and to review delimitations. Researchers have recommended studying both aspects together to obtain a better understanding if indeed lowered engagement and satisfaction creates a less financially successful M&A.

Opportunities for further studies might include researching employee engagement and satisfaction in non-healthcare organizations. Another recommendation would be to perform a multi case study. A researcher could look at multiple facilities and compare the results. A multicase study could also be used to look at the views of employees in the

acquiring organization versus the views of the employees in the acquired organization. This data would divulge information related to the difference in views of the two merged organizations.

Finally, additional quantitative studies could be performed to expand the existing findings based on current quantitative studies. Contributions from a quantitative study could add further insight into employee engagement and satisfaction on a much larger platform. A survey could be distributed to participants in a larger area to determine factors that influence satisfaction and engagement during an M&A. Additionally, this study was focused on the North Central part of the United States; future studies could be performed in other parts of the country or world to gain a broader understanding of employee engagement and satisfaction.

Reflections

The doctoral study process was quite overwhelming at times. Piece by piece the study slowly came together and was a great learning experience. I was able to gain knowledge regarding employee engagement and satisfaction during M&As. I have been through an M&A as an employee and was able to learn what others had been through during a similar process. The topic of M&As is going to expand as time passes. I have always believed that when employees are engaged, the organization will experience higher success rates.

When I chose this topic of M&As, I knew that I had experienced an M&A and had to become unbiased. To lessen the possibility of bias I chose to conduct a qualitative study so that I did not bring predetermined variables into question. This type of study

allowed the participant to explain their views about the M&A they had experienced. I followed an interview protocol to ensure that I stayed on track. I had not met any of the interview participants prior to the interview and had never been in the facility. The fact that I did not know anyone helped to decrease bias.

One of the main lessons I learned from the interviews is that M&As and large organizational change can have strong emotional effects on the people involved. Many participants shared emotions and feelings that were raw and passionate. While listening to them, I realized that they were all very dedicated to the organization and wanted things to improve. This made me think; what if all of that energy and emotion were turned in a positive direction. A few alterations in leadership and communication could drastically change the engagement and satisfaction of these people, not only in their careers, but also in their lives.

Summary and Study Conclusions

To increase market share and compete globally, many organizations are turning to M&As. The number of M&As continues to rise (Mantere et al., 2012). Although the occurrence of M&As continues to rise, the success rate has not followed (Larhiri & Narayanan, 2013). This qualitative descriptive case study was completed to discover reasons why the success rate may be lacking. The purpose of this study was to explore the human side of M&As and how employee engagement and satisfaction might influence the success or failure of an organization going through an M&A. Business owners and leaders might not understand what human factors influence the success or failure of an M&A.

After coding the data, five strategies emerged. I then linked each of these theories back to the literature, the social exchange theory, and the existing body of knowledge. The themes that emerged were communication, leadership, trust, resources, and corporate culture. The findings indicated that there is a direct link with employee engagement and satisfaction to these five themes. To increase employee engagement and satisfaction when going through an M&A the five themes should be considered.

I concluded from the study that it is important to view change from the employee's perspective. When the participant was not happy with communication, leadership, trust, resources, and corporate culture they were less engaged and satisfied. When employees were happy with the communication, leadership, trust, resources, and corporate culture they were more satisfied and engaged. Leadership should become more involved in this process, and should consider employees prior to an M&A. There should be a plan in place to lessen turmoil in the workplace. Hiring an integration specialist or an experienced leader that has been through successful organizational change may be beneficial. It is important to prepare for the financial aspect of an M&A, but equally as important to prepare for the human aspect of an M&A.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date _____ Time _____

Location _____

Interviewer _____ Participant Identifier _____

Instructions:

- Review the purpose of the study with participant.

    Tell participant: The purpose of this study is to determine what factors may or may not influence employee engagement and satisfaction during a healthcare merger and acquisition. Do you have any questions regarding this?

- Review the informed consent form and have participant sign it.

    Tell participant: This is the informed consent form that you previously received via e-mail (read with participant). Do you have any questions or concerns regarding this form? If you are in agreement please sign and date.

- Assign a number (identifier) to participant and record on top of page.

    Participant will be identified as a leader (L), or a participant (P). The number will correspond to the order of interview.

- Audiotape the interview.

    Tell participant: I am going to test the audio equipment before we get started. Do a test run to ensure that the device is recording correctly. If it is, begin interview.

- Follow the order of the questions, probing deeper as needed.

Tell participant: We are going to begin the interview now, I may write notes during your answers, please do not hesitate to stop me at any time and ask questions.

Begin with question number 1. Do not forget to ask additional questions as applicable.

- Take notes next to questions as needed.

- Remind the participant about transcript review.

Tell participant: When the interviews are transcribed, I will be sending you a copy of your interview transcript to review for accuracy. Please respond within 5 days with any changes. If you have any questions please let me know.

- Review contact information if participant has any questions.

Tell participant: If you have any questions after this meeting please feel free to contact me at XXXXX

- Thank the participant for their time.

Tell participant: I appreciate you taking the time to respond to this interview and assist me with this study. Thank you very much.

Appendix B: Informed Consent for Participants Over 18 Years of Age

You are invited to take part in a research study of the Exploring Strategies Health Care Leaders Use for Mergers and Acquisitions. You were chosen for the study because you are (a) are employed by a healthcare organization in the North Central United States. (b) have been employed by the organization prior to, and after the recent merger and acquisition. (c) are employed by the same organization at the time of the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Angie Kovarik, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background information: The purpose of this study is to explore how employees in the healthcare field describe the social exchange process as it relates to morale, engagement, and satisfaction after an M&A. Themes from employees in the healthcare organization regarding employee engagement and satisfaction may be helpful in developing effective strategies for future M&As.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Participate in one semistructured, audiotaped interview with the researcher regarding employee engagement in the healthcare field after an M&A. The duration of the interview will be thirty to sixty minutes.

- Transcript review the interview data, which is ensuring your opinions about the initial findings and interpretation is accurate.

Here are some sample questions:

1. What methods of communication were used to tell you about the merger?

2. How would you describe employee engagement and morale prior to the merger?

Voluntary nature of the study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision as to whether or not you choose to be in the study. If you chose not to participate in the study, you will not be treated differently. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and benefits of being in the study: Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress or becoming upset. The time commitment related to this study is that you will be asked to complete the 30 to 60 minute interview after normal work hours. You will be given a copy of the results of this study for your personal information. Your participation will contribute to the knowledge base relevant to improving employee engagement, morale, and productivity pre and post M&A.

Compensation: You will be given a $50 Visa gift card will be given as compensation for your participation in this study.

Privacy: Any information you provide will be kept confidential. A limited number of research staff may know that you participated in the study, however,

any information that you provide (i.e. responses to interview questions) will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. The electronic information will be stored on a password-protected flash drive, and documents related to this study will be kept in a locked file storage cabinet which only the researcher will have access. Data will be kept for a period of at least five years, after which they will be destroyed.

Contacts and questions: You may ask any questions you have now. Alternatively, if you have questions later you may contact the researcher, XXX, at XXXXXX or XXXXX. You may also contact the researcher's faculty mentor and doctoral study chair, XXXX at XXXX. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call XXXX. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is XXXXX. Walden University's approval number for this study is 04-08-16-0476261 and it expires on 4/7/2017. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

Statement of consent: I have read the above information and I feel that I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing this consent form I am agreeing to participant in the study based on the terms described above.

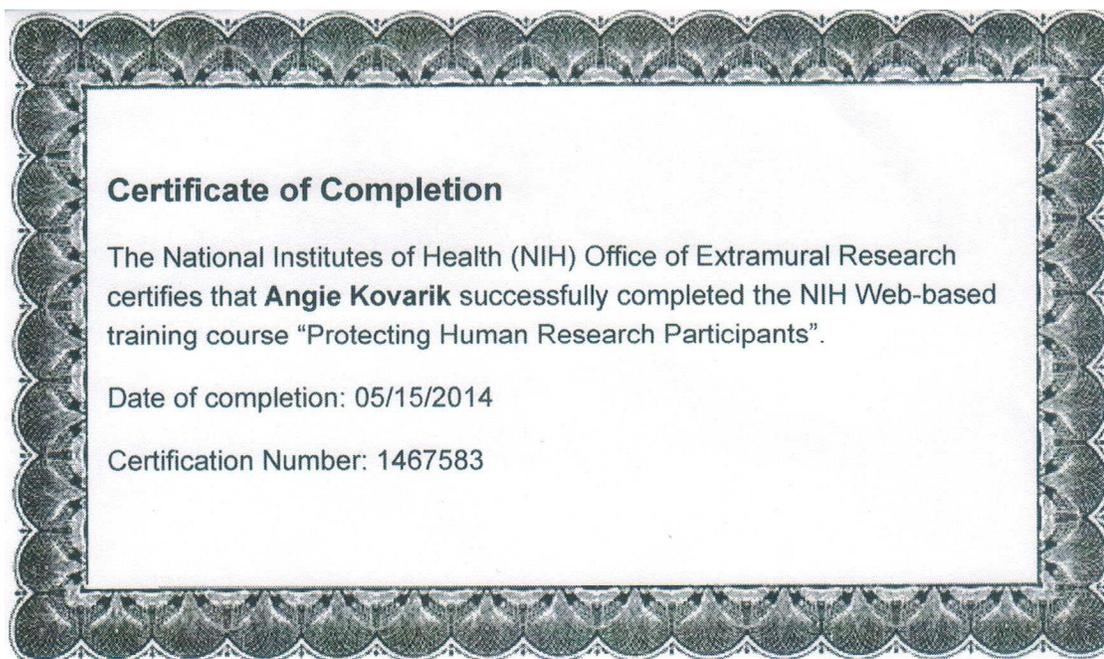Printed name of participant

Date of consent   _____

_____

Participant's written signature   _____
Researcher's written signature   _____

Appendix C: NIH Certificate of Completion

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Angie Kovarik** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 05/15/2014

Certification Number: 1467583

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. What job position did you hold during the recent merger?

2. What methods of communication were used to tell you about the merger?

3. How satisfied were you with the communication methods used?

4. What kind of expectations did you have about the merger? Such as job influence or changes in corporate culture?

5. How do you believe those expectations were met postmerger?

6. How would you describe employee engagement prior to the merger? On a scale of 1-10, 10 is most engaged, what would you choose? Why?

7. How would you describe employee engagement postmerger? On a scale of 1-10, 10 is most engaged, what would you choose? Why?

8. How would you describe your satisfaction as an employee premerger to postmerger? On a scale of 1-10, 10 is most satisfied, what would you choose? Why?

9. If there were any changes to employee engagement and satisfaction, what do you think caused that?

10. Do you feel that the performance has gone up, down, or stayed the same since the merger? Why?

11. Can you tell me anything else about the recent merger that would be helpful for my study?

Appendix E: Organizational Permission
Letter of Cooperation

02/29/16

Dear Angie Kovarik,

Based on our discussion of your research proposal, I give you permission to conduct research for your study entitled "Exploring Strategies Health Care Leaders Use for Mergers and Acquisitions within XXXXXX. As part of this study, I authorize you to collect the contact information for four leadership staff and four non-leadership staff, interview the eight employees, correspond with the employees for transcript review, and provide the employees with copies of the completed study. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include, sending out an agreed upon e-mail to employees that explains the researcher's study. The e-mail will inform the staff of what would be asked of them, compensation provided, and researchers contact information. The employees would then contact the researcher if they were interested in participating. We would also assist by providing a private place to interview participants within the facility. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

The student researcher (Angie Kovarik) will be responsible for complying with our site's research policies and requirements.

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

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

Sincerely,

XXXXXX

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the e-mail, or (b) copied on the e-mail containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic

signature" can be the person's typed name, their e-mail address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an e-mail address officially on file with Walden).