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Strategies for Employee Engagement in a Small Business Enterprise

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College of Management and Technology

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Jennifer Lynn Kizer

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Strategies for Employee Engagement in a Small Business Enterprise

by

Jennifer Lynn Kizer

MBA, Walden University, 2012

BS, Walden University, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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August 2016

Abstract

In 2013, 35% of the workforce was not engaged, which results in lack of productivity and loss of profitability for small business enterprises (SBEs). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore successful strategies that frontline leaders in a 4 generation, family-owned excavating business used to engage their frontline employees. The excavating business was started in 1947 by the father of the current business owners. William Kahn's employee engagement theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Data were collected through a focus group and direct observations of engagement during meetings and frontline areas from a population of 8 frontline leaders from construction work at an excavating business in Stephens City, Virginia. Data from the focus group and direct observations were thematically analyzed and then triangulated to ensure the trustworthiness of the interpretations. The 5 themes that emerged included: investing in sustainability, leading by example, providing clear and open communication, implementing a system of measurement, and developing a professional image. These themes could provide the basis for the area frontline leaders to improve the employee engagement level of their frontline employees. These findings could prompt what has been a missing dialogue of communication that could bridge the employee engagement gap between the area employees and employers. Social change implications of these findings could lead to productivity improvement that could contribute to the survival of SBEs and to the employment status of the community.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my loving and devoted husband who stood by me through this journey, TSgt Dan J. Kizer USAF (Retired).

I also dedicate this doctoral study to my loving grandparents who I miss dearly, Althea German, Alta Mae Minick, and Sgt Richard Minick US Army Air Corp.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Employee engagement strategies have led to employee enthusiasm regarding their work roles and commitment to organizational values, objectives, and goals (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Saks & Gruman, 2014b). High employee engagement shows a balance between adhering to the regulatory requirements and expressing employees' preferred self, which characterizes individuality (Shuck & Herd, 2012). Small business enterprises (SBEs) can create the internal condition that enable employees to do their job, drive higher levels of sustainable employee engagement, and energize the workforce, which might lead to increased productivity (Glaves, 2012). Frontline leaders of SBEs will provide a baseline to the understanding of the different frontline employee engagement to increase productivity through employee engagement strategies (Lester, Standifer, Schultz, & Windsor, 2012; Schullery, 2013). Frontline employees make the achievement of SBEs sustainability through the contribution of employee engagement strategies (Carmeli, Dutton, & Hardin, 2015; Fugate, Prussia, & Kinicki, 2012). This research study was about employee engagement strategies that benefit frontline leaders to engage their staff and to increase the productivity level of SBEs.

Background of the Problem

According to the Small Business Administration (2013), approximately 65% of the employees within SBEs throughout the United States during the field period of April 2013 through June 2013 were engaged in their company. Engaged employees contribute to the development of innovative ideas, establishing stronger and loyal relationships with customers, and infusing the organization with entrepreneurial energy that assists in the

development of a successful, sustainable business (Kang, Stewart, & Kim, 2012; Meyer, Stanley, & Parfyonova, 2012). In contrast, disengaged employees tend to express their dissatisfaction with the job differently (Glaves, 2012), offer limited knowledge sharing with peers (Saks & Gruman, 2014b), and exhibit more limited creativity and innovation than engaged counterparts (Beek, Hu, Schaufeli, Taris, & Schreurs, 2012). Disengaged employees perform at an average or below average productivity level (Anitha, 2014; Glaves, 2012). Disengaged employees are less sensitive to aspects of the job responsibilities and typically will be part of the statistics of high turnover trends (Beek et al., 2012; Glaves, 2012; Saks & Gruman, 2014b).

Problem Statement

Small business enterprises are in a precarious position with declining employee engagement satisfaction scores among the frontline employees (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). Sixty-five percent of the average SBE workforces in 2013 were fully engaged (Small Business Administration, 2013). The general business problem was that some SBE frontline leaders are negatively affected by low employee engagement, which results in loss of productivity for the organization. The specific business problem was that some SBE frontline leaders lack strategies to engage their frontline employees.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore the strategies that SBE frontline leaders used to engage their frontline employees. Qualitative studies can contribute to an in-depth understanding of business strategies by answering how and what (Hynes, 2012; Williams & Schaefer, 2013). The target population was comprised of

frontline leaders from a SBE in the state of Virginia. In my research study I identified trends and characteristics that contributed to successful strategies used in the engagement of frontline employees. I provided strategies that are used to increase sustainable engagement to improve productivity that bridges the employee engagement gap between employee and employer. Social change implications included in this research study indicated how improved productivity contributed to the increase of SBEs that survive, flourish with employees, and positively contribute to the business community.

Nature of the Study

I considered three viable research methodologies: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. I then considered four viable research designs: case study, phenomenology, narrative, or ethnographic for this research study. After I completed research on all three viable research methods and four research designs, I selected a qualitative research method and exploratory single-case study.

Research Method

Hynes (2012) asserted that the nature of qualitative research is to develop a new framework that makes a research method to explore both early and contemporary to theories of engagement. The qualitative research method is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual (i.e. non-numerical) data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest (Williams & Schaefer, 2013). A qualitative research is an in-depth understanding of business strategies (Yin, 2014).

The three research methods of research that I considered for this research study were qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. I selected a qualitative research

method because I wanted to explore *how* and *what* specific attributes that may affect and lead to employee engagement. I based my research method selection on the following criteria: (a) the desire to gain an in-depth understanding of a group of individuals in an existing settings, (b) the ability to develop a complete detailed description of the phenomena under exploration, (c) the ability to explore and address intangible aspects such as thinking, believing, and reasoning, and (d) the desire to establish, based on the findings of this research, an analytical generalization (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2014). From the outset, a quantitative research method was ruled out as a viable method for this research study. The purpose of my research study was not to count and classify features to construct a statistical model. Yin (2014) suggested that a qualitative research method does not establish a statistical generalization in order to explain an observed phenomenon. Stake (2013) suggested there was no need to establish either a correlation or causation between and among variables. A mixed method was ruled out because the quantitative contribution to the study was not necessary for this research study.

Research Design

I selected the exploratory single-case study as the appropriate research design. A case study is based on the following criteria: (a) the form of the research questions–the research questions are how and what, (b) the required level of control of the participants during the research, and (c) the focus on a contemporary event (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). Case studies are exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive and can involve a single business in a single location or multiple businesses in multiple locations (Yin, 2014). I had the option of selecting a phenomenology, historical, narrative, or ethnographic

research design. A phenomenological design was ruled out because this type of research design focuses on the lived experience of the participants and is a challenging and exhaustive process (Moustakas, 1994). A historical design was ruled out because this type of research design would be more difficult to conduct to predict future events from interpreting past events (Moustakas, 1994). A narrative design was ruled out because this type of research design focuses on a single individual causes and does not have a standard set of procedures to obtain an objective manner (Moustakas, 1994). I also ruled out ethnographic design because this type of design focuses on researching an in-depth culture of a particular demographic over an extensive period where the researcher frequently lives with the cultural group (Moustakas, 1994). The suitable research design for this qualitative research study was an exploratory single-case study.

Research Question

The formulation of an overarching research question, as well as focus group questions, may capture information about different engagement strategies to help provide an understanding of ways SBE frontline leaders can improve engagement with frontline employees. The research question that guided this research study was *what strategies do SBE frontline leaders use to engage their frontline employees*?

Focus Group Questions

I conducted a focus group with frontline leaders of a SBE to explore what strategies were used to engage frontline employees. The focus group questions were as follows:

1.   How do you define employee engagement?

2.   How have you determined the key drivers that affect your level of

      employee engagement?

3.   What engagement strategies have you used to increase employee

      engagement?

4.   What method did you find worked best to increase and retain employee

      engagement?

5.   What engagement strategy challenges have you encountered?

6.   How did you measure the level of employee engagement?

7.   How have you seen employee engagement drive the level of productivity?

8.   How did you respond to employee engagement strategies to increase your

      productivity levels?

9.   Is there anything you would like to add that I might have missed?

Conceptual Framework

The theory of employee engagement was the primary conceptual framework for

this research study. In 1990, Kahn developed the theory of employee engagement, which

I used to explore strategies that frontline leaders from a SBE used to engage their

frontline employees. According to Kahn, employees can be engaged on physical,

emotional, and cognitive levels. The theory of employee engagement was applicable to

achieve a business's strategic goals by creating the conditions for management to be

successful and for employees to be productive for the interest of the business

(Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Glaves, 2012; Shuck & Herd, 2012). Employee

engagement theory has associations with personal engagement and personal

disengagement that influences productivity level in the workplace (Anitha, 2014). The theory of employee engagement was necessary to counterbalance the habits and practices rooted over the past decades of negative strategies used by managers to engage employees (Harold Siow, 2014; Kahn, 1990). The theory of employee engagement as applied to this research study holds that I would expect employee engagement strategies to create influences on how employees will be productive within their work environment. The findings of this study added to the theory of employee engagement critical issues in developing employee engagement strategies to create influences on how employees will be productive within their work environment.

Definition of Terms

Disengaged employees: Disengaged employees are characterized as typically dissatisfied with their work, those who do not commit to the organization and those who perform poorly or below expectations (Beek et al., 2012).

Employee engagement: Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as the level to which an employee is willing to invest in achieving the organization's goals. Engaged employees demonstrate positive and proactive attitudes, strive to be accountable and lead, exhibit dedication and passion for duties and tasks, and show a higher level of commitment to the organization (Beek et al., 2012).

Frontline leaders: Frontline leaders in this research study consist of directors, managers, or anyone holding a supervisor role that adds value to the business (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012).

Productivity: Productivity is a certain amount of an employees' input to produce the desirable business output (Harold Siow, 2014).

Small business enterprises (SBEs): SBEs are normally privately owned by working managers within the business and who employee fewer than 500 employees (Eid & El-Gohary, 2013; Williams & Schaefer, 2013).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions in this research study are facts that I considered to be true, but not verified. Weaknesses are potential limitations that I faced in this research study and delimitations refer to the scope or the boundaries of my study.

Assumptions

Assumptions are critical elements of every academic study, as they may skew the overall results and findings of a study (Yin, 2013). In the process of developing this research study, I identified two main assumptions. I assumed that participants in this research study understood the focus group questions and provided clear, honest, and unbiased answers. I assumed that participants understood to remain unbiased throughout this research study.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses that might be in a study and are out of the researcher's control (Yin, 2013). In the process of developing this research study, one limitation was the geographical area in the state of Virginia. A second limitation was finding frontline leaders from a SBE in this area with access to employee engagement strategies that were willing to participate in this research study. A third limitation was not being able to

locate enough SBE frontline leaders to volunteer as participants for this research study on employee engagement strategies. Not having an adequate number of frontline leaders limits the ability to view perspectives from other SBE frontline leaders.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries that needed further clarification to narrow the scope of the research study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The delimitation of this study included the sample size, geographical location of the research study, and a SBE. The sample size of one SBE was sufficient for exploring employee engagement strategies to increase productivity. The geographical location of this research study was in the state of Virginia. Participants of this research study were frontline leaders from a single SBE.

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Significance of the Study

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Employee engagement strategies in SBEs provide value for businesses by improving productivity (Anitha, 2014). Understanding the importance of employee engagement in the workplace was vital to improve the social business influence of productivity (Longoni, Golini, & Cagliano, 2014). Improving the employee engagement strategies increases the level of engagement while increasing productivity (Longoni et al., 2014). Improvements in productivity provide value in sustainable SBEs (Anitha, 2014).

I explored the strategies that SBE frontline leaders used to engage their frontline employees. Understanding these strategies will help SBE frontline leaders to develop and improve employee engagement strategies to support the frontline employee workforce and ultimately improve productivity. Productive businesses offer better opportunities to make a positive contribution to social change (Andrew & Sofian, 2012;

Cogin, 2012; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012). Small business enterprises benefit significantly by aligning employee engagement with the frontline employees to have a competitive advantage in the workforce for retaining employees (Lyons & Kyron, 2013; Shuck & Herd, 2012). If employee engagement was a main indicator of the frontline employees' productivity, the findings of this research study might guide SBE frontline leaders to develop strategies to engage the frontline employee workforce.

Contribution to Business Practice

This research study filled in literature gaps that contributed to SBEs by providing insights for frontline leaders to develop employee engagement strategies to increase employee engagement, which in turn could increase productivity. Employee engagement strategies give businesses the opportunity to enhance engagement to build a productive culture for frontline employees. When frontline employees are at their full potential, the level of productivity increases and enhances the full quality of the business (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Shuck & Herd, 2012). I explored engagement strategies that were utilized by SBE frontline leaders that assist in the quality of SBE sustainability. Frontline leaders of SBEs might use the findings from this research study to evaluate the effectiveness of the employee engagement strategies in an effort to increase productivity among frontline employees. It is critical for SBE frontline leaders to focus on the factoring issues that decrease employee engagement, so they can monitor the level of engagement and the level of productivity to take any action as necessary to increase these levels.

Implications for Social Change

In 2013, small business administration conducted a field study on federal employees during the periods of April 30th, 2013 through June 14, 2013 and discovered on average 65% of the workforce was fully engaged. The objective of this research study was to advance the dynamics of employee engagement strategies among frontline employees to improve the productivity and social conditions in society. The frontline employees' differences can influence organizational workforce environments in a variety of different ways. The phenomenon of this research study provided society a better understanding of how employee engagement can relate to the longevity of productivity and develop strategies to increase employee engagement and decrease the level of disengagement.

Paying attention to employees' engagement allowed management to spare and create excitement for a social change (Kim, Kim, & Wachter, 2013; Moss & Martins, 2014). Newly developed strategies assisted frontline leaders in improving employee engagement, which made positive contributions into the social, economic activity in the state of Virginia. Social change created positive contribution that increased employment opportunities, improved job satisfaction, and increased employee engagement. From a social change, frontline leaders influenced the development and implementation of engagement strategies that opened up new dialogue of communication for advancement in productivity.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the strategies that SBE frontline leaders use to engage their frontline employees. I searched various databases for this literature review to conduct a critical analysis and synthesis of multiple searches using the following under Walden University's Library: Encyclopedias and Handbooks, Google Scholar, Thoreau, Psychology, Business and Management, ProQuest, Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Complete, EBSCOHost, Emerald Management Journals, and Sage Premier. I reviewed one published book and two government websites in this research study. The literature review contained 101 articles, which 96% were peer-reviewed and 97% have been published within the last 5 years. Keywords for retrieving electronic sources included the following: *employee engagement, theory of employee engagement, employee engagement models, employee engagement productivity, employee engagement strategies, small business enterprise, frontline leaders and frontline employees.*

The review of journal articles determined what has already been researched on a specific topic. I reviewed journal articles that helped in finding new areas for future research in using similar methodologies previous researchers benefited from. The disadvantage of reviewing journal articles was that critical analysis process was very time-consuming for a researcher.

I organized the literature review by subject matter and content. The literature review included a critical analysis and synthesis of varying perspective of the topic. The primary areas of focus in this study included employee engagement, employee

engagement theory, rival theories, employee engagement drivers, engagement strategies, measurement instruments, and productivity. Greaves, Zibarras, and Stride (2013) noted that employee intentions capture the actions that motivate employees, which influence the employees committed to the business.

Employee Engagement

In the past 10 years, employee engagement has become the focus in several research studies (Saks & Gruman, 2014a). Cook (2012) defined engagement as how positively the employee thinks about the organization, feels about the organization, and how proactively he or she achieves the organizations goals. Kahn (1990) argued that the more an employee gives of their self in their work role, the more exciting and comfortable their work performance will be. With the heightened interest in employee engagement, businesses discovered the key factor to their success is through employee engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014a). Furthermore, employee engagement is the art and science of engaging people in authentic experiences and recognizing connections between strategy, roles, performance, organization, community, relationship, customers, development, energy, sustainability, and transforming the work relationships into results (Menguc, Auh, Fisher, & Haddad, 2013; Saks & Gruman, 2014b; Soane, Shantz, Alfes, Truss, Rees, & Gatenby, 2013; Zinger, 2013).

Kahn (1990) was the first to define employee engagement through his study on the psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. Kahn defined employee engagement as the level to which an employee is willing to engage and accomplish the organization's goals. Kahn defined personal engagement as employees

harnessing themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally into their work role performances. Kahn argued that engagement simultaneous employment to promote the physical, emotional, and knowledgeable connections to work performances and allows the employee to express their preferred self in task behaviors. Kahn defined disengagement as employees withdrawing themselves from the physical, emotional, and knowledgeable aspects of work performances. Since Kahn developed the definition of employee engagement, other researchers have not been in agreement with the definition causing numerous other definitions of employee engagement to exist (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Cole, Walter, Bedeian, & O'Boyle, 2012). Researchers argued that employee engagement should instead be called job engagement or work engagement (Schaufeli, 2012).

Engaged employees demonstrate positive and proactive attitudes, strive to be accountable and lead, exhibit dedication and passion for duties and tasks, and are satisfied with their work to show a higher level of commitment to the organization (Beek et al., 2012; Saks & Gruman, 2014b). Sustainable engagement reduces employee turnover, increases productivity, and achieves profitable growth (Glaves, 2012; Meyer et al., 2012). Sustainable engagement created the following positive influences on sustainability: (a) It is linked to high performance, (b) it starts at the top all the way down to the frontline staff, (c) it tracks the communication progress, (d) it engages the first line leaders, (e) it individualizes the engagement, (f) it creates a motivational culture, (g) it reinforces and rewards the right behavior, and (h) it promotes the right behaviors and traits for the organizational culture (Beek et al., 2012; Glaves, 2012; Meyer et al., 2012).

Greaves et al. (2013) noted that employee intentions capture the actions that motivate employees, which influence the commitment to the business. Greaves et al. argued that the productivity level of any business depends upon the level of engagement of the workforce.

Businesses need a work environment that creates motivation for employees to want to connect with their work and job (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Each employee is different, which means employees have different engagement strategies that drive productivity to motivate them, but also to manage every level of employee engagement (Cook, 2012). Manzoor (2012) found that skill and knowledge enhancement was not just necessary for the employees, but provided a learning culture essential for organizations to remain in a constantly changing business environment. Employees will work harder, be supportive, and have a sense of belonging and an increase in motivation and engagement when the organization creates a clear vision and mission, which may create a sustainable wealth (Ruck & Welch, 2012; Saks & Gruman, 2014b; Shuck, Ghosh, Zigarmi, & Nimon, 2013).

Den Hartog and Belschak (2012), Shuck and Herd (2012), and Andrew and Sofian (2012) argued that having leaders who are well invested, interact with staff, are responsible and accountable, are clear with open communication, and have performance management provide the support necessary for staff to increase productivity and engagement. Andrew and Sofian found that leadership was the key to engagement and has a clear association to motivate employee's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee's behaviors that affect employee engagement. Kang et al.

(2012) and Ruck and Welch (2012) argued that leaders could recognize employee engagement from lease turnover rates and absence, excellent customer service, great communication, being enthusiastic and energetic, teamwork, and a willingness to learn and take on more responsibility. Past researchers have found that recognition was an excellent tool for managers to use to enhance motivation, which lead to commitment and sustainable employee engagement (Hansen & Leuty, 2012; Kang et al., 2012; Saks & Gruman, 2014b). When employees are engaged and productive, they influence not only the work environment but also other employees to encourage them to be productive (Glaves, 2012). With employee engagement, workers can flourish in the workplace to create social and environmental initiatives (Glaves, 2012).

Employee Engagement Theory

Kahn (1990) was the first scholarly researcher to mention engagement in research. During Kahn's research, he observed that employees are either present or absent in the moment of job performances throughout the workday, which caused employees to experience behavioral shifts. Kahn developed personal engagement and personal disengagement to express the cycle of employees becoming attached and detached psychologically within the workplace. He also explored how employees' personal experiences and perception influences one's commitment, involvement, and behavior level (Kahn, 1990).

Kahn (1990) developed the theory of employee engagement, which researchers have used in relationship to employee engagement. He developed the theory to achieve a business's strategic goals by creating the conditions for management to be successful and

for employees to be motivated to deliver the best performances for the interest of SBEs (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Glaves, 2012; Shuck & Herd, 2012). According to Kahn, employees can be engaged on physical, emotional, and cognitive levels. As applied to this study, the theory of employee engagement created successful collaborative work teams who worked together and held the expectation on how employees perceive and perform their job duties within their work environment (Soane et al., 2013). Analyzing each of the business's strategic goals independently allowed a pattern to emerge that lead to the identification of the cause of the successful engagement method of workers across the targeted frontline employees (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015; Greaves et al., 2013; Shuck, 2013). Having a solid foundation and better understanding of the concepts of employee engagement made it possible to develop tools to better assess how engagement affects an organization (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015; Shuck & Herd, 2012; Soane et al., 2013).

Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement measured one's engagement level through commitment. The factors that affect an employee's commitment level could be indicators of motivators to increase employee engagement (Kang et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 2012). The theory of employee engagement was needed to counterbalance the habits and practices rooted over the past decades of negative strategies used by managers to engage employees. Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) brought to the forefront that learning from the frontline leadership was a critical issue in developing employee engagement strategies, but created two implications. The first implication was developing engagement strategies that employees might not be enthusiastic about (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). The second implication was principals of the organization not asking the

harder questions to determine active employee engagement strategies (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). As a result, fewer employees are fully engaged (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). Arrowsmith and Parker found that employee engagement does offer management the potential to increase the workplace's motivation and job performance. However, human resources could undermine employee engagement with constraints that would affect the administrative support for active communication and management (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Kang et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 2012).

Kahn's (1990) unique framework for his theory of employee engagement offered three distinct levels of employee engagement: (a) cognitive engagement, (b) emotional engagement, and (c) behavioral engagement. Kahn defined cognitive engagement as finding meaning in ones work, feeling safe (physically, emotionally, and psychologically), and having resources to complete one's work. Cognitive engagement resolves around an employees work who believes their work matters to embrace it and increase engagement (Kahn, 1990; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Kahn defined emotional engagement as broadening and investing in personal resources (pride, trust, and knowledge) employees have within their influence. Emotional engagement enhances critical thinking processes to influence and direct outward energy toward completing work task (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Kahn defined behavioral engagement as increased levels of effort directed toward organizational goals that broaden an employee's available resources (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Employees who experience higher levels of engagement experience positive affect that broadens the employees' critical thinking

process that has positive implication on Kahn's employee engagement theory (Kahn, 1990; Shuck & Reio, 2014).

Rival Theories

There are always rival theories to examine a phenomenon. Kahn's (1990) employee engagement theory has two rival theories. The theory of planned behavior and the self-determination theory were the two rival theories to examine a phenomenon.

The theory of planned behavior. The theory of planned behavior framework included steps to understand the progression of the thought process (Greaves et al., 2013; Kautonen, van Gelderen, & Tornikoski, 2013; Kim et al., 2013). One of the pathways to understanding how to develop and implement strategies in the business environment was to understand the human cognition and the entire process of business managers' and employees' thought process, perception, and behavioral patterns (Kautonen et al., 2013). Human cognition, thought process, perception, and behavior can be, captured, analyzed, explained, and understood by utilizing the theory of planned behavior (Greaves et al., 2013; Kautonen et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2013; Yoon, 2012). Using the theory of planned behavior provides the framework to understand the various behavior patterns of the employee that directly influence the respective attitude toward employee engagement (Yoon, 2012). Isolating each element of the theory of planned behavior (chain thought process, attitude toward the behavior, and behavior) businesses were able to gain a better understanding of the contribution of each generational component to the overall desired commitment (Yoon, 2012). The theory of planned behavior was not selected because the

purpose of this research study was not to explore the employees' behavior or the employees' thought process.

The self-determination theory. The self-determination theory is a theory of motivation and behavior that provides a framing for human motivation and personality traits to give insights into one's quality of performance (Miniotaite & Buciuniene, 2013). When organizational leaders discuss sustainable employee engagement, they determine ways to motivate staff into becoming engaged in the organization (Miniotaite & Buciuniene, 2013). The self-determination theory explores the effects of extrinsic motivators on intrinsic motivation (Ankli & Palliam, 2012; Roche & Haar, 2013). Extrinsic motivation has four types: (a) external regulation, (b) interjected regulation, and (c) identified regulation (Miniotaite & Buciuniene, 2013). Intrinsic needs consist of (a) the need for competence, (b) the need for autonomy, and (c) the need for relatedness (Miniotaite & Buciuniene, 2013). The theory stated that an individual's well-being and growth depend upon the intrinsic needs being fulfilled (Miniotaite & Buciuniene, 2013; Roche & Haar, 2013). The essence of this theory was that individuals were more resourceful, innovated, and motivated because of feeling inner satisfaction within their work (Ankli & Palliam, 2012; Roche & Haar, 2013). The self-determination theory was not selected because the purpose of this research study was not to explore human motivation and personality traits (Miniotaite & Buciuniene, 2013).

Key Drivers of Employee Engagement

The importance of employee engagement drivers is to motivate employees and recognize that employees want to become engaged in their organization to make a

positive contribution (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Bakker, 2014; Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014).

Demerouti (2014) argued that businesses were recognizing that employee engagement

drivers were tools critical to productivity. Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) argued that

engaged employees would consistently outperform other employees in a business that

created drivers of engagement for good working environment standards. Bakker (2014),

Bedarkar and Pandita (2014), and Demerouti (2014) found it was important to analysis

the drivers of employee engagement for job-crafting.

Employee engagement fluctuates throughout the day contributing to the level of

productivity (Bakker, 2014). Key drivers of employee engagement are when employees

are able to change the content of their work and assign meaning to their work task to

influence their own daily work engagement creating job crafting (Bakker, 2014;

Demerouti, 2014). Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli, and Hetland (2012) argued that

job-crafting was conceptualized as exploring resources and challenges, and reducing

demands. Employees construct their jobs in order to create conditions to take control

over certain aspects of their work to avoid negative consequences, enable a more positive

sense of their self, and to connect to others (Petrou et al., 2012).

Resource exploring, challenge exploring, and demand reducing are three distinct

job-crafting resources. Resource exploring is a job demand of asking for feedback or

advice for achieving goals and completing tasks (Petrou et al., 2012). Challenge

exploring is new challenges at work to keep busy and add new responsibilities that create

situations that promote mastery (Petrou et al., 2012). Reducing job demands is exploring

ways to reduce one's workload to ensure the treatment of diminished health, but has

detrimental effects of productivity (Petrou et al., 2012). Job-crafting behaviors vary significantly from one day to another and enhance the employees' ability to adapt to the demands of the changing work environment (Demerouti, 2014).

      Job-crafting resources. Job-crafting is the process of employees shaping their jobs to choose job task and creating meaning to these task to drive employee engagement in the work environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Tims, Bakker, and Derks (2012) defined job-crafting as the changes employees may make regarding their job demand and job resources. Bakker and Demerouti (2014) defined job-crafting as the physical and cognitive changes employees make in their task or relational boundaries. The physical changes refer to the different changes that can take place to complete a job task and how the employee sees the job task refers to cognitive changes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Petrou et al., (2012). Petrou et al. (2012) argued that employees design their job in order to create conditions in which they can work in order to avoid negative work environments and be motivated to control aspects of their work tasks. Tims et al. (2012) argued that job-crafting correlates positively with work engagement and job performance. Tims, Bakker, and Derks (2013) argued that job-crafting could predict future job demands and job resources, which would have a positive impact on job satisfaction and increase work engagement. Tims et al. (2013) found that employees who constructed their job resources, increased their work engagement, job satisfaction, and job performance. The more employees directly designed their own job resources, the more the employee was engaged in their work performance (Petrou et al., 2012; Tims et al., 2013).

Job-crafting plays an important role in communications in ensuring employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Tims et al., 2013). Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) argued that employees require clear communication from leaders on job requirements to prevent barriers to employee engagement. Leadership communication is necessary to communicate the organizational values and goals of the business and to obtain the support of the employees (Bakker, 2014; Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Petrou et al., 2012). Ruck and Welch (2012) explored the impact of communications on employee engagement and found that leadership communication created a sense of belonging and commitment to the organization for employees. Communication relates to employee engagement, leadership affects the employees learning, improvement, and action to achieve the organizational expectations (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Ruck & Welch, 2012; Petrou et al., 2012).

Threat to employee engagement. Dysfunctional leaders are those leaders that place burdensome structures in the pathway to increase employee engagement (Rose, Shuck, Twyford, & Bergman, 2015). The researchers found that in the upwards of 13% to 36% of employees have been treated disrespectful from dysfunctional leaders. Schyns and Schilling (2013) argued that dysfunctional leaders have a set of behaviors that were not a leadership style, which use this behavior style too intentionally or unintentionally cost businesses productivity. Rose et al. (2015) argued that dysfunctional leaders lose discretionary efforts that affect turnover rates and business goal achievement. The researchers found that employees who deal with dysfunctional leaders bring their work baggage home causing negative effects for the family to cope with.

Dysfunctional leaders provide few positive outcomes for an organization. Schyns and Schilling (2013) argued that leadership behavior can only have an effect when perceived by followers as dysfunctional. Xu, Huang, Lam, and Miao (2012) argued that employees' based their perception of a dysfunctional leader on the leader's outlook, disposition, and circumstance. Rose et al. (2015) argued that dysfunctional leadership goes to the limits of work environment aggression through belittling, humiliating, and undermining the employee's performance. The researchers found that this leadership style has long-lasting negative effects on employee engagement. Hu (2012) argued that the more severe side of dysfunctional leadership behavior included name calling, loud and angry tantrums, invading an employee's personal space and privacy, and displays of coercion, intimidation, derision, or vindictiveness. This dysfunctional behavior causes the employee pain, emotional stress, and sees their self as a victimized employee (Hu, 2012; Rose et al, 2015; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Xu et al., 2012). Victimized employees from dysfunctional leaders are not in a position to defend themselves from this type of leadership's behavior on their own (Hu, 2012; Rose et al., 2015; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Xu et al., 2012).

Demir and Rodwell (2012) and Hu (2012) both argued that employees with higher levels of emotional intelligence could cope with dysfunctional leadership without it causing a decrease to their work performance. Henle and Gross (2013) argued that lower levels of emotional intelligence display negative emotions at work and subjects them to endure abuse from dysfunctional leadership. Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, and Marinova (2012) found that new employees were the most vulnerable when dealing with

dysfunctional leadership. Decoster, Camps, Stouten, Vandevyvere, and Tripp (2012) found that newer employees who dealt with a dysfunctional leadership had a higher rate of turnover and avoid filing complaints on the leadership. Estes (2013) argued that organizations need to recognize that dysfunctional leadership does exist in their organization to take action. Ucanok and Karabau (2013) found that taking action toward a dysfunctional leadership can be challenging not to allow them to continue their reign, but could lead to positive organizational employee engagement.

Engagement Strategies

Businesses today create strategic partnerships with engaged employees as a competitive advantage to impact productivity in the workplace (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Employees will work harder, be supportive, have a sense of belonging, and have an increase in productivity and engagement when the organization creates a clear vision and mission, which may create a sustainable wealth (Ruck & Welch, 2012). Bedarkar & Pandita (2014) argued that employee engagement is a powerful resource to increase productivity. Garavan, Carbery, and Rock (2012) explored talent development and strategies, which talent development is a talent management process to determine the skill to be developed, competencies to be developed, drivers to be developed, and support for the development. Manzoor (2012) found that skill and knowledge enhancement was not just necessary for the employees, but provided a learning culture essential for organizations to remain in a constantly changing business environment.

Sustainability and excellence are two interrelated concepts that drive business education for crucial corporate growth with benefits to generational engagement in the

workforce (Anninos & Chytiris, 2012). Inyang (2013) explored the nature of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises with regards to engagement practices, driving factors to initiatives, strategies of engagement, and challenges the of implementation of corporate social responsibility. Inyang discovered four internal motivations or drivers for engagement: (a) management's personal values or ethical orientation plays a significant role in management's level of commitment, (b) engagement is purely based on normative case to give back, (c) improving the business image creates better returns and loyalty, and (d) strong identification with employees provides driving forces for engagement. Businesses have adopted many strategies to increase engagement, but the following reflect areas to develop engagement strategies in: (a) community involvement or development, (b) employee related initiatives, (c) consumerism, (d) environmental initiatives, and (e) supply chain (Hsu & Cheng, 2012; Inyang, 2013). Increased sales, recruitment, business reputation, client relationship, productivity, employee performance, motivational workforce, and customer satisfaction were just some of the benefits that come from adopting employee engagement strategies (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015; Hsu & Cheng, 2012; Inyang, 2013). Incentives also can provide motivation to employees who result in behavior changes that leadership can formulate for proper work incentives to sustain employee motivation (Ankli & Palliam, 2012; Galpin & Whittington, 2012). To be a sustainable organization to make lasting improvements, business organizations should comprise of leadership, strategy, activity analysis, and performance assessment (Mohr, Sengupta, & Slater, 2012; Rask & Lauring, 2012; Taylor et al., 2012).

Albrecht (2012) explored how employment level factors influence engagement and employee's productivity, as well as the outcome variables. The researcher found that organizational culture was directly and positively associated with team resources, job resources, engagement, commitment, and extra role behaviors were positively associated with engagement and job resources (Albrecht, 2012). Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) argued that work life balance is an important part of driving employee engagement for the well-being of the employee. Albrecht also argued that the development and management of employee's well-being and engagement are not the motivational factor of productivity (Albrecht, 2012). Bedarkar and Pandita found that an increased workload created higher levels of employee engagement in the work environment.

Shuck and Rose (2013) explored how meaningful work plays a role in employee engagement and found that meaningful work characteristics of participation increased high correlations with predictors of productivity. Shuck and Rose argued that characteristics of meaningful work relate to engagement and the outcomes associated with each characteristic. The researcher found that overlooked sources of engagement realized one's life purpose, values, work goals, feeling of personal accomplishment, and career advancement, which can have a social influence through work (Shuck & Rose, 2013). Steger, Littman-Ovadia, Miller, Menger, and Rothmann (2013) also explored the value of efficient disposition and meaningful work on employee engagement. The researchers argued that when employees perceive work as meaningful; there was no difference in the level of commitment found between those with high or low scores of affective disposition (Steger et al., 2013).

Breevaart, Bakker, and Demerouti (2014) explored how self-management relates to employee's work engagement on a daily basis and how employees can contribute to their own daily work engagement. Breevaart et al. argued that employees are less engaged depending on the amount of job resources available to them to complete their job requirements. Breevaart et al. defined self-management as employees' having control over their own behavior instead of being externally controlled by the supervisor. Monitoring performance, taking corrective actions, and exploring resources are managerial functions that employees' are responsible for under self-management (Breevaart et al., 2014). Strategies to increase productivity and daily work engagement include self-observation, self-goal setting, self-cueing, self-reward, and self-punishment. Self-observation means that employees' are aware of their behaviors and why they show certain behavior (Breevaart et al., 2014). Self-goal setting means employees contribute to the goals set forth of the organization when the goals are specific, challenging, and attainable (Breevaart et al., 2014). Self-cueing means that employees' develop reminders to help adjust their behavior to focus on what needs to be accomplished (Breevaart et al., 2014). Self-management is a trainable strategy that will save time and expenses on external managers as self-managing employees' will optimize their daily work environment that contributes to their daily work engagement (Breevaart et al., 2014).

Bakker (2014) and Breevaart et al. (2014) explored the concept of daily work engagement and how daily work engagement varies from one employee to another employee. Breevaart et al. defined daily work engagement as a transient, positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and

absorption. Breevaart et al. argued that daily work engagement creates positive outcomes not only in productivity and performance, but also in proactive behavior. Bakker argued that daily work engagement reflects a transient state of mind that exists on a given moment and fluctuates over short periods within the same individual creating the within-person approach. The within-person approach finds the differences that are associated with activities that coincide with the different levels of work engagement (Bakker, 2014). This employee-focused approach was a nonleaded focus approach creating employees to conduct self-management to increase work engagement (Bakker, 2014; Breevaart et al., 2014).

An organization must understand where it wants to go with employee engagement before the implementation of any strategy to achieve the engagement results. If the direction of engagement was not toward a specific achievable target, engagement could decrease in momentum, focus, impact, and sustainability (Benzer et al., 2013). Instead of focusing on the problems with engagement, an organization can use this as an opportunity to leverage engagement to achieve a strategic economic result. Creating a sustainable workforce requires strategies within the workforce to recruit, support, engage, lead, innovate and succeed (Benzer et al., 2013; Cameron, 2012). Keeping a competitive advantage requires not only understanding the environmental issues, but also keeping up with the organizational changes that will affect employee engagement to increase successful engagement and productivity (Cameron, 2012).

Measurement Instruments

Measuring the level of employee engagement has become increasingly common among businesses (Small Business Administration, 2013). Using different engagement models in a business allows managers to unlock the full potential in every employee. Several engagement models offer the foundation for understanding employee engagement level (Greaves et al., 2013; Miniotaite & Buciuniene, 2013). There are several models available to enhance the level of engagement in the workforce that continues to be questioned as to how the models measure engagement (Miniotaite & Buciuniene, 2013; Saks & Gruman, 2014a; Schaufeli, 2012). The engagement models for examination in this literature review are appreciative inquiry, job demands-resources model, meaningful work inventory, sustainability leadership model, and Zinger engagement model.

Appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry is a strength-based approach developed by Case Western Reserve University in 1987 to create energy, fostering innovation, and being expensive and proactive (Selcer, Goodman, & Decker, 2012). This approach focuses in learning from what went right to expand on what went right instead of getting the development wrong. The appreciative inquiry is a way of thinking differently so an organization can work together in new ways that create positive thinking. This approach works on exploring real experiences and future visions to encourage optimism within the workforce. The appreciative inquiry used the 5D cycle as a framework to examine an organization's leadership to build active and collaborative sustainable engagement.

Job demands-resource model. Albrecht (2012) used the job demands-resources model to conduct a study to explore employment level factors that influence engagement and employee's well-being, as well as the outcome variables. Job demand and job resources are the two working conditions that job demands-resource model divides into (Saks & Gruman, 2014a). The purpose of the two conditions was to influence engagement through a process (Saks & Gruman, 2014a). The researcher found that organizational culture was directly and positively associated with team resources, job resources, engagement, commitment, and extra role behaviors was positively associated with engagement and job resources (Albrecht, 2012). The model helped to explore what resources were necessary for facilitating engagement. The researcher also argued that job demands-resources model provides a motivational framework, unlike Zinger's engagement model. The job demands-resources model has been used the most in the research of employee engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014a). Zinger and Albrecht's engagement models are different, but both focus on the development and management of employee's well-being and engagement and not the motivational factor (Albrecht, 2012).

An extension of the job demands-resource model is the job demands-resources theory, which this theory combines two research traditions, job designs and job motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). The researchers found that the job demands-resource theory proposes reversed causal effects. Saks and Gruman (2014a) argued that employees who are overextended at work create job demands to the business. Albrecht (2012) argued that engaged employees stay engaged by creating their own job resources. The job demands-resource model helps to predict job burnout, motivation, and

engagement (Clausen, Nielsen, Gomes Carneiro, & Borg, 2012; Saks & Gruman, 2014a). The job demands-resource theory helped to understand job burnout, motivation, and engagement to make predictions about employee job performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Clausen et al., 2012). Bakker and Demerouti (2014) argued that job demands-resource theory is flexible and can apply to all work environments and resources. Bakker (2014) argued that job demands could turn into a hindrance with achieving job performance with job. Job resources can stimulate personal growth, learning, and development that are necessary to deal with daily job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). The researchers found that job resources and job demands influence work engagement by the level of motivation from the employee (Tims et al., 2012).

Meaningful work inventory. Michael F. Steger developed meaningful work inventory in 2011 to measure work characteristics that correlate through 64-items of employee outcomes. Shuck and Rose (2013) explored how meaningful work played a role in employee engagement and found that meaningful work characteristics of participation increase high correlations with predictors of involvement. Shuck and Rose argued that characteristics of meaningful work relate to engagement and the outcomes associated with each characteristic. The researcher found that overlooked sources of engagement realized one's life purpose, values, work goals, feeling of personal accomplishment, and career advancement, which can have a social influence through work (Shuck & Rose, 2013). Steger et al. (2013) also explored the value of efficient disposition and meaningful work on employee engagement. The researchers argued that when employees perceive work as meaningful; there was no difference in the level of

commitment found between those with high or low scores of affective disposition (Steger et al., 2013).

Sustainability leadership model. The sustainability leadership model is committed to creating sustainable strategies and developing the foundation for these strategies through stages, which engages employees to commit to the organizational policies and the core values (Galpin & Whittington, 2012). The researchers argued that sustainability leadership model provided a guideline on how to structure leadership in sustainable endeavors for an engaged workforce to motivate employees to increase performance (Galpin & Whittington, 2012; Vincent-Hoper, Muser, & Janneck, 2012). Galpin & Whittington (2012) argued that workforce engagement is a central element of transforming a business's sustainability mission, strategy, and values into measureable results. The core of this model was workforce engagement that was based off how leadership performance can motivate employees (Galpin & Whittington, 2012).

Sustainability leadership model has two components, macrocomponent and microcomponent. Macrocomponent has three stages of sustainability; the first stage is commitment to sustainability, the second stage of sustainability is development, and the third stage is corporate sustainability (Galpin & Whittington, 2012). The first stage focuses on tools to protect the businesses reputation and sustainability, whereas the second stage focuses on an integration stage to use social issue management to gain a competitive advantage (Galpin & Whittington, 2012). The final stage focuses on leadership's openness to lead on social issues integrating into the businesses responsibilities (Galpin & Whittington, 2012). The researchers argued that these stages

often fail to link to sustainability due to the fact that businesses won't refine their business strategy to include sustainability. The microcomponent of this model focused on the engaged workforce and the success to the organizational sustainability efforts through developing a relationship between the organization and the employees (Galpin & Whittington, 2012). The researchers argued that leadership that fails to develop this relationship would leave the business with an ill-defined sense of direction.

Transformational leadership has a correlation to job enrichment to increase workforce engagement by building in five core job dimensions of task variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback (Galpin & Whittington, 2012; Vincent-Hoper et al., 2012). Vincent-Hoper et al. (2012) argued that the facilitation of the five core dimensions increased work engagement. The researchers found that transformational leaders can be coached and adopt a leadership style that can influence employees performance. Galpin and Whittington (2012) found the core job dimensions have the potential to increase workforce engagement by developing performance goals for each employee. The researchers argued that having these measurable goals under each core dimension encouraged employees to incorporate sustainability in the daily work performance.

Vincent-Hoper et al. (2012) argued that the relation on the effects of transformational leadership on employee performance lacks in research to understand the relation and this area still needs more clarification. Tse, Huang, and Lam (2013) found that transformational leadership relates to employee engagement. Galpin and Whittington (2012) found that transformational leadership would approach business

situations with a fresh perspective that leads employees' performances beyond

expectations. A leadership's trustworthiness is key attribute identification for leadership

in sustainable organizations (Galpin & Whittington, 2012; Vincent-Hoper et al., 2012).

Vincent-Hoper et al. found that employees consider their work performance and work

priorities to be significant to the business when they have a transformational leader. A

keen awareness of engagement within the business environment increases

knowledgeability with engagement for the decision making process for leadership

(Haines, Rousseau, Brotheridge, and Saint-Onge, 2012). Transformational leadership

demonstrates their commitment to the business by holding their followers to a higher

degree of dedication by promoting work engagement (Vincent-Hoper et al., 2012).

Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES). UWES is an employee engagement

tool used to measure the daily work engagement through surveying the employees.

Originally, UWES included 24 items through three dimensions: vigor (*At my work, I feel*

bursting with energy), dedication (*I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose*),

and absorption (t*ime flies when I am working*) to measure daily work engagement

(Bakker, 2014; Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014; Vincent-Hoper et al., 2012). Storm et al.

defined vigor as employees with high levels of energy, mental resilience while working,

persistence when faced with difficulties, and a willingness to invest effort in work. Storm

et al. defined dedication as employees having a sense of inspiration, pride, significance,

enthusiasm, and challenge at work. Storm et al. defined absorption as employees being

happy, fully concentrated, and deeply engrossed in work, with trouble detaching from

work. Bakker (2014) argued that UWES is a valid and reliable instrument to assess the

level of daily work engagement in an employee. Zinger (2012) found that his engagement model used the businesses weakness to affect the involvement, engagement, and dedication of employees to increasing employee engagement. Vincent-Hoper et al. (2012) found their mediation model has a relationship between transformational leadership and subjective occupational success significantly mediated by work engagement. The mediation model ties back into UWES through work engagement from vigor, dedication, and absorption. These models related back to sustainability leadership model by empowering employees to demonstrate more effort and commitment to the business through work engagement and job performances (Bakker, 2014; Galpin & Whittington, 2012; Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014; Vincent-Hoper et al., 2012).

Productivity

In the United States, SBEs are creating more job growth opportunities through innovation (Small Business Administration, 2013). Small business in 2014 had 5,707,941 establishments with employees throughout the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Small Business Administration (2013) defined the employee size standard of 500 employees or less. Judd and McNeil (2012) and Levy (2012) argued that SBEs are the key drivers of innovation through the development and implementation of new business ideas. Bello and Ivanov (2014), Ivanov (2013), and Peltier and Naidu (2012) argued innovational development was the only way that SBE were able to survive.

Small business enterprises have become a leading component of the economic development worldwide (Eid & El-Gohary, 2013; Soininen, Martikainen, Puumalainen, & Kylaheiko, 2012). Small business enterprises differ from larger businesses when it

comes to the engagement level of the workforce (Williams & Schaefer, 2013). Small business enterprises are owner-mangers that enable them to have the freedom necessary for decision making versus larger business mangers (Williams & Schaefer, 2013). The importance of SBEs is to provide wealth and jobs into the economic development of the community, while leading a strategic direction of employee engagement (Eid & El-Gohary, 2013; Williams & Schaefer, 2013). Eid and El-Gohary (2013) stated that the development of small enterprises has been regarded as an important factor for the achievement of development objectives such as poverty alleviation, economic development, and the promotion of more democratic societies (p. 32).

The productivity of a business relies heavily on the engagement level of the employees and the employees' efforts to drive the productivity (Saks & Gruman, 2014b). Businesses with higher levels of employee engagement have higher levels of return in shareholder returns, profitability, and productivity (Saks & Gruman, 2014a). Engaged employees make positive contributions to the level of productivity, disengaged employees can be a liability to the level of productivity (Saks & Gruman, 2014a; Saks & Gruman, 2014b). With a decline in employee engagement, businesses can aspect to see a decline in the level of productivity that is referred to as an *engagement gap* (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Saks & Gruman 2014a). The engagement gap can cost businesses in a loss of productivity up in the billions of dollars annual (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Saks & Gruman, 2014a).

Influence that employees have on productivity. Employee engagement has been receiving a lot of attention over the past 10 years with the relationship it associates

with on business outcomes (Schaufeli, 2012). Productivity, profitability, customer satisfaction, turnover, and safety were just some of the business outcomes associated with employee engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014a). Employee engagement was considered to be the level of commitment and involvement that an employee has toward the business (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). Not only does employee engagement have negative effects on business outcomes, it also has work interference with family life (Saks & Gruman, 2014a).

The differences that each employee has in the workforce can relate to each employee by showing the skills, attitudes, expectations, and the learning styles that are necessary to increase productivity (Dixon, Mercado, & Knowles, 2013; Helyer & Lee, 2012; Manzoor, 2012). The employee differences found were teamwork, autonomy, security, professionalism, flexibility, formal authority, technology, social media, work structure, involvement, continuous learning, fun-at-work, and recognition (Lester et al., 2012; Moss & Martins, 2014). Older workers are more experienced and dominant in the work environment with the future generations working together (Helyer & Lee, 2012; Schullery, 2013). Employee diverse career expectations can be managed to ensure higher levels of engagement and improve employee productivity, particularly for frontline employees who may be exploring job changes, promotions, and career redirection (Lyons, Schweitzer, Ng, & Kuron, 2012; Muja & Appelbaum, 2012). The employee differences that will help businesses to develop employee engagement strategies to address the expectations of work productivity are stimulating job, job security, intra

organizational mobility, work-life balance, work atmosphere, autonomy, salary, and task description (Lub, Bijvank, Bal, Blomme, & Schalk, 2012).

The perceptions of job productivity are sustainable by the extensive work intensification (Brown, 2012). Work intensification increase productivity to return positive outcomes, which reduces stress and increases employee engagement for SBEs (Brown, 2012). Many studies have taken place that explored new ways to bring a new employee into an organization to get them to apply personal strengths and engage them in the job productivity (Brown, 2012; Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013; Shuck et al., 2013). Kalliath and Kalliath (2012) argued that changes in the work environment could influence the frontline employees, which affects an employee's engagement level and the employee's productivity level. Andrew and Sofian (2012) argued that employees display different variations of engagement levels that interact daily with coworker situations.

Influence that management has on productivity. A characteristic of a strong manager is being well invested and interacts daily with their frontline employees (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Shuck & Herd, 2012). Leaders are responsible and accountable to include clear and open communication that creates a positive performance management to increase employee engagement and productivity (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Shuck & Herd, 2012). Glaves (2012) explored how SBEs affect employees and found that employees find meaning in work orientation through employee engagement strategies. The researcher also found that the construction of employees was different, had different meaningfulness at work, and had different characteristics (Glaves, 2012).

Jaca, Viles, Mateo, and Santos (2012) explored the perception of management's continuous improvement programs. Sustainability of continuous improvement in management's commitment involve key productivity indicators, development program objectives, adequate training, communication, employee involvement; promote teamwork, adaptation to the environmental changes, and recognition or rewards (Jaca et al., 2012). Shuck and Herd (2012) and Taylor et al. (2012) noted the strategic role of frontline leaders and the development of the organization's sustainable programs to increase sustainability through engagement, goals, and employees. Changes in organizational culture developed new engagement competencies to increase employee's willingness to accept organizational culture change, which decreased the barriers to sustainability due to conflicting understandings (Shuck & Herd, 2012). A key intervention for human resources is to engage the top leadership, to explore the aid in creating awareness and their help in discovering bottom line opportunities (Kim et al., 2013; Shuck & Herd, 2012; Taylor et al., 2012). Employee engagement starts from the top leadership and filters down to the frontline staff, if leadership cannot become engaged, and then it might be harder for frontline employees to become engaged within the organization (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Kim et al., 2013; Shuck & Herd, 2012; Vincent-Hoper et al., 2012).

Influence that engagement has on productivity. Schmitz, Matyok, Sloan, and James (2012) explored the relationship between ethics, social justice, and sustainability as a need to encourage the social value creation in frontline management decisions. The researchers argued that a new generation of workers would learn the importance of

leadership development to strengthen the workers understanding of sustainable issues for a service learning experience that creates a gateway to community engagement and enriched learning (Schmitz et al., 2012). Stoughton and Ludema (2012) argued that different perspectives toward sustainability exist between senior leadership, management, and employees among organizations. Sustainability focuses on many productivity areas, one of them being employee engagement. Incentives and awards help to engage the frontline employees and identify main drivers of sustainability, which are organizational (integration perspective), functional group (differentiated perspectives), and individual levels (fragmented perspective; Stroughton & Ludema, 2012). Kruschwitz (2012) argued that sustainable productivity creates value and creates operational excellence. The researcher discovered that sustainability provided value and created a stronger employee engagement for productivity with frontline employees for sustainable business reputations for social change (Kruschwitz, 2012).

Gould (2012) explored the contribution of engagement toward the sustainable development of organization innovation orientation, and the difference that innovation makes. Engagement has internal and external stakeholders that affect an organizations sustainable innovation orientation (Gould, 2012). Engagement with the different stakeholders has mechanisms that could promote sustainable change for the organization and leaders would manage this affect internally by being responsible for managing the stakeholder's ideas to convert those ideas into innovations (Gould, 2012). The researchers also found that stakeholder's behavior influences innovation and that each generation of stakeholders has perceptions of engagement and innovation, which inspires

another generation (Gould, 2012). The dependent variable of sustainable innovation service provides a perception that measures engagement on innovative behavior, which might not be flexible mechanisms to connect to an active stakeholder dialogue with successful innovation strategies (Gould, 2012).

Transition and Summary

Section 1 included key elements for this research study, which included the problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, research question, focus group questions, conceptual framework, significance of the study, and the review of the academic literature review. SBEs are negatively affected by employee engagement resulting in loss of productivity. This research study may serve as a foundation for the development of strategies to increase sustainable engagement to improve productivity that bridges employee engagement gap between employees and employers. Section 2 details key elements of the qualitative single-case study including the role of the researcher, participants, population and sampling, ethical consideration, data collection instrument, data analysis techniques, and credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Section 3 will present the doctoral study findings, including the application to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for action and further research.

Section 2: The Project

There are varieties of strategies that SBE managers use to engage employees to enhance productivity within organizations (Anninos & Chytiris, 2012). This section provides more in-depth understanding to aspects of my study, which includes reiteration of the purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, data analysis technique, and credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore the strategies that SBE frontline leaders used to engage their frontline employees. In my research study, I identified trends and characteristics that contributed to successful strategies used in the engagement of frontline employees. I provided strategies that are used to increase sustainable engagement to improve productivity that bridges the employee engagement gap between employee and employer. Social change implications included in this research study indicated how improved productivity contributed to the increase of SBEs that survive, flourish with employees, and positively contribute to the business community.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I conducted a focus group and direct observations with frontline leaders to explore what strategies are used to engage frontline employees. I am familiar with the topic of this study because I am a frontline manager in healthcare with experience in increasing employee engagement levels. I conducted this research study

with the local SBE frontline leaders within my home state of Virginia. My role as the researcher was to mitigate bias; I did not conduct this study in my place of employment. I provided the owners of the SBE with the fully completed doctoral research study. The results of this doctoral study were made available in a 1-2 page report summary for more widespread distribution in the SBE.

The ethical code of standards applied to all conversations that I had in person, over the telephone, postal communication, and any electronic communication to protect the participant's information in establishing a relationship of trust between researcher and participant. In relation to the Belmont Report protocol, no research was conducted on human subjects (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). In order to mitigate bias, I viewed the data from a personal lens, so I can better understand the participants' personal viewpoint. A focus group facilitates interaction with participants that enhances the data gathering to clarify responses and enable listening techniques (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013; Petty & Meng, 2012; Thomson & Stew, 2012).

Ethical guidelines were set forth to increase validity throughout the data collection (Gottlieb et al., 2013; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Johnson, 2014). The focus group protocol and focus group questions (see Appendix A) ensured that ethical guidelines were set forth to inform focus group participants of participation and to ensure the trustworthiness, consistency, and validity of the focus group. The focus group protocol and focus group questions (see Appendix A) served as the secondary instrument.

Participants

The participants for this qualitative singe-case study were the frontline leaders of a SBE in the state of Virginia. Small business enterprise frontline leaders meet eligibility criteria to be an eligible participant in the focus group. Frontline leaders were employed by the participating SBE operating in the state of Virginia. Participants for this research study were 18 years of age or older. The knowledge gained from this research study helped to identify trends and characteristics that contributed to the successful engagement of frontline employees. This knowledge served as a foundation for the development of strategies to increase sustainable engagement to improve productivity that bridged an employee engagement gap between employee and employer (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015; Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Saks & Gruman 2014a).

To gain access to participants I reached out to a local SBE operating within the geographical boundaries of Virginia. I obtained approval and obtain a Letter of Cooperation from the SBE to conduct a focus group and direct observations with frontline leaders prior to obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The SBE business owner sent the letter of invitation (see Appendix B) out to frontline leaders to participate in a focus group because the business does not have email for me to send out to frontline leaders. Upon IRB approval, I reviewed the consent form with participants prior to the focus group start. I then had participants sign the consent form. The consent form included an outline of the confidentiality that is associated with participating in this research study. Furthermore, the consent form noted participants had the right to withdraw from this research study at any time for no reason.

The requirements for a case study require the researcher to establish a working relationship with the participants (Johnson, 2014; Meng, 2012; Yin, 2014). Working relationships with participants need to have mutual respect, trust, and communication. Mutual respect is best served by concentrating on the benefits in the development of strategies to increase employee engagement (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Meng, 2012; Schmitz et al., 2012). A lack of trust can be a major barrier in this research study (Hansen & Leuty, 2012; Johnson, 2014; Meng, 2012). To prevent this, information remained confidential and participants remained confidential.

The focus group participants were assigned random identifier codes (F1-F6). A smaller focus group consists of 8 to 10 participants (Ryan, Gandha, Culbertson, & Carlson, 2014; Stake, 2013; Yin, 2014). Open exchange of information resulted in minimizing misinterpretation and stimulates a level of trust (Johnson, 2014; Meng, 2012; Yin, 2014).

Research Method and Design

The selection of the methodology and design for this research study derived from the business problem and research question. Using a qualitative research method and a single-case study design, I explored strategies that SBE frontline leaders use to engage their frontline employees to increase productivity and employee engagement. Employee engagement leads to motivational actions or lack thereof, and the goal of this qualitative case study was to explore the outcome of the desirable employee engagement strategies (Anitha, 2014; Merry, 2013; Richard, 2013). The desirable outcome is strategies that benefit SBEs to increase employee engagement among the workforce.

Research Method

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are the three research methods available for a research study (Stake, 2013; Williams & Schaefer, 2013; Yin, 2013). A qualitative method was an appropriate research method to capture strategies to improve employee engagement that will successfully increase productivity. Qualitative studies can contribute to an in-depth understanding of business communications by answering how and what (Covell, Sidani, & Ritchie, 2012; Hynes, 2012; Williams & Schaefer, 2013). Hynes (2012) asserted that the nature of qualitative research is to develop a new framework that makes a research method to explore both early and contemporary to theories of engagement. In a qualitative method, research continues to develop the themes that are definable by the data collection from the participants (Covell et al., 2012; Hynes, 2012; Williams & Schaefer, 2013). The following criteria drives the underlining criteria for a qualitative research method: (a) the desire to gain an in-depth understanding of a group of individuals in an existing setting, (b) the ability to develop a complete detailed description of the phenomena under exploration, (c) the ability to explore and address intangible phenomena such as thinking, beliefs, and reasoning, and (d) the desire to establish an analytical generalization (Covell et al., 2012; Hynes, 2012; Williams & Schaefer, 2013).

According to Hoe and Hoare (2012), quantitative research tests hypotheses, examines relationships between variables, and measures the frequency of observations. The quantitative research method was ruled out for the following reasons: (a) the goal was not to count and classify features nor to construct a statistical model in order to

explain an observed phenomenon, (b) there was no need to establish a statistical generalization, and (c) there was no need to establish either a correlation or causation between and/or among variables. A mixed method was ruled out on the grounds that it requires both qualitative and quantitative methods to conduct a research study. Within this research, a study to explore strategies that SBE frontline leaders used to engage their frontline employees, I did not compare variables, and hypotheses were not tested. This research study does not require a large participation size, where a mixed method and quantitative method does require a larger participant size. A quantitative research study is more rigorous through the involvement of statistical analysis and larger participant size, which might predetermine the participant's responses that would alter the findings (Hoe & Hoare, 2012; Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012; Morse, 2015).

Research Design

Selecting an appropriate research design maximizes the possibility of collecting accurate data that leads to beneficial conclusions on strategies to improve employee engagement (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Hynes, 2012; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Qualitative research has many different research designs and the standard designs to use are case study, phenomenology, historical, narrative, and ethnography (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

A case study was the research design that allowed for proper interpretation of data to develop conclusions relating to improved employee engagement strategies. A case study is an appropriate research design when (a) there is one or more cases with exemplary outcomes in relation to some evaluation questions, (b) prior knowledge of the

issues exist to gather how and what the particular outcomes might directly replicate the same conditions from case to case, and (c) it allows for an in-depth understanding of phenomena's or processes within a real-world setting (Barnett & McCormick, 2012; Cao, Thompson, & Triche, 2013; Lexen, Hofgren, & Bejerholm, 2013; Petty et al., 2012). Data saturation is met when it becomes counter-productive and where the new discovery does not necessarily add anything new to the overall story, model, theory, or framework (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Walker, 2012).

Phenomenological, historical, ethnographic, and narrative research designs were options for that I considered and ruled out for this research study. Phenomenology research design focuses on the lived experience of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Stake, 2013; Yin, 2014). A phenomenology design was not appropriate for my study because this type of research design falls outside the scope of my research study. Historical design was ruled out because this type of research design would be more difficult to conduct to predict future events from interpreting past events (Moustakas, 1994). The ethnographic design was not an appropriate research design because it focuses on examining a culture of a particular demographic over an extended period (Petty et al., 2012; Stake, 2013; Yin, 2014). Finally, narrative research was not an appropriate research design for my research study. A narrative research design tells a story of the participant or detail life experiences of an event (Petty et al., 2012; Stake, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Population and Sampling

The population for this research study was frontline leaders with a SBE in the state of Virginia. A single-case study is an appropriate research design when participants are within the same setting (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Stake, 2013; Yin, 2014). I selected a purposeful sampling method that was appropriate for selecting participants for this research study because this method attained data saturation. Purposeful sampling allowed the selection of participants by the researcher who would provide a wealth of knowledge of the phenomenon (Elo et al., 2014; Hennink et al., 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Purposeful sampling was necessary for accurate interpretation of findings to achieve data saturation.

The numbers of participants for a case study are irrelevant and should instead reflect the necessary number to gather enough data (Guetterman, 2015; Stake, 2013; Yin, 2013). A qualitative research study can have as few as 12 participants or more, depending on reaching data saturation (Guetterman, 2015; Stake, 2013; Yin, 2013). I had one focus group of 8-10 participants for this single-case study and met data saturation. Since data saturation was met, I did not need additional focus groups using the remaining population of the SBE. An appropriate sample size is one that is adequate to address the research question of this research study, but not too large of a sample size that will not allow for in-depth analyses of the data collection. Data saturation reached the point where it become counter-productive and the new discovery does not necessarily add anything new to the overall story, model, theory, or framework. Due to the depth of

information in a qualitative study, a smaller number of participants are suitable to serve the needs of this research study.

The criteria for participant selection for this research study was to first reach out to a SBE that had a desire to improve employee engagement strategies to increase the level of engagement and productivity in frontline employees. The SBE business owner sent the letter of invitation out to frontline leaders to participate in a focus group because the business does not have email for me to send out to frontline leaders. Eligible participants met the following criteria for inclusion in the research study, frontline leaders in a SBE included managers, supervisors, and team leaders to join the focus group as their experiences provided valuable information in the development of employee engagement strategies. Small business enterprise frontline leaders met eligible criteria to participant in the focus group. Frontline leaders were employed by the participating SBE operating within the boundaries of Virginia. Participants for this research study were 18 years of age or older. Through the signed consent form with the participants, I ensured the criterion was met for inclusion in the research study.

The focus group setting in this research study provided a comfortable environment to allow the participants to express their personal experiences. To collect data, I used the technique of scheduling a focus group to be conducted in the SBE as a face-to-face focus group. I scheduled the focus group for a time, date, and a location at the SBE that best suited the participants. The focus group was arranged for duration of 60 to 120 minutes. The focus group took place in the conference room at the SBE. If

there was not a conference room at the SBE, a public conference room would have been obtained.

Ethical Considerations

An informed consent form is a process of explaining the research study to the participant and encouraging the participants to ask any questions before making a decision about participating (Covell et al., 2012; Irvine et al., 2013; Johnson, 2014). Participants in this research study signed an informed consent form for participating in the focus group and allowed me to facilitate the focus group and audio record the focus group. The informed consent form included an outline of the confidentiality that was associated with participating in this research study. The informed consent form provided a guideline to inform the participants of the focus group process to develop prior knowledge of what will take place during the focus group and the participant's rights during the focus group. Prior to the participant signing the informed consent form, I explained the study to the participant and encouraged the participant to ask any questions. I gave the participants adequate time to review the study information and to ask any questions before signing the informed consent form. Participants had the right to withdraw from this research study at any time for no reason. No incentives were given to frontline leaders for participating in the focus group.

Ethical research requires a lifelong effort to act ethically, to have ethical behavior as a researcher, and to protect participants of this research study from harm (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Johnson, 2014; Yin, 2014). Ethical consideration was of utmost importance when dealing with human subjects during the research collection. An ethical

code of standards applied to conversations that included in-person or over the telephone, postal communication, and any electronic communication to protect the participant's information in establishing a relationship of trust between researcher and participants (Gottlieb, Handelsman, & Knapp, 2013; Johnson, 2014; Rowley, 2012). This research study protected the participant's wellbeing and minimized any potential harm to the participants. IRB approval ensured that I incorporated all the necessary eliminates to protect human participants. I studied the National Institute of Health Office of Extramural Research and received certification required to engage in research involving human subjects.

Participants' information or any other identifiers that associated with them from the collection of data was maintained in a safe for 5 years to protect the rights of the participants. After the 5-year mark, all participant information was destroyed by shredding this information through a crosscut shredder. Data was not collected for this research study prior to getting obtained approval from the Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) without an identification number and expiration date (Walden IRB approval number is 03-08-16-0127982 and it expires on March 7, 2017). The protection of individual identification and the identification of the organization was essential to secure and protect their identity. To protect this, information remained confidential and participants remained confidential. Each participant in the focus group was assigned a random identifier code (P1-P8).

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Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument and motivated participants in the focus group. I used a set of focus group questions as my secondary instrument in the focus group for data collection. The focus group consisted of nine open-ended focus group questions covering the participant's experience and perception of strategies that SBE frontline leaders need to engage their frontline employees. The focus group questions were related to defining employee engagement and exploring the next steps of the development of employee engagement strategies to increase productivity.

The process of this focus group instrument explored the perceptions and ideas about employee engagement strategies needed in order to increase the SBE productivity levels. Ethical guidelines were set forth to increase validity throughout the data collection (Gottlieb et al., 2013; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Johnson, 2014). The importance of a focus group protocol and focus group questions (see Appendix A) ensured the ethical guidelines set forth to inform focus group participants of participation and ensured the trustworthiness, consistency, and validity of the focus group. The focus group protocol and focus group questions (see Appendix A) served as the secondary instrument. The focus group questions were directed by the central research question of this research study. By frontline leaders answering the focus group questions; the participants were able to describe their experience of implementing and developing employee engagement strategies.

To maximize the reliability and validity of this research study, I used member checking after the completion of the focus group transcriptions by returning to the SBE to

complete. Member checking validates the reliability of data collection analyzes between research and participants (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012; Haper & Cole, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Member checking validates that data saturation is met through no new information, no new coding, or no new themes appear (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012; Haper & Cole, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Participants advised if changes were required to reflect the truth of the responses (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012; Haper & Cole, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Data Collection Technique

Data collection techniques that can be used include interviews, focus groups, and direct observation (Yin, 2014). Data collection requires careful planning to ensure that the execution of the focus group with the participants will gain scholarly respect and trust (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Williams & Schaefer, 2013). The data collection technique that I used was a focus group. I recorded the data collection using an electronic audio device along with a backup electronic audio device that ensured the collection of data was adequate and transcribed error free.

I scheduled the focus group for a time, date, and a location at the SBE that best suited the participants to collect data. The focus group was arranged for duration of 60 to 120 minutes. I was able to conduct the focus group at the SBE; therefore, I did not have to use a public conference room such as the library, hospital, or school board office.

I had the advantage of being able to play back the recordings at the end of the focus group to ensure that I was be able to analysis the data collection. The disadvantage that I could have had was equipment malfunctions. To address this challenge of

technology, I ensured that the equipment was in working condition by testing the equipment prior to each focus group. I made arrangements for a time at the agreed upon meeting location to test the equipment at that facility prior to ensure the equipment worked in that setting. This allowed me to ensure that I had the necessary accessories to operate the equipment.

I used methodological triangulation to establish validity in my research study. To establish the validity I used more than one data collection technique. The results from the focus group were integrated with direct observations made from the frontline leaders work environment. The advantage of methodological triangulation included understanding the problem of the research study that revealed unique findings to the results. The disadvantage of methodological triangulation for this research study was the plan to collect data was time-consuming.

With a focus group, I had the advantage of providing an environment for participants to interact with each other to stimulate a discussion on employee engagement. A focus group setting allowed participants to project ideas off each other and allowed participants to express their experiences. The disadvantages to a focus group is ensuring participation and encouraging each individual to speak in front of others, which lead to independency and true saturation (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Stewart et al., 2014).

A work environment direct observation protocol (see Appendix C) was used to acquire knowledge about the frontline leaders through direct observation only. I used direct observations to collect data by observing frontline leaders in their work

environment. This allowed me to understand how employees engage in their job duties, work actions, and their interaction with their coworkers. The advantage to direct observation was documenting employees' in a natural setting that helped to shape data into results. Direct observation is a time-consuming process and may causes changes of direct observation bias by the researcher (Boundles, 2015; Breevaart et al., 2014; Hynes, 2012). The direct observation is a chance to experience a specific aspect of social life (Boundles, 2015; Menguc et al., 2013; Seuring & Gold, 2012). I completed direct observations by making four site visits over 2 weeks on Tuesday and Thursday of each week during the manager meetings. Each visit was 2 hours long for a total of 8 hours. I observed all eight frontline leaders together during each managers meeting.

Data Organization Techniques

I used NVivo software to analyze my qualitative data. NVivo software can present data in a manner to better understand the facts (Boundles, 2015; Breevaart et al., 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). Participant identifiers are assigned for confidentiality and to protect participant's identification (Gottlieb et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2013; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The participants' information or any other identifiers that could associate with them from the collection of data was maintained in a safe for 5 years to protect the rights of the participants. The storage of the recordings was maintained in a safe for 5 years along with the digital backup records being password protected on a secure network. Any field notes that I took during the focus group, as well as the nonverbal reactions that I observed was recorded. The storage of these field notes were

also maintained in a safe for 5 years. After the 5-year mark, I will destroy all

participants' information by shredding this information through a crosscut shredder.

Data Analysis Technique

Methodological triangulation was the method I used to triangulate data to

establish validity in this research study. To establish the validity I used more than one

data collection technique. Preparing, analyzing, and interpreting the data for meaning is

an important task for any researcher to conduct (Boundles, 2015; Irvine et al., 2013;

Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Given that the research design for this case study consisted of

a set of focus group questions, the questions served the basis for the discussion. I

allocated sufficient time for follow-up questions and clarifications questions during the

focus group. The focus group process consisted of asking the actual question that has

been developed to ensure that the questions are unbiased. The results from the focus

group were thematically analyzed with results from direct observations. Validation

draws to a conclusion when all data collection methods draw to similar conclusions

(Boundles, 2015; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Guion et al., 2008). The advantage of

methodological triangulation included understanding the problem of the research study

that revealed unique findings to the results (Guion et al., 2008). The disadvantage of

methodological triangulation for this research study was the plan to collect data was time-

consuming (Guion et al., 2008).

The focus group was audio recorded and transcribed after the completion of this

meeting. The data analysis and interpretation of the data are the two most important

components to ensure the research question were being answered. Data from the focus

group and direct observations were thematically analyzed and then triangulated to validate the reliability of interpretations. I used NVivo version 11 software to sort and analyze the data in my research study. NVivo software allowed me to analyze qualitative data and present the data in a manner that was conducive to a better understanding of the facts to draw a conclusion. NVivo software helped the validity of the focus group transcripts to check for (a) the original coding strategy, (b) the emerging engagement themes, and (c) the data saturation point. I provided the owners of the SBE with the full completed doctoral research study upon publication. The results of this doctoral study were made available in a 1 to 2 page report summary for more widespread distribution in the SBE.

The conceptual framework for this research study was the theory of employee engagement by Kahn, which suggested that employees are either present or absent in the moment of job performances throughout the workday. The theory of employee engagement was applicable to achieve a business's strategic goals by creating the conditions for management to be successful and for employees to be productive for the interest of the business. Employee engagement theory has associations with personal engagement and personal disengagement that influences one's productivity level in the workplace (Anitha, 2014; Kahn, 1990; Shuck & Herd, 2012). The focus group questions enabled the participants to generate responses that were related to answer the research question. The theory of employee engagement counterbalances habits and practices rooted over the past decades of negative strategies used by managers to engage employees (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Harold Siow, 2014; Kahn, 1990). The theory of

employee engagement as applied to this research study holds that employee engagement strategies influence employees' productivity within their work environment. The data analysis focuses on the responses that provide greater detail on improving engagement strategies that can influence the productivity level of engagement for frontline employees.

Dependability, Creditability, Transferability, & Confirmability

In this qualitative research study, dependability, creditability, transferability, and confirmability are four main concepts for this research study. These main concepts were analogous criteria for a qualitative research study. I discussed dependability, creditability, transferability, and confirmability in further detail to address the sensitive issues in a clear and meaningful manner within the research design.

Dependability

The challenge with a qualitative research study is the variability of the evolving environment, which means the work environment was different from what was expected or understood (Chenail, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013; Petty et al., 2012). The research infrastructure must be able to replicate to be adequate and relevant or the research study had limited influence, causing the dependability to be affected (Chenail, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013; Petty et al., 2012). The purpose of dependability is to stay on focus and to be opened to change and variation. The documentation of changes in methodology is necessary to ensure the relevance of research to increase the dependability of the audit trail (Chenail, 2012; Elo et al., 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Petty et al., 2012). Changes include the number of focus group participants, nonverbal cues, analysis, focus group

coding, contact time with participants, and any changes to the research environment (Elo et al., 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Petty et al., 2012).

Creditability

Credibility is defined as the methodological procedure and source used to establish a high level of harmony between the participants' expressions and the researcher's interpretations (Chenail, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013; Petty et al., 2012). For this research study to be credible, I selected the appropriate participants, selected the appropriate data collection methodology, and ensured that the participants' responses were open, complete, and truthful. The following methodological procedures were used to increase the credibility of this research study:

1. Established enough time (2 hours) with the participants to gather the necessary amount of data needed to develop and to increase the quality of the research study for data saturation.

2. Reviewed the data from different perspectives and viewpoints to understand the participants' environment.

3. Reviewed the critique for the research and the data collection to gain knowledge from a different perspective.

4. Used methodological triangulation or multiple sources of data collection techniques to ensure data saturation.

5. Allowed the participants to review the transcribed focus group recording for accuracy with their experiences and perceptions of the context of this research study.

6.   Achieved data saturation when there was lack of any new emerging data.

Methodological triangulation from two data collection techniques established

validity in this research study. The results from the focus group were thematically

analyzed with results from direct observations. Validation draws to a conclusion when

all data collection methods presented similar conclusions (Boundles, 2015; Guion et al.,

2008; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Walker, 2012).

Transferability

I carefully selected participants in my qualitative research study because it is

appropriate to have a smaller participant pool unlike seen in a quantitative research study.

Transferability enables the transfer of results to other studies and increases in a

qualitative research study with two key considerations: (a) how closely the participants

are linkable to the context study and (b) the contextual boundaries of the findings

(Houghton et al., 2013; Ivanov, 2013; Petty et al., 2012). The readers and future

researchers will determine the transferability of the findings in my qualitative research

study and the contributions on social change. Future researchers may discover that the

finding from this research study contribute to social change by preparing frontline leaders

for success in the development of strategies for employee engagement.

Confirmability

I used the actions and the perceptions of the participants to analyze their

expressions of frontline employee engagement. After the focus group, I interpreted the

participants' expressions through a coding process that generated consistency in the

research study. The confirmability helped the coding process by verifying the

truthfulness or meaning being asserted in the research study. Confirmability is an

accurate means to verify two goals within a qualitative research study (Chenail, 2012; Elo

et al., 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Petty et al., 2012). The first objective was to

understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the research participant. The second

goal was to understand the meanings participants give to their experiences. A qualitative

case study uses an audit trail to reduce bias by focusing on the quality and meaning of

results (Houghton et al., 2013; Johnson, 2014; Meng, 2012; Petty et al., 2012).

Transition and Summary

Section 2 indicated why a qualitative single-case study was the appropriate

research method and research design for this study. The purpose of this study was to

explore specific strategies that increased employee engagement of frontline employees to

achieve the SBE strategic objectives. A focus group of participants shared strategies used

in employee engagement. Employee engagement leads to productive action and this

action determined the outcome of employee engagement strategies in my qualitative

study. The desirable outcome for SBE frontline leaders was successful engagement on

the frontline employee workforce that will benefit future generations to become engaged

in the workforce. The focus group questions and direct observations served the basis for

the discussion during the focus group. The data from the focus group and direct

observations were thematically analyzed to present the data in a manner that was

conducive to a better understanding of the facts and drawing the conclusion. The

software analyze will validate the reliability of data interpretations. Section 3 provides

the findings and the results of my research and future recommendations for research studies.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 provides an in depth aspect of the data collection on what strategies SBE frontline leaders used to engage their frontline employees. This section provides an introduction, presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and recommendations for further research, my reflections, and the conclusion to this research study.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore the strategies that SBE frontline leaders used to engage their frontline employees. Employee engagement strategies in SBEs provide value for businesses by improving productivity through frontline leaders engaging frontline employees. Data collection techniques included a focus group with frontline leaders and direct observations. Five themes emerged from the data that were thematically analyzed for this research study. The five emerging themes were: (a) investing in sustainability, (b) leading by example, (c) providing clear and open communication, (d) implementing a system of measurement, and (e) developing a professional image. The findings indicated that SBEs lack employee engagement strategies and require implementation of additional employee engagement strategies to improve productivity. Five out of eight participants indicated they are negatively affected by low employee engagement from frontline employees, which has resulted in loss of productivity for the business. The SBE frontline leaders showed a strong commitment to the business success.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question that guided this research study was *what strategies do SBE frontline leaders use to engage their frontline employees*? The five themes that emerged from the data analyze in this research study were (a) investing in sustainability, (b) leading by example, (c) providing clear and open communication, (d) implementing a system of measurement, and (e) developing a professional image.

Investing in Sustainability

In line with Kahn's definition of employee engagement, frontline leaders indicated their definition of employee engagement as finding out what employees want, what you expect out of them, always communicating with them, staying in touch with them, and train everyone to be productivity to meet the business goals to be successful. Kahn (1990) was the first person to define employee engagement as the level to which an employee is willing to invest in achieving the organization's goals. Kahn found that engaged employees strategies demonstrate engagement by being honest toward other people, putting in an honest day's work, being proud of your work, and having a work ethic. Beek et al. (2012) and Saks and Gruman (2014b) mentioned that engaged employees demonstrate positive and proactive attitudes, strive to be accountable and lead, exhibit dedication and passion for duties and tasks, and show a higher level of commitment to the organization. Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) confirmed that employee engagement does offer management the potential to increase the workplace's motivation and job performance. The factors that affect an employee's commitment level

are indicators of motivators to increase employee engagement (Kang et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 2012).

A characteristic of a strong leader is being well invested that interacts daily with their frontline employees (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). Five out of eight participants indicated that showing frontline employee's appreciation and acknowledging their achievements is a form of a strategy to increase employee engagement. Lis (2015) mentioned that showing employees' gratitude is an action to strengthen a positive work environment for the employees and for the business. All participants confirmed that appreciation is a simple form of thank you or expressing to the employee they did a good job. One participant stated that the strategy the SBE uses is acknowledging what the employee has done correctly on the job to increase employee engagement and to inspire the employee to work harder. Leaders are responsible to express their gratitude toward their employees to establish a positive work environment (Lis, 2015).

Through direct observations, I observed participants acknowledging ideas on how to improve their job duties for the day and discussing those ideas on how to implement them. Participants' responses confirmed if you show a little respect, give a pat on the back, and manage up an employee enough; employees go out of their way to do a better job. Creating a sustainable workforce requires strategies within the workforce to recruit, support, engage, lead, innovate and succeed (Benzer et al., 2013; Cameron, 2012). Employees who experience higher levels of engagement experience positive affect that broadens the employees' critical thinking process that has positive implication on Kahn's employee engagement theory (Kahn, 1990; Shuck & Reio, 2014).

All participants' stated that working for a SBE is beneficial because employees are made to feel as though they are part of a family-type setting, in contrast to the anonymity and impersonal nature of the larger business. All participants' stated that they need to earn respect from frontline employees instead of demanding it. Participants' were observed showing respect during meetings with frontline leaders, communications with frontline employees, and interactions with both business owners. All participants' stated you have to show a little respect and give a pat on the back to frontline employees for them to go over and beyond to perform a better job. In addition, this relates back to the theory of employee engagement by Kahn (1990), where this theory creates successful collaborative work teams who work together and are held to the expectation on how employees perceive and perform their job duties within their work environment.

Leading by Example

The findings from this research study confirmed SBE participants lead by example, which is a strategy to demonstrate appropriate work behaviors and work ethics to frontline employees. Jiang and Probst (2016) and Lis (2015) both mentioned leading by example is being a role model for their followers to promote excellence. Through the direct observations, I observed participants leading with their actions along with their communication. The findings indicated that the participants hold a high credibility from their frontline employees by showing them respect through communication, teaching employees the job requirements, and demonstrating a higher standard of work ethics for the SBE family name. All of the participants confirmed that they lead by example for the family business name. The participants want to make something great out of the family

name to keep passing it down to the future generations. Furthermore, the participants want to keep the family name to where customers know the business is honest and to know the family will provide excellent work.

Leading by example is a form of transformational leadership. Vincent-Hoper et al. (2012) mentioned that transformational leadership demonstrates their commitment to the business by holding their followers to a higher degree of dedication by promoting work engagement. Jiang and Probst (2016) mentioned that transformational leadership provides inspirational motivation and is concerned with the employees' development and wellbeing. Galpin and Whittington (2012) mentioned that transformational leadership brings about adopting a leadership style that can influence employee's performance, productivity, and increase employee engagement. Engaged employees demonstrate positive and proactive attitudes, strive to be accountable and lead, exhibit dedication and passion for duties and tasks, and are satisfied with their work to show a higher level of commitment to the organization (Beek et al., 2012; Saks & Gruman, 2014b).

Kahn (1990) mentioned that the more an employee gives of their self in their work role; the more exciting and comfortable their work performance would be. The theory of employee engagement was needed to counterbalance the habits and practices rooted over the past decades of negative strategies used by managers to engage employees and to measure one's engagement level through commitment. The findings from this research study confirmed that frontline leadership actions affect their employee's level of engagement and their work performance. A strategy the participants used to improve work performance of frontline employees is to work harder so their

employees will follow their leadership example. When frontline employees follow the work performance of leadership, six out of eight participants agreed they have engaged their employees to improve work performance. One participant mentioned that this strategy goes back to lead by example, which is the way we have always done it. Another participant mentioned an important strategy is to show the employees you can do the job, this engages them to work harder, and engages them to hold other employees accountable to the same work standard.

The more employees take a direct task at designing their own job resources, the more the employee is engaged in their work performance (Petrou et al., 2012; Tims et al., 2013). The challenge the participants mentioned they faced with employee engagement strategies is it only takes one frontline employee to ruin the whole crew and bring the rest of the employees down. The participants agreed once this happens, they find themselves the only one completing the job. For those employees, the six out of eight participants confirmed their strategy would be to work those employees out of the business for the best interest of the businesses profit success. Hu (2012) and Vincent-Hoper et al. (2012) mentioned that employees consider their work performance to be significant to the business when they have a transformational leader. When employees are engaged and productive, employees influence not only the work environment but also other employees to encourage them to be productive (Glaves, 2012).

Providing Clear and Open Communication

Leaders are responsible and accountable to provide clear and open communication that fosters a positive performance management to increase employee

engagement and productivity (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Shuck & Herd, 2012). Participants' responses confirmed the importance of effective communication and staying in touch with frontline employees throughout the day. All participants agreed that communication needs to start from the top of the business down to frontline employees. Findings indicated that participants seek additional communication from the business owners through planned meetings to discuss business related issues, plan future jobs, pay scale development, assignment of equipment, and selection of new hires. One participant mentioned that more communication would be beneficial to their own engagement to lead employees. Another participant mentioned certain business issues should be agreed upon in meetings. Frontline leaders influence the development and implementation of engagement strategies that open up new dialogue of communication for advancement in productivity (Carmeli et al., 2015). The impact of communication on employee engagement and leadership communication creates a sense of belonging and commitment to the organization for employees to achieve the organizational expectations (Ruck & Welch, 2012). Lis (2015) mentioned that through clear communication employees can be taken care of by creating and sustaining a positive work environment.

The findings from this research study confirmed that regular business and safety meetings need to happen on a regular base for more clear communication. Four out of eight participants indicated that the challenge for regular meetings is from business owners not attending, which causes agenda items not to be agreed upon or discussed in the meetings. Four out of eight participants indicated that since they are the upcoming

owners, they would like to be more involved in the business meetings and dealings to not only understand more of the business, but to be more engaged in the business. One participant indicated that more clear and open communication would increase our involvement. The participants' responses confirmed that the current employees are tenor employees who are aware of all the safety regulations. The findings indicated that these meetings are for the benefit of the business to ensure that no one gets put into a dangerous situation that could cause harm. Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) mentioned that employees require clear communication from leaders on job requirements to prevent barriers to employee engagement. Leadership communication is necessary to communicate the organizational values and goals of the business and to obtain the support of the employees (Bakker, 2014; Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Petrou et al., 2012).

Implementing a System of Measurement

Participants' responses confirmed that measurement of employee engagement is on how the employee benefits the business, on the completed jobs, the revenue made and lost from the completed jobs, and if the job required additional work after completion. The findings from this research study indicated that the SBE does not have a good way to measure employee engagement. The analysis of the direct observations indicated this was a strategy to improve upon because participants do not know what the front office is doing and do not see the crews for long periods of time. Participants' responses confirmed that one employee engagement measurement would not work because everyone does not do the same job. Findings indicated that employee engagement measurements need to be on the job, the office that you work in, and different

measurements are necessary for each crew. Participants' responses confirmed that the strategy would be to sit with the front office and each crew to improve and develop an employee engagement measurement.

Using different engagement measurements in a business allows managers to unlock the full potential in every employee. Several engagement models offer the foundation for understanding employee engagement level and help to improve upon the measurement of employee engagement. The appreciative inquiry is a way of thinking differently so an organization can work together in new ways that create positive thinking. This approach works on exploring real experiences and future visions to encourage optimism within the workforce (Selcer et al., 2012). The job demands-resources model explores the employment level factors that influence engagement and employees wellbeing (Albrecht, 2012). This model helps to explore what resources are necessary for increasing employee engagement and provides a motivational framework (Albrecht, 2012). Meaningful work inventory measures work characteristics that play a role in employee engagement (Shuck & Rose, 2013). When employees perceive work as meaningful; employees realize life purpose, values, work goals, feeling of accomplishment, and career advancement, which can influence employee engagement (Steger et al., 2013). Sustainability leadership model is committed to creating sustainable strategies and developing the foundation for these strategies through stages, which engaged employees to commit to the business policies and the core values (Galpin & Whittington, 2012). Moreover, UWES is an employee engagement tool used to measure

the daily work engagement through surveying the employees to determine vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker, 2014 & Strom et al., 2014).

Developing a Professional Image

Engaged employees make positive contributions to the level of productivity, disengaged employees can be a liability to the level of productivity (Saks & Gruman, 2014a; Saks & Gruman, 2014b). Businesses today create strategic partnerships with engaged employees as a competitive advantage to impact productivity in the workplace (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Sustainability of continuous improvement in management's commitment involve key productivity indicators, development program objectives, adequate training, communication, employee involvement; promote teamwork, adaptation to the environmental changes, and recognition or rewards (Jaca et al., 2012). Through direct observation, I observed participants showing frontline employees how to complete different tasks. Responses from all participants indicated they were shown how to do their job duties, talked through how to do their job duties, and then allowed employees to complete the job duties on their own. Participants shared they face challenges with some frontline employees back talking when asked to complete certain job duties, not wanting to come to work to work hard, and not being a team player to jump in to help finish a job faster. Six out of eight participants confirmed their strategy when faced with these challenges are showing employees how to do the job and not telling employees to do something that they would not do their self. Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) mentioned that learning from the frontline leadership was a critical issue in developing employee engagement strategies.

Participants' responses confirmed that in order to grow the business the SBE needs to adapt to modern office strategies, install modern office equipment and software applications, and adopt modern business practices. The findings from this research study indicated that the lack of office modernization is a challenge to improve the level of productivity and the inefficient office employees is a challenge to increase the level of employee engagement. One participant indicated that there is an issue here that needs to be resolved that will increase productivity and must start in the office, because we cannot grow out in the field until we organize in there. Another participant indicated that the business cannot keep up with the orders due to the lack of modern business practices. Through direct observation, I observed participants trying to make sense out of completed jobs that needed to be billed for and shorting through loose hand written paperwork to figure out what needed to be billed for. In my findings from this research study, I indicated that the business is losing money and does not know why they are losing money or where they are losing money. In most cases, the SBE is waiting for the customer to come to them instead of seeking out additional customers or bidding on projects.

The strategy of modernizing the SBE with business practices and applications would allow participants to be engaged into the business to seek additional business through online project bidding; this would help find the jobs to bring it back into the business to increase productivity. Participants' responses confirmed that they as frontline leaders could have more say in recruiting more jobs; finding different jobs would increase their employee engagement because they are bringing revenue back into the

business. Key drivers of employee engagement are when employees are able to change their content of their work and assign meaning to their work task to influence their own daily work engagement creating job crafting (Bakker, 2014; Demerouti, 2014). Job crafting is the process of employees shaping their jobs to choose job task and creating meaning to these task to drive employee engagement in the work environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). In my analysis, I confirmed that communications extend knowledge on job-crafting that plays an important role in increasing employee engagement and productivity. The theory of planned behavior is a thought process to understand how to develop and implement strategies in the business environment to understand the human cognition and the entire process of business manager's and employees' thought process perception, and behavioral patterns (Kautonen et al., 2013). Business leaders can directly influence the respective attitude toward employee engagement by understanding the various behavioral patterns of employees (Yoon, 2012).

Having leaders who are well invested, interact with staff, are responsible and accountable with clear open communication, and have performance management skills provides the necessary support for employees to increase productivity and engagement (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012). One participant mentioned that the business improvement is having dedication to the family business and showing the previous generations that the current generations will work just as hard as they did to keep the family name honest. Inyang (2013) discovered four internal motivations or drivers for engagement: (a) management's personal values or ethical orientation plays a significant role in management's level of commitment, (b) engagement is purely based on normative

case to give back, (c) improving the business image creates better returns and loyalty, and (d) strong identification with employees provides driving forces for engagement. Keeping a competitive advantage requires not only understanding the environmental issues, but also keeping up with the organizational changes that will affect employee engagement to increase successful engagement and productivity (Cameron, 2012). The dedication that the SBE has to the family business relates back to the self-determination theory. The self-determination theory is a theory of motivation and behavior that provides a framing for human motivation and personality traits to give insights into ones quality of performance (Miniotaite & Buciuniene, 2013). When business leaders discuss sustainable employee engagement, leaders determine ways to motivate staff into becoming engaged in the business (Miniotaite & Buciuniene, 2013).

Applications to Professional Practice

In the United States, SBEs are creating more job growth opportunities through innovation (Small Business Administration, 2013). The importance of SBEs is to provide wealth and jobs into the economic development of the community, while leading a strategic direction of employee engagement (Eid & El-Gohary, 2013; Williams & Schaefer, 2013). The productivity of a business relies heavily on the engagement level of the employees and the employees' efforts to drive the productivity (Saks & Gruman, 2014b).

Employee engagement strategies give businesses the opportunity to enhance engagement to build a productive culture for frontline employees. When frontline employees are at their full potential, the level of productivity increases and enhance the

full quality of the business. Employee engagement strategies in SBEs provide value for businesses by improving productivity. Understanding the importance of employee engagement in the workplace was vital to improve the social business influence of productivity (Longoni, Golini, & Cagliano, 2014). Improving the employee engagement strategies increases the level of engagement while increasing productivity (Longoni et al., 2014). Improvements in productivity provide value in sustainable SBEs (Anitha, 2014).

The purpose of this research study was to explore the strategies that SBE frontline leaders used to engage their frontline employees. Understanding these strategies was relevant to help SBE frontline leaders to develop and improve employee engagement strategies to support the frontline employee workforce and ultimately improve productivity. The business problem that some SBE frontline leaders lack strategies to engage their frontline employees was addressed through this research study. Some SBE frontline leaders are negatively affected by low employee engagement, which results in loss of productivity for the organization. The conducted focus group revealed employee engagement strategies that could increase the productivity levels of frontline employees and increase business profits with new customers. Productive businesses offer better opportunities to make a positive contribution to social change. The themes that emerged from the focus group provided the bases for frontline leaders to improve the employee engagement level of their frontline employees.

The frontline employees' differences can influence organizational workforce environments in a variety of different ways. The phenomenon of this research study provided society a better understanding of how employee engagement can relate to the

longevity of productivity and develop strategies to increase employee engagement and decrease the level of disengagement. SBE frontline leaders might use the findings from this research study to evaluate the effectiveness of the employee engagement strategies in an effort to increase productivity among frontline employees. It is critical for SBE frontline leaders to focus on the factoring issues that decrease employee engagement, so they can monitor the level of engagement and the level of productivity to take action to increase these levels.

Implications for Social Change

SBEs create the internal condition that enable employees to do their job, drive higher levels of sustainable employee engagement, and energize the workforce, which may lead to increased productivity (Glaves, 2012). The implementation of engagement strategies may open up new dialogue of communication for the advancement in productivity for excavating industries in the state of Virginia. SBEs frontline leaders may provide a baseline to the understanding and development of employee engagement strategies that will bring tangible improvements to excavating industries in Virginia to increase productivity and could catalyze social change. Productive industries offer better opportunities to make tangible improvements to contribute to social change.

Employee engagement strategies contribute to the sustainability of SBEs (Carmeli et al., 2015). Researchers may use the findings from this research study to evaluate the effectiveness of employee engagement strategies in SBEs to increase productivity among frontline employees. It is critical for researchers to focus on the factoring issues that decrease employee engagement, so they can monitor the level of engagement and the

level of productivity to take action as necessary to increase these levels. Employee

engagement strategies give global businesses the opportunity to enhance engagement to

build a productive culture to catalyze frontline employees' behaviors. Paying attention to

employees' engagement allows management to spare and create excitement for a social

change (Kim, Kim, & Wachter, 2013; Moss & Martins, 2014). The potential

implications in these strategies improve employee engagement, which contributions to

global positive social and economic activity that impacts the community, institutions, and

the different cultures in society. Positive contributions from frontline employees will

increase employment opportunities, improve job satisfaction, and increases employee

engagement in excavating industries in Virginia. From a social change, frontline leaders

influence the development and implementation of engagement strategies that opened up

new dialogue of communication for advancement in productivity for global businesses.

Recommendations for Action

Excavating industries should pay attention to the results of this research study to

implement employee engagement strategies to improve productivity. Implementation of

the below six recommendations can improve frontline employee engagement. The first

recommendation is to have a strategy that establishes collaborative work teams who work

together. The second recommendation is to lead by example to demonstrate appropriate

work behaviors and work ethics to frontline employees. Training employees to optimize

their daily work environment contributes to their daily work engagement. The third

recommendation is for SBE frontline leaders to provide clear and open communication.

The SBE business owners and frontline leaders need to establish monthly meetings to

discuss business related items and to keep open lines of communication. The fourth

recommendation is to measure and improve employee engagement. Small business

enterprise frontline leaders can use the findings from this research study to evaluate the

effectiveness of the employee engagement strategies in an effort to increase productivity

among frontline employees. The fifth recommendation is to contribute to the level of

productivity. Installing a modernized operating system for business practices would

allow for faster data networking with employees and contractors, access to potential jobs

and customers, and additional excavating resources. This modernized operating system

will be essential to reorganize the offices for billing of completed jobs. The last

recommendation is for the SBE business owners to work with the next generation of

family to learn the business operations and to let them take over certain aspect of the

business operations. This last recommendation is crucial to the SBE as the current

business owners are discussing retirement.

It is critical for SBE frontline leaders and excavating industries to focus on the

factoring issues that decrease employee engagement, so they can monitor the level of

engagement and the level of productivity to take any action as necessary to increase these

levels. Excavating industries that do not have employee engagement strategies or

looking to enhance their current employee engagement strategies need to pay attention to

the results of this research study. The findings of this research study will be beneficial to

business owners of any industry, frontline leaders, and frontline employees to pay

attention to. The results of this research study will be disseminated to the SBE business

owners and frontline leaders and through the Walden University scholarly works for

future academic purposes. In addition, I plan to continue my research so that I may disperse my findings through writing articles, talking at conferences, publications, and through training development.

Recommendations for Further Research

The main limitation of this research study was using a qualitative study instead of quantitative or mixed methods. I would recommend further research using different research methods for a comparative of research findings. The delimitation of this research study was the geographical area in the state of Virginia. This research study was limited to one excavating business in the state of Virginia; therefore, I would recommend further research with other different industries in Virginia. I would also recommend a study to compare employee engagement strategies among other excavating industries outside of Virginia for a more global impact on findings. This research study had a limitation and delimitation of sample size on not being able to locate enough SBE frontline leaders to volunteer as participants for this research study. I would recommend using a different data collection by interviewing the same frontline leaders individually. Not having an adequate number of frontline leaders limits the ability to view perspectives from other SBE frontline leaders. I would recommend finding other industries with larger employment size and using three or four different data collection techniques. This recommendation would require spending more time collecting data to gather a larger amount of data to compare and analyze. In addition, I also recommend postdoc research to consider the impact that disengaged employees have on a SBE profits and the financial impact disengaged employees have on productivity.

Reflections

This study has given me experience into conducting research to advance my knowledge in research skills to better understand a business problem. This study required me to be dedicated and have an abundance of patience to understand how to conduct a doctoral study. This study advanced my knowledge base in understanding the importance in ethical considerations when dealing with human participants during the doctoral study. I was able to advance my critical thinking skills to be more engaged in my doctoral study to provide a critical analysis of my data that I collected and observed to bring forward extended knowledge into strategies that SBE frontline leaders can use to engage frontline employees.

In my doctoral study, I was unique in the fact I used a focus group to collect my data in a single excavating family own business. The focus group allowed participants to brain storm different strategies to increase employee engagement. This type of data collection allowed me to interact with the participants to get participants more involved to stimulate an in depth conversation. This type of data collection allows me to continue my research to develop new ideas and concepts with additional research methods and designs.

Working with the excavating business that I had the pleasure to work with was truly an inspiration. The excavating business owners welcomed me into their business to conduct my doctoral study. The frontline leaders opened up to me about how and what they do so I had a better understanding of the family business. They not only welcomed me into their business, but they made me feel like I was part of their family. Each

employee in the SBE helped to support my doctoral study and even asked me if I would return to help implement some of the findings to improve their business.

Even though this doctoral study has had its ups and downs for me, I am truly more knowledgeable on employee engagement strategies and have a better perception on collecting data and the interpretation of data. Now that I have reached the highest level of academic achievement, I want to continue my research by staying current with continuous research on employee engagement and collaborating with other researchers. Furthermore, I want to disseminate what I learned to businesses to improve productivity that bridges the employee engagement gap between employees and employers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore the strategies that SBE frontline leaders used to engage their frontline employees. Employee engagement strategies in SBEs provide value for businesses by improving productivity. The success of employee engagement in the workplace is vital to improve the social business influence of productivity. Improving the employee engagement strategies increases the level of engagement while increasing productivity. Improvements in productivity provide value in sustainable SBEs. The specific business problem was that some SBE frontline leaders lack strategies to engage their frontline employees. Frontline leaders of a SBE in the state of Virginia participated in a focus group and direct observations.

The focus group and direct observations morphed five themes from the data analyze, which included (a) investing in sustainability, (b) leading by example, (c) providing clear and open communication, (d) implementing a system of measurement,

and (e) developing a professional image. The findings indicated that implementation of these strategies has the potential of improving employee engagement and the business practices to increase productivity levels. The frontline leaders hold a high credibility from their frontline employees by showing them respect through communication, teaching employees the job requirements, and demonstrating a higher standard of work ethics for the SBE family name.

The findings from this research study confirmed when a SBE frontline leader leads by example; it demonstrates appropriate work behaviors and work ethics to frontline employees. Frontline leaders seek additional communication strategies from the business owners through planned meetings to discuss business related issues, plan future jobs, pay scale development, assignment of equipment, and selection of new hires. Findings indicated that engaged employees strategies demonstrate engagement by being honest toward other people, putting in an honest day's work, being proud of your work, and having a work ethic. A strategy the frontline leaders used to improve work performance of frontline employees is to work harder so their employees will follow their leadership example. In addition, the research study indicated that employee engagement strategies give frontline leaders the opportunity to enhance engagement to build a productive culture for frontline employees. In conclusion, the findings of this research study showed there are effective employee engagement strategies that SBE frontline leaders can use to improve their frontline employees engagement level. The employee engagement strategies may also apply to other excavating industries that want to improve frontline employee engagement and to increase productivity. Furthermore, the findings

increase sustainable engagement to improve productivity that bridges employee

engagement gap between employees and employers.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol and Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Protocol	
What you will do	**What you will say—script**
I will greet all participants upon their arrival.	Hello and welcome!
Review the informed consent form for signature	1. Give copy of the consent form to the participants and ask them to read over the consent form. 2. Ask the participant if they have any questions or concerns that need to go over. 3. Have participant sign the informed consent form. 4. Give a copy of the informed consent form to the participant for their personal records. 5. Have participant take a seat and let them know the focus group will start in a few minutes.
Introductions	Hello and welcome! My name is Jennifer Kizer and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I want to thank you all for coming out to attending this focus group. I do have experience as a motivator for focus groups and I look forward to our discussion today. This focus group is here to explore what strategies do SBE frontline leaders use to engage their frontline employees. Our duration of this focus group is between 60 to 120 minutes. In this period, I will ask the focus group nine questions. This time will allow us to gain valuable knowledge to identify trends and characteristics that contribute to the successful engagement of frontline employees. Could everyone please introduce his or her self? Before we get started, are there any questions? If not, let us begin with the focus group questions.
Audio recorder	Let participants know that I am turning on the audio

	recorder to record the focus group.
Flip chart	I will use a flip chart to read the nine focus group questions to the participants.
Field notes	I will take field notes on frontline leadership engagement during the focus group.
End of questions	That was the last of my questions, is there any question that anyone would like to go back to for additional feedback or comments?
	If not, I would like to thank everyone for taking time out of his or her busy day to help me gain valuable information that will be beneficial for my research study.
	If you think of anything after I leave and would like to contact me, please feel free to reach out to me (make sure all participants have my contact information).
	End of the focus group – wish everyone a good day. Remind participants to keep what was said in the focus group private.
Focus Group Questions	
What you will do	**What you will say--script**
Introduce the focus group and set the stage—often over a meal of coffee	Hello and welcome!
	My name is Jennifer Kizer and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I want to thank you all for coming out to attending this focus group. I do have experience as a motivator for focus groups and I look forward to our discussion today.
	This focus group is here to explore what strategies do SBE frontline leaders use to engage their frontline employees.
	Our duration of this focus group is between 60 to 120 minutes. In this period, I will ask the focus group nine questions. This time will allow us to gain valuable knowledge to identify trends and characteristics that contribute to the successful engagement of frontline employees.

	Could everyone please introduce his or her self?
	Before we get started, are there any questions?
	If not, let us begin with the focus group questions.
Focus Group Questions	1. How do you define employee engagement?
	2. How have you determined the key drivers that affect your level of employee engagement?
	3. What engagement strategies have you used to increase employee engagement?
	4. What method did you find worked best to increase and retain employee engagement?
	5. What engagement strategy challenges have you encountered?
	6. How did you measure the level of employee engagement?
	7. How have you seen employee engagement drive the level of productivity?
	8. How did you respond to employee engagement strategies to increase your productivity levels?
	9. Is there anything you would like to add that I might have missed?
Wrap up focus group thanking participant	That was the last of my questions, is there any question that anyone would like to go back to for additional feedback or comments?
	If not, I would like to thank everyone for taking time out of his or her busy day to help me gain valuable information that will be beneficial for my research study.
	If you think of anything after I leave and would like to contact me, please feel free to reach out to me (make sure all participants have my contact information).
	End of the focus group – wish everyone a good day.
Schedule direct observation dates	Meet with owners to schedule dates and times to come back to the business to do direct observation.

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation

Dear Participant:

My name is Jennifer Kizer. I am currently pursuing a Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) through Walden University in Minneapolis. My doctoral study project is ***Strategies for Employee Engagement in a Small Business Enterprise.***

I am interested in studying the strategies that frontline leaders use to engage their frontline employees to increase the productivity level of the organization. Permission was granted to conduct a focus group in your organization and the manager has forwarded this letter out on my behalf to all frontline leaders who are 18 years of age or older. This letter of invitation is to all frontline leaders who want to volunteer and participate in the below research study.

The focus group will be held on _____ at _____ o'clock in the _____ conference room.

The study will take the form of a focus group with frontline leaders lasting approximately 60-120 minutes. Your protection in your participation and information will be consistent with Walden University's confidentiality guidelines. Your participation will be instrumental in providing the required data best to analyze strategies to engage frontline employees to increase the productivity level.

If you decide to participate, I will give you the consent form for review and for signature prior to the start of the focus group. This will allow for any questions you might have prior to your signature. The consent form describes your rights during the process and the purpose of the doctoral study. At the end of this doctoral research study, I will share the results and findings with participants, scholars, and other stakeholders.

Participation in the focus group will be voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. **All willing participants interested must give their names to their manager or email me directly confirming their acceptance to participate in the study.** Please advise if you have any questions or require any additional information. My contact information is ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jennifer L. Kizer
Walden University DBA Student

Appendix C: Direct Observation Protocol

Direct Observation Protocol	
Observation Steps	**What you will do**
Schedule direct observation dates	Meet with owners to schedule four dates and times to come to the SBE to conduct direct observations to collect data by observing frontline leaders in their work environment.
	I will make four site visits over two weeks on Tuesday and Thursday of each week. Each visit will be 2 hours long for a total of 8 hours.
	Tentative Schedule:
	1. Date/Time: _____
	2. Date/Time: _____
	3. Date/Time: _____
	4. Date/Time: _____
Observation areas	I will conduct discreet direct observations by sitting in on meetings and frontline areas
I will make field notes on	I will take field notes on frontline leaders by observing their engagement with employees during meetings and frontline areas.
At the end of the observations	I will thank the owners of the business for allowing me to conduct my direct observations for my research study.
	End of direct observations.

Appendix D: Human Research Protections Training Certificate

Certificate of Completion

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

Date of completion: 03/14/2013

Certification Number: 1143378