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Midlevel Manager Strategies to Improve Employee Engagement in Small Businesses

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MBA, Upper Iowa University, 2004

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The ability to improve employee engagement in small businesses is critical, not only to workers but also to midlevel managers who want to retain productive employees in the workplace. Supervisors who lack efficient managerial practices also risk decreases in productivity, profitability, and sustainability. The conceptual framework for this qualitative, exploratory single-case study was Kahn's theory of personal engagement and disengagement. The population consisted of 2 midlevel managers from a single, small, franchise company in metropolitan Alabama, both of whom used engagement practices, and managed at least 5 subordinates in the company. Data collected, analyzed, and triangulated were from semistructured interviews, direct observations, and a review of company documents. Coded interview responses aligned with the research question, conceptual framework, and emergent themes resulted in identifying successful engagement strategies that midlevel leaders to use. Two critical themes that emerged were management and communication. Supportive management behaviors and leader-member exchange yielded positive employee engagement and increased job performance and productivity. These results could be used to help midlevel managers develop strategies that improve employee enagagement and job performance. Social change implications included leaders developing new strategies that encourage positive relationships among top-level and midlevel leaders, lower level employees, and customers.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this doctoral study to my loving husband and mother, Deloris. Without their unconditional love, accomplishing my personal and professional goals would not be possible. I also dedicate this study to my four children Kenny, John, Crystal, and Michael. May they one day understand that without love, happiness, peace, balance, and knowledge of self, one cannot truly experience life.

Acknowledgement

The completion of this doctoral study would not be possible without the support of so many people. I would first like to thank God for granting me the strength, knowledge, ability, and understanding to complete this study. Without God nothing is possible. I would also like to offer a special thanks to my husband, children, and mother for their unconditional love, continued support, and sacrifice during this journey. Life is what we make it. We must win in our minds, before we win in our lives.

I would like to acknowledge my amazing committee. Dr. John House, thank you for your patience, push, and constant encouragement. My success is a reflection of your knowledge, wisdom, and commitment. Dr. Ify Diala and Dr. Judith Fisher-Blando, thank you for your support and expertise. Dr. Freda Turner thanks for believing in my work and assisting me throughout my journey. Lastly, thank you to my colleagues. Your constant support and encouragement will forever remain in my heart. Thank you all for believing in me.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Employee engagement is a problem in the U.S. work environment (Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011; Vitt, 2014). Research on employee engagement has gained much attention (Albdour & Altarawneh, 2014). Employee [work] engagement refers to the attitudes that employees develop toward their job and organization that affects commitment, discretionary effort, and satisfaction (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Sak, 2006). Employee engagement is the central element for transforming a company's sustainability, values, mission, and strategy into substantiated results (Galpin & Whittington, 2012). Leaders of large and small businesses realize they are unable to achieve sustainability without committed, motivated, and actively engaged employees in the workplace (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009; Riggs, 2013). Highly engaged employees display positive behaviors within their organization (Matz-Costa, Besen, James, & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2014). Disengaged employees are less committed and physically, emotionally, and cognitively disconnected while performing daily work (Kahn, 1990). To enhance productivity, managers must understand and incorporate strategies that improve revenues and customer satisfaction, that maintain organizational sustainability, and that improve employee engagement and trusting relationships (Galpin & Whittington, 2012; Lacy, Arnott, & Lowitt, 2009).

Background of the Problem

Leadership behaviors play a major role in influencing employee engagement (Shuck & Herd, 2012). The relationship between leaders and subordinates, also known as a leader-member exchange, affects employee engagement (Agarwal, Datta, Blake-Beard, & Bhargava, 2012). Supportive managerial environments and trusting, interpersonal relationships promote interactions among employees (Kahn, 1990). In a context of high levels of cognitive demands and resources, empowered leaders inspire engagement that optimizes and strengthens favorable work conditions (Tuckey, Bakker, & Dollard, 2012). Engaged workers experience high levels of organizational connectivity or attachment. Employee perceptions of leader-member exchanges affect job performance and company citizenship behaviors, that is, behaviors that affect the efficiency and productivity that lies within the employees' ability and commitment (Vidyarthi, Liden, Anand, Erdogan, & Ghosh, 2010). When leaders are perceived as supportive, employees engage in discretionary efforts contribute to their workplace (Shuck, 2010).

Ariani (2013) found that employee engagement had a significant relation with improved behaviors and decreased behaviors. Problems arise when managers demonstrate a lack of performance management (functional leadership behaviors) and communication skills (Leary et al., 2013; Zajkowska, 2012) (Leary et al., 2013) Productivity, profitability, retention, and engagement could decline when employees lack commitment, trust, cooperation, and honesty (Zajkowska, 2012). Leaders, who fail to promote increased employee productivity and high levels of energy (discretionary efforts) undermine engagement and organizational performance (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013). Without effective leaders, organizations might not develop strategies that improve leader-employee exchange and maintain performance, communication, and citizenship among organizational members (Vidyarthi et al., 2010).

Problem Statement

Empowered leaders could improve [employee] engagement by optimizing work conditions that affect the physical and cognitive job demands (mental efforts) and resources of their employees (Tuckey et al., 2012). Thirty-eight percent of actively engaged employees are likely to put forth more discretionary effort than employees who disengage in the workplace (Shuck et al., 2011). The general business problem is that some immediate supervisors are unable to engage employees, which reduces the profitability and productivity of the organization (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013). The specific business problem was that some midlevel managers in small businesses lacked strategies that improve employee engagement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, single-case study was to explore the strategies that midlevel managers in small businesses used to improve employee engagement. The target population consisted of a single, small franchise that used midlevel managerial strategies to improve employee engagement in the metropolitan area of Dothan, Alabama. An implication of positive social change determined that this research could help midlevel leaders understand how to increase productivity, profitability, and sustainability. This study could also help midlevel managers identify, react to, and address negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that cause distrust and a lack of communication between leaders and employees.

Nature of the Study

The selected approach to this study was a qualitative, exploratory, single-case study. A qualitative approach is an efficient research method that can offers the researcher insight into an existing business problem that is not useful when of quantifying a small sample size by member checking (Richards & Morse, 2012). The quantitative method and mixed method were not appropriate. The quantitative approach is appropriate if a hypothesis is testable when examining the relationship between theoretical constructs, variables, or the prediction of research outcomes (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2012; Maxwell, 2012). A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods results in the mixed method approach (Hayes, Bonner, & Douglas, 2013). However, there were no quantitative elements in this study.

Case studies are useful for investigating particular occurrences, events, and individuals (Yin, 2013). Case studies can also afford the researcher an opportunity to ask open-ended questions to learn *how* and *why* the study is transpiring (Yin, 2013). Tirgari (2012) noted that the phenomenological design includes the perceptions and lived experiences of others. The phenomenological design remained inappropriate because my study did not address the lived experiences of the participants. According to Batts (2012), the ethnographic study centers on understanding the views of people of an entire culture. This study did not include the observation of a cultural group or the essence of the lived experiences of others in a particular phenomenon. Thus, neither phenomenological nor ethnographic methods were suitable.

Research Question

The research question for this exploratory, single-case study was as follows: What strategies did small business midlevel managers use to improve employee engagement?

Interview Questions

1. How did you, as a midlevel manager, define employee engagement?
2. What strategies did you, as a midlevel manager in a small business, use to improve employee engagement?
3. What strategies did you think your employees found most meaningful for increasing employee engagement?
4. How did midlevel managers measure employee engagement to improve performance?
5. What strategies did you, as midlevel management, find were the most effective in improving employee engagement within a small business?
6. What additional information would you like to share regarding strategies that business midlevel managers can use to improve employee engagement?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study used Kahn's (1990) theory of personal engagement and disengagement because it helps explain the causes and barriers of employee engagement from a behavioral aspect of organizational commitment and performance. Managers influence communication, behaviors, relationships, performance, and commitment in the workplace (Leroy, Palanski, & Simons, 2012; McDermott, Conway, Rousseau, & Flood, 2013). Engaged employees choose to express themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically when they involve themselves in activities, when they believe that the tasks are meaningful and safe, and that resources are available to complete the tasks (Kahn, 1990). In contrast, when leaders behave irresponsibly, counterproductive behaviors increase and employee engagement decreases (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012). Workers suppress their expressive and energetic personalities by withdrawing from their job roles (Kahn, 1990). Factors that increase the likelihood of staff members disengaging from tasks include stress, uncertainty, anxiety, insecurity, and apprehension.

Unethical leadership behaviors and lower organizational commitment cause employees to disengage from tasks, ignore ethical standards (Bonner, Greenbaum, & Mayer, 2014) and disregard checks and balances (Thoroughgood, Padilla, Hunter, & Tate, 2012). Factors that influence the psychological and physical safety of employees include: (a) management styles and process, (b) group and intergroup dynamics, (c) organizational norm, and (d) interpersonal relationships (Kahn, 1990). Implementing the theory of personal engagement and disengagement allowed me the opportunity to determine whether research identified and filled in any gaps that might help midlevel managers develop strategies that improve employee engagement to increase organizational productivity.

Operational Definitions

These terms were unique and concrete to the topic of exploring strategies that midlevel managers from small businesses used to increase employee engagement. Definitions of the critical terms assisted the reader to understand the study. The following definitions consisted of terms implemented in the peer-reviewed literature of the research.

Counterproductive behaviors. Samnani, Singh, and Ezzedeen (2013) described unethical, dishonorable, defiant, harmful, and corrupt acts as counterproductive behaviors. According to Cennamo, Berrone, Cruz, and Gomez-Mejia (2012), counterproductive behaviors are practices that occur when employees cannot conform to conduct established as consistent with values of social and personal ethics. Lane (2013), Celep and Konakli (2013) and Raver (2013) described counterproductive (destructive) behaviors as harmful practices that affect individual, group, and organizational outcomes such as revenge, aggression, and bullying.

Employee disengagement. Georgakopoulos, Wilkens, and Kent (2011) referred to disengagement as the ability to disconnect or isolate oneself. Kahn (1990) described disengagement as the state in which an employee withdraws or becomes cognitively, physically, or emotionally defensive during role performances. A synonymous term used to describe disengagement is presenteeism, which is the state in which employees are physically present, but mentally or emotionally distracted or disengaged (Moore, 2012).

Employee engagement. Engagements are task-related behaviors associated with an individual’s ability to express their views honestly at work (Robinson, Wang, &

Kiewitz, 2014). According to Dash (2013), engagement is the level of employee commitment and involvement toward the company and its ethics. Employee engagement was synonymous with work engagement, which refers to the attitudes employees develop in their job and organization that affects commitment, discretionary effort, and satisfaction displayed by employees (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Organizational citizenship behavior. According to Saks (2006), organizational citizenship behaviors are informal, and voluntary actions that encourage subordinates and other levels of employees improve the cooperation in the organization (Saks, 2006).

Productivity. Productivity refers to the gross domestic output per person employed (Maia & Menezes, 2014).

Profitability. Profitability is the return or yield income of the organization (D'Haen, Van den Poel, & Thorleuchter, 2013).

Retention. Retention is the process in which employees are encouraged to remain with the organization (James & Mathew, 2012; Ratna & Chawla, 2012).

Small businesses. Small businesses are independent organizations, with fewer than 500 employees that operate for profit (Dietrich, 2012).

Sustainability. Sustainability means the ability to take care of, protect, or preserve for a period (Grabara, Modrak, & Dima, 2014).

Turnover. Turnover occurs when an employee resigns, transfers, departs, or permanently leaves a company (Hom, Mitchell, Lee & Griffith, 2012).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

According to Frederic, Di Bacco, and Lad (2012), assumptions are predetermined suggestions in which the researcher plans to account for changing conditions of the chosen phenomenon. Assumptions are somewhat out of the researcher's control; however, if they are not stated, the study becomes irrelevant (Maxwell, 2012). This study was based on three assumptions. Participants would provide truthful responses to the interview questions because they knew that their information was confidential. Participants were suitable for representing a group of midlevel managers who exercise useful strategies that improve employee engagement. The final assumption for this study was necessary to help managers identify *how* and *why* negative organizational behaviors were associated with decreases in business productivity due to the lack of employee engagement. In this single-case study, I assumed that the participants would respond honestly and openly when they provided explanations of their perceptions of the engagement strategies during the semistructured interviews.

Limitations

This study was subject to four limitations, that is, weaknesses in the design or method (Maxwell, 2012). The sample did not represent every group of leaders in the United States. Participants were limited to individuals to midlevel managers who led at least five employees in a small business. For this single-case study, I focused on conducting the semistructured interviews with two members of the study population using a census sampling. A qualitative study subjects the researcher to unavoidable cultural biases, beliefs, and values (Richards & Morse, 2012). This study's findings could result from *small business midlevel* managerial views based on their lack of knowledge and opinions on employee engagement. Additional problems could also arise if the participants were unable to articulate their thoughts or if they had little understanding of the subject matter.

Delimitations

Delimitations limit the scope and define the boundaries of the study; they are under the researcher's control (Brackin, 2012). A small business was chosen to narrow the scope of the study. The company consisted of a single small business that hired individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, age categories, and education levels. The related qualitative analysis of this restrictive research focused on the experiences and knowledge of a sample group of midlevel managers in a small business.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

This study is expected to be of value to businesses because the successful engagement strategies used by midlevel managers could increase the organization's morale, productivity, profitability, and competitiveness. Exploring the strategies that one pair of small business midlevel managers used to improve employee engagement might help other such small businesses managers (a) become equipped to influence trusting relationships and to influence employee performance and commitment and (b) to identify and respond to situations that lead to employee disengagement and reduced productivity in the organization.

Implications for Social Change

Implications for social change rely on understanding how managerial development and strategies influence employee engagement and organizational performance (Shuck & Herd, 2012). An increase in employee engagement could contribute to the collective strengthening of the local economy, improve social development, and encourage businesses to reinvest in their communities. Application of the theory of personal engagement and disengagement might help middle management and top-level executives understand how social settings, personal standards, and attitudes affect employee engagement and production in the work environment. This study could also help management identify methods that influence workers to stay employed with the company.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The goal of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies that some midlevel managers used to improve employees' commitment toward maintaining productivity. I identified strategies that supported employee engagement using a qualitative, single-case study by conducting member checking follow-up interviews to ask probing questions of two midlevel managers from one small business in metropolitan area of Dothan, Alabama to achieve data saturation.

There were 314 references supporting the entire study: (a) 292 peer-reviewed sources (92.99%), which included 277 peer-reviewed seminal journals and 12 dissertations, (b) two government and organizational websites, and (c) 22 scholarly seminal books. Of the 314 references, 275 were less than 5 years old (87.58%). Using peer-reviewed articles and journals, dissertations, books, and professional websites, I conducted a literature review of 166 sources related to managerial strategies to sustain productivity. Items included in the in-depth analysis of the professional literature were: (a) 159 peer-reviewed sources (95.78%), which included 149 peer-reviewed journals and nine dissertations, and (b) seven scholarly seminal books. Of the 166 references in the literature review, 153 (92.17%) were less than 5 years old.

Empirical information used in the literature reviewed were from qualitative and quantitative case-study research, qualitative research methods, quantitative research methods, and the theory of personal engagement and disengagement. The following databases were used: Google Scholar, Business Source Complete, SAGE Journals, Lexis-Nexis Academic, Political Science Complete, EBSCO and PsycINFO and Emerald Management Journals. First, theory of personal engagement and disengagement were discussed. Then the literature review was organized on four themes: (a) management styles and process, (b) group and intergroup dynamics, (c) organizational norms, and (d) interpersonal relationships. Leadership affects organizational behaviors and relationships. Managers have legitimate power to influence work conditions, as they play a significant role in retaining productive employees who will engage in the workplace (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014). The quality of relationships between employers and staff members influence the behaviors, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions of the employees (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). The employees' interaction with their primary supervisor is a useful technique to build a trusting and just culture (Pattison & Kline, 2015; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013). For this reason, studying midlevel managers' experiences, in small businesses, helped identify some strategies that increase engagement and productivity within similar companies.

Personal Engagement and Disengagement Theory

Kahn (1990), who studied organizational behaviors at Boston University, was the first scholar to conceptualize the theory of personal engagement and disengagement in the workplace. Kahn's theory measures the levels of employee engagement and disengagement displayed through commitment. As an ethnographic researcher, Kahn (1990) described personal engagement as the attachment or detachment that employees develop to their work roles. He found that individuals chose to become cognitively, mentally, emotionally, and physically engaged or disengaged from job roles and organizational tasks in diverse working conditions. Kahn (1990) proposed that personal engagement represents a state in which an employee attaches or detaches one's self during work role performances, devotes personal energy, and experiences an emotional connection with their work. In other words, engagement occurs when employees express themselves through their behaviors, thinking, and work performances.

Human behaviors influence employee engagement and could be related to the theory of planned behavior and cognitive self-regulation (Ajzen, 1991). The theory of planned behavior includes the idea that researchers could predict the outcomes of human behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The engagement level of an employee comes from his or her ability to make a cognitive decision to display a given behavior. Ajzen (1991) noted that human behaviors could be a positive influence on employee motivation. Human intentions also influenced the acts in which workers commit themselves to aligning their behaviors to accomplish daily tasks. Motivation and employee engagement exist in companies that develop open, supportive, and fair teams and organizational cultures, ensure that business objectives align with the jobs of the workers, and have appropriate levels of support, autonomy, and career development opportunities (Albrecht, 2012).

Employee engagement. Andrew and Sofian (2012) described employee engagement as an intellectually, emotional commitment to an organization. Researchers have used terms such as work engagement, job engagement, and employee engagement interchangeably to describe the relationships among workers and their job roles (Saks, 2006; Schaufeli, 2012). Engagement is the state in which employees choose to commit and involve oneself in the organization and work tasks (Kahn, 1990). Rothbard (2001) defined *engagement* as a psychological state in which an employee devotes attention and absorption to work. *Attention* refers to the amount of time an employee focuses on their role in the organization (Rothbard, 2001). *Absorption* refers to the level of intensity and focuses that employees use to concentrate on their tasks (Rothbard, 2001). Macey and

Schneider (2008) defined *engagement* as the measure of attitudes, which, in turn, affects commitment, discretionary effort, and the satisfaction displayed by employees. In contrast, Saks (2006) indicated that distinct differences existed between the terms. *Job engagement* refers to the relationship of the employee with his or her work, whereas employee and work engagement may also include a link to the organization (Saks, 2006; Schaufeli, 2012).

Numerous terms for personal engagement exist. Researchers have associated engagement with job-related attitudes such as organizational citizenship (Ariani, 2013), satisfaction, involvement, commitment, leader-member exchange (Volmer, Spurk, & Niessen, 2012), and performance (Karatepe, 2013). The majority of definitions center on ideas such as absorption in and enthusiasm for work tasks and roles, rather than meaningfulness, saturation, and contentment (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Professional and academic interpretations of employee engagement appear throughout this research. Many factors influence employee engagement. Characteristics of work engagement include involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, absorption, motivation, focused effort, zeal, dedication, and energy (Schaufeli, 2012).

Macey and Schneider's (2008) understanding of employee engagement theory included: (a) behavioral engagement (e.g., extra-role behavior, proactivity, role expansion), (b) trait engagement (e.g., conscientiousness, trait positive affect, proactive personality), and (c) state engagement (e.g., satisfaction, involvement, empowerment). Consequently, while commenting on Macey and Schneider's study, Saks (2008) described *engagement* as an umbrella term for whatever one wanted it to be. In contrast, Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) referred to *work engagement* as an experienced psychological state that mediates the effect of job resources and personal resources on organizational outcomes.

According to Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzàlez-Romá, and Bakker (2002), characteristics of engagement include dedication, vigor, and absorption in which employees experience a fulfilling state of mind. *Work engagement* centers on the work experiences of the employees. Work engagement refers to the efforts an employee is willing to put towards work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Schaufeli et al., 2002 referred to dedication as the meaningfulness, passion, inspiration, commitment, and connection empowered employees experience toward their job performance (Schaufeli, 2012). *Vigor* is the invested effort, increased energy, mental resilience, and persistence that employees display while faced with continuous challenges (Schaufeli, 2012). Finally, *absorption* refers to the state of effectiveness in which employees focus and become favorably involved in their work tasks (Schaufeli, 2012). Bakker, Shimazu, Demerouti, Shimada, and Kawakami (2014) found that workers that possessed high levels of dedication, vigor, and absorption had higher levels of work-life balance.

Personal disengagement. Disengagement hinders individual growth and development of staff members and lessens the quality of commitment toward the job and organization (Kahn, 1990). While favorable treatment is the response to organization citizenship behaviors, disengagement is the reaction to poor treatment established by counterproductive behaviors (Saks, 2006). Negative influences of disengagement include poor leadership, interpersonal conflicts and uncertainty, and lack of control (Branch, Ramsey, & Barker, 2013), stress, anxiety (Leary et al., 2013), and counterproductive behaviors (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012), and lack of support (Vaccaro, Jansen, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2012). Disengagement occurs when workers withdraw or detach from situations and defend themselves cognitively, emotionally, or physically while completing tasks in the work environment (Kahn, 1990). Disengaged employees become isolated, defensive, and conceal their thoughts, emotions, or identity, which would affect their ability to complete a task (Kahn, 1990). Disengagement leads to isolation (Robinson, O'Reilly, & Wang, 2013) or withdrawal (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Suárez-Acosta, 2014) could have a significant effect on the employees and the individuals who witnessed the practices and the sustainability of the organization.

The development of the theory of personal engagement and disengagement continued to evolve through the works of Shuck and Herd (2012), Bakker et al. (2014), and Den Hartog and Belschak (2012). Shuck and Herd (2012) determined that managerial business strategies affect the engagement of employees and performance of the organization. Bakker et al. (2014) found that the theory could help leaders determine the welfare of the organization and behavioral outcomes of individual employees. Den Hartog and Belschak found that when leaders behave irresponsibly, counterproductive behaviors increase, as employee engagement and commitment decreases. The theory of personal engagement and disengagement could help midlevel managers identify awareness and training strategies (Soane et al., 2012) that enhance employee experiences within the workplace. Managers influence employee engagement (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013). Midlevel managers influence communication, behaviors, and relationships in an organization (McDermott et al., 2013), which are characteristics of organizational engagement (Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012). Midlevel managers that develop and apply strategies that increase engagement also improve the productivity of the company.

Management Styles and Process

Leadership styles refer to an array of behaviors that influential people use to shape how others behave (McDermott et al., 2013; Robertson & Barling, 2013). Motivational work designs, managerial practices, and transformational behaviors influence the organization’s performance levels (Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, & Courtright, 2015). Motivation and employee engagement exist in companies where supportive teams and organizational cultures, ensure that business objectives align with the jobs and have appropriate levels of autonomy and career development opportunities (Albrecht, 2012). During the engagement, employee motivation increases performance on the job (Wong & Laschinger, 2013). In contrast, employees that disengage in the workplace might develop a state of lacking motivation referred to as amotivation (MacCormick, Derby, & Kolb, 2012). Amotivation occurs when an employee is physically present as required, but mentally absent by focusing their attention elsewhere (MacCormick et al., 2012). Kahn (1990) argued that individual conflicts are likely to shape staff tendencies toward disengagement. Disengaged employees might also partake in *controlled motivation*, which occurs when employees cognitively choose not to engage beyond certain parameters (MacCormick et al., 2012, p. 195). These internal and external motivational acts could help organizational leaders understand how the beginning stages of engaged and disengaged behaviors occurred. Strategic management techniques that teach employers to support, motivate, educate, and manage employees could help leaders determine which engagement behaviors to combat.

Kahn (1990) indicated that psychological availability is the sense of having the psychological, physical, and emotional resources obtainable to engage at a given moment. Psychological availability is a strategic management technique used to assess the readiness of employees to engage, given the distractions they experience as members of social systems. Rurkkhum and Bartlett (2012), who studied engagement in Thailand, contended that employee attachment to the job relies on understanding the cultural behaviors and supportive leadership. Effective leaders influence cultural behaviors, job performance, and employee commitment (Leroy et al., 2012). According to Bloom, Sadun, and Van Reenen (2012), techniques that leadership use for learning and accountability increases employee engagement and productivity by 23%. Effective leaders also promote positive experiences and optimize work conditions that shape policies, procedures, and social norms (Crenshaw, 2012). Engaged employees display positive behaviors, attitudes, intentions resulting from high levels of mutual relationships with their employers and colleagues (Andre & Sofian, 2012).

Midlevel management roles. Midlevel managers include line managers, administrators, junior executives, department heads, and branch managers (Kitoo, 2013); human resource managers, and immediate supervisors (Argawal et al., 2012). Individuals in midlevel leadership positions serve several purposes within the organization, making them suitable for strategizing ways to sustain engagement and productivity. Birken, Lee, and Weiner (2012), who studied roles of midlevel management, contended that middle managers contribute to settings in which perceptions of innovation implementations can be expected, supported, and rewarded. According to McDermott et al. (2013), midlevel leaders influence behaviors, relationships, and communication within the work environment. Individuals in middle management positions are accountable for leading lower levels of the company and achieving the objectives of the organizational subsystems (Beringer, Jonas, & Georg Gemünden, 2012).

Middle management provides an essential resource to organizations as the demand for productivity continues to increase. Kitoo (2013), who studied line management in Kenya, furthered the idea by describing middle managers as individuals who possess intermediate leadership positions subordinate to high-level executives but above the lowest levels of operational staff. Beringer et al. (2012) noted that as mediators, middle managers implement business strategies and manage the daily business. Midlevel managers also have the power to implement and influence intervention and awareness strategies that reduce engagement (Beringer et al., 2012; Kelloway, Turner, Barling, & Loughlin, 2012). By implementing effective leadership styles, behaviors, and strategies, midlevel managers could influence positive behaviors and decrease negative behaviors in the company (McDermott et al., 2013).

Leader-member exchange. Behaviors and relationships between the leaders and employees affect the central function of the organization (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012). Research has shown that leaders who responded to employee proactivity influence positive work outcomes (Zhang, Wang, & Shi, 2012). Leaders manage job-related resources and assess employees' performance, which plays a critical role in affecting employees' engagement in taking initiative, as well as its results (Zhang et al., 2012). Leader-member relationships emerge as the development of a series of exchanges and interactions during which these roles develop. As employees become an unproductive part of society, disturbances in the workplace cause increases in absenteeism and presenteeism (de Beer, 2014; McTernan, Dollard, & LaMontagne, 2013). Kahn (1990) indicated that increases in employee engagement and productivity take place in enterprises where adequate resources, supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships, and employee safety are available. Several studies indicated that highly engaged employees increase productivity (Schaufeli, 2012; Warr & Inceoglu, 2012). Kahn (1990) explained that engaged employees produce a higher quality of work and commitment. Job satisfaction and motivation of the employees within the organization lead to increases in engagement and performance.

Another positive outcome that results from employee engagement is that it progresses the individual growth and development of workers (Kahn, 1990). Shin et al.

(2012) found that employees, who perceived that they had received a high level of encouragement from their leaders, were more committed to changes within the company. Resources such as psychological resilience and organizational inducements, influence workers to develop a higher quality of social exchange relationships and experience the state of positive effects within the organization (Shin et al., 2012). Low-level employees, who experience lesser leader-member exchange are less disengaged, and they perceive that their leaders ignore employees, withhold valuable resources and fail to act on the employees' behalf (Foster, 2012).

Many researchers identified leadership practices and contextual factors as key drivers that influenced engagement within an organization (Alfes et al., 2013). Alfes et al. (2013) suggested that perceived organizational support and leader-member exchange affects employee commitment and job satisfaction. Agarwal et al. (2012), who studied leader-member exchange in India, found that engagement relates to positive behaviors associated with innovation while harmful acts associate the intention to quit. Negative behaviors lead to indirect expenses that include poor work performances, high turnovers and role conflicts, and reduced organizational productivity (Zablah, Franke, Brown, & Bartholomew, 2012). Other expenses include (a) employee commitment, (b) potential health and stress claims, and (c) difficulty attracting skilled professionals (Zablah et al., 2012).

Barrow, Kolberg, Mirabella, and Roter (2013) who studied leadership behaviors in the United States and Canada argued that replacing engaged employees is a factor that contributes to indirect and direct costs incurred by organizations. Barrow et al. (2013) noted that factors that contribute to indirect cost include loss of productivity, stress, and replacement of personnel. Whitman, Halbesleben, and Holmes (2014) discovered that employees who experienced a lack of mistreatment and job satisfaction were more likely to become less productive and desire to leave the organization than actively engaged workers. Lian, Ferris, and Brown (2012) suggested that bad experiences are more influential that positive experiences, during events that reduce leader-member exchange. In contrast, Kelloway et al. (2012) suggested that employees could also leave their organization after they developed close relationships such as friendships and marriages. Effective leadership occurs at a higher rate than poor leadership and has a greater effect on the employees' well-being (Kelloway et. al., 2012).

Transactional behaviors. Leadership is one of the key drivers of employee engagement. Researchers use terms such as transformational leadership (Breevaart et al., 2014) and authentic leadership (Laschinger, Wong, & Grau, 2013) interchangeably to refer to positive managerial influences, citizenship behaviors, and employee engagement. Transactional leaders are effective in setting goals and inspiring, encouraging, and supporting workers (Bass, 1985). The transactional leadership style develops the ability to apply managerial powers to reward or sanction employees that produce desirable outcomes (Bass, 1985). An assortment of rewards from praise to pay could develop desired employee behaviors (Bass, 1985). Transactional leaders work with existent job requirements to build incentives tied to job goals and apply counteractive behaviors to substandard efforts (Bass, 1985).

Line managers with transformational behaviors, emphasize the development of transferable and organization-specific skills, motivated through personal concern and appeals to higher motives, and afford workers the opportunity to use their professional judgment and become involved (McDermott et al., 2013). Leaders that possess transformational behaviors interact with employees daily (Grant, 2012). Transactional leaders support satisfactory job performance, which complies with legal, safety, and workplace requirements (McDermott et al., 2013). In contrast, Leiding (2010) noted that leaders who use laissez-faire management techniques that lack communication, distrust, ambiguous job descriptions, and unclear lines onset authority opportunities for unjust behaviors. Kelloway et al. (2012) found that inspirational management occurs more frequently than unethical management, which exerts positive effects on the welfare of the employees. Managers should develop strategies that enhance employees' commitment and behavioral reactions to organizational change that influence positive outcomes and social exchange (Shin et al., 2012). According to Hayati, Charkhabi, and Naami (2014), leaders, who possess transformational behaviors, could encourage employees to experience and overcome new issue to increase work engagement.

Strategic planning. According to James and Mathew (2012), organization leaders should work to develop and implement engagement strategies that retain valuable employees. Managers must fully understand the importance of particular characteristics of the business setting and act as role models who display open and honest mutual respect throughout the organization (Bentley et al., 2012). Managers must foster a culture of respect and courtesy, institute policies that outline acceptable acts and establish consequences for employees who fail to comply with behavioral expectations (Gumbus & Meglich, 2012). Managerial roles, guidelines, and descriptions of immoral behaviors are reasons managers need to understand, identify, acknowledge, and react to the phenomenon (Gumbus & Meglich, 2012; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012). Communication, conflict management (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012), education, and team-building activities (Beirne & Hunter, 2013) are proactive approaches to developing and retaining key personnel.

Managers should also understand that isolation is a common sign of problems with commitment and productivity because when the managers do not positively influence employee engagement, job performance decreases (Lee, 2012). Gumbus and Meglich (2012) suggested that managers proactively identify engagement issues by developing a respectful culture and by confronting problems fairly, swiftly, and assertively. Few researchers have evaluated the effectiveness of counterproductive intervention strategies; however, intervening early and understanding counterproductive behaviors are necessary (Skehan, 2014). Chou and Pearson (2012) found that an employee’s commitment to the job and organization are significant predictors of their perceived job satisfaction, which in turn affects the degree of counterproductive behaviors exhibited. As organizations incorporate prevention tactics into their cultures, they educate employees, influence a positive environment with respect for everyone, and encourage employers to develop policies (Gumbus & Lyons, 2011). According to Miller (2014), leaders who manage an actively engaging workforce could improve investment, increase productivity, raise retention rates, boost investments, and raise employee and customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Coaching and pairing. Coaching is a cost-efficient and fair method of resolving disputes arising under federal and state Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regulations. Aguilar et al. (2011) referred to coaching as a technique that increases improvement and performance. Coaching incorporates coaches and mediators experienced in managing conflict resolutions (Branch et al., 2013). Supervisory coaching serves as a technique that motivates staff and results in commitment and increases positive effects and attitudes toward work (Albrecht, 2012). Coaching is an opportunity to prepare leaders in the organization for future systematic engagement initiatives. Coaching also provides an opportunity for a learner to understand the effects of destructive behaviors.

People who work as coaches could also help employees confront their colleagues and leaders. Implementing a coaching process could increase engagement and provide personal and professional support to employees. Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012) noted that unskilled individuals who lack encouragement in managing conflicts become disengaged, aggressive, and easily frustrated. As an intervention strategy, Brown (2012) suggested that external mediators, supervisors, team leaders, counselors, worker representatives, or committees take on the task of mediation.

Pairing is a mentoring strategy that helps managers develop skills, identify professional and personal learning objectives, and achieve organizational goals (Heston, 2013). Although there is a relation between pairing and coaching, they are different because a coach is not a mentor; however, a mentor could be a coach (Aguilar et al., 2011). Likewise, Celep and Konakli (2013) suggested that leaders support employee efforts by providing comprehensive strategies that enhance engagement among employees, decrease stress, and increase people skills. Comprehensive planning should also include conflict resolutions, work ethics, and laws (Kammeyer-Mueller, Simon, & Rich, 2012). Such strategies as training and role-playing could help employees understand damages that immoral and unjust behaviors cause to employees and the organization (Kossek et al., 2012).

Group and Intergroup Dynamics

Employee engagement influences the dynamics of a company. The dynamics of a group rely on unconscious roles of managers that encourage the ability for employees to express themselves in a safe manner (Kahn, 1990). Negative relationships occur because of the lack of support, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment might participate in counterproductive that affect interpersonal relationships (Berry, Lelchook, & Clark, 2012). Employee engagement plays a significant role in the functioning of the business, and adequacy and availability of resources for a given work task (Kahn, 1990).

Organizational relationships are limited when there is a lack of communication among leaders, employees, and colleagues (Lane, 2013). Ofluoglu (2013) noted that people are the most important influencing factors that contribute to the achievements and failures of a company. According to Duffy and Sperry (2013), organizational, group, and individual dynamics contribute to disengagement within the organization. Gülşen and Kılıç (2013) noted that dysfunctional organizational and managerial dynamics could trigger corrupt behaviors. Dysfunctions in dynamics include unfavorable conditions, poor leadership skills, power conflicts, organizational change, insecurities, and job uncertainties (Gülşen & Kılıç, 2013).

Conditions that influence negative behaviors also foster instabilities in work relationships and the organization (Montes, Gutiérrez, & Campos, 2012). Although there is no particular influence on unreceptive behaviors, leaders must provide training and develop strategies that affect the employees' well-being and safety (Bentley et al., 2012; Petrou, 2012). Leaders should encourage organizational commitment, job satisfaction (Aydin, Sarier, & Uysal, 2013) and trust (Braun, Peus, Weisweiler, & Frey, 2013), improve productivity (Robertson, Jansen Birch, & Cooper, 2012), and mitigate destructive behaviors (Lane, 2013).

Training and development. Training consists of professional development within an organization that provides job-related knowledge, career growth, and skill (Weng & Elroy, 2012). Ameeq-ui-Ameeq and Harif (2013) noted that employees' training increases commitment, job satisfaction, motivation, and, consequently, the profitability of the organization. Training increases the competitive advantage of the organization (Smith et al., 2014). Corporate training is a factor in influencing productivity and profitability (Latif, 2012) and provides opportunities for team building, collaboration, and employee engagement (Bedwell et al., 2012). Employees who develop skills through training are less likely to leave the organization (Jiang et al., 2012). Leaders who exhibit genuine managerial behaviors increase employee job performance by influencing positive behaviors by supporting workers through mediation and making morally driven decisions (Peterson, Walumbwa, Avolio, & Hannah, 2012). They also exhibit genuine managerial behaviors by using self-awareness to understand better how they affect employees (Peterson et al., 2012). Businesses should pay attention to the learning of their employees so that they retain high-level performance workers (Joyce & Slocum, 2012).

Leadership development is training for corporate leaders, policy makers, and human resource managers to develop skills that help them to understand, identify, and address incivility (Gedro & Wang, 2013). Constructive leadership skills, organizational support, and initiatives increase employee engagement and organizational productivity (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013). In contrast, poor leadership skills intensify the lack of respect and trust in the workplace (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013). Underdeveloped managers are in need of training to manage organizational behaviors, increase employee performance and commitment, and organizational relationships (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013).

Cavelzani and Williams (2013) noted that leadership development helps managers enhance their skills in leader-follower interactions, conflict resolutions, and leadership behaviors. Leadership could learn to influence a healthy and productive work environment for employees through training and development (Gedro & Wang, 2013). Midlevel executives could assess opportunities for training and development relating to the retention and turnover rates of employees in an organization (Kennett, 2013). Training and development is also beneficial for lower level staff members. Organizations could also include lower-level employees into training and development exercises. Companies that increase the learning and development opportunities for their employees, also increase engagement by 41%, compared to businesses that do not invest in workforce training and development (Lombardozzi, 2012). Kennett (2013) noted that limited training influences the employee's decision to leave the company. Smith, Stokes, and Wilson (2014) noted that there were no associations between satisfaction with the job, lack of employee awareness, and training and development. When employees do not think there is a chance for development and growth in the company, they might decide to leave. Some leaders are reluctant to offer employees opportunities for training in fear that they may leave, which affects the retention and turnover rates of the company (Kennett, 2013).

Collective decision-making. Sharing in collective decision-making processes could increase employees' perception of procedural justice. Leaders should implement clear and valid decision-making processes and policies and offer opportunities for workers to voice their opinions (He, Zhu, & Zheng, 2014). Schiuma, Carlucci, and Sole, (2012) found that applying developed processes should include strategies to facilitate acceptance in the workplace. A one-step process does not exist for improving employee engagement among a unit, team, or organization (Shuck et al., 2011). Increasing employee engagement increases both, cost and benefits for the organization (Shuck & Herd, 2012). According to Brown (2013), all businesses strive to maintain links between business strategies and their performance management systems. Linking business strategies and performance management systems occur when companies ensure that all leaders and workers relate their individual functions and activities toward reaching a common goal (Brown, 2013).

Kim (2012) indicated that strategies for retaining professionals could include bonus programs, opportunities for promotions and advancement, salary increases, training and development, pay and reward, supervisory communities, family friendly policies, and enhanced benefit programs. Businesses should pay particular attention to assessing the associations between organizational operations and strategies (Brown, 2013). A shared understanding of immoral behaviors could assist managers to identify, acknowledge, and address the problem. Abraham (2012) found that factors such as job, benefits, and fair treatment, sound company policies, recognition, and cooperation, team spirit, and performance management systems improve job satisfaction and employee engagement. Companies must find strategies that bring about equality and fairness among managers and staff members. Encouraging employees to engage actively in the workplace is the most influential strategy companies possess for improving productivity and performance (Anitha, 2014; Shuck & Herd, 2012).

Organizational Norms

Organizational beliefs influence the work norms, communication practices, and ethical standards of employees (Hu, Dinev, Hart, & Cooke, 2012). According to Kahn (1990), psychological safety is associated with clear role performances within the boundaries of organizational norms. Employees feel safer in environments where the working environment includes protective boundaries. Norms exist in most social systems that include deviant behaviors, such as frustration and anxiety for workers with lower levels of leverage and status (Kahn, 1990). When companies lack protective boundaries, and the employees feel unsafe, the workers could choose to safeguard themselves by withdrawing from the environment. They might even participate in counterproductive behaviors (Raver, 2013)

Counterproductive work behaviors and conflicts are inevitable in any company. Employers have a significant influence regarding how employees react to and against the company (Raver, 2013). Counterproductive behaviors are interpersonally versus organizationally directed (Raver, 2013). Organizationally directed acts include stealing, sabotaging equipment, acquiring excessive absenteeism, avoidance, bad-mouthing the company and lying about hours or work activities (Raver, 2013). Interpersonally directed acts to include making threats, using aggressive gestures, spreading rumors, making sexually and ethnically inappropriate comments, and engaging in deception with the intention of damaging a person’s career and the organization (Raver, 2013). Counterproductive behaviors could also include acts of bullying and mobbing (Branch et al., 2013; Martin & Peña, 2012). The outcomes of disengagement include decreased job satisfaction, morale, commitment, performance, and citizenship behaviors, and increased turnover rates (Anitha, 2014).

In contrast, the antecedents of employee engagement are job characteristics, perceived company and leadership support, rewards and recognition, and fairness (Saks, 2006). Den Hartog and Belschak (2012) concluded that ethical leaders, who stress values that enhance employee engagement, also improve initiative and decrease counterproductive behaviors. Employees participate in counterproductive (Zuber, 2014) or dysfunctional (Simha & Cullen, 2012) behaviors when they willfully commit acts that intend to harm organizations or people within them. Employees that experience a lack of support from their leaders and colleagues, job-fit, job security, and performance feedback might withdraw from actively engaging in the company (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012). Workers are also less likely to perform to a higher standard (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012).

Consequences of disengagement. Disengaged employees create significant problems for the company, management, and the employees. Kahn (1990) found that employees disengaged in situations for which they were less available. Without engaged employees, a company cannot develop sustainability, values, mission, and strategy into substantiated results (Galpin & Whittington, 2012). Counterproductive behaviors lead to high costs that affect productivity, the reputation of the enterprise, the value of the employees, and use of employee benefits programs (Klotz & Buckley, 2012). Companies pay financially, physically, mentally, and socially for negative interpersonal behaviors that cause employee disengagement (Georgakopoulos et al., 2011; Martin & Peña, 2012). Disengagement is most likely to occur in organizations where poor and stressful management exists (Astrauskaite, Kern, & Notelaers, 2014). According to Gülşen and Kilic (2013), who studied organizational practices, as negative perceptions and behaviors develop into organizational problems, conflicts escalate among employees that affect the job satisfaction and productivity of the workers. Companies that allow the existence of dysfunctional practices to lose track of the money they invest in valuable employees who leave the company (Kemp, 2014).

Work-related factors such as employee engagement, depression, financial stress, and anxiety influence the well-being and productivity of workers (Gandy et al., 2014). Costs associated with the lack of motivation from departed employees and replacement and supervision of new employees affect the productivity of the company (Inabinett & Ballaro, 2014). Calvin (2012) and Hakanen and Schaufeli (2012) found that the costs of stress-related illnesses associated with the workplace include mental health issues, work-life conflicts, high turnover rates, quality of work, absenteeism, poor relationships, sabotage and counseling, and lack of motivation. During times when socioeconomic factors result in constant uncertainty, a lack of control and insecurities within the workplace, detachment becomes worse for the employee (Branch et al., 2013). Wellness in the workplace occurs as companies develop organized, employer-sponsored programs to adopt and sustain engaging behaviors that support work-life balances (Heron, 2013). Programs that help sustain behaviors reduce health risks, improve the quality of life, enhance personal effectiveness, and benefit the organization's bottom line (Heron, 2013).

Turnover intention. Turnover refers to the complete detachment that employee experience in an organization (Kahn, 1990). It also is the highest expense an organization could acquire (Golden, 2012). Kehoe and Wright (2013) noted that quality of relationships between leaders and their workers influence organizational behaviors, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. Alfes et al. (2013), who studied human resource practices in the U. K., indicated that employee observations and understanding influence behaviors and engagement in the work environment. High levels of engagement rely on relationships among the employees, leader, and the organization. Alfes et al. found that improved leadership practices increased citizenship behaviors, and decrease turnover intentions. Leaders control evaluating factors that influence the motivation, productivity, and job satisfaction of employees and increase organizational commitment (Manzoor, 2012; Wright, Moynihan, & Pandey, 2012). Boccio and Macari (2014) noted that when behaviors affect organizational cultures, managers are accountable for employees working in a safe, pleasant, and productive environment. Strategies and policies that reduce conflicts and stress promote self-awareness, group interaction, and positive behavioral expectations and the well-being of workers (Sonnentag, 2012). Managers who fail to address reasons employees disengage could render current organizational policies ineffective.

In contrast, employees become disengaged from negative working conditions (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Fischbach, 2015), which reduces citizen behaviors and increase turnover intentions (Alfes et al., 2013). In professional businesses, employee turnover continues to be detrimental to the success of companies (Frey, Bayón, & Totzek, 2013). When professionals leave the company, the effectiveness of sustainability is at risk (Stahl et al., 2012). Companies that lose employees within the organization also lose leadership, expertise, knowledge, training, and culture. These are two reasons that turnover is essential to understanding employee engagement. Other reasons employees leave organizations to include work-life conflicts, lack of advancement opportunities, job-related stress, and relationships with their leaders and colleagues (Gialuiss & Coetzer, 2013).

Parker and Griffin (2011) argued that the association between employee turnover intentions, engagement, and organizational misconduct was not straightforward. Research on employee turnover has led to the discovery that an employee’s intention to turnover is a powerful predictor of that employee’s future behavior. There is a link between an individual’s intention to leave and the actual turnover than workplace satisfaction or commitment (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011). The relevance of intention to turnover is essential to understanding the relation between employee engagement and commitment, and productivity (Shuck et al., 2011). If employees spend their time at work thinking about leaving their job, their work would reflect their detachment from completing necessary tasks. The more those employees detach from their jobs, the more they disengage from the workplace. Managers must understand the job resources and demands that contribute to negative organizational behaviors, engagement, and safety outcomes (Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Hofmann, 2011). Direct managers play a critical role in shaping cultures and understanding how an employee interprets a job (Shuck et al., 2011).

Retention. The retention of staff members influence determines the success of the business (Shore, 2013). Studies that mention the retention of employees included both large organizations (Samson, 2013) and small companies (Gialuisi & Coetzer, 2013). Regardless of the enterprise’s size, retention is a developing issue for many company leaders, worldwide (Shore, 2013). Retention is the result of organizational culture and the challenges imposed by additional job opportunities (Shore, 2013). As retention continues to be an issue, companies continue to adapt to tough economic times, maintain quality relationships between employers and employees, and understand reasons that employees stay (Milman & Dickson, 2014).

Employees that disengage from their jobs, often view work is meaningless and experience rejection and isolation (Shuck et al., 2011). There is a link between work-life conflicts and decreased commitment, job satisfaction, and citizenship and increased stress and burnout (Moqbel, Nevo, & Kock, 2013). Employees, who experience dysfunctions and are always humiliated become insecure, develop feelings of helplessness, and an inability to produce mentally and physically (Shallcross et al., 2013). Employees feel helpless when power imbalances cause conflicts to develop into harassment, work-life conflicts, and offensive behaviors (Ofluoglu, 2013). As a result, unfair practices could develop into short- and long-term effects that leave employees feeling hopeless and threaten the sustainability of the entire company (Kossek, Kalliath, & Kalliath, 2012). Such feelings, if not addressed, could eventually lead employees to leave the organization.

The retention of workers might not always be in the best interest of the company (Self & Self, 2014). Businesses that retain staff members that do not benefit the company are engaging in negligent retention (Self & Self, 2014). Self and Self (2014) suggested that businesses identify employees who exhibit counterproductive behaviors and work to dismiss these workers from the company's workforce. Leaders that develop strategies to address issues with engagement and support employees, increase relationships and promote safe and healthy work environments (Barrow et al., 2013). Essentially leaders must develop strategies that sustain employee engagement to prevent employee intentions to quit (Airila, Hakanen, Punakallio, Lusa, & Luukkonen, 2012).

Retention is critical in protecting a company's human resources (Shore, 2013). Retaining valuable employees is dependent on the satisfaction of their job within the enterprise (Milman & Dickson, 2014). Managers who cannot understand, identify, and react to job performance and commitment challenges experience problems in knowing what to do when faced with negative behaviors and relationships (James, 2013). Ineffective leaders might only permit one-way conversations, and do not allow others to speak in the company (Gordon & Gilley, 2012). Cavazotte (2012) found that managerial experiences influenced leadership behaviors and effectiveness administrative roles while neuroticism (mental well-being) effect leadership effectiveness. Some managers possess poor listening and comprehension skills, which discourages communication (Gordon & Gilley, 2012).

Managers need to improve their two-way communication skills to improve interaction between them and their subordinates (Gordon & Gilley, 2012). When managers ignore the employee complaints, the problems worsen (Duffy & Sperry, 2013; Georgakopoulos et al., 2011) until the employee is no longer a productive part of the organization. Existent counterproductive behaviors within the work environment decrease employees' self-esteem and productivity (Priesemuth, Arnaud & Schminke, 2013). As a result, harmful workplace behaviors cause employees to lose trust in their organizations, management, and force employees to leave the company (Georgakopoulos et al., 2011).

Financial costs of disengagement. Employee disengagement could affect the employees' well-being and create financial burdens on the business. Negative relationships, with stress-related outcomes, cause absenteeism, voluntary lateness, turnover, and burnouts, which are physical and psychological withdrawal behaviors that cause employees to disengage and become unproductive in the workplace (Berry et al., 2012). Indicative behaviors of employee withdrawals include presenteeism**,** lateness, absenteeism, turnover, and laziness, and intentionally slow work have devastating effects on a company's productivity and efficiency when employees are unable to complete their task (Eder, Paul, & Eisenberger, 2008).

According to Edmans (2011), who studied employee satisfaction, lack of information affects the income and integrity growth, stock prices, and financial and employee performance of the company. Productivity costs are significant for U.S. employers, who pay a percent of their employees' health care (Goetzel et al., 2012; Lensberg, 2013). Prices associated with disengaged employees cost U.S. businesses trillions of dollars yearly because of decreases in productivity. Medical spending has almost doubled in the last decade, and employers invest approximately $2.7 trillion in the health and wellness cost for nearly 150 million employees (Heron, 2013). According to Scott (2012), the costs of replacing an employee from a department range from 50% to 200% of the departing employee's salary. Barrow et al. (2013) found that negativities within the workplace cost companies billions of dollars annually in lost productivity, staff turnover, and competitive edge. Regardless of the costs, organizations must understand the substantial financial loss they could endure because of employee disengagement.

Companies lose money invested in training new and former employees (Fineman, 2013) and loss functions of the organization (Beheshtifar, Borhani, & Moghadam, 2012). Besides production fees, legal liabilities associated with withdrawal and negative organizational behaviors could lead to ramifications resulting in failures among businesses (Lee, 2012). Employee disengagement could cause health problems and reductions in employee morale (Golden, 2012), which result in wrongful termination claims, litigation by employees, and workers' compensation (Fineman, 2013; Mao, 2013). Highly engaged employees could be advantageous to companies (Mao, 2013).

Engaged employees increase the competitive advantages of the enterprise because of their personal and enthusiastic connection to the organization, drive innovative ideas, and develop positive attitudes toward work (Dash, 2013). These costs alone support the explanation for business losses in productivity, profitability, and sustainability of the organization.

Physical withdrawal. According to Strijk, Proper, van Mechelen, and van der Beek (2013), healthier employees are more likely to stay in the workforce than workers who are physically incapable or sick. As human capital, the health of employees is an essential component of investment to increase sustainability, productivity, and profitability (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012; Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012). Vitt (2014) used data from the Gallup report to indicate that disengaged employees account for 70% of the United States, which leaves approximately 30% of workers engaged in the workforce. Disengaging behaviors are unethical or defiant practices used to show disregard for the employees and rules and regulations of the organization (Treviño, den Nieuwenboer, & Kish-Gephart, 2014). These negative behaviors cause employees to become detached or withdrawn from their work environment and organizational commitment (Treviño et al., 2014).

Repercussions of disengagement become more challenging once workers suffer from health issues that cause them to miss work (Bakker et al., 2014; Merrill et al., 2013). When detachment affects employees' health, employee disengagement becomes a negative contribution to human capital with repercussions for organizational productivity

(Mudge-Riley et al., 2013). Calvin (2012) used data from Hoel and Coopers's article to explain reasons disengaged employees take an additional 7 days of sick leave annually, compared to actively engaged employees in the workplace. According to Keashly (2012), employees could experience chronic illnesses, stress, obesity, posttraumatic stress disorder (), nausea, and headaches. Yamada (2013) noted that employees might suffer from physical health problems that include high blood pressure, headaches, cardiovascular illness, and digestive problems. Strategies that aid midlevel managers in learning about the physical and mental challenges that disengagement create could also help managers assess losses in productivity.

Emotional withdrawal and burnout. Several researchers indicated that employees, who become disengaged, experience physical and stress related issues (Martin & Peña, 2012; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Burnout, depression, and stress create negative outcomes of engagement. Since the mid-70s, researchers have explored the negative effects of disengagement associated with burnout, depression, and stress (Hogh, Hansen, Mikkelsen, & Persson, 2012). Companies with limited controls, high demands, and the lack managerial support foster environments that influence stress-related illnesses (Jourdain & Vézina, 2013). Martin and Peña (2012) noted that as employees become defensive, they are unable to concentrate on their jobs. Poor health conditions associated with stress-related illnesses leads to increases in absenteeism and decreases in employee engagement (Mudge-Riley et al., 2013). Approximately 75-90% of doctor visits in the United States are stress-related (Tsui, 2013). Researchers showed a correlation between stress and disturbances that increase mental and physical health problems (Nielsen, Hetland, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2012). Mental and physical health issues include musculoskeletal problems, stress, depression, and anxiety (Nielsen et al., 2012). Shaw (2012) found that employees that disengage from the organization suffer mental effects that cause impaired judgment, lack of concentration, irritability, anxiety, anger, illness, memory loss, and depression. According to Asfaw et al. (2014), when they lack leadership support are exposed to physical and mental disorders such as anxiety, hypertension, immune deficiencies, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Problems also include weight loss, irritability, insomnia, and disruption of relationships (Keashly, 2012; Lehelma, Lallukka, Laaksonen, Saastamoinen, & Rahkonen, 2012).

Burnout is a negative indicator of the employee’s well-being (Tims, Bakker, and Derks, 2013). Hakanen and Schaufeli (2012) noted that burnout, caused by employee disengagement, is a state in which increased job demands trigger employees to experience stress, distrust, and exhaustion. Tims et al. found that employees who experienced higher workloads also experienced burnout. Fernet, Austin, Trépanier, and Dussault (2013) indicated that characteristics of the work environment associated with worker perceptions of independence, competence, and relatedness could prevent burnout. Boccio and Macari (2014) noted that businesses lose between 75-85% of productivity costs to reduced performance of employees who suffer from depression. Approximately 8% of employees who work full-time experience episodes of severe depression (Jain, Roy, Harikrishnan, Yu, Dabbous, & Lawrence, 2013). Unemployed people experience higher rates of clinical depression than percentages reported (Appelbaum et al., 2012). Managers must understand reasons disengagement affects the mental well-being of employees and the productivity of the company (Nahrgang et al., 2011). When companies do not develop practices and policies to maintain sustainability, businesses carry excessive business and personal costs, and workers experience burnout and stress-related diseases and disorders (Tunwall & Stutzman, 2014). Until companies improve engagement strategies and health and welfare programs throughout the United States workforce, no one wins.

Communication, practices, and policies. Implementing effective strategies must sustain engagement and maintain the productivity of the company. Most organizations face challenges in obtaining leaders, who are passionate about achieving company excellence. Managers play a significant role in shaping opportunities to learn, work climates, and organizational engagement (Shuck et al., 2011). Schaufeli et al. (2002) recommended that leaders relate to and communicate with employees in the workplace. The implementation of efficient strategies begins with management. Midlevel managers could play a critical role in influencing employee engagement (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012). Likewise, engagement strategies that reduce negative behaviors affect organizational expectations (Gumbus & Meglich, 2012) and employees' well-being (Sonnentag, 2012).

Communication factors could help lessen the tolerances of counterproductive behaviors. Albrecht (2012) suggested that companies develop group as well as fair and supportive organizational cultures. Companies should ensure that job descriptions are openly supportive of organizational goals and provide employee development that motivates employee performance (Albrecht, 2012). Codes of ethics should include clearly communicated policies that indicate zero tolerance for negative behaviors. Managers should actively discuss the codes of ethics of the employees in the organization (Kossek et al., 2012). Wager and Kleinert (2012) noted that companies should develop clear policies that define misconduct. Policies should also specify the commitment of the organization to reduce harmful behaviors, the responsibilities of managers, procedures for complaints, and disciplinary action for aggressors (Wager & Kleinert, 2012**).**

Reward and recognition. A significant factor in retaining employees relies on the existing retention system a business has implemented (Patel & Conklin, 2012). Erturk (2014) found a correlation between turnover intentions of the retention and recognition of employees. The way employers treat their employees affect the voluntary turnover of a company (Johnson, 2015). Workers appreciate the recognition from their immediate supervisors (Kang, 2014). Reward and recognition are techniques that represent a sense of accomplishment and appreciation, which motivates the employee to remain with the organization (Kang, 2014). Unfortunately, in many organizations, workers perceive that only the most productive employees receive recognition (Burris, 2012). Employee recognition positively influences employee behaviors (Yukl, 2012). Extrinsic rewards create employee motivations that affect retention (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2013).

Interpersonal Relationships

According to Kahn (1990), supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships promote psychological safety within the company. Leadership commitment and employee engagement and trust are necessary for organizational change (Eccles, Perkins, & Serafeim, 2012). Interpersonal relationships encourage trusting, supportive, and opened communication in the organization with a lack of threat (Kahn, 1990). In a competitive environment, companies experience organizational change and pressures to succeed (Gumbus & Meglich, 2012). Destructive, demanding, and competitive businesses influence undesirable outcomes (Branch et al., 2013). Leaders in the modern business world do not have the 3–5 years it takes to transform the cultures in an organization (McDeavitt, Wade, Smith, & Worsowicz, 2012). For that reason, organizational change, and competitive pressures increase stress levels within an organization while creating a dysfunctional atmosphere (Gumbus & Meglich, 2012). Organizational change and situational conditions also force companies to remove layers of management and downsize to stay efficient and proficient because of existing counterproductive behaviors (Gumbus & Meglich, 2012). For this reason, managers need to acknowledge accusations and remain alert to counterproductive behaviors in the work environment (Boccio & Macari, 2014).

Organizational productivity depends on the effectiveness and quality of interaction among managers and employees (Calabrese, 2012). Engaged employees exhibit rewarding behaviors that demonstrate inclusion, positivity, and commitment to the work environment (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Ilies, 2012). In contrast, harmful practices reflect negative perceptions toward the reputation, credibility, and business circle of the organization. There is a need to identify factors that could improve commitment and motivation among employers and employees (Airila et al., 2012). Trust is a major factor that contributes to organizational loyalty and individual relationships (Gülşen & Kilic, 2013). Trusting relationships develop as managers display behaviors that positively influence corporate culture, demonstrates fairness, encourages employee growth and development, and promotes work-life balance (Gordon, Gilley, Avery, Gilley, & Barber, 2014). When managers do not address repetitive negativities, behaviors lessen the opportunities to reach shared goals and develop trust in the organization (Gülşen & Kilic, 2013). There is a need to identify factors that would improve commitment and motivation among employers and employees (Airila et al., 2012).

Transition times. Leaders play a major role in fostering cultures with good work-life balance (Darcy, McCarthy, Hill, & Grady, 2012). Kossek et al. (2012) recommended the implementation of transition strategies, which minimizes losses and helps promote work-life balances for the employees. On a particular time of the day, employees could stop their daily routines and manage their transition times (Kossek et al., 2012). According to Kossek et al., transition times allow employees flexibility or time for a break when shifting from one job to another. By maintaining transition times, leaders could promote positive interaction and physical and mental well-being of workers.

Kossek et al. also suggested that a sense of humor, stay focused, laugh at ourselves, and learn from common mistakes promote positive interactions in the workplace.

Mentoring. Mentoring refers to a professional relationship in which a skilled person known as the mentor, and a mentee (Topa, Guglielmi, & Depolo, 2014). A mentor assists another individual in developing particular attitudes, skills, and knowledge (Topa et al., 2014). People identify with the diversity of their culture. For this reason, diversity in groups offers a fair representation of everyone and an opportunity for professional growth and development (Topa et al., 2014). Mentoring improves the less experienced worker's professional and personal growth (Branch et al., 2013; Topa et al., 2014). The mentor analyzes the current situation within the work environment and identifies strengths and weaknesses (Wright & Hill, 2014). Mentoring could also help companies develop goals that will create positive change and implement strategies that might influence a productive environment (Wright & Hill, 2014). Managers must apply diverse mentoring strategies to represent everyone and not just certain groups in an organization. Successful mentoring programs develop working relationships, positive behaviors, and organization productivity.

Management styles, group dynamics, social norms, and interpersonal relationships influence psychological safety within the work environment (Kahn, 1990). Leaders must exercise strategies within social systems that develop consistent, predictable, and non-threatening conditions to increase employee engagement (Kahn, 1990). As leaders implement effective strategies to improve employment engagement, they influence climates, resources, and demands employees experience in their work roles, the psychological experience of meaningfulness, attitudes, and outcomes related to performance and behaviors, and safety and availability (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015). Strategies that increase employee engagement could also decrease challenges with employee retention and turnover.

Summary and Transition

In Section 1, I addressed the problem statement and explained the importance of researching emerging theories of employee behaviors; I introduced a plan to identify and explore strategies that midlevel managers used to reduce workplace disengagement; I set the foundation for exploring the relationships among employee behaviors and reduced productivity. Presenting the literature on employees' acts in a multifaceted manner to make the concept of employee engagement convincing and applicable for use in various industries.

Section 2 includes information about a suitable research method and design for this study and explains the research steps for thinking, understanding, writing, and collecting information (Sergi & Hallin, 2011). Section 2 presents the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, the criteria for the targeted participant selection, the collection and analysis of data, and the reliability and validity of the research. Section 3 consists of data collected from multiple sources, such as semistructured interviews, member-checking, the implications of social change, and applications to professional practices. Section 3 also includes reflections on lessons learned throughout the study, recommendations for future research, and the conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

The emphasis of this qualitative, exploratory, single-case study was to understand how small business midlevel manager strategies that increase employee engagement and productivity. I collected data from (a) experts in middle management positions using face-to-face, semistructured interviews and from corporate documents, such as reports, company policies, and public records. Understanding small business strategies that midlevel managers have implemented to increase positive organizational relationships can help high-level executives identify, acknowledge, and address challenges with workplace engagement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory single-case study was to explore strategies that midlevel managers in small businesses used to improve employee engagement. The target population consisted of a single, small, franchise that incorporated midlevel managerial strategies to improve employee engagement in the metropolitan area of Dothan, Alabama. An implication of positive social change concluded that this research could assist midlevel leaders in understanding the competitive advantages for maintaining engaged employees. This study could also help midlevel managers identify, react to, and address negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that cause distrust and a lack of communication between leaders and employees.

Role of the Researcher

I was responsible for making making informed decisions, thinking, linking, and abstracting the explored data. As the research, I listened carefully, asked the right questions, and completed parallel tasks and knew my study, examined the collected, and showed determination. Maintaining rapport with the small sample group of midlevel managers was useful when assessing their knowledge, views, and expertise on disengagement (Yin, 2011). I kept the participants' information confidential; there was no prior association between the company, its members, and me. The researcher could collect data using methods, such as interviews, document analysis, and observation to help deepen understanding of a qualitative case study (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). I collected, analyzed, and interpreted detailed data from a group of midlevel managers to understand *how* and *why* particular strategies increased engaging behaviors in the company.

Throughout this study, I maintained the ethical standards of the Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Human Services and Health [HHS], 1979) and Institutional Review Board (HHS, 1979). The Belmont Report (HHS, 1979) underlies the guidelines, ethical principles, and application in which the researcher applies human subjects to a study. I respected the confidentiality, ideas, and opinions of the participants and accurately reported the information they provided. The members received fair treatment, even if they chose not to continue participating in the study. The participants had to review and sign a consent form to ensure that they understood the boundaries and practices, ethical principles, and application of this study. Explanations for using consent forms, assessment of the risk and benefits, and selection of participant ensured that the members understood their rights during the interview process (HHS, 1979).

Bias refers to any display of partial information, such as the information that stands out and fits the theory of the researcher (Maxwell, 2012), which would prevent an equal consideration of the data. Logic suggested that biases occurred during the planning, data collection, analysis, or any stages of the study. Listening carefully, recording, and capturing the participants' beliefs and opinions mitigated biases with the study. As I had hoped to identify and understand the expertise of the participants in this study, personal biases and opinions did not interfere. I observed and decoded data, identified themes and patterns and drew conclusions to mitigate biases. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) noted that qualitative researchers use interview protocols to assist them in collecting data, which helped minimize any personal bias and ensured consistencies in the data collected to answer the research question. An important step included the use of the interview protocol (see Appendix A). I enhanced my comprehension of how others viewed employee engagement by recognizing and accepting my personal preferences.

Participants

The focus of in-depth interviews was to gain detailed information based on the *how and why* of the participants' experiences (Prendergast & Chan Hak, 2013). Interviewing the entire population of members could reduce sampling errors (Bothma & Roodt, 2012). A researcher could conduct a qualitative study by using a single unit with multiple participants within the same setting (Yin, 2011). The members had to meet the criteria for this study, which were: (a) be in a midlevel management position, (b) use engagement practices, and (c) manage at least five subordinates in the company.

Professional networking (communication) is the most important communication step for gaining entry to a group (Phelps, Heidl, & Wadhwa, 2012). In qualitative studies, researchers might experience problems accessing participants, depending on the target population (Moralez, Rao, Livaudis, & Thompson, 2012; Svensson, Ramirez, Peres, Barnett, & Claudio, 2012). While communicating with the midlevel management daily, the owner of the organization provided the names, initial introduction, and contact information of the candidates for this study. Thus, I had prior permission from the owner and founder of the business, which provided easier access to candidates who volunteered for this study. I also received permission to conduct research at the site. To gain access to the participants who met the criteria of the study, I delivered a letter of agreement to the business owner, which described the study. The letter included steps for communicating and answering any questions or concerns the participants had about the study.

Building a working researcher-participant relationship is essential to successful qualitative research (Swauger, 2011). I had no prior relationship with the participants of this study. Using the contact information provided by the owner, I contacted the participants in an e-mail with information about the study. I gave participants 2 days to respond to their invitation letter. Once the members agreed to partake in this study, I consistently communicated with the selected participants to establish a good working relationship. A researcher maintains integrity by representing truthful positions and statements (Yin, 2011). I was honest and clear to the participants about my position, intentions, and principles, and position. Once the members agreed to participate in the study review and sign the consent forms, I consistently communicated with the members in person, through phone calls, and emails. During the interview process, the nature of the questions, active listening to the participants and attention to detail determines the quality of the data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The focus of this study centered on exploring strategies that small business middle managers used to encourage employee engagement, using a qualitative research method. Qualitative research methods are appropriate for exploring research about events relating to cultural and human experiences (Sergi & Hallin, 2011). The intent of the qualitative research process is to understand experiences and interpretations of the environment in which the incident takes place (Yin, 2011). Use of the qualitative research is a method in which participants express their perceptions of the phenomenon in their words (Coenen, Stamm, Stucki, & Cieza, 2012). The qualitative method consisted of a suitable process for developing an in-depth understanding of the effects of disengagement in the organization, based on the participants' experiences and perceptions.

The quantitative and mixed methodologies were not suitable for this study. Quantitative and mixed methods are useful for examining detailed complementary relationships through interviews and surveys that may be superficial in the qualitative study (Yin, 2011). Quantitative methods center on the measurements and analysis of the causal relationship between variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Quantitative methods fail to provide a detailed description of the experience of the phenomenon of the affected population (Choy, 2014).

Conducting a mixed method study relies on the researcher possessing an in-depth understanding of the qualitative and quantitative research method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Problems could occur during the data analysis and interpretation process of a quantitative and mixed method study (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Problems could also arise when the theories and methods are neither distinguishable nor meaningful (Yin, 2011). Both methods could involve calculating larger samples, challenges to the credibility, transferability, and accuracy of the research may occur, such as misuse of sampling could transpire (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011).

Research Design

Single-case studies enrich the research concerning human actions based on the participants' experiences, knowledge, and perceptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Conducting case studies is a process in which the researcher implements a small number of people, situations, and multiple sources to collect data (Yin, 2011). The requirements for a single-case study are to explore, understand, verify, and explain the experiences and opinions of the participants associated with the primary research and interview questions (Yin, 2013). Procedures included identifying middle managerial strategies useful in increasing engagement among employees. The use of a single-case study was suitable for this study.

The phenomenological design was not an appropriate method for this study because biases in the data could cause problems with establishing dependability, transferability, and credibility in procedures and information. A phenomenological design involves gaining an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences could provide an insight of the phenomenon (Tirgari, 2012). Although a phenomenological design affords the opportunity to evaluate behaviors, experiences, perceptions, and possible patterns over time, it provides no single reality (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011). Problems could occur when participants face difficulties expressing their feelings (Parks, 2015). The participants' realities helped explain emotions, relationships, and events.

The ethnographic design is not an appropriately selected technique because the process does not sufficiently center on studying the phenomenon in isolated, or single, case studies (Batt, 2012). An ethnographic design is a process that involves field observations and a qualitative analysis of human behaviors in a relaxed atmosphere (Sigfridsson & Sheehan, 2011). The ethnographic design study centers on understanding the views of people in an entire culture (Wilson, 2012). Using an ethnographic approach includes participating as part of the study's sample group, which could lead to years of research. Although conducting research through ethnographic design might be useful when examining new and in-depth ideas, the approach might be time-consuming (Sigfridsson & Sheehan, 2011).

Population and Sampling

I implemented the census sampling method that ensured the recruitment of participants, who acquire the necessary knowledge and experience of the phenomenon. Census sampling is a technique that useful for determining the criteria of the participants interviewed from an entire population (McCreesh et al., 2012). Robinson (2014) noted that when using the case-study design, the use of a typical sampling is not a logical technique for a qualitative single-case study because generalizations of a population are not obtainable through a sample. Use of the entire population as a sample is a more accurate sampling approach compared to normal random sampling strategies that only include small portions of the population (Bothma & Roodt, 2012). The researcher could minimize sampling errors by selecting a sample of participants in an unbiased way and choosing a large enough sample for the estimates to be precise (Jawale, 2012).

The population for the study consisted of two midlevel managers from a single, small, franchise that applied strategies to improve employee engagement in the metropolitan area of Dothan, Alabama. Typical patterns, which could emerge from different data, are significant while exploring the how or why a process works (Francis et al., 2010). The midlevel managers shared their strategies to improve employee engagement. I sought to understand the methods they found most useful for increasing engagement among employees within their organization. Two or three interviews are suitable for obtaining an appropriate amount of richness and balance of the participants' views (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). An appropriate sample size is useful for adequately addressing the research question and establishing an in-depth analysis (Sandelowski, 1995), to justify a small sample size of two participants for this study.

According to Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013), a relationship exists between sample size and cultural factors are useful for achieving data saturation. The sample size is justified by interviewing participants until the researcher reaches data saturation and the sufficient data to replicate the study (Francis et al., 2010). The size of the sample centered on a collection of new information. To reach data saturation, I asked probing questions during the member checking follow-up interviews to collect additional information. An advantageous technique is to use follow-up interviews for member checking with probing questions to achieve data saturation (Berg, Stewart, Schreck, & Simons, 2012). For the purpose of achieving data saturation, choosing suitable elements helped me reach the objective of the study was important. I reached saturation once the responses to the interviews no longer provided new information or themes.

Midlevel managers represent a suitable sample group for a study because individuals in leadership positions implement strategies and influence policies, procedures, and social norms within an organization (Birken et al., 2012). The members of the study were: (a) in a midlevel management position, (b) used engagement practices, and (c) managed at least five subordinates in the company. People who did not meet the criteria of being a midlevel manager in the company were not eligible to participate in the study.

Javalgi, Granot, and Alejandro (2011) suggested that researchers make the interviews convenient for the participants. Conducting interviews at the participants' convenience is advantageous to the researcher and members (Chaney, Barry, Chaney, Stellefson, & Webb, 2013). Conducting interviews at a location such as the public library or an office within the organization eliminated the inconvenience in which the participants did not need to make travel arrangements. I allowed the participants to request an alternative location for the interviews at a place that we agreed upon because I wanted the members to feel safe and comfortable during the process. For the protection and convenience of the participants, I used an area to conduct the face-to-face interviews that was free from noise, was free from interruptions, and was in a comfortable location in the meeting room of the company. Participants reported to me at the designated time and place to complete the interview process. After 2 days, the participants confirmed that they understood all the information associated with the study, by reviewing and signing a consent form. According to Yin (2013), the opened-ended conversational approach is a useful method to conduct semistructured interviews. I focused on obtaining ideas about strategies that midlevel managers used to improve employee engagement in small businesses.

Ethical Research

Data were collected after approval of the proposed study by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (Approval No. 03-14-16-0273758). The board works to ensure that the study's methods comply with all ethical standards regarding participants (HSH, 1979). Before the interviews took place, the participants signed and returned their consent forms to take part in this study. The participants had two days to review the information in the consent form such as the intent of the research and their rights. All participants had the right to withdraw should they be uncomfortable (Farquhar, 2012). Participants also received information explaining their rights to withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me via email or phone. After voicing the lack of confidence in answering questions, SP20 (study participant 20) withdrew from the interview. There were no incentives given to the participating members of this study.

A certificate issued by the National Institute of Health ([NIH], 2011) Office of Extramural Research confirmed my competency to manage ethical guidelines for human subjects research. I understood the ethical considerations concerning confidentiality and respect for the study's participants. I used a fundamental guide for ensuring ethical research, which consisted of guaranteeing the confidentiality of the study's members. I also offered the participants in the study a copy of their transcribed interview results and a brief summary of the findings.

The collected data will remain in a locked safe on a password-protected flash drive for a minimum of 5 years to safeguard the rights of the members. My ethical obligation, as the researcher, is to destroy all raw data after a 5-year holding period. I will delete the files from the flash drive and shred all paperwork. Ensuring anonymity or the members and organization used to conceal any information that might betray the participants' identity (Farquhar, 2012). The names of the participants and company are confidential. The participants were assigned identification numbers, and I referred to the organization with a pseudonym.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and ter Bogt and van Helden (2012) noted that the researcher is the primary instrument of the study, as they collect data through active participation, observations, and exploration of archival documents. Through an interpretive lens, a researcher relies on data, intuition, and skills (Bowen, 2009). The objective of the document collection was to assess the perceptions of the participants on the strategies they have experienced while addressing employee engagement. Data collection instruments were useful when validating middle management strategies that encouraged employee engagement within the work environment. The three additional data collection instruments that I used for this single-case study were semistructured, open-ended interview questions and protocol (see Appendix A), direct observation protocol (see Appendix B), and company documents, such as reports, records, and policies (see Appendix C). Use of the instruments helped me confirm and compare consisitencies in the most effective strategies for increasing employee engagement. With prior permission, I implemented an interview protocol from a modified copy of Fusch’s (2015) model (see Appendix A) for this study.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), semistructured interviews that include informal and formal questions, help to gain a detailed account of the participant’s views. The semistructured interviews contained six open-ended questions relating to the participants’ experiences and perceptions of strategies midlevel leaders used to increase employee engagement instrument (see Appendix A), which guided the participants in providing thorough responses. The interview questions centered on understanding the perceptions of the participants and research question to understand the participants’ answers. The open-ended semistructured interview consists of using of unexpected probing questions that clarify the participants’ response (Richards & Morse, 2012). The interview questions also relate to Kahn’s (1990) personal engagement and disengagement theory. During the semistructured interview process, the participants reflected on their ideas and views as they related to strategies that improved employee engagement. The primary research question helped guide the interview questions of the study. During conversations, the researcher asks the participants guided questions to collect data (Yin, 2013). I digitally audio-recorded conversations during the interview process.

Implementing observational instruments also occurred in this study. Direct observations could become part of the case study protocol when the researcher to observe the behaviors of the members of a study in their natural setting (Yin, 2013). The researcher conducts a continuous monitoring and written recordings of a group of peoples or individual's behavior (Bernard & Bernard, 2012). Observational data could be recorded using field notes (Punch, 2013). For one hour each visit, I observed and recorded the behaviors of the midlevel managers in their natural work setting for two weeks on Monday, Friday, and Saturday. The verbal and nonverbal observations and recorded data relied on how the midlevel managers communicated with their employees, customers, and colleagues.

Ter Bogt and van Helden (2012) and Yin (2013) noted that archival documents are also data collection instruments. Methodological triangulation required various techniques of data collection such as interviews, documentary evidence, and direct observations. Secondary data instruments, such as archival records support methodological triangulation to answer the research question (Yin, 2011). Incorporating the methodological triangulation technique using relevant documents, such as recorded interviews and routine data would help with understanding the similarities and differences in the data collected throughout the interview and study process (Walshe, 2011). The master log included reflective notes developed during the data collection process. I reviewed audiotaped interviews, as well as field and archival notes recorded on the master log (see Appendix C).

The member checking follow-up process is a useful technique for capturing the meaning and word choice (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). I conducted member checking follow-up interviews to obtain clarity by asking the members probing questions. Member checking is also helpful for ensuring that accuracy and understanding of the participants continue throughout the study (Marshall et al., 2013). I also ensured the accuracy of the participants' information and avoided an erroneous interpretation of data. Harper and Cole (2012) suggested that researchers omit personal biases during the research process. Therefore, I excluded my personal biases during the member checking process. I used open-ended questions in a guided conversation. Then I coded the responses to determine participants' successful strategic experiences and suggestions for improvement. Confirmation of the accuracy and completeness of the participants' information enhance the credibility of this study. No other person had access to any of the participants' personal information. I documented any follow-up questions that developed through the interviews. Additional to using an interview protocol guide (see Appendix A), I asked the participants to review the transcripts to ensure clarity of information for the second time. The participants were offered a second chance to give their suggestions for improvements.

Data Collection Technique

Qualitative researchers use interview protocols to assist them with collecting data (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). I followed the interview protocol to conduct semistructured, face-to-face interviews for this study. Semistructured interviews were useful for uncovering factual data about topics associated with understanding the research questions of the study while applying prepared interview and probing questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A researcher must listen carefully, ask the right questions and complete parallel tasks, know my study and care about the data collected and show determination (Yin, 2011b).

The advantage of using interviews is that they help gain insight and a perspective of the study (van Wijk & Harrison, 2013). A disadvantage of this process is that participants become vulnerable to biases within the interview (van Wijk & Harrison, 2013). As planned, I scheduled the interviews at a convenient time and place for both, the participants and I. The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. A SONY ICD PX333 digital audio tape recorder helped me record the face-to-face interviews. Although the expected duration of the semistructured interviews was approximately 30 minutes, the time it took members to discuss their individualized engagement experiences and to answer and review the interview questions varied. After the semistructured, face-to-face interviews, the participants shared additional information that further enhanced the study. As with interviews, relevant documents, and direct observations are also helpful in a study (Wayhuni, 2012; Yin, 2013).

Implementing direct observations also occurred in this study. Direct observations are opportunities for the researcher to observe the behaviors of the members of a study in their natural setting (Yin, 2013). Recording observational data could range from audio-visual equipment to field notes (Punch, 2013). Continuous monitoring is a method of direct observations in which the researcher observes and records a group of peoples or individual person’s behavior consistently (Bernard & Bernard, 2012). Implementing direct observations also occurred in this study. For two weeks on Monday, Friday, and

Saturday for approximately one hour (see Appendix B), I went to the work site to conduct a direct observation of midlevel managerial engagement in a natural setting. I observed how both midlevel managers communicated and engaged with the employees, customers, and colleagues. I did not collect data on the employees subordinate to the midlevel managers nor customers.

During case study research, data collection could occur using multiple sources (Yin, 2009). Secondary data was obtainable by triangulating findings to answer the research question. The use of the triangulation technique requires a collection of various data (Walshe, 2011). Resources such as interviews, documentation, archival records, direct observation, and participant observation (i.e., site visits), and physical artifacts are useful for collecting data (Yin, 2011). I incorporated methodological triangulation by using interviews, direct observations, and relevant documents, such as company reports, records, and policies. I used a master log to record data from the documents.

By applying methodological triangulation, I confirmed and compared consistencies within the three sources, which included semistructured interviews, direct observations, and company documents. Company documents included policies, records, and reports. Analyzing consistencies of concepts uncovered in the interviews and the documentation provided insight of the most effective strategies for improving employee engagement. The advantages of using a document review are that document analysis is more efficient and less time-consuming than other research methods (Bowen, 2009). Another advantage is that document analysis helps the researcher respond to the concerns related to reflection (awareness), or the lack of it, which is essential in other qualitative research methods (Bowen, 2009). A disadvantage of review could be that the documents to do not provide sufficient information to answer the research question (Bowen, 2009). Another disadvantage could be because of blocked access, documents are irretrievable (Bowen, 2009). Researchers collect qualitative data by using transcribed interviews (Nicholls, 2009). Upon completion of the interviews, I saved a copy of the transcribed interviews in a Microsoft Word file.

The necessity of information comprised of completeness and credibility of data. Berg (2009) suggested that a pilot test is complete before familiarizing the people and researchers with the topic in question to facilitate the identification of unclear or inappropriate questions. Case studies are flexible, and the researcher is not required to follow strict criteria (Runeson, Host, Rainer, & Regnell, 2012). A pilot test is not a requirement for a case study when the researchers probe for additional information, during the interview process, which offers the same results (Kinchin, Streatfield, & Hay, 2010). Instead of conducting a pilot test to provide clarity to the study, I asked probing questions by using member checking follow-up interviews. Asking probing questions and conducting member checking using a small number of interviews are appropriate when the researcher asks direct research questions to resolve problems (Brannen, 2013). An application of member checking follow-up interviews centered on addressing the integrity and credibility of information, which relied on the participants' confirming the accuracy of the data, descriptions, and interpretations.

Member checking is useful for improving the transferability, credibility, completeness, and accuracy of the recorded data during the interview process (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). The member checking process helps the researcher verify the participants' information without including the researcher's personal biases (Harper & Cole, 2012). I conducted the member checking to confirm the information provided by the participants and company documents. Member checking occurred once the members analyzed and reviewed data for authenticity or interpreted new themes and patterns. Conducting member checking interviews develop through the application evidence-based interview practices that increase representation and legitimation of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To verify the accuracy of the information provided, I summarized, restated, and questioned the members throughout the interview. While conducting member checking follow-up interviews, I asked probing questions until I reached data saturation. Reaching saturation meant once the responses to the interviews no longer provided new information or themes, at which point the assumption was that the sample was sufficiently large. I organized the data collection, analyzed, and included the changes requested by the members.

Data Organization Technique

Organizing the collected data permits the researcher to maintain easy access to research materials and analyze data (Yin, 2011). Data organization techniques are methods used to categorize and classify evidence or findings of sources (Bowen, 2009). I used a systematic master log to track critical data from the participants' face-to-face, member checking follow-up interviews, and notes during the research. While organizing the collected data the researcher is also able to maintain easy access to research materials and analysis (Yin, 2013). The master log included the assigned number of the participants useful for tracking the type of communication techniques with the members (see Appendix C). Documenting archived events in a master log allowed me to maintain and present data with a neatly organized appearance. I used the master log to classify detailed information about the participants, as well as information obtained from the participants in the interviews and company documents. The information also included the identification number, instead of the identifying information of the participant, organization's pseudonym, and the type of data collected.

Coding helps to develop themes (Richards & Morse, 2012). Codes and themes generated through integrated semistructured interviews and data gathered from relevant documents (Bowen, 2009). Compared to Nvivo, Excel was convenient for entering, updating, and showing the frequencies as the participants' responses from the interviews. Applying Microsoft Excel helped validate ideas about the data that reflected earlier findings. Microsoft Excel was useful for organizing and keeping track of the extensive data, such as relevant company reports, records, and policies. Microsoft Excel was also helpful for organizing and coding data and exploring themes from the semistructured interviews and company documents. This data related to the similarities and differences associated with strategies the midlevel managers used to increase employee engagement. By assigning generic codes to each participant, a researcher could achieve confidentiality and anonymity of each participant (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013). I used alphanumeric-codes to conceal the participants' identities for this study. By assigning each participant an identifying number ranging from 10 to 20 preceded by the letter SP (for study participant), I gained permission to audio record the interview through the signed consent forms.

Tracking information included a delegated number for the participants, communication records, company documents, dates, and times of the interviews. Using a database increases the reliability of the case study when the researcher can track and organize stored data collection such as audio files and relevant documents because the files can be easily retrieved later (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Documents are the means for tracking change and development (Bowen, 2009). I kept labeled folders on a flash drive containing recorded interviews, company documents, and records for each study participant. Labeled folders can contain the collected data of the participants, which includes transcribed interviews recording the entire interview process verbatim (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The folder also consisted of assigned identification numbers and interview responses during the interview process, interview forms, and field notes.

A password protected flash drive was suitable for transferring the data from one place to another. I stored the data in a secure location to ensure the confidentiality of the participants' identity. After the completion of the study, I would lock all raw research data in a secure safe and retain it on a password protected flash drive for 5 years. After the 5-year period, I would destroy the data related to the participants of this study by deleting the files from the flash drive and shredding the paperwork.

Data Analysis

The purpose of the thematic analysis was to identify, analyze, and report common themes from the study (Cachia & Millard, 2011). Use of methodological triangulation helped with checking consistencies in a study, as I compared findings from the semistructured interviews, direct observations, and company documents. A variety of collected data could help deepen comprehension of the qualitative case study using the document analysis technique (Baralt, 2012; Petty et al., 2012). Useful sources for comparing and organizing data might include interviews, relevant company documents, and direct observations (Yin, 2013). Enhancement of the interview process occurs once the researcher incorporates the methodological triangulation to collect data from multiple reference points, such as company documents, and observations to verify patterns, rule out alternative explanations and clarify meaning (Walshe, 2011).

Data analysis is a technique used to assess information and make it explicit (Lincoln & Guda, 1985). I followed Yin's (2009) 5-step approach to analyze data collected for this study. Yin's (2013) analysis process includes compiling the data, disassembling the data, reassembling the data, interpreting the meaning of the data, and concluding the data. The first step was to collect data. I collected and organized the data from the semistructured interviews and relevant company documents based on concepts and ideas most closely associated themes. Becoming familiar with the data from the interviews and company documents helped me gain an understanding of the reasons one concept might influence another. I searched for consistencies in concepts revealed while conducting the semistructured interviews and company documentation to establish the most suitable strategies for improving employee engagement. Next, I conducted member checking through follow-up interviews and asked the participants probing questions to clarify my understanding of the inconsistencies. By using member checking follow-up interviews, I offered clarity through detailed descriptions of the data in a final report and ensure data saturation.

I also collected relevant company documents, such as policies, records, and other printed materials relating to the study. Triangulation can occur using observations, interviews, and comments on questionnaires to develop themes (Baralt, 2012). By incorporating the methodological triangulation technique using relevant documents, such as company records, notes, and policies help enhance the understanding of the interview process and study (Walshe, 2011). Methodological triangulation is a technique used in research to confirm similar data discovered in various data collection sources (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Walshe, 2011). I used methodological triangulation to review and sort the data collection. I requested to review and use relevant company documents, such as policies, reports, and records and other printed materials relating to the study. I used a master log to help sort relevant data from the documents.

Microsoft Excel was the selected software program for this qualitative exploratory case study. Software does not necessarily offer the overview needed to notice original or distinctive patterns, but the tool is helpful for organizing extensive data (Malterud, 2012). Qualitative methods are useful for reviewing written documentation, interviews, and participants using content analysis, which lessens the chances of bias (Krippendorf, 2012). An implementation of software decrease biases influenced by the researcher’s purpose, approach, background, and personal experience (Bazeley, 2012). In this qualitative study, coding was the process whereby data needed to be broken down into sections or given names. Coding is a helpful process for developing themes (Richard & Morse, 2012). Coding could be a useful strategy for identifying and categorizing the most important data in documented answers to the interview question (Richards & Morse, 2012). The use of Microsoft Excel provided a visual depiction of two or more themes in a coding system related to similarities associated with strategies the midlevel managers used to increase employee engagement. Visual depictions referred to an outline or representation of themes revealed when asked specific questions.

I interpreted the meaning by establishing themes. Themes were obtainable by using relevant member-checking follow-up interviews and company documents. Themes drawn from organized data that relate to the primary research question may include: (a) management styles and process (b) group and intergroup dynamics, (c) organizational norms and (d) interpersonal relationships. Drawing additional themes also occurred from the personal engagement and disengagement theory. Associated themes included supportive managerial behaviors, engagement strategies, and employee behaviors that affect organizational productivity when procedures were nonexistent and existent in a company.

Before developing a conclusion of the results and establishing the findings of the study, I assessed alternative theories from the company documents and interviews using follow-up questions and interpreted results. Comparing data from the member checking follow-up interviews, direct observations, and company documents helped me confirm the credibility of the collected data. The theory of personal engagement and disengagement was suitable for the problem of the study. Kahn’s theory of personal engagement and disengagement were useful while interpreting and understanding the collection of data and exploring midlevel manager strategies that sustain employee engagement in the company. Kahn’s theory helped me to understand and interpret the collection of data related to the causes, barriers, and managerial strategies associated with employee engagement. A link existed between the conceptual framework, methodological process, and primary findings from the study.

Reliability and Validity

In a qualitative study, reliability and validity refer to the trustworthiness of the qualitative study and its findings (Robson, 2011). Trustworthiness transpires through dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guda, 1985).

Reliability

Dependability. The purpose of attaining dependability within a qualitative case study relies on drawing repeated results and accounting for and describing the changes that occur, and affect the current study (Grossoehme, 2014; Lincoln & Guda, 1985). Measuring reliability transpires when the dependability within the qualitative study is established (Wang & Lien, 2013). Dependability occurs by using research instruments that draw continuous data throughout the study (da Mota Pedrosa, Näslund, & Jasmand, 2012). I ensured dependability by providing a detailed description of the processes and procedures using the proper case study protocol. I also ensured there was an existing relationship between study's purpose and outcomes from the data collection, by confirming the trustworthiness of the study.

Seven steps helped me identify mistakes and minimizing them to an acceptable level to increase the dependability of the data. First, I audio-recorded the interviews verbatim. I also documented the sequence of the procedure through the stages of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. By carefully documenting and reporting data, the reader can assess how the researcher has collected, produced, and interpreted the data (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). I established methodological triangulation from the midlevel managers' interviews and the collection of documents on engagement strategies that midlevel leaders used to sustain productivity. In this study, I described the procedural structure and implementation strategies, unfolded the basis for participant selection, and understood the role of a researcher and relationships with the members. I also conducted member checking follow-up interviews to ensure the accuracy of information from the interviews.

Validity

Data that confirms the trustworthiness of the study could include coding and classifying of themes, member checking, audit trails, structural validation, and references (Phillips et al., 2014). Credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the study would enhance the trustworthiness, the accuracy of data, and the experiences of the researcher (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). As I obtained information from multiple sources and established a chain of events, I also demonstrated that the findings were reliable in the study. Two standard techniques for assuring the trustworthiness and accuracy of a qualitative study are credibility and transferability (Grossoehme, 2014).

Credibility. Credibility determines the extent to which the participants of the study believe the findings (Lincoln & Guda, 1985). Providing detailed descriptions of the collected data determines the level of trustworthiness, relevance, and credibility (Grossoehme, 2014). By assessing the data collection through various methods, the researcher could validate the findings of the study and reduce the effects of potential biases that can exist (Bowen, 2009). Methodological triangulation is useful for collecting and comparing data from different methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Suitable sources for comparing data include (a) archival records, (b) documentation, (c) physical artifacts, (d) direct and participant-observation, and (f) interviews (Yin, 2013). As planned, I used triangulation to collect and cross-check various sources, such as company documents with interviews. I also tested and observed consistencies within the findings, observed for inconsistencies, considered the alternative, completed explanations and negative cases, and verified data and comments on interpretation with study participants through member checking follow-up interviews.

Transferability. Transferability refers to the degree in which the study applies to other setting and participants (Lincoln & Guda, 1985; Petty et al., 2012). I left the decisions to obtain transferability to future researchers. To achieve an honest examination for achieving external validity, I submitted my proposed study the doctorate committee for review, which ensured that the proper peer evaluation and debriefing takes place. I provided thorough descriptions to document the research process in detail with transparency, which allowed other researchers to replicate it. Qualitative interviews coupled with other forms of data collection, interpretations, relevant company documents, and conclusions made about realistic experiences are beyond the controlled boundaries of the study (Petty et al., 2012). Relevant business documents include reports, policies, and public records (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Achieving data saturation is the means in which the sample size is large enough to capture a range of experiences without repetition (Mason, 2010). Census sampling is a process that includes a whole sample population in the study (Bernard & Bernard, 2012).

Confirmability. After addressing dependability, credibility, and transferability, confirmability may take place (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Confirmability refers to the degree in which the findings reflect the focus of the exploration (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Through confirmability, the methodological triangulation method is useful for ensuring credibility within the analysis and establishing a clearer understanding of the data (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). The methodological triangulation process is helpful for comparing the data and responses from multiple interviews, disclosing researcher bias and verifying transcribed data (O'Reilly & Marx, 2011). I used methodological triangulation to compare the data responses from multiple interviews, through member checking follow-up interviews and company documents to establish confirmability of the study.

Summary and Transition

In Section 2, I explained the steps and research process. I collected data from semistructured interviews and relevant documents. Face-to-face semistructured interviews consisted of six open-ended questions focusing on engagement awareness strategies that helped the business maintain organizational productivity. Secondary data also came from relevant company documents in which the collection of information about employee engagement strategies used by midlevel managers within an organization. Microsoft Excel was useful for identifying and coding themes related to the similarities and differences associated with strategies that midlevel managers use to increase employee engagement. I ensured the same dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability processes through methodological triangulation, document analysis, semistructured interviews, follow-up member checking interviews, acknowledging bias, and constant participation and feedback from participants.

Analyzed data in Section 3 was useful for determining the findings of this study. In Section 3, I describe the outcomes of this study in detail. The sections are as follows: an overview of the study, presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for future studies, and conclusion of the study.

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

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory single-case study was to explore strategies that midlevel managers used in small businesses to improve employee engagement. The findings indicated that businesses should develop managerial strategies that improve employee engagement and create positive outcomes. In specific, these strategies should demonstrate clear expectations, improve leader-employee relationships and communication, and increase employees' commitment, trust, and retention. According to the findings, five leadership strategies affect employee engagement. Leaders should develop strategies that influence leader-member exchange. Managers should develop clearly defined policies and procedures that influence workplace expectations, by clarifying and reinforcing standards of operations, that result in positive attitudes and behaviors that increase the company's productivity, profitability, and sustainability. Companies that incorporate training and development strategies into the working environment could help leaders and employees understand the importance of commitment and communication. Mentoring and counseling might influence trust, loyalty, and leader-employee relationships. Recognition and reward might increase retention and motivation. Recognition programs offer prominence, motivation, and appreciation of employees.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this proposed exploratory case study was: What strategies had small business midlevel managers used to improve employee engagement? Themes from the organized data that related to the primary research questions comprised (a) management, (b) training and development, (d) communication, and (d) reward and recognition. The themes corresponded with those found in the literature review. There were gaps in the literature review that described additional engagement strategies that midlevel managers could use to improve employee engagement.

Kahn's (1990) theory of personal engagement and disengagement was helpful in interpreting and understanding the collection of data and exploring midlevel manager strategies that sustain employee engagement in the company. The findings supported Kahn’s engagement and disengagement theory. In Kahn’s theory of personal engagement and disengagement: (a) management styles and process, (b) group dynamics, (c) organizational norms, and (d) interpersonal relationships depend on unconscious roles of leaders that encourage positive workplace behaviors and relationships for the best interest of the company.

Management Theme

The findings resulted from interview data provided by SP10 indicating that managers could improve employee engagement by communicating with employees on a regular basis. SP10 stated, " Both, the owner and I feel a personal connection with the employees." SP10 indicated that when issues with employees arise in the company, the problem was resolved at that moment. SP10 also indicated that the employees received no formal counseling or mentoring. The findings based SP10's information, also supported information from the literature reviews that managers influence engagement behaviors that influence the safety and well-being of employees and the productivity, profitability, and sustainability of the company.

Effective strategies for managing behaviors and emotions influence the development of higher quality leader-employee relationships in the workplace (Little et al., 2016). Leader-member exchange is a factor of employee engagement. Immediate supervisors communicate with company leaders and lower level employees, which makes them very aware of the status of the enterprise. According to Little, Gooty, and Williams (2016), leader-member exchange influences employee perceptions of the emotion management strategies used by their leader. Senge (2006) noted that leaders who create relationships also create high organizational commitment. Managerial actions aid in fostering employee perceptions that leaders care about accomplishing goals and positively related to their assessment of the quality of their relationships. Bass (1985) indicated that transactional leaders are effective in setting goals and encouraging, inspiring, and supporting employees. Managers that display a mutual respect throughout the company maintain personnel. Line managers influence the engagement of their employees (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012). Browne (2013) suggested that leaders and staff members work towards a common goal when leaders and their staff develop business strategies and performance management systems related to individual functions and activities. To improve engagement, managers could develop relationships with senior leaders and employees through mentoring programs. Employers could also share clearly defined goals with their employees.

An important leadership trait is to develop behavioral strategies to manage negative emotions, behaviors, and attitudes in employees (Little et al., 2016). Managerial influences are dependent on the power imbalance or supervisor's ability to attach emotionally to their workers (Loi, Lamar, & Chan, 2012). Power imbalance refers to the disparity or misalignment of the social exchange process in an organization (Bakker et al., 2014). When power imbalances create gaps in the understanding of expectations, decreasing communication, and discouraging interpersonal relationships, the extent of the power imbalance also affects the engagement of the employees (Loi et al., 2012). Leaders' efforts to attend to employee needs and emotions by reframing events or modifying the situation could increase leader-employee relationships. Implementing effective engagement strategies begins with the administration (Schaufeli, 2012). Employers should develop employee engagement strategies that ensure the well-being and safety of employees, increase retention efforts, and improve leader-employee relationships. When midlevel managers include strategies that help them understand, identify, and address issues that affect the productivity, profitability, and sustainability of the business, they also improve employee engagement.

Training and Development Theme

SP10 also indicated that there was no training of any kind given or required for the managers or employees. After completing six observations, during a 2-week period, SP10 showed consistent involvement with the employees compared to SP20. SP20 seemed less secure and involved with subordinates compared to SP10. SP20 communicated uncomfortable feelings due to the lack of experience in engaging with the employees. SP20 was inexperienced in exercising midlevel management skills; therefore, the participant was unable to answer any of the interview questions. SP20 was unable to answer the interview questions due to being inexperienced in working with the employees without first consulting with SP10. SP10 indicated that the company does not incorporate techniques, such as training and development, to measure employee engagement in the organization. The document review confirmed SP10’s claim that the company had no training and development programs in place. The company did not have resources available to conduct managerial training. Data from the interviews refuted information from the literature review. However, this study confirmed that training and development techniques could benefit midlevel leaders and staff by aiding in the development an understanding of clear corporate expectations and productivity.

Training and development benefit companies in several ways. Training and development are useful tools for improving individual behaviors, knowledge, and skills to help companies achieve competitive advantages in the business industry (Garcia, Lajara, Sempere, & Lillo, 2013). Organizations that lose workers also lose money, expertise, training, and knowledge. Managers that lack experience in engaging with employees are less capable of making decisions that may help the company (Diefenbach, 2012; Gedro &Wang, 2013). Inexperienced managers need training and development to improve their decision-making process, employee performance, commitment, and organizational relationships and manage organizational behaviors, increase employee performance (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013).

Staff members who perceive organizational culture as supportive, friendly, and collaborative then experience satisfaction with their workplace, which reduces turnover intentions and increases employee moral (Dike, 2012). However, employees' dissatisfaction in their leaders' action can increase turnover intentions and decrease morale (Dike, 2012). Training and development are opportunities for managers to learn strategies that influence healthy and productive work environments for employees (Gedro & Wang, 2013). Training and development are also opportunities for leaders and employees to gain knowledge, skills, value, and insight on the importance of developing strategies that improve employee engagement.

Training and development are necessary for maximizing employee productivity in businesses (Cocchiara, Connerley, & Bell, 2010). However, some companies do not incorporate training and development into their organization. Training and development are resources by which employers and staff alike could understand organizational standards that deter harmful and unprofessional behaviors (Gedro & Wang, 2013). Not having the proper resources available forces managers to decide the sustainability of the company, which means investing in training and development or do nothing at all. Nouri and Parker (2013) indicated that career growth opportunities are beneficial to employees in that workers would commit to companies that offer career growth opportunities. Companies that include training and development increase leader-employee exchange, employee commitment, and competitive advantage.

Communication Theme

SP10 discussed the importance of listening to employees. SP10 suggested that leaders should carefully listen to employees, regardless of how large or small a request or complaint may seem. SP10 stated that addressing unprofessional behaviors occurs immediately and privately with the employees, instead of waiting. The document analysis revealed that managers did not administer written disciplinary actions for disobedient employees. According to SP10, as employers listen to their employees, they develop a better understanding of the necessities and expectations required to maintain the environment, relationships, and staff. SP10 stated, "I find that with each, I have a personal connection. I engage them all differently. They know that when they walk in we are family, but there is the business." When an issue occurs, SP10 indicated that the employees were approached individually or in group meetings. SP10 indicated that the mangers did not provide performance appraisals to the employees. Managers did not belittle or approach employees in public or around their colleagues. The findings based SP10’s information and the literature review, supported that managers should include strategies that involve engaging with employees on a regular basis to improve communication. The findings based on SP10's data refuted information suggested in the literature review that performance appraisals are necessary resources for communicating corporate requirements. The findings based SP10's information compared to the literature review also refuted that managers should develop policies that clearly describe organizational expectations. The document review revealed that the company faced a variety of risk. The document review revealed that it is necessary for companies to create performance appraisals, policies, and procedures that clearly communicate the roles and expectations of everyone in the company. Although disciplinary policies existed, no guidelines with clearly defined expectations or training and development programs exist for the employers and employees.

Communication strategies improve relationships among leaders and staff (Gordon & Gilley, 2012). Effective leaders should be able to relate to and communicate with workers. Communication strategies influence relationships between employers and their staff members (Welch, 2011). Managers who influence open communication creates opportunities for employers and employees to share strategies and ideas that could help them work towards reaching common goals. Communication strategies could include interacting on a daily basis, incorporating appraisals, and developing policies and procedures. Appraisals could include quarterly assessment that might communicate how well the employee is doing, improvements, and expectations. Employers, who permit open communication to exist in a company, allow employees express their viewpoints without fearing retribution. A lack of communication among leaders, employees, and colleagues, limits relationship within the business (Lane, 2013). Ross (2012) suggested that engagement strategies go beyond possessing a suggestion box, and managers should explain how employees might meet their goals.

Employees that feel unappreciated and disrespected engage less in the workplace. According to Gordon and Gilley (2012), inexperienced managers possess poor listening and comprehension skills and that discourages communication. Managers with inexperienced leadership skills intensify the lack of respect and trust in the workplace (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013). Managers must be willing to listen to employees' ideas that could improve the workplace. Listening might be more encouraging than communicating verbally (Guay, 2013). Guay indicated that managers have a primary responsibility to hear to their workers. Workers are not productive in companies where leaders ignore the employee complaints and harmful workplace behaviors exist (Duffy & Sperry, 2013).

Van De Mieroop and Vrolix (2014) noted that managers are continuously utilizing performance appraisals to improve competencies and meet performance requirements. However, not all companies use performance appraisals. Assessments would help managers keep track of problem behaviors with their employees. Leaders should develop policies and procedures that deter harmful practices, specify managerial responsibilities, procedures for complaints, and disciplinary actions taken (Wager & Kleinert, 2012). Ineffective leaders influence negative experiences that lessen work conditions that shape policies, procedures, and social norms (Crenshaw, 2012). Managers must foster a culture of respect and courtesy, institute policies that outline acceptable acts and establish consequences for employees who fail to comply with behavioral expectations (Gumbus & Meglich, 2012). Managerial roles, guidelines, and descriptions of immoral behaviors are reasons managers need to understand, identify, acknowledge, and react to the phenomenon.

Reward and Recognition Theme

Several times SP10 referred to everyone in the business as a family. SP10 reported that leaders and employees assemble every couple of months to show the team value and appreciation for their efforts. The business also displayed motivational quotes to encourage employees daily. The business did not have any recognition programs or procedures in effect. The findings based SP10’s data refuted the information from the literature review, which suggested that managers should reward and recognize individual efforts to increase commitment, motivation, retention, and behaviors. The document analysis revealed no data related to individual employee reward and recognition.

According to Teck-Hong and Waheed (2011), leaders should focus on strategies that include recognition, company policies, working conditions, and salaries when developing reward strategies that increase performance, productivity, and employee satisfaction. Recognition programs in businesses could increase retention, encourage and reinforce values, and positively influences productivity, and profitability (Nelson, 2012). When employees feel valued they are less likely to leave the company and turnover rates decrease, and retention rates increase (Kennett, 2013). Leaders treat employees and customers with fairness and respect improve behaviors and increase commitment and engagement. Reward and recognition strategies could benefit the company. In many businesses, staffs perceive that only the most productive employees receive recognition (Burris, 2012). Valued employees increase in retention, positive attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that improve trust and leader-employees communication and relationships.

Transactional leaders could influence job satisfaction among employees by exercising reward and recognition strategies (Bennett, 2009). Kang (2014) indicated that staff members appreciate the recognition from their immediate supervisors. Managers who exercise laissez-faire leadership skills influence decreases in exercise job satisfaction and increase turnover rates (Ho et al., 2009). Reward and recognition strategies could have a significant influence on the engagement, motivation, and retention of valued employees. When employees receive recognition for their efforts, they feel a sense of value and appreciation, which causes them to give more efforts toward the company.

Applications to Professional Practice

This research was expected to be meaningful and applicable to business practice in various ways. The objective of this study was to identify strategies that midlevel managers could use to improve employee engagement in small businesses. Employee engagement influences the productivity and profitability of an organization. When staff disengages from the workplace, productivity and profitability decrease. Without committed, actively engaged employees, leaders of large and small organizations are incapable of achieving sustainability (Riggs, 2013). Companies need efficient strategies to identify, understand, and address issues related to employee engagement.

Leader-Member Exchange Strategies

Leader-member exchange refers to the relationship between a leader and follower (Dadhich & Bhal, 2008; Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012; Kuvaas, Buch, Dysvik, & Harerem, 2012). Managerial strategies that foster positive relationships between leaders and employees affect employee engagement (Agarwal et al, 2012) and create opportunities to attain organizational goals (Ariani, 2012). Leaders who take the initiative to respond to workers influence positive work outcomes (Zhang et al., 2012). Sias and Jablin (1995) indicated that when followers perceive differences among team members such as on loyalty, effort, and task performance, they might actually become upset if the leader does not differentiate. Leader-member exchange strategies affect team performance and team commitment (Le Blanc & González-Romá, 2012).

Leader-member exchange strategies aid in developing positive relationships and behaviors among employers and employees that increase productivity (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Supportive leaderships and leader-member exchange techniques affect employee commitment and job satisfaction. When leaders develop engagement strategies that increase leader-member exchange, work values and team performance increase (Le Blanc & González-Romá, 2012). Without leader-employee relationships, organizations could not develop strategies that improve employee engagement and maintain performance, communication, and citizenship among organizational members (Vidyarthi et al., 2010).

Negative relationships exist when employees develop ineffective strategies that lack support, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment might cause leaders to participate in counterproductive behaviors that affect interpersonal relationships (Berry et al., 2012).

Policy and Procedure Strategies

Policies refer to a strategic set of values used to help managers translate the way a company operates (Minoja, 2012). Aguinis and Glavas (2012) defined policies as social responsibilities and actions of businesses, such policies and actions are implemented and influenced by stakeholders at all levels of analysis (e.g., institutional, organizational, and individual). Greening and Gray (1994) suggested that companies develop policies that focus on societal issues. Polices help managers and employees comply with the responsibilities and legal obligations of the organization (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Procedures that describe the legal obligations of the company should explain specific actions needed to execute a policy or another requirement (Minoja, 2012). Procedures provide clear instructions on the way to implement a policy, ensure uniformity and compliance across the organization, and allow monitoring of policy implementation (Chen, Ramamurthy, & Wen, 2012).

Developing and communicating clearly defined policies and procedures are an integral part of the workplace that determines the success of an organization. Among the notable advantages of effective communication is the ability to generate synergy or engagement, which is the purpose of the employees of an organization (Chen et al., 2012). Companies that develop efficient policies positively influence employee performances, attitudes, and behaviors (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). As a result, the social responsibility of the corporation influences stronger relationships, as values of supervisor commitment to ethics, equity sensitivity of managers, individual employee discretion, and salience of issues to employees increase.

Training and Development Strategies

According to Noe, Tews, and McConnell-Dachner (2010), training and development must fill-in the education gaps in a timely manner. The process of training and development has tremendous potential to create strategic alignment between employees and an organization, and link performance and customer satisfaction to the concepts of organizational behavior (Swanson, 2009). Robles (2012) stated that essential skills for business managers consist of (a) positive attitudes, (b) responsibility, (c) teamwork, (d) communication, (e) courtesy, (d) flexibility, (g) integrity, (f) interpersonal skills, (g) professionalism, and (h) work ethic. Implementing training and development programs could also increase production and aid managers and staff in reaching a common goal. When organizations learn from experience, the organization creates new knowledge (Argote, 2011). In order for organizations to keep pace with the global competitive environment, training and development must be in its culture to help employees address the uniqueness of change and challenges in the customer environment (Esbjerg et al., 2012).

Training and development programs have catapulted at the strategic level of organizations to build learning and training environment for employees (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011). According to Ford and Dickson (2012), companies are implementing and developing self-efficacy pre and post training assessment to evaluate and improve customer awareness and employee performance. Maynard, Mathieu, Gilson, O’Boyle, and Cigularov (2013) indicated organizational learning might arise, but often group collective learning does not always yield positive results. Organizations that want to have good customer service must provide customer service training on a regular basis and that training should be focused on the needs of the employees who have the most contact with customers (van Dun, Bloemer, & Henseler, 2012). It is highly recommended that service organizations strategically develop training programs where the customer service goals are clear throughout the employee learning and development.

The best practices in customer focused training and development is the ability for leaders to support and encourage employees to see the strategic goals and vision of the organization to create alignment for service quality. An assertion is that organizations that engage its employees in all aspects of the business strategies to include customer information, training and development culturally is more prone to deliver excellent service quality and improve employee performance and build leader-employee relationships for business success (Mackelprang, Jayaram, & Xu, 2012). Several discussions have focused on the effectiveness of training and development to evaluate the return on investments to see whether the teaching is meeting the needs of the employees from an organizational standpoint (Noe et al., 2010). Therefore, training and development is a key recommendation that organizations must evaluate the training before and after the employee attends, and follow up with them by way of surveys, questionnaires, and personal interventions to see the effectiveness of the training. Given the opportunity, a group's members may construct their experiences. Each learner has different past experiences and diverse perspectives.

The correct definition is dependent on the required actions, leading to the effective accomplishment of such actions and resulting in deeper insights (Tuleja & Roberts, 2011). For experiential learning to be effective, training should result in the attainment of the intended learning objectives. Argote (2011) concentrated on the learning climate and organizational learning as influencers of learning outcomes. Argote classified organizational learning as three sub-processes, which included creating, retaining, and transferring knowledge. Colleagues that share knowledge share and retain awareness that exhibits sustainability throughout the organization (Argote, 2011). No single correct approach exists that could define organizational learning (Maynard et al., 2012). Employees that include top level and midlevel managers and low-level employees need training and development that could help them understand and address the significance of employee engagement, leader-member relationships, and communication.

Mentoring Strategies

Leaders that exercise laissez-faire management strategies influence unjust behaviors that lack distrust, communication, ambiguous job descriptions, and unclear work expectations (Leiding, 2010). Managers that develop and implement formal mentoring programs must make decisions about policies, program objectives, guidelines, and activities (Hezlett & Gibson, 2005). Reasons managers might mentor could include learning and development, performance improvement, and retention (Joo, Sushko, & McLean, 2012). Managers-as-coach could include internal managers that aid low-level employees in a less structured environment. The primary focus of manager-as-coach mentoring is to establish partnership and communication (Joo et al., 2012).

The reasons companies conduct executive mentoring could include self-awareness learning and manage behavioral change and performance improvement (Joo et al., 2012). Mentors are most likely to be external professionals that assist senior and high-level managers. Executive mentoring focuses on organizational problems (Joo et al, 2012). Mentoring might take place in a systematic or structured environment. Formal mentoring is necessary for socialization management development and for understanding organizational politics. According to Joo et al. (2012), senior managers could conduct formal mentoring to help lower level employees to achieve high potential, which takes place in a structured setting. Formal mentoring focuses on people, process, and mutual benefits for all stakeholders (Joo et al, 2012). Mentoring is an opportunity for the supervisor to teach staff techniques that could increase performance, improve relationships, and reach common organizational goals.

Performance Appraisals Strategies

According to Gruman and Saks (2011), employee engagement has received increasing amounts of attention from researchers as an important element of employee performance. Employees must perceive performance appraisals as fair (Gupta & Kumar, 2012). As a face-to-face communication technique, formals appraisals afford opportunities for the supervisor to explain the staffs' overall work performance and explain needed improvements. Leaders could require that employees receive formal appraisals, which explains the employee work performance, on a quarterly basis. Employees who perceive informational and distributive and informational justice through the appraisal process are most likely to exhibit greater well-being and be engaged in their work (Gupta & Kumar, 2012).

Appraisal provides key factors in predicting employee engagement. West and Dawson (2012) indicated that if health and well-being, and associated attitudes such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover are predictors of key company outcomes (such as innovation, effectiveness, and productivity), there are many reasons to encourage positive employee attitudes (West & Dawson, 2012). The appraisal process includes adequate notice, fair hearing, and evidence-based judgement (Folger et al., 1992). Adequate notice requires organizations and their managers to publish, distribute, and explain performance standards to workers. The managers might discuss the reasons company standards must be met, and to provide for systematic and timely feedback on job performance. Fair hearing includes a formal review meeting to inform the employee of a tentative assessment describing how management derived job performance. Evidence based judgement requires the managers to apply performance standards consistently across employees, without corruption, external pressure, or personal prejudice. Employees who receive a well-structured performance appraisal actively engage more than employees who receive poor performance appraisals (West & Dawson, 2012).

Reward and Recognition Strategies

According to Dysvik and Kuvaas, (2013), rewards create employee motivations that affect retention. Maslach et al. (2001) indicated that lack of rewards and recognition can lead to burnout. Appropriate recognition and reward strategies are important for engagement. Employees that feel appreciated are less likely to leave the company (Johnson, 2015). Developing ideas that motivate staff allow workers to feel a sense of worth and appreciation.

According Kahn (1990), employees differ in their engagement as the function of staff perceptions of the roles performed received from worker benefits. While recognition and reward can lead to engagement, the lack of reward and recognition could lead to benefit (Ram & Prabhakar, 2012). A sense of return on investment might come from external rewards and recognition in addition to meaningful work. Workers might expect higher employee engagement at work to the extent that they perceive a bigger amount of rewards and recognition for their role performance (Ram & Prabhakar, 2012). Maslach et al. (2001) also proposed that lack of rewards and recognition could lead to burnout. Appropriate recognition and reward is important for engagement.

Implications for Social Change

The study added to the existing body of knowledge to develop strategies and provide knowledge on how the findings were relevant to improving professional business practices. Regarding tangible improvements to individuals, communities, cultures or societies, the six midlevel manager strategies that might improve increase employee engagement. The first strategy could be to develop trusting leader-member exchange. Managers could also develop clearly defined policies and procedures that influence workplace expectations and positive attitudes and behaviors that increase productivity, profitability, and sustainability of the company. Incorporating training and development techniques could aid leaders and employees in comprehending the importance of commitment and communication. Leaders might also include mentoring strategies that could possibly influence trust, loyalty, and leader-employee relationships. Performance appraisals could aid employees in understanding organizational expectations. Finally, reward and recognition might increase synergy, retention, and motivation.

Including advanced techniques to develop strategic plans to increase employee engagement could also support improved long-term sustainability strategies for leaders of organizations and communities. Exploring the effects of performance in the workplace might assist leaders in acquiring strategies that increase productivity and profitability. Developing strategies could reduce negative workplace behaviors and positively influence workplace performance to retain an efficient workforce. This study might help determine how leadership involvement increases employee engagement and organizational productivity. Implementing effective management strategies might help leaders understand, identify, and address behavioral barriers that decrease employee engagement.

Recommendations for Action

Understanding the results of this study might benefit the entire organization through awareness on employee engagement strategies. This study could help leaders identify, react to, and address negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that lead to distrust and a lack of communication between leaders and employees. This study could also help midlevel leaders understand the competitive advantages to maintain engaged employees. Midlevel managers could possibly develop relationships and open communication with top-level managers and employees. Midlevel and high-level managers could incorporate strategies that include training and development to educate leaders and employees on the importances of employee engagement. Leaders should listen carefully, influence healthy relationships, and develop policies to ensure the safety and well-being of employees and the company.

Training and development might also teach leaders write effective policies and understand, identify, and address barriers that lead to disengagement. Managers could implement quarterly counseling to discuss with employees their strengths and weaknesses and remind workers of company expectations and goals. Midlevel managers could include the use of plaques and awards to recognize and show appreciation to employees for their efforts and hard work. A dissemination of the results of this study might occur through business journals, conferences, and scholarly journals. I could also publicize the results of this study through consultation, seminars, and training regarding strategies that leaders of small businesses used to improve employee engagement.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings from this study warranted additional exploration of midlevel manager strategies that improve employee engagement within small, mid-sized, and larger organizations. Conducting further studies that address delimitation or limitation issues not covered in this study would be topics to conduct further research. The sample identified in this study did not represent every group of midlevel leaders in the United States. The results associated with employee engagement came from the insight and views of small business midlevel managers. SP20 articulated a limited amount of thoughts and understanding of the subject matter.

The findings of this study also warranted further exploration of employee engagement strategies recommended from the viewpoints of top-level managers’ and employees, instead of those in mid-level leadership positions. I conducted this study in the metropolitan area of Dothan, Alabama. Recommendations for future researchers could include examining employee engagement strategies that leaders use in diverse geographical locations. I would also suggest conducting a study to identify employee engagement strategies of various public, private, and non-profit organizations. A comparison between these business types could reveal engagement strategies best suited for the size of each business category.

Reflection

The composition of doctoral level research has afforded me a wealth of knowledge on employee engagement, managerial strategies, group dynamics, and interpersonal relationships. I became emotionally and physically drained and challenged with the level of data, the alignment, and details required during the research process. SP10 eagerly shared strategies used to improve the engagement of the employees in the organization. Due to inexperience with managing employees, SP20 was unable to answer any of the interview questions. SP20 always referred to SP10 with inquiries about managing the employees. As a result, this demonstrated that SP20 managed the employees in the same manner as SP10. Although there were some differences in the participants' views, I recognized the differences and similarities in challenges they faced as midlevel managers looking to retain skilled employees. The findings from this study revealed some additional techniques and strategies that managers could use to increase employee engagement.

Interviews were conducted in the meeting room for the convenience of the participants. I carefully followed the interview protocol outlined in the research design by ensuring the participants understood their rights during the research process. I ensured the participants were comfortable in the environment when asked probing, opened-ended interview questions in a conversational manner. I also confirmed that their responses were correct and understood through member checking follow-up interviews. SP10 eagerly and openly engaged in the interviews and demonstrated an interest in the study topic. Coding data was more challenging than realized; however, I consulted with a fellow researcher to strengthen the suitability of themes and increased validity of the findings. During the progression of the interviews, I understood the importance of listening and confirming answers given by the participants. The participants addressed the importance of developing open communication, motivation, and mutually respectful relationships to increase engagement among employees.

Conclusion

In conclusion, managerial performances influence employee engagement. This study revealed that trusting relationships between leaders and employees were significant factors that affect the productivity, profitability, and sustainability of a company. Without actively engaged staff, companies risk losing trust, money, expertise, and knowledge. SP10 shared the midlevel managerial strategies used to improve employee engagement in the small business as a resource that provided useful data for this doctoral study.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What you will do	What you will say—script Good afternoon! My name is Patricia Silva and I will be conducting this interview as it relates to the different strategies midlevel managers use to improve employee engagement.
Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee	Interview Question: What strategies do midlevel managers in small businesses use to improve employee engagement? Me: Before we begin, I would first like thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to participate in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to resign from this interview at any time. The study should take approximately 30 minutes; however, the time may vary depending on the time it takes for you to discuss your individualized engagement experiences and to answer and review the interview questions may vary. If you do not mind, I would like to audio record this interview for research purposes. All of the information you share with me will be kept completely confidential. I will only identify you through a number I will assign you. In two days, I will come back to conduct a follow-up member checking interview. After the interview process, your interview will be transcribed and you will receive a copy to ensure the accuracy of all information you have provided. Do you understand all the information I have just shared with you? Great, then let us begin!
• Watch for non-verbal ques • Paraphrase as needed • Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth	1. How do you as a midlevel manager define employee engagement?
	2. What strategies do you, as a midlevel manager in a small business, use to improve employee engagement?
	3. What strategies do you think your employees find most meaningful for increasing employee engagement?
	4. How do you, as a midlevel manager, measure employee engagement that improves performance?
	5. What strategies do you, as midlevel management, find is the most effective in improving employee engagement within a small business?
	6. What additional information would you like to share regarding strategies that business midlevel managers use to improve employee engagement in an organization?

Wrap up interview thanking participant	Script Thank you so much participant #09, for participating in this study. Your participation in this study help gain insight on different strategies that improve employee engagement. In two days, I will return to conduct a follow-up member checking interview. I will provide you with a transcribed copy of the previous interview so that you may check the information for accuracy and we could further discuss the study. I look forward to seeing you.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	For example: Today is 9/9/2009 the follow-up member checking interview will occur 9/14/2009. We this be okay for you? Should anything happen or you are unable to physically attend the member checking interview, please feel free to contact me at 305-340-XXXX. I can always email the information to you, if you find that to be more convenient for you. Talk to you soon!

Appendix B: Direct Observation Protocol

Direct Observation Protocol	
What I will do? *Only the behaviors of the midlevel managers will be recorded.	During the busiest times of the three days, I visited the natural setting of the midlevel managers to observe and record with their employees, customers, and colleagues in the work environment.
Duration of observations	1 hour for two weeks
Day and times	Monday, 12:00 - 1:00 Friday, 11:00 - 12:00 Saturday, 2:00 - 3:00
Observations and recorded field notes *No data with respect to lower level employees nor customers will be recorded.	1. Leader-member exchange (LMX). Leaders engage with employees. Recorded notes: SP10 was more engaged with the employees. SP20 referred to SP10 on how to manage the employees. 2. Customer exchange (CUS). Midlevel managers engage with customers. Recorded notes: SP20 seemed a little bit more comfortable in engaging with the customers; however, SP20 still referred to SP10 for answers to questions 3. Colleague exchange (CE). Midlevel managers engage with each other. Recorded notes: Both managers constantly engaged and communicated organizational goals. 4. Verbal (VC) and nonverbal cues (NC). Expressions employees express when engaging in the workplace. Recorded notes: SP20 displayed significantly less confidence and knowledge than SP10.
Wrap-up direct observations	I would leave the natural setting. Due to the lack of personnel, training, and time, SP20 lacked confidence in completing tasks and engagement.

Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either, (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person’s typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verifies any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).

Appendix C: Master Log

Study: Midlevel Manager Strategies that Enhance Employee Engagement in Small Businesses

ID # ___1___

Date	Gender	Participant's ID #:	Age	Ethnicity	Org. Level	Data type
4/10/16	F	SP10	N/A	White	Midlevel	Interview
4/10/16	F	SP20	N/A	White	Midlevel	Interview

Collected Data (Check all that apply):	Dates	Person Collected	Person Reviewed
Semantic Notes	3/28, 4/1, 4/28 4/4, 4/8, 4/9	P. Silva	P. Silva
Debriefing notes	N/A		
Interview guide notes	4/4	P. Silva	P. Silva
Information Review	4/11 and 4/13	P. Silva	P. Silva
Handwritten field notes	3/28, 4/1, 4/28 4/4, 4/8, 4/9	P. Silva	P. Silva

Expanded field notes	N/A		
Hardcopy of Electronic Document	4/10	P. Silva	P. Silva
Interview Recordings	4/4 and 4/8	P. Silva	P. Silva
Site	3/28, 4/1, 4/28 4/4, 4/8, 4/9, 4/11, and 4/13	P. Silva	P. Silva

Data Sign-out Information				
Date In	Date Out	Name	Items:	Purpose:

Organization's Level: 1 = Midlevel Managers