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# Strategies for Increasing Employee Engagement in the Service Industry

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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2016

Abstract

Strategies for Increasing Employee Engagement in the Service Industry

by

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MBA, Southern CT State University, 2003

BS, Post University, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2016

## Abstract

The annual loss to U.S. organizations consequential to a lack of employee engagement was approximately \$300 billion in 2013. Employee engagement is vital to the business sustainability of an organization. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore successful strategies that business leaders of a service organization used to increase employee engagement. The conceptual framework guiding this study was the behavior engineering model theory developed by Gilbert. A purposeful sample of 6 engineering managers was selected based on their success in creating strategies resulting in increased employee workplace engagement in a monopoly service organization in Connecticut. Semistructured interviews were employed to elicit detailed information from participants and their experiences with employee engagement. A review of company documents and website data was used to enhance the credibility of the findings. Using Yin's 5-step method assisted in identifying themes. Two themes emerged with a focus on communication and rewards, benefits, and compensation. Communication through a variety of platforms and an attractive, rewards, benefits, and compensation package appealed to employees with unique skill sets and talents that fostered an environment for increased engagement. The findings of the study may contribute to positive social change by providing business leaders with tools to enhance greater employee job satisfaction and engagement in the service industry, which may in turn lead to a more productive and engaged workforce.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to God and my Lord and Savior. All glory belongs to God, for, if you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes (Mark 9:23 NKJV). I thank my family, my children, and significant other who have supported and listened to me along this doctoral journey. A special dedication to Aliyah and Avon to carry the torch and to do even greater exploits in this lifetime.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem .....	1
Problem Statement .....	2
Purpose Statement.....	3
Nature of the Study .....	3
Research Question .....	5
Interview Questions .....	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Operational Definitions.....	7
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	8
Assumptions.....	8
Limitations .....	8
Delimitations.....	9
Significance of the Study .....	9
Contribution to Business Practice.....	9
Implications for Social Change.....	10
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	11
Behavior Engineering Model Theory .....	12
Employee Engagement .....	15
Employee Engagement Types.....	17



Employee Disengagement .....	19
Leadership.....	21
Leadership Types .....	24
Performance and Engagement Strategies.....	26
Productivity and Engagement Factors .....	35
Motivation and Employee Engagement.....	37
Engagement Initiatives.....	40
Employee Engagement and Positive Psychology .....	42
Transition and Summary.....	43
Section 2: The Project.....	45
Purpose Statement.....	45
Role of the Researcher .....	45
Participants.....	47
Research Method and Design .....	49
Research Method .....	49
Research Design.....	50
Population and Sampling .....	52
Ethical Research.....	53
Data Collection Instruments .....	54
Data Collection Technique .....	56
Data Organization Technique .....	58
Data Analysis .....	59

Reliability and Validity.....	61
Reliability.....	61
Dependability/Reliability.....	62
Validity.....	62
Credibility.....	63
Transferability.....	63
Confirmability.....	63
Transition and Summary.....	64
Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change.....	65
Introduction.....	65
Presentation of the Findings.....	65
Theme 1: Communication.....	70
Theme 2: Rewards, Benefits, and Compensation.....	77
Conclusion.....	84
Applications to Professional Practice.....	84
Implications for Social Change.....	87
Recommendations for Action.....	89
Recommendations for Further Research.....	90
Reflections.....	91
Summary and Study Conclusions.....	93
References.....	95
Appendix A: Semistructured Interview Questions.....	113

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in the Study.....114

List of Tables

Table 1. Rewards, Benefits, and Compensation for ABC Company..... 79

Table 2. Engagement Initiatives for ABC Company.....83

## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Employee engagement is not a new topic in organizational behavior research (Carasco-Saul, Kim, & Kim, 2014). Researchers defined employee engagement as the level of commitment employees have toward their organization and its goals (Anitha, 2014). Organizational success occurs when financial results and employee engagement are in balance (Little, 2012). Engagement of employees is a workplace approach that organizations might implement to achieve success in business.

### **Background of the Problem**

Kahn (1990) conceptualized engagement theory and suggested that, when personally engaged, people employ and express their preferred selves physically, cognitively, and emotionally when in role performance. Engagement might occur when employees invest their whole selves in their roles in the workplace. Workers must employ all three selves (a) emotionally, (b) cognitively, and (c) physically for engagement to occur (Jose & Mampilly, 2014).

Leaders who put forth the effort to engage employees can have healthier, more productive, and safer work environments. Engaged employees have higher retention than disengaged employees who quit more often, are less productive, negatively affect profitability, and suffer from more illnesses (Wollard, 2011). Disengaged employees do the minimum amount of work, are resistant to change, have negative attitudes, and see the work as hard labor (Marrelli, 2011). Disengagement might cause a work environment to suffer from low performing, unproductive, and negative employees.

Leaders in business organizations might maximize employee engagement by implementing strategies to increase and maintain engagement. Strategies to implement engagement in the workplace require long-term leadership commitment (Keeble-Ramsay & Armitage, 2014). Leaders play a vital role in engaging employees by maximizing their level of energy and involvement (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Leaders might commit to engaging employees in the long term to reap substantial business results.

Research has emerged about the concept of employee engagement; however, further research may be necessary to learn more about this topic (Bakker, 2011). Leaders question whether high engagement is necessary for high performance in all work environments, and some have reported low engagement with high levels of employee performance (Brown & Reilly, 2013). Additional research is necessary regarding how leaders influence employee engagement and what strategies are necessary to explain the influence (Bakker, 2011). New research may assist the development of strategies for business leaders in some industries to increase engagement.

### **Problem Statement**

The annual loss to U.S. organizations, from a lack of employee commitment and engagement, is approximately \$300 billion (Cherian & Farouq, 2013). Organizations with low employee engagement had a 32.7% decrease in operating income (Moreland, 2013). Leaders with disengaged employees are susceptible to a decline in performance, lower productivity, increased absenteeism, and decreased employee retention (Marrelli, 2011). The general business problem is disengaged employees have an adverse effect on the

ability of businesses to remain competitive. The specific business problem is some business leaders in service industries lack strategies to engage employees.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies that business leaders use to engage employees. The targeted population consisted of engineering managers from a midsized service company in New England County, Connecticut. I also reviewed company documentation as an additional data source. The findings of this study might contribute to social change by helping business leaders reduce employee attrition, improve organizational success, and provide economic stability within the community.

### **Nature of the Study**

The three methods of research considered for this study were quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. A qualitative method was the research method chosen for the study. A qualitative method allows a researcher to view the phenomena from the perspective of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Researchers use qualitative methods for exploration if no preexisting answer exists (Yin, 2014). The intent of the study was to explore strategies that business leaders use to engage employees. A quantitative approach was not suitable for this study, as this approach requires the testing of relationships between two known variables. Quantitative research emphasizes the measurement and analysis of relationships, not processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A mixed methods approach requires the use of both the qualitative and quantitative method in a research study (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). A mixed methods design was not

feasible for this study, because of cost and Walden Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) completion time constraints. A mixed methods approach is necessary when the research requires more than one method or worldview (Pearce, 2012), which was not the intent of the study.

Qualitative research has several design methods, which include case study, phenomenology, narrative research, ethnography, and grounded theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A single-case study design was the most appropriate design for this study. A qualitative case study design method allows for the understanding of a contemporary phenomenon and the use of multiple data sources (Yin, 2014). The focus of phenomenology is to study the lived experiences of the participants (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013), which was not the intent of this study. A phenomenological study requires interviewing multiple individuals with similar experiences to gain a broader perspective on the phenomenon.

The objective of the qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies that business leaders use to increase employee engagement. A narrative research study was not acceptable for this study as the focus was on exploring the life of an individual (Kar, 2012). An ethnographic study focuses on an entire culture to gain the perspective of the individuals who live in that culture (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2012), which was not the intent of the study. Grounded theory was not a suitable design for the study because the data collected is for the development of a new theory (Walker, 2012). I chose a single-case design rather than a multiple case design for this study because the focus was on a single organization. The single organization chosen for the study offered a



unique set of engagement strategies based on the premise that the company was a service organization and was a monopoly in Connecticut.

### **Research Question**

The central question for this research study was as follows: What strategies do business leaders use to increase employee engagement? I explored opportunities that business leaders use to engage employees.

### **Interview Questions**

1. How do you define employee engagement?
2. How do you increase employee engagement?
3. How do you define performance in the workplace?
4. How do you increase employee performance in the workplace?
5. How do you define productivity in the workplace?
6. How do you increase productivity?
7. How do you define disengaged employees?
8. How have disengaged employees affected performance?
9. How have disengaged employees affected the work environment?
10. How does an engaged employee become disengaged?
11. What strategies do you currently use to increase employee engagement?
12. What additional information would you like to provide that you have not already addressed?

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding the study was the behavior engineering model theory, developed by Gilbert (2007), which separates employee performance by the individual and the environment in which the employee works. Gilbert is also known as the pioneer of human performance technology who developed the human competence model to understand the importance of human performance within an organization. Gilbert explained human performance based on the two key constructs, environmental issues and worker behavior that underlie human performance in the workplace. The key constructs are associated with leadership and employee behavior. Organizations that foster a culture of leadership and employee engagement might see an improvement in employee performance. Employee performance might improve with desired results if the work culture is enhanced (Fusch & Gillespie, 2012).

In addition to the two constructs, the three general areas that affect performance include (a) information, (b) instrumentation, and (c) motivation (Gilbert, 2007). Outlined under these three areas are six conditions, analyzed to identify insufficiencies and areas for performance improvement, which include (a) data, (b) instruments, (c) incentives, (d) knowledge, (e) capacity, and (f) motives (Gilbert, 2007). These conditions are vital elements of employee behavior that affect performance and must be present for performance improvement (Yukl, 2012).

Fusch and Gillespie (2012) suggested that a gap exists between performance and the desired result, and organizations should ask questions with the desired end in mind to identify the performance gap. Gilbert (2007) indicated there are work behaviors that are

within the employees' control, and there are certain environmental issues management can control that affect employees. As applied to this study, the behavior engineering model theory holds that I would expect the propositions advanced by the theory to allow participants to explore perceptions and experiences regarding employee behavior. The behavior engineering model theory was the framework for the study to gain an understanding of how business leaders can use strategies to increase employee engagement.

### **Operational Definitions**

This section includes definitions of the terms and phrases used on the topic of employee engagement and workplace performance.

*Behavioral engagement:* Behavioral engagement is the manifestation of emotional and cognitive engagement in a physical form (Shuck & Reio, 2014).

*Cognitive engagement:* Cognitive engagement is whether employees see work as meaningful and if employees have the appropriate tools to complete the work (Shuck & Reio, 2014).

*Disengagement:* Disengagement is the withdrawal of physical, cognitive, and emotional absence from work roles to protect oneself from threat (Kahn, 1990).

*Emotional engagement:* Emotional engagement is an emotional connection one feels toward the workplace (Shuck & Reio, 2014).

*Employee engagement:* Employee engagement is the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive state of an individual employee while at work (Shuck & Herd, 2012).

*Gamification*: Gamification is a way to influence human behavior through fun, play, and challenges with application to real-world business activity (Dale, 2014).

*Presenteeism*: Presenteeism is employees who are physically present at work, but absent in mind while at work (Merrill et al., 2012).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are the essential foundation for any research study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Assumptions are what the researcher believes to be true without concrete evidence. The first assumption in this study was participants would answer honestly. The second assumption in this study was participants would recall enough information during the interview process. The third assumption was participants selected would provide the best vantage point for understanding the phenomenon.

#### **Limitations**

All research studies have a set of limitations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Limitations are factors known at the inception of the study that may affect the outcome of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The study participants included engineering managers in New England County, Connecticut, which did not permit a mixed demographic outside of the area. The qualitative single-case study was not broad in the sense that it did not allow for nonengineering-manager participants who had experienced the phenomenon to participate. Additionally, the qualitative single-case study was limited as the results were not general to all settings, industries, and populations.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations provide the parameters for research studies (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The parameters for the study included participants in New England County, Connecticut. The population included engineering managers and did not allow for participants outside of the population. The sample size in the single-case study included mitigation through data saturation. The study used a purposeful sampling of participants to obtain strategies on employee engagement.

**Significance of the Study**

Understanding the influence employee engagement has on the workplace is necessary for organizational success. Organizational success occurs when employee engagement and financial results are present (Little, 2012). Engaged employees go beyond job expectations in the work environment, are loyal, and increase organizational productivity (Anand & Banu, 2011). The research in the study was to further contribute to business practice.

**Contribution to Business Practice**

The intent of the study was to contribute information to business leaders regarding employee engagement for increased workplace engagement and performance. Employee engagement positively affects the following business outcomes: (a) consumer loyalty/engagement, (b) profitability, (c) productivity, (d) turnover, (e) safety incidents, (f) absenteeism, and (g) quality (Zhang, Avery, Bergsteiner, & More, 2014). Disengaged employees might lead to negativity in the workplace and increase stress levels, lower morale, undermine teamwork, and disrupt the smooth running of the workplace (Bagga,

2013). The study could expose ways to reduce (a) stress, (b) anxiety, (c) loss of revenue and productivity, (d) employee turnover, and (e) litigation costs. Through interviews with engineering managers, the results of this study may provide business leaders with strategies that might increase engagement in the workplace.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This study may be of value to the business organizations because employee engagement is a vital business component that has a direct effect on an organization's profitability. Increased employee engagement in a business organization might promote and develop employee self-worth and pride, thereby creating a more productive work environment (Little, 2012). Business leaders who value employees and communicate company initiatives and goals effectively with employees may increase employee engagement. Engaged employees find happiness at work, are innovative, focus on organizational interests, and create cohesive work environments (Marrelli, 2011).

Increased engagement might lead to increased productivity, employee retention, and increased performance in the workplace (Weldon, 2012). The findings of this study might contribute to social change by providing organizations with an understanding of what drives employee engagement. Business leaders may benefit from the findings of this study that provided strategies on how to promote employee engagement in the work environment. Employees may benefit from the strategies business leaders effectively implement by increased job satisfaction and meaningful work.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The objective of the qualitative study was to identify strategies business leaders could use to increase employee engagement. To gain knowledge about engagement, the researcher must understand how employee engagement and disengagement may affect performance in a business organization (Weldon, 2012). The specific focus areas revealed in the academic literature are organized based on the following topics: behavior engineering model theory, employee engagement, employee engagement types, employee disengagement, leadership, leadership types, performance and engagement strategies, productivity and engagement factors, motivation and employee engagement, engagement initiatives, employee engagement, and positive psychology. Subtopics include performance reviews and surveys, training and development, work-life balance, compensation, high performers, under performers, rewards and incentives, retaining employees, gamification and service industries, low productivity, and high productivity.

A review of the literature about employee engagement included peer-reviewed articles and journals, books, websites, dissertations, and government reports. Primary research databases included those available through the Walden University Library, ProQuest, Google Scholar, Thoreau, Sage, EBSCO Primary, and Emerald Management. Articles in this literature review were researched using peer-reviewed searches with developing themes. The themes were consistent as seen below in the literature. Research information from the literature review included 75 references. Of the 75 articles and books examined, 70 were peer-reviewed sources, 68 published within the last 3 to 5 years, representing 90% of the literature review.

### **Behavior Engineering Model Theory**

The conceptual framework guiding the study was the behavior engineering model theory developed by Gilbert (2007), which researchers have used to analyze organizational issues and identify performance gaps. Gilbert is also known as the pioneer of human performance technology who developed the human competence model to understand the importance of human performance within an organization. Gilbert explained human performance based on the premise that performance in an organization is dependent upon employee behavior and environmental issues. The two key constructs underlying human performance in the workplace include environmental issues and worker behavior. Employee performance might improve with desired results if efforts enhance workplace culture (Fusch & Gillespie, 2012).

In comparison, Kahn (1990) developed the theory of employee engagement while at work. Kahn created the theory to understand employee engagement and disengagement while at work. Theorists suggested an explanation of engagement based on the premise that employees engage or disengage depending on the conditions of work (Kahn, 1990). The constructs underlying the theory of engagement are meaningfulness, safety, and availability (Shuck & Rose, 2013). Employee engagement develops when employees have a sense of meaningfulness, safety, and availability (Shuck & Reio, 2014).

Other viewpoints regarding the theory of engagement include the positive and negative attributes of engagement. Engagement is an employee's positive or emotional attachment to his or her job, colleagues, and organization (Kapoor & Meachem, 2012). Engaged employees are (a) more productive, (b) healthier, (c) safer, and (d) have higher



retention (Wollard, 2011). In contrast, disengaged workers are less productive, have a negative effect on profitability, and quit more often (Wollard, 2011).

Kahn (1990) characterized disengagement as the disconnection of employees who tend to withdraw emotionally from work duties and the other employees while at work. Disengagement is a gradual distancing of an employee from the work role (Kahn, 1990). According to Shuck and Herd (2012), disengagement occurs when individuals begin to protect themselves emotionally, physically, and mentally when a real or perceived threat might exist while in work roles. The process of disengagement occurs in several stages; in the beginning stages of disengagement, the employee may become confused and cognitively disengage (Wollard, 2011), which may lead to an emotional disconnection. Kahn suggested in the middle stages of disengagement, individuals withdraw and defend themselves and act out of momentary attachments and detachments. The final stages of disengagement are turnover and then resignation (Wollard, 2011).

Further research is necessary to understand the process by which employees move from engaged to disengaged workers. The various levels of engagement may include (a) engaged employees, (b) disengaged employees, and (c) highly disengaged employees (Kapoor & Meachem, 2012). The process by which employees move from engaged, partially disengaged, to full disengagement, has not yet been fully explored (Shuck & Herd, 2012). Further exploration is necessary to understand what occurs between engagement and disengagement; however, researchers reviewed in the literature for this study defined the characteristics at each stage.

A related construct to employee engagement in organizational behavior is flow, advanced by Csikszentmihalyi (2014). Csikszentmihalyi suggested flow as the *holistic sensation* that people feel when they act with total engagement. When in flow, an individual may be operating at full capacity while engaged. The characteristics of when an individual is in flow include intense and focused concentration on the tasks at the present moment and the experience of an intrinsically rewarding activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

Compared to Csikszentmihalyi's (2014) flow, Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement suggested employees should invest their whole selves while in work role performance. In contrast to Csikszentmihalyi's flow, disengagement occurs when employees disconnect emotionally, physically, and cognitively from the work role performance (Shuck & Herd, 2012). Employees who disengage may not be in flow as individuals are not involved fully in the task or duties in the present moment.

The ability of a business leader to manage employee engagement is likely to increase performance and improve productivity (Kumar & Sia, 2012). To increase employee engagement, business leaders must articulate employee needs in the organization (Kapor & Meachem, 2012). Trust in management may also influence employee engagement in the organization (Zhang et al., 2014). Business leaders might play a critical role in encouraging employment engagement in the work environment; therefore, the goal of the study was to explore strategies that business leaders use to engage employees.

## **Employee Engagement**

Engagement in the workplace between employees and business leaders is critical to the success of an organization (Bakker, 2011). Employee engagement is a concept used in the management of business to measure the investment of employees (Kumar & Sia, 2012). Kahn (1990), who conceptualized engagement theory, suggested that when personally engaged, people employ and express the preferred self physically, cognitively, and emotionally, when in role performance. Engaged employees invest their whole selves in roles while in the workplace.

Kahn (1990) suggested three types of engagement: (a) cognitive, (b) emotional, and (c) behavioral engagement. *Cognitive engagement* occurs whether employees see work as meaningful or not and whether the appropriate tools are available to complete the work (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Employees perceive meaningful work through the organization's purpose, products, and services and are happy to serve the organization's customers based on their individual contribution (Subramoniam, 2013). Employees who see their work as meaningful might engage and engross themselves in the success of the company (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012).

*Emotional engagement* is a connection that causes a commitment from individuals by providing a personal sense of beliefs, pride, and knowledge to the organization (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Shuck and Rose (2013) suggested that antecedents such as stress, family, and emotional connection might affect the development of employee engagement. This type of engagement occurs when an employee demonstrates emotional connectedness and

a oneness occur with the organization. Family-focused organizations usually have an emotional connection.

*Behavioral engagement* is the manifestation of emotional and cognitive engagement in a physical form (Shuck & Reio, 2014). At this level of engagement, employees are highly productive and their contribution increases as employees' progress in their careers (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Shuck and Reio (2014) suggested that in a highly engaged work environment, employee efforts consistently increase productivity and profit. When behavioral engagement is at work, the physical effort put into the work causes high engagement and emotional and cognitive engagement increases.

Engaged employees who value the work environment and are doing meaningful work may express their ideas without fear of retribution. Measures that determine meaningful work include (a) employee surveys, (b) personal accomplishments, (c) purpose, (d) goals, (e) values, and (f) career success (Fairlie, 2011). Employees feel safe when individuals can express ideas without the perception of receiving negative feedback (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013). Implementing measurement tools to determine employee engagement allows employees to express ideas, which might be necessary to maintain and increase workplace engagement.

Employee engagement is not a singular concept that can fit in all industries, and the strategies may differ to encourage engagement based on type and size of the organization. Strategically applying different methods might establish a culture of engagement in different ways based on the structure of the organization (Shuck & Herd, 2012). Many companies use a business strategy to incorporate effective employee

engagement (Cattermole, Johnson, & Jackson, 2014). Leaders might have to examine why employees are not motivated to engage and then devise a plan that best fits their organizational needs.

Bakker (2011) suggested that because of the issues with engagement, further research might be necessary on what may affect various areas of engagement. Further research is necessary to understand how employee engagement affects public sector employees (Vigoda-Gadot, Eldor, & Schohat, 2013). Future studies should include research on workplace engagement over short and long periods of time (Bakker, 2011). The gaps in the literature provide opportunities to investigate workplace engagement through research in different industries and over certain time frames.

Employee engagement is a critical concept that organizations should implement. Further research is necessary regarding how to implement employee engagement (Anand & Banu, 2011), and how business leaders should influence employee engagement (Bakker, 2011). The research in this study might further expand the body of knowledge about employee engagement and offer strategies business leaders can use within their organizations.

### **Employee Engagement Types**

Researchers have defined employee engagement in several ways. Employee engagement is an emerging concept (Sambrook, Jones, & Doloriert, 2014), defined as a business management problem and academic term. Employee engagement is a new and emerging business idea, and senior management has noted engagement as a concept that is crucial to business success and survival (Choo, Mat, & Al-Omari, 2013). Employee

engagement is an emerging dynamic that, if ignored by businesses leaders, might hinder business success.

*Fully engaged* employees are individuals who use the entire being in the workplace. Fully engaged employees use spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental energy at work (Wollard, 2011). Employees that engage fully show an increase in work effort, productivity, innovation, and work quality (Pater & Lewis, 2012). Fully engaged workers create a better work environment for the employee and employer (Wollard, 2011).

*Highly engaged* employees work diligently and are more likely to stay employed for a number of years (Anand & Banu, 2011). Employees who work diligently, find happiness at work, are innovative, who think about the organization's interests, and create a cohesive work environment are said to be highly engaged (Marrelli, 2011). Highly engaged employees go beyond job expectations in the work environment, are loyal, and increase organizational productivity (Anand & Banu, 2011).

*Moderately engaged* employees are individuals who are at work but not fully engaged (Marrelli, 2011). According to Marrelli (2011), moderately engaged employees are individuals who show up to work to earn a paycheck and do just enough work to stay employed. Employees that were engaged in the past or are neutral can become disengaged over time if managers are not swift on addressing workplace issues (Pater & Lewis, 2012). Management within organizations should attend to employees who reduce their engagement to ensure individuals do not fall into a disengagement category.

How an organization defined emotional engagement and transactional engagement might make a difference in how employees perceive the organization. Transactional engaged employees have less emotional attachment to their employers but remain engaged (Baron, 2013). In contrast, emotionally engaged employees have higher levels of well-being and engage at a deeper level (Baron, 2013). This difference might help business leaders to determine what strategies to use to engage employees based on their level of engagement.

Based on the differences between emotionally engaged and transactionally engaged employees, business leaders may want to hire emotionally engaged employees (Baron, 2013). Transactional engagement links positively to work intensity and may show significant performance in the short term; however, over time, performance declines (Baron, 2013). Organizational leaders who focus on transactional engagement in the short term ineffectively foster leadership (Baron, 2013). Businesses that focus on hiring emotionally engaged employees might foster increased performance and effective leadership in the long term.

### **Employee Disengagement**

*Disengagement* is the withdrawal of physical, cognitive, and emotional absence from work roles to protect oneself from threat (Kahn, 1990). Disengaged employees do the least amount of work, resist change, are negative, and see the work as tedious (Marrelli, 2011). Unengaged employees are task-oriented instead of goal-oriented and usually do not have work relationships with managers and coworkers (Anand & Banu, 2011). The disengaged worker is unmotivated and protective (Kahn, 1990).

*Disengaged employees* are individuals who do not want to be at work, but are working for personal needs. Disengaged employees see work as hard, have negative attitudes, do enough to stay employed, and resist change (Marrelli, 2011). According to Anand and Banu (2011), disengaged employees are task-oriented, are not working at full potential, and have poor relationships with employees in the workplace. Disengaged employees do not value the mission and vision of the organizations for which the employees work.

Employees may transition from full engagement to disengagement for several reasons. Organizations have several reasons why employees begin new jobs eagerly and become disengaged (Anand & Banu, 2011). Employees might become disengaged because the organizations' values and goals have shifted and management conflicts of power (Pater & Lewis, 2012). According to Marrelli (2011), employees might become disengaged because employees no longer trust their supervisor, goals are not measurable, and lack of communication from leadership and supervisor which does not follow through on commitments.

Disengaged workers may separate from their work duties because of personal or professional reasons. Individuals disengage at work based on a real or perceived threat to their physical, emotional, or mental selves (Wollard, 2011). Individuals may not commit themselves completely to work duties because of other areas of satisfaction such as volunteering and hobbies (Marrelli, 2011). Employees disengage at work for a number of reasons, such as (a) lack of passion, (b) work responsibilities, or (c) management.



## **Leadership**

Leadership might be a critical factor to assist with increased engagement of the employee in the workplace. Evidence shows that business leaders may provide (a) meaningful work, (b) support and development, (c) personal resources, and (d) enhanced work relationships (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Leaders who focus on worker enthusiasm might positively affect productivity and work quality (Pater & Lewis, 2012) to increase employee engagement. Leaders who develop employees might expect employees to be enthusiastic, productive, and are more likely to stay in their employ (Serrano & Reichard, 2011).

Business leaders may need to remain committed to employee engagement on a continuous basis. Employers who demanded long-term commitments from management caused an increase in employee engagement (Keeble-Ramsay & Armitage, 2014). Open and honest communication on a continuous basis with feedback to employees might increase engagement initiatives (Powis, 2012). Communication between employees and business leaders on a consistent basis might increase employee value in the organization and, therefore, increase engagement (Powis, 2012).

Business leaders must be willing to communicate organizational goals to employees to implement the workplace approach of employee engagement. Leadership theory has the ideology that a successful leader must develop and embrace a higher level of thinking (Gambrell, Matkin, & Burbach, 2011). Research shows employee engagement as a relatively new concept, and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) must communicate this perspective from the top down (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014).

Employers who receive rewards for *best companies to work for* have senior leaders who engage employees by communicating often, are open and honest, easily accessible, and provide clear direction (Marrelli, 2011). Communication from leadership might be vital to keeping employees informed about changes to programs and new ideas and concepts.

Business leaders might incorporate employee engagement as a part of their mission statement and business strategy. Several companies have used their organizational mission to incorporate employee engagement (Cattermole et al., 2014). Increasingly, organizations are motivating, challenging, and creating employee engagement using business strategy (Cattermole et al., 2014). Organizations play a critical role in creating a flourishing environment to engage the employee, but the employee may also take action (Hazelton, 2014). Development might occur in engaged work environments through dual functions, employees, and the organization.

Human resources may aid business leaders by establishing policies and facilitating meetings on engagement. Human resource managers may facilitate employee engagement by employing a policy and using engagement assessment models to gauge high or low engagement on an individual and team basis (Bakker, 2011). Researchers demonstrated through engagement studies on a consistent basis that all employees start a new position engaged (Pater & Lewis, 2012); however, within 6 months the engagement drops to 40%, and after 10 years only 20% of employees are engaged (Marrelli, 2011). Employees are an organization's biggest asset, and finding ways to increase engagement levels will cause employees to remain committed to the organization (Smith, 2013).

Human resource strategies might play a vital role in developing and increasing employee engagement and performance. Engagement perpetuates when managers and leaders work together to increase levels of engagement thereby increasing performance (Sparrow, 2013). Organizational practices are critical for employee engagement but should align with the organization's strategic mission and human resource strategy (Choo et al., 2013). Human resource strategies and company strategic plan may bring together a collaboration of management and leaders to increase employee engagement and performance.

Engaged employees may trust that management and the organization have fair treatment toward employees. Management is likely to influence an individual's engagement in the organization when trust is present (Malinen, Wright, & Cammock, 2013). Employees are likely to disengage if the employees perceive unfair treatment of others, even if the employees themselves receive fair treatment (Baron, 2013). Trust in management is a critical link to employee engagement, and is vital for leaders to build trust to increase organizational benefits (Zhang et al., 2014). A positive influence on organizational engagement occurs when employees view higher levels of perceived justice (Malinen et al., 2013).

Communication from business leaders to management to employees might be vital to the success of an organization. Business leaders recognize that interpersonal communication is a crucial factor of productivity and engagement in the workplace (Hynes, 2012). Researchers demonstrated in a study on engagement that the CEO should communicate ideas to management to ensure implementation of engagement in the

organization (Mishra et al., 2014). Communication at all levels may ensure that the organization is working collaboratively on the common goals and mission of the organization to implement engagement.

Decision making by leadership must be sound for employees to buy into organizational change (Carter, Armenakis, Feild, & Mossholder, 2013). Employees must trust leadership and perceive that leaders are making sound decisions for the organization (Malinen et al., 2013). Managers should be aware of their actions and behavior as their decisions may drive employee engagement (Baron, 2013).

### **Leadership Types**

Leadership styles are essential to the implementation of employee engagement in the workforce. Managers engage employees in an effective way when a workplace activity is present, such as a group meeting (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013). The leadership style of supervisors has a direct association with employee engagement (Zhang et al., 2014). Employees perceive they are valued members of the organization when managers encourage employees to speak up in group meetings (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013). Effective leadership styles and employee inclusion by management causes employees to perceive they are members of the team, which may increase workplace engagement (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013).

Leadership styles might differ from an individual and organization, and some styles may be more effective at increasing engagement than others. Spiritual leadership is a style of leadership in which employees come to work looking for wholeness, spiritual support, and personal and financial growth from the work environment (Gambrell et al.,

2011). The partnership style of leadership is a bond between employee and supervisor with an emphasis on shared goals, values, and mutual respect (Zhang et al., 2014).

Spiritual leadership theory is a style of leadership which challenges (a) low morale, (b) disengaged workers, and (c) leadership styles which view workers as intellectual property (Gambrell et al., 2011). Spiritual leadership theory may be a style of leadership which has the components of a disengaged worker.

In contrast, a visionary (known as transformational or charismatic) leadership style affects employee engagement because it requires that employees become involved emotionally and that leaders provide a clear vision for the future (Zhang et al., 2014). A visionary leadership style focuses on developing trust among employees and fostering confidence in the organizational vision (Gambrell et al., 2011). Research confirmed that with visionary or transformational leadership style, employee engagement is positively affected (Zhang et al., 2014). The visionary leadership style once implemented within organizations might produce positive outcomes.

Authentic and classical are other types of leadership styles (Zhang et al., 2014). Authentic leadership occurs when the leader and follower view their actual selves with the potential to become their possible selves through self-awareness (Gambrell et al., 2011). In contrast, classical leadership requires that followers have very little involvement with the organization, vision, and goals which include low emotional, intellectual, and behavioral involvement (Zhang et al., 2014). Authentic leadership notes that through self-awareness leaders and followers may be authentic to self by their behavior and actions (Gambrell et al., 2011). Zhang et al. (2014) confirmed that

engagement is negative under the classical leadership style. Depending on the type of leadership style, organizations should note which styles are effective at engagement and which are not.

Shuck and Rose (2013) suggested there a significant number of opportunities are available for business leaders to learn how to increase employee engagement. Leaders can increase employee engagement through (a) meaningful and motivating work, (b) encouraging and mentoring employees, (c) increasing personal resources, and (d) facilitating team building by fostering coworker relationships (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Employees are likely to increase engagement when leaders make good use of time management in scheduling workgroup meetings (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013). Leaders might be privy to a number of ways to increase employee performance through engagement.

### **Performance and Engagement Strategies**

Employee engagement might affect performance. Employees who have the right job fit and are passionate about work are likely to perform well and continue to work for an organization (Marrelli, 2011). Performance affects attitude and engagement; therefore, assessments, interviews, and surveys are tools that might be used to measure performance (Moreland, 2013). On a continuum, employee engagement should be a process of learning, improvement, measurement, and action (Anand & Banu, 2011). Employee engagement and its effects on performance might create maximum results if measured on a continuous basis.

**Performance reviews and surveys.** Surveys are tools that enhance employee engagement and increase company performance (Risher, 2012). Management can analyze employee survey results to gain knowledge of how employees perceive work related issues that affect employees (Bishop, 2013), as a direct link exists between employee engagement and employee commitment. Additionally, surveys can assist in monitoring changing behavior and identify training and development needs of employees (Risher, 2012). Understanding the results of employee surveys may assist organizations in taking the necessary actions to engage employees.

Annual surveys about engagement may provide organizations with opportunities to increase and maintain employee well-being and value to increase engagement. Engagement surveys that have a high score on attitude and satisfaction confirm the following input to engagement (a) motivation, (b) satisfaction, and (c) effectiveness (Baron, 2013). Annual surveys measure employee perception and affect on engagement, enabling organizations to make adjustments, increase profitability, and achieve desired business results (Merry, 2013). Annual surveys might be crucial to organization success to keep up with changes in the economy and organizational change.

Performance reviews and surveys are tools used to link performance and engagement (Fairlie, 2011). Employers can use social media platforms to provide feedback on colleague performance (Mosley, 2013). Employers should analyze and take action on survey results on employee performance (Brown & Reilly, 2013). Managers can use the feedback from colleagues to provide an evaluation of employee performance

(Mosley, 2013). The feedback may provide an opportunity for employers to take action on low performance and engagement.

**Training and development.** Training and development in organizations might motivate and increase performance (Chaudhary, Rangnekar & Barua, 2012). Training is vital to close the gaps and to promote the strength of the organizations' employees to achieve high performance (Marrelli, 2011). Standards and performance are critical components to organizations' success (Weldon, 2012). Training employees and raising standards might be the keys to high performing employees in the workplace.

Human resource development and proper training, coaching, and tenure might be predictors for highly engaged employees. Organizations that build employee confidence and provide proper training and coaching from human resources improves employee engagement (Chaudhary et al., 2012). Highly engaged employees provided with training programs conducive to the work environment and who have tenure are more likely to have retention (Kumar & Sia, 2012). Training employees on a continuum and building confidence leads to improved employee engagement (Marrelli, 2011). Employees with improved engagement might work for the organization for a long time, which increases tenure and retention.

**Work-life balance.** Workspace and work environment might contribute to highly engaged employees in the workplace. A work-life-balance (WLB) study showed a positive correlation between employee engagement and WLB (Wasay, 2013). Open workspaces and work-from-home programs increase employee engagement and retention (Bakker, Demerouti, & Lieke, 2012). Employees who worked in organizations with part-



time employment, maternity leave, and job sharing have higher levels of engagement (Wasay, 2013). Providing employees with more flexibility to implement work-life balance in the work environment might create opportunities for higher employee engagement.

**Compensation.** Organizations that have various avenues of compensating employees may have (a) engaged, (b) retained, and (c) happy employees (Subramoniam, 2013). Leaders that offer total compensation programs for their employees may usually include (a) merit raises, (b) bonuses, (c) instant rewards, (d) tuition reimbursement, (e) training, (f) benefits, (g) gift cards, and (h) employee stock offering (Weldon, 2012). Companies should communicate compensation increases directly to employees individually based on company performance and merit increases (Mosley, 2013). Organizations that offer a total compensation package to employees and offers performance-based bonuses may attract employees who desire to meet the organization's goals.

Performance-based executive compensation leads to increased engagement, whether in the public or private sectors. Criticism has occurred regarding executive pay in the public and private sectors because the pay is not reflective of performance (Farmer, Brown, Reilly, & Bevan, 2013). Further research is necessary regarding the relationship between engagement and organizational performance in the public sector because great benefits may be reaped overall (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2013). Fairness by compensation committees might improve employee engagement with long-term performance and close the income gap (Farmer et al., 2013). Compensation allocated fairly among all

employees, not just executives, may increase engagement because all levels of employees have a hand in increasing workplace performance.

Compensation is a vital element for employees to perform well and to be productive in organizations (Ellig, 2013). Employee recognition increases motivation and performance to reap the rewards of increased pay (Weldon, 2012). Compensating employees requires organizations to compare salaries to other organizations with similar job responsibilities and performance (Ellig, 2013). Employees may be more productive when compensation matches their responsibilities.

**Employee participation.** Employee participation in decision making with management might have a direct effect on performance. Employees who participate with management in their job design and align themselves with organizational goals may contribute to individual and team performance (Tims, Bakker, Derks, & Van Rhenen, 2013). Employee participation in workplace policies crafted to provide a quality work experience may contribute to performance (Markey & Townsend, 2013). The involvement and participation of employees in meeting organizational goals contribute to performance individually and company-wide.

**High performers and underperformers.** Lack of engagement in the workplace may affect performance levels in a number of ways. Underperformance occurs in organizations from (a) low productivity, (b) boredom at work, (c) lack of engagement, (d) low success rates with organizational change, (e) low well-being, and (f) corporate bureaucracy (Little, 2012). Employee engagement remains a priority for business leaders within organizations' as the potential exists for low morale and well-being in the

economic climate of 2014 (Merry, 2014). Engaged employees and high-performance levels reduce the potential for underperformance in organizations.

High performing employees do not equate to highly engaged employees (Weldon, 2012), dealing fairly with all employees is critical to the success of an organization. Employees without high levels of engagement have reported high levels of performance (Brown & Reilly, 2013). Employers who focus only on high performers might reduce the morale, motivation, and retention of the rest of the staff (Weldon, 2012). Employers should focus on engagement for all employees and should reward employees based on their performance (Brown & Reilly, 2013).

**Rewards and incentives.** Leaders might use many avenues to establish a relationship between engagement and performance for rewarding employees. Performance aligns with engagement when (a) feedback, (b) reward, and (c) recognition opportunities exist (Weldon, 2012). The researcher demonstrated in survey findings that employee reinforcement occurs in reward-engagement-performance when the focus is on best-fit rather than best practices of a human resource and reward management program (Brown & Reilly, 2013). Leaders should have several factors at work to align engagement with performance and reward.

Performance based incentives work well for employees who understand job-related goals. Employer incentives for employee performance work well when goals are measurable, and employees might accomplish the goals (Ellig, 2013). Incentives based on revenues and not profit are best for employees (Dale, 2014). Employee incentives are

successful in the organization when goals are measurable, and revenue is the basis for incentives (Ellig, 2013).

Other noncash benefits might be highly attractive to retain and increase employee performance. Employees are consistently looking for organizations that provide work-life-balance with an increase in performance and opportunity to advance in a career (Custers, 2012). Organizations may need varied reward packages to increase engagement and maximize performance (Brown & Reilly, 2013). Maximization occurs in employee performance by meeting employee needs based on cash and noncash rewards.

Incentive and recognition programs are another opportunity to improve employee engagement. Engagement improves when incentive and recognition programs include (a) performance, (b) reward, and (c) the desired outcome (Smith, 2013). Employee incentives are valuable to reward employees when the goals are clear, and a measurable objective is achievable (Ellig, 2013). A total compensation management program is another tool organizations may use to reward employees and increase productivity, profitability, and employee job satisfaction (Weldon, 2012). A complete employee compensation program includes (a) balance of cash, (b) benefits, and (c) performance incentive rewards.

Nonmonetary compensation has increased employee retention in some organizations. Noncash benefits are vital to motivating and retaining employees (Custers, 2012). The researcher demonstrated in survey findings that 76% of employees would take a job that had lower compensation but offered more benefits (Smith, 2013). Vital to the

success of employers is to offer employment packages that have a good balance of compensation and benefits.

**Retaining employees.** Retaining employees in a poor economy may not be difficult; however, as soon as the job outlook changes, dissatisfied employees may look for other employment opportunities. In a recession, successful employers are organizations who inspire and motivate employees for a common goal (Custers, 2012). Leaders and research studies show that top performers are restless and suggest that top talent may leave as soon as job conditions improve (Smith, 2012). Once the job market improves, talented employees may be looking for better opportunities that best fit the needs of the employees.

One solution to retaining employees and reducing turnover is allowing fun in some industries (Dale, 2014). Fun is an intrinsic reward as opposed to financial rewards that are extrinsic and associated with normal work (Dale, 2014). In the hospitality industry, employee turnover is a challenge for management (Tews, Michel, & Stafford, 2013). One method to recruit and train well-qualified employees are benefits (Custers, 2012). Fun may be the answer to employee turnover as employees want more from work than monetary compensation (Tews et al., 2013). Allowing more fun in certain industries may reduce employee turnover and increase retention.

**Gamification and service industries.** Business leaders may find strategies to increase engagement and performance without using cash as a basis for reward. The preceding are some nonmonetary strategies organizations can use to increase engagement and increase performance. Employers who use gamification as a strategy to increase

engagement should not use financial incentives as a reward (Dale, 2014). Employees desire the following benefits over monetary reward (a) job flexibility, (b) additional training and development, and (c) additional paid time off and work abroad opportunities (Custers, 2013). Gamification strategies can increase employee engagement via surveys, contest participation, and comments on blogs and discussion forums (Dale, 2014). Other strategies include visits to specific areas on the company website, use of social networks, and downloaded corporate information (Dale, 2014).

Leaders of service industries can use gamification as a strategy to increase productivity and engagement. Consumer and service companies use gamification for improvements in the areas of employee engagement and consumer loyalty (Dale, 2014). Challenges to service firms include increasing productivity from front-line customer service employees while increasing sales revenue (Yu, Patterson, & Ruyter, 2013). Companies with a gamification strategy may reap employee benefits through (a) increased productivity and motivation, (b) alignment of goals and expectations for stakeholders, (c) employees and customers, (d) full engagement, and (e) employee advocacy (Dale, 2014). The benefits of gamification may increase productivity and engagement; however, this strategy does not allow implementation in certain industries.

Another opportunity for organizations to increase performance and engagement is good old-fashioned fun. Fun in the workplace has a positive effect on employee performance and engages employees in their work roles in many different ways (Tews et al., 2013). The new millennial employees created practices more suited to the millennial generation (Risher, 2012), and the practices enhanced employee performance. Fun

provides employees with the opportunity to engage. Employees can take a few moments away from completing their duties, relax, and come back to finish the tasks (Tews et al., 2013). The new millennial generation has created a change in work practices to create an opportunity for work fun that increases performance and engagement.

Substandard economic conditions have caused employers to reward employees who are high performers. Employers are rewarding high-performing employees with significant increases to retain high performers, but funds for salary increases are limited (Custers, 2012). Costs for recognition and incentive programs have proven to increase employee engagement and performance is fundamental (Smith, 2012). High performers in a substandard economy deserve the retention, recognition, and rewards from their companies.

### **Productivity and Engagement Factors**

**Low productivity.** Productivity might decline when employees are physically at work but not fully engaged. Presenteeism is a term used to define employees who are physically present at work, but absent in mind while at work (Merrill et al., 2012). Companies that engage employees receive in return increased performance, innovation, and productivity (Brown & Reilly, 2013). When Presenteeism is present, an on-the-job productivity loss occurs from the employee's engagement on personal matters (Merrill et al., 2012). Whether employees are absent in mind while at work or physically absent from work, substantial costs and loss of productivity may occur in organizations.

Job fit and the work environment can affect productivity and employee engagement. Disengaged employees decrease the morale and productivity of the

organization and undermine coworker success when an employee is not a good job fit for the organization (Moreland, 2013). High-quality work environments contribute to a productive and engaged workplace (Smith, 2011). A direct relationship exists between a quality work environment and job fit, and when both are a good match for the employee, the employee may be more productive and engaged.

Employees are not as productive when employees are experiencing stress, and the workplace is not enjoyable. Productivity might affect employees functioning in the workplace when they are experiencing stress (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). Gamification is a way to influence human behavior, through fun, play, and challenges with application to real-world business activity (Dale, 2014). Employers who find ways to make work enjoyable and less stressful for employees might increase productivity. Gamification as a motivator to employees does assist with employee innovation, skill development, and changes in behavior (Dale, 2014).

**High productivity.** Highly productive employees are consistent with certain motivational factors. The results of findings in a survey conducted on motivational factors suggest that the work environment and employment contract were the two prevailing factors affecting workplace productivity (Raskar, & Bhola, 2012). Employment contracts, management reputation, and fairness are ways to motivate workplace productivity (Liu & Zhang, 2015).

Incorporating incentive programs in employee contracts will increase morale and motivate workers to higher levels of productivity (Raskar, & Bhola, 2012). The incentives in the employment contract and reputation of management within



organizations lead to higher levels of productivity and higher compensation (Liu & Zhang, 2015). Employees that receive incentives and fair treatment from management might have increased trust for management with higher morale and may be more likely to increase productivity.

Productivity and profitability increase in organizations when engagement and strategy best fit the organizations' needs. Industries with low profitability and increased competitive pressure have an oversupply of businesses (McLaughlin, 2013). Business leaders who manage employee engagement may experience increased performance and business solutions (Anand & Banu, 2011). Some industries might raise productivity by investing in their employees and adopting a value –added market strategy for their product (McLaughlin, 2013). Leaders who want to maintain organizational profitability and productivity must manage and engage their workforce and develop market strategies that offer value.

### **Motivation and Employee Engagement**

The many constructs of the theory of motivation may affect employee engagement. Herzberg (1959) theory of motivation suggested when an achievement occurs, responsibility, and opportunity for employee growth in a job increases employee motivation (Giancola, 2014). Spreitzer (1995) suggested the psychological empowerment is a motivational idea manifested in four ways (a) meaning, (b) impact, (c) competence, and (d) self-determination. Psychological empowerment is a precursor of employee engagement, thus the more empowerment, the more engagement (Jose & Mampilly,

2014). Studies showed that motivation theory and other antecedents link to employee engagement.

Motivating employees to buy-in to changes within an organization is crucial to the success of the business. Employees who buy-in to building a culture of respect and empowered by lending their voice to the decision-making process might enhance their personal and professional lives (Brewer & Kennedy, 2013). The barriers to implementation of programs within businesses occur without employee buy-in (Witt, Olsen, & Ablah, 2013). Employees engaged as part of the culture of an organization and the decision-making process is more likely to buy-in to organizational growth and change.

Motivation and engagement in the workplace are two qualities that employees need to be successful in organizations. Engagement is necessary to the success of an organization while motivation is specific to completing job duties (Giancola, 2014). Value propositions and rewards may attract, maintain and motivate various levels of staff (Brown & Reilly, 2013). Current reporting by human resource consulting firms show low levels of engagement (Giancola, 2014) and similarly employee motivation reporting is difficult to find. Additional research is necessary to find strategies that may be used to motivate and engage employees.

Two types of motivating factors in the workplace are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Factors that drive extrinsically motivated employees are external (Giancola, 2014). Intrinsically motivated individuals are self-motivated to achieve goals and initiate

high performance and satisfaction (Bakker, 2011). Intrinsic work values and rewards within organizations increase motivation and engagement in the workplace.

Work values that include creativity, growth, openness to change, and autonomy are intrinsic (Parboteeah, Cullen, & Paik, 2013). Intrinsic rewards contribute to employee engagement, motivation, and job satisfaction (Giancola, 2014) and might be an inexpensive and powerful motivator to the employee. The relationship between intrinsic work value and rewards are opportunities for the employer to raise the bar and separate themselves from other employers.

Business leaders who motivate employees and foster positive work environments might increase performance. Findings in an analysis on higher education suggested that when the motivation potential of performance guidelines lack optimization, the organization is undermining employee effort, innovation, productivity, and motivation (Hardre' & Kollmann, 2012). Leaders who value, develop, and grow employees may achieve increased organizational performance (Boverie, Grassberger, & Law, 2013). Companies have the responsibility of keeping their employees motivated, thus leading to higher engagement and increased productivity.

Organizational leaders face several challenges to keeping employees motivated and engaged. Organizational leaders face challenges by providing work to meet individual needs and attracting the best talent to maximize productivity and growth (Little, 2012). Economic constrained environments cause companies to create motivation and productivity by balancing organizational and employee needs and ensuring they are

valued (Merry, 2014). Leaders might overcome the negative economic climate by hiring the best talent and balancing company strategy with employee needs.

### **Engagement Initiatives**

Employee engagement is most effective in organizations when several factors are at work. Determinants that enhance employee engagement include (a) work environment, (b) leadership, (c) workplace well-being, (d) team and coworker relationships, (e) training and career development, (f) compensation, and (g) organizational policies (Anitha, 2014). Employees, who share a common goal of social responsibility that might help to identify their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, enhance their engagement (Ferreira & de Oliveira, 2014). Many factors might affect employee engagement and with further research, researchers might identify the factors as listed above affecting employee engagement.

Organizational leaders must create and maintain change programs to increase performance and employee satisfaction. Organizational leaders who have issues with sustaining change programs also have a reduction in performance (Little, 2012). Change programs have a significant effect on employee innovation, satisfaction, and intrinsic rewards within businesses (Stumpf, Tymon, Favorito, & Smith, 2013). Organizational leaders who are successful at implementing and maintaining change programs can increase workplace performance.

Developing an employee value proposition with a clear set of goals may maintain employee engagement over the long-term. Organizations with a clear and concise employee value proposition may attract, retain and engage employees over the long-term

(Merry, 2014). Engagement development occurs when organizations establish a foundation for a relationship (Kaltcheva, Patino, Laric, Pitta, & Imparato, 2014). Business leaders create a sustained foundation for engagement over the long-term when they establish working relationships.

Global work environments have a profound effect on the recession and engagement has decreased from this phenomenon. The recession of 2009 caused a reduction in corporate budgets and spending on employees of which worker engagement decreased the following year (Merry, 2014). In times of uncertainty and instability, the attitudes of employees toward organizations in global work environments have serious implications (Malinen et al., 2013). Attitudes toward global work environments because of the recession have serious consequences for the organization and business leaders must take note.

Employees are crucial to the success of an organization, and increasing engagement may ensure continued success. Surveys indicated that employees feel rewarded by more benefits than cash. According to a global survey, many organizations have missed the opportunity to reward and motivate employees with nonmonetary benefits (Custers, 2012). Aflac Insurance found the current recession has caused many employees to reassess the organization's value proposition in relationship with the employer's goals (Smith, 2013). The recession has caused many employees to reassess the value of organizations with hopes of choosing the best place to work.

## **Employee Engagement and Positive Psychology**

Employees who have positive emotions may create a high level of energy and positive work environment overall. Positive emotions lead to happiness and highly successful and flourishing individuals in the workplace (Hazelton, 2014). Positive or negative meaning assigned by individuals affect their emotional responses (Keeble-Ramsay & Armitage, 2014), and this type of positive psychology influences employee engagement. Employees with low engagement who chose to assign positive emotions in the workplace may negatively affect others in the work environment.

Cognitively engaged employees are passionate about their work. A characteristic of employee's passion includes how employees value their job and how they internalize the value (Ho et al., 2011). The passion an employee feels about work extends to performance, morale, and satisfaction and engagement (Subramoniam, 2013). The relationship between passion and cognitive engagement extends to worker performance, and the job of management is to assist employees in becoming passionate about the work experience. Managers play a critical role in assisting employees on valuing their jobs, which increases passion for work and directly affects workplace engagement.

According to Robertson, Birch, and Cooper (2012), organizational leaders should focus on employees' mental well-being, not just job and work attitudes. Wellbeing is the most crucial factor in measuring the affect an organization has on employees (Anitha, 2014). Organizations may be successful in engaging employees if they consider all factors such as leadership, training and development, compensation, and psychological well-being.

## **Transition and Summary**

Section 1 was an introduction to the problem statement, purpose statement, conceptual framework, and literature review. Employee engagement in the workplace has a significant influence on performance and productivity in organizations (Anand & Banu, 2011). Exploring strategies to implement engagement in the workplace requires a long-term commitment from leadership (Keeble-Ramsay & Armitage, 2014). Leaders play a significant role in engaging employees by maximizing their level of involvement (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Leaders might commit to engaging employees in the long term to reap superior business results (Anitha, 2014). Business leaders have often used engagement theory to optimize performance (Weldon, 2012). The implementation of this management philosophy requires that all employees become committed to organizational change, which may foster benefits for all and success for the employees and the organization (Carter et al., 2013). The research findings could be of interest to business leaders who want to increase employee engagement and maximize performance.

The literature review focused on engagement theory, employee engagement, employee engagement types, employee disengagement, leadership, leadership types, performance and engagement strategies, productivity and engagement factors, motivation and employee engagement, engagement initiatives, and employee engagement and positive psychology. In my review of the literature, I recognized factors which may drive employee engagement. Increasing employee engagement in the workplace is vital to the success of business organizations. Business leaders may play a critical role in assisting organizations with implementing engagement initiatives. In Section 2, I provided detailed

information on the role of the researcher, the research method and design, and data collection information for the study. In Section 3, I provide the findings of the research study and the study's contribution and value to business practice.



## Section 2: The Project

The objective of Section 2 is to describe the purpose of the study and the research conducted. The research method and design used was a qualitative single-case study approach. In this study, I interviewed participants and reviewed company documents to identify strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement. Section 2 of this study covers (a) restatement of the purpose, (b) role of the researcher, (c) research participants, (d) research method and design, (e) population and sampling, (f) ethical research, (g) data collection instruments, (h) data collection techniques, (i) data organization techniques, and (j) reliability and validity of the study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies that business leaders use to engage employees. The targeted population consisted of engineering managers from a midsized service company in New England County, Connecticut. I also reviewed company documentation as an additional data source. The findings of this study might contribute to social change by helping business leaders reduce employee attrition, improve organizational success, and provide economic stability within the community.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this study, I conducted interviews with engineering managers in New England County, Connecticut. I served as the primary data collection instrument for this qualitative case study. Researchers performing qualitative research assume the role of the data collection instrument (Leedy & Ormond, 2005). I live in New England County,

Connecticut, and I conducted interviews at the consenting organization's location in a private office. Prior to conducting interviews, I did not have a relationship with the interview participants. In addition to interviews, I reviewed company documents. I followed the procedures detailed in the Belmont Report. The guidelines in the report were to ensure that research executed on human subjects occurs ethically (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). I mitigated bias by compiling the data based on the participants' responses and verified the validity of the responses from interviews via member checking.

Prior to the initial interviews, I communicated with the participants to ensure they were making an informed decision regarding participation in this study. The questions prepared in this study allowed me to gain the knowledge needed to complete the research. I asked the same open-ended questions in a face-to-face interview to each of the participants in the same order. I checked participant responses through member checking of interviews immediately after the initial interviews. Member checking is the process where the participants will confirm the accuracy of participant responses via review of the interpreted interview dialogue (Harper & Cole, 2012).

I collected data from the participants in the study and analyzed the information for thematic patterns. The analysis of the findings addressed the central research question: What strategies do business leaders use to increase employee engagement? The findings of this study offered strategies business leaders could use in their organizations. I included additional recommendations for further study.

## **Participants**

A qualitative case study requires the researcher to recruit participants who have experience with the phenomenon studied (Yin, 2014). The criteria for this study included engineering managers who worked for a service company and had successful strategies for employee engagement. The Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval for the qualitative single-case study. Walden University's approval number for this study is 12-14-15-0311736. Strategies to gain access to participants occurred through personal and professional relationships. Participants were asked to sign a consent form prior to the interviews. I identified a potential case study by making phone calls to engineering managers of companies in the service industry from phone books in New England County, Connecticut. If the owner/manager met the criteria for the study and agreed to participate voluntarily, I obtained his or her e-mail address and e-mailed a consent form. Company documents, archival records, company internet, website content, and other external sources were obtained to compliment interviews for data collection. I established a working relationship by encouraging participants to ask questions prior to receiving and signing the consent form sent via e-mail. An e-mail was the primary method of communication for the participants to contact me. Participants also had my phone number as another mode of communication. Once I e-mailed the consent form, and participants understood the purpose of the consent form, I addressed questions and concerns via e-mail. Once a participant returned the signed consent form, I contacted the participant to establish a time and place for face-to-face interviews. I reminded each participant of the criteria to participate in the study, the purpose of the study, and the

process of protecting their data. I requested permission to record the interview for accuracy. Once participants agreed to the recording of the interviews, I recorded and took notes. Each participant answered the same questions, which lasted approximately 30 minutes. Participants were able to withdraw from the research by canceling the interview. The cancellation of the interview would occur via e-mail or phone; however, there were no cancellations by participants. Upon completion of all interviews, data collection, member checking, coding, and analysis occurred. Participants could request a brief summary of the findings, which is available upon request. In my aim to protect the identity of the participants, I stored the names of individuals and business organizations on a USB drive in a locked file cabinet for 5 years. After 5 years, I will destroy the data from this study.

The population for this research consisted of engineering managers in New England County, Connecticut. Participants in the study could have been male or female, but all participants were male. The sampling method chosen for this study was purposeful. I selected participants through purposeful sampling, which is appropriate for case study research in justifying a sample (Draper & Swift, 2011). The sample size for this qualitative, single-case study included the population within the organization that was engineering managers. Patton (2002) suggested that qualitative inquiry does not have a set number for sample size; however, meaningful case studies might employ one participant for the sample size.

In qualitative research, narrowing down a sample size is a challenge; therefore, as a rule, the phenomenon studied suggests the sample size (Draper & Swift, 2011). The

sample size for this qualitative single-case study included six participants. The required number of participants to achieve data saturation in a qualitative study ranges from five to 50 (Dworkin, 2012). Universally, qualitative research does not have a set number of participants; however, a minimum of at least six participants is necessary, or until the population within the organization is satisfied (Draper & Swift, 2011). In qualitative research, data saturation is achieved through the depth of the sample and repetition in the data through interviews (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Data saturation consists of participants with the most knowledge to answer the question on the research topic (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). I achieved data saturation by interviewing six participants who met the criteria for the study.

### **Research Method and Design**

The research method was qualitative, and the design was a single-case study. I selected the research method and design based on the nature of the topic. The topic of employee engagement in the workplace needs further exploration. The importance of engaging employees in the business environment is crucial to the success of business organizations. A qualitative method and case study design was the best fit for this study. A qualitative case study provides the understanding of a contemporary phenomenon and the use of multiple data sources (Yin, 2014). I chose a single-case design rather than a multiple case design for this study because the focus was on a single organization.

### **Research Method**

Three methods exist for researchers, which include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed or hybrid methods. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of

a variety of data (Yin, 2014). Data types include a case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts, cultural texts, and historic and observational data based on lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Quantitative research emphasizes the relationship between two variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The quantitative method involves experimental and statistical testing. A quantitative approach was not suitable for this study, as this approach requires the testing of relationships between two known variables which was not the intent of this study. A mixed methods approach is necessary when the research requires more than one method or worldview (Venkatesh et al., 2013). This method is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research, might be time-consuming, and would not provide the data needed for this type of study. A qualitative method was the most appropriate method for this type of study to be able to use a variety of data within a real-life environment. According to Yin (2014), the qualitative method is appropriate when the research is contemporary and within a real-life context.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative single-case study design was the appropriate choice for the study. A case study inquiry is the exploration of a contemporary issue, which requires the collection of data from multiple sources of data (Yin, 2014). The instruments used in the study included interviews and company documents. Data for case studies have six origins. Yin (2014) suggested a collection of data from two of the following six available sources: (a) documentation, (b) archival records, (c) interviews, (d) participant observations, (e) site visits, and (f) physical artifacts. Case study research allows the

collection of data from multiple sources to enhance the validity of a single-case study (Wahyuni, 2012).

Qualitative researchers might also use other research design approaches including phenomenological, ethnographic design, and grounded theory. I considered each of the qualitative design approaches and found the case study inquiry the most appropriate for the qualitative case study. The single-case study inquiry was most appropriate for this study because I explored one business in which I interviewed engineering managers to gain knowledge of how business leaders use strategies to engage employees. I reviewed company documents as an additional resource to gain knowledge on the research question.

A phenomenological design approach addresses the lived or personal experiences of how individuals experience a phenomenon (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). Although a phenomenological study is suitable when the purpose is to understand lived experiences, the design was not suitable for study as the purpose of this study is to explore strategies for engagement in its natural setting. I did not choose a phenomenological design because the participants were likely to be few and would not satisfy the requirements of the sample size for a phenomenological approach.

Ethnographic research requires that the researcher observes a culture and records a group of people or events over a prolonged period (Saltmarsh, 2013). The research topic does not provide the time necessary to study a culture over a prolonged period as the intent of this study was to research a single-case study. Grounded theory allows the researcher to develop a new theory based on interactions with large groups of people

(Zarif, 2012). Grounded theory was not suitable for this study because the purpose was to gain knowledge of how a business leader might use strategies to engage employees, not to develop a new theory.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population sample for this qualitative single-case study included engineering managers who were leaders or managers based in New England County, Connecticut. Participants could have included both male and female engineering managers based on purposeful sampling, though all participants were male, and were interviewed in their natural setting. Purposeful sampling is common in qualitative research in which the researcher selects individuals and sites for the study that can provide in-depth information on the research problem (Draper & Swift, 2011). I selected participants through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is appropriate for case study research in justifying a sample (Draper & Swift, 2011). The criteria for selecting participants in the study included engineering managers who worked for a service company and had strategies for employee engagement. Engineering managers selected managed at least two employees and were able to recommend strategies that would increase engagement and employee performance in the workplace.

Data saturation determines the sample size (Walker, 2012). The sample size should not be so large that the researcher is unable to analyze the data gathered; however, it should be adequate to answer the research question (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). The required number of participants to achieve data saturation in a qualitative study ranges from five to 50 (Dworkin, 2012). Universally, qualitative research does not have a set



number of participants; however, a minimum of at least six participants is necessary, or until the population within the organization studied is satisfied (Draper & Swift, 2011). Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) achieved data saturation within the first six interviews. I justified the sample size in this study based on the criteria. I ensured data saturation by interviewing six participants for this research who were engineering managers and met the criteria for the study.

The quality of the data is more vital than the quantity (Draper & Swift, 2011). The interviews and company documents provided information on employee engagement and the organization's engagement strategies and initiatives. The findings of this study revealed strategies business leaders could use to increase engagement. The findings not only identified how to increase employee engagement, but they also identified engagement initiatives leaders could use to employ engagement in the workplace.

### **Ethical Research**

I coded all information obtained from each participant to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants. Researchers must ensure the confidentiality of participants and maintain ethical conduct (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013). I invited participants to the study via e-mail invitation and upon acceptance; I addressed any concerns at that moment regarding the informed consent form. Participants must provide informed consent for participation in the research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011).

The interview took place at a location that was convenient for the participants. The average completion time of the interview was 30 minutes; however, more or less time was available per participant. Interviews took more or less time based on the

response of the participants. The participants could withdraw from the interview by contacting the researcher, via e-mail or phone contact, without any repercussions; however, no participants withdrew from the study.

I will maintain data collected from the study on a USB drive, in a locked cabinet for 5 years, under my control to protect the rights of the participants. The files on a USB drive were password protected to prevent unauthorized access. To ensure confidentiality, participant names were filed using a coding system. The use of a coding system is a strategy the investigator could use to ensure confidentiality of the participants (Gibson et al., 2013). After 5 years, I will destroy the USB drive along with any electronic media and shred paper documents.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument for the study. I used semistructured interviews for data collection. Semistructured interviews provide new ideas throughout the interview process based upon what the interviewee conveys (Harper & Cole, 2012). Each interview consisted of 12 open-ended questions covering participants' experience and perceptions of strategies that business leaders use to increase employee engagement (see Appendix A). I used a voice recording in conjunction with the paper instrument. Member checking was completed immediately after the initial interview. Additionally, company documents, archival records, company internet, website content, and other external sources complimented semistructured interviews for data collection. Yin (2014) recommended applying interview data with (a)

documentation, (b) archival records, (c) direct observations, (d) participant-observation, and (e) physical artifacts.

Upon IRB approval, I encouraged potential participants to participate in the study by e-mailing a consent form explaining the risks and benefits of the study. I was available to address any concerns and answer questions that had arisen via phone contact. The interview was approximately 30 minutes; however, more or less time was available for each participant. Once the interview was complete, data collection, coding, and analysis did occur. Participants reviewed interpretations of the dialog of the interviews through word documents as a part of the follow-up interview process. I enhanced the reliability and validity of the collection instrument through member checking by completing a review of the data from the interviews with each of the participants. Member checking is the process by which participants will review the interpretations of the dialog in the interview process to ensure validity (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Member checking ensured that I was reporting the information accurately from each participant. To ensure validity and consistency of the research process each of the participants engaged in an interview protocol based on the standardized interview process. Each of the participants answered the same questions. The information gathered from the interviews was stored in a locked cabinet. After 5 years, I will destroy the USB drive along with any electronic media and shred paper documents.

Data collection is vital for obtaining pertinent data about the central research question of what strategies do business leaders use to increase employee engagement. The primary collection instrument was to solicit answers to support the central research

question. Data collection occurred verbatim from the participants to identify strategies that business leaders used in the work environment.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Qualitative researchers often use interviews to collect data on research studies (Yin, 2014). Semistructured interviews and the collection of company documents pertaining to engagement were the research instruments for this qualitative case study. A case study inquiry requires the collection of data from multiple sources of data (Yin, 2014). I scheduled semistructured interviews using the following protocol. I scheduled a date, time, and location of which both the participant and I could agree. I obtained permission and used their location in a private meeting room.

Participants answered questions regarding their personal knowledge of employee engagement and increasing employee performance in the workplace. The interview included 12 questions asked face-to-face of the participants who were engineering managers. The interview was approximately 30 minutes; however, more or less time was available for each participant. The interviews included a question on how business leaders increase employee engagement. Interviews of participants did occur face-to-face and responses were tape-recorded via the smart pen for the immediacy of data collection. In addition to semistructured interviews, I augmented data collected from company documents. Company documentation, archival data, note taking, and other external sources were useful. The analysis of the findings revealed strategies that could increase engagement and performance within organizations.

Advantages of data collection techniques include (a) the opportunity to gain insight on the topic of engagement, (b) to gain an understanding of engagement from the participant's perspective, and (c) usefulness for gathering evidence for the study (Rowley, 2012). Disadvantages of data collection techniques include (a) bias, (b) time constraints, (c) expensive collection methods, and (d) participants may feel like the researcher is intrusive (Rowley, 2012). A pilot study is not applicable to the study after IRB approval. According to Yin (2014), a pilot study will be necessary in a complicated case study to detect any issues in the data collection process before the actual case study. A pilot study was not necessary in this single-case study, as it was not a complicated case study.

Upon receiving approval from Walden University IRB, I followed the following protocol for the research study. I gathered contact information from potential study participants. I made initial contact with the participants and clarified any questions about the study and informed consent form. I retrieved the informed consent form via e-mail or in person. I scheduled interviews and met with participants face-to-face. I imported data into NVivo 10.

Prior to importing the data collected into Microsoft Word and completing the data analysis, I contacted the participants to verify the accuracy of the interviews through the member checking process via face-to-face as suggested by Harper and Cole (2012). Member checking is the process by which the researcher will restate or summarize the information collected from the interview and question the participant to determine the accuracy (Harper & Cole, 2012). If the participant decided to make changes to the

information collected from the interview, I made notes to the original document on the changes made by the participant. I analyzed the data. Yin (2014) recommended the following process for data analysis (a) compiling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, and (e) concluding the data. I used this process to manually analyze the data and imported the data into NVivo10.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Data organization is a vital component for analyzing and interpreting data in the study. Case study research requires continuous organization and examination of the data to be interpreted (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). I collected data from each participant in the study, identified by a number, recorded, and coded on an Excel spreadsheet. The researcher can achieve anonymity and confidentiality by coding each participant (Gibson et al., 2013).

I transcribed, analyzed, and saved to a USB drive the data collected. Access to the information was restricted to only the researcher to prevent unauthorized access to the participants' responses. I maintained the data collected from the study on a USB drive, in a locked cabinet, under my control to protect the rights of participants. Confidential data should be stored to ensure the protection of participants (Gibson et al., 2013). I stored data on a password-protected USB drive to prevent unauthorized access. I coded the participants' names to ensure confidentiality. After 5 years, I will remove the USB drive from the locked cabinet, destroy electronic media, and shred paper documents.

## **Data Analysis**

I used a qualitative single-case study method, which included participant interviews and company documentation. All case study analysis should use a general analytic strategy because the techniques are not well defined (Yin, 2014). Company documentation included newsletters, archival data, and electronic data.

The Yin five-step process (2014) formed the basis for qualitative analysis: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. After transcribing interviews and gathering company documentation, I completed a manual analysis. I compiled the interviews, company documents, and member checking. I transferred all data into Microsoft Word. I disassembled the data by each participant for manual analysis. Data was then reassembled and analyzed manually for themes. I then highlighted the themes in Word based on my manual analysis. The data was then imported into NVivo 10, disassembled, reassembled, and interpreted. The interpretation of the data revealed themes that supported the manual analysis. The data concluded with two main themes. The themes provided strategies business leaders could use within the workplace to engage employees.

The purpose of data analysis was to identify themes that answer the research question. In qualitative research, data analysis is a significant step in the process of the research (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). Data analysis involves identifying meaningful themes, patterns, and descriptions that answer the central research question (Yin, 2014). I organized the collected data into categories regarding the literature review. For topics, I used engagement theory, employee engagement, defining employee engagement,

employee disengagement, performance and engagement strategies, motivation and employee engagement, engagement types and initiatives, and employee engagement and positive psychology. I analyzed the data using the following process (a) compiling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, and (e) concluding the data (Yin, 2014).

NVivo 10 software is a computer-aided software (CAQDAS) used to categorize and code qualitative data analysis (Rademaker, Grace, & Curda, 2012). Researchers can use data analysis software for creating themes (Garrett-Howard, 2012). Advantages of using NVivo 10 software includes the ability to use a continuous coding scheme, ability to compile data into a single location, and it provides easy access to information (Rowley, 2012). The NVivo 10 software allowed me to verify the themes identified through the manual analysis and the categories identified in the literature review.

The conceptual framework is the link between the method, the literature, and the findings of the study (Borrego, Foster, & Froyd, 2014). The framework for the study is behavior engineering model theory by Gilbert (1990). I analyzed data in view of Gilbert's theory of performance and behavior. I selected the framework to assist me in interpreting the data collected for the study. Exploring engagement through the view of Gilbert assisted me in establishing themes that supported the phenomenon. I explored strategies through the lens of Gilbert by comparing and contrasting themes in a review of the literature. Through member checking, I verified the accuracy of the data collected. I analyzed data by the consistency of recurring themes in the literature and compared my findings to new research published since writing the proposal to validate the findings.



Data analysis focuses on the central research question in the study. The focus of interview questions in a study is to gain insight into the phenomenon studied (Rowley, 2012). A researchers' goal is to find common themes based on the experiences of participants (Jennings & Van Horn, 2012). In qualitative research, theme development is the focus of data analysis.

### **Reliability and Validity**

The value of research is dependent on the level of trust others place in the researcher's findings. Qualitative researchers demonstrate diligence to establish trust in the findings of a research study, whereas quantitative researchers demonstrate reliability and validity (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The information that follows contains data on the use of a case-study protocol in qualitative research.

#### **Reliability**

The consistency of the research process including the research questions, data collection, data interpretation, and researcher created the base for the reliability of the study. In case study research, the reliability of research occurs if other researchers will follow the same procedures in the study and obtain the same results (Yin, 2014). The information gathered would be detailed and identical for each participant in the study. The accuracy of transcription responses from participants will ensure the reliability of the instruments. Researchers seek to build trustworthiness in qualitative research (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Guba (1981) developed the following model that addresses the four constructs of qualitative research (a) dependability, (b) credibility, (c) transferability, and (d) confirmability.

**Dependability/Reliability**

Research is valuable to other researchers when researchers follow it.

Dependability occurs when another researcher will replicate the audit trail used by the researcher (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Reliability is synonymous with dependability. I addressed dependability by requesting that participants verify the accuracy of the data through member checking. Member checking is a quality control technique where researchers improve their interpretation of the data through participant review of the interview dialogue (Harper & Cole, 2012).

**Validity**

Validity in qualitative research is dependent on trustworthiness and the experience of the researcher (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Trustworthiness is analogous to validity. To achieve internal validity in qualitative research, the researcher should review data for consistency among participants (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). In case study research, validity improves by using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2014). I addressed validity by collecting data from multiple sources, which include conducting interviews and review of company documentation. I conducted interviews in a consistent manner for each participant (see Appendix A). In qualitative research, it is vital to distinguish between credibility and transferability, which are equivalent to internal and external validity respectively (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). Ensuring credibility is a vital factor in establishing trustworthiness (Harper & Cole, 2012).

**Credibility**

In qualitative research, the experiences of the participants confirm credibility. Credibility occurs when the researcher establishes a parallel among participants by a review of the transcripts (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The researcher ensured credibility through member checking. Member checking is the process where the participants will confirm their responses via review of the interview dialogue interpreted by the researcher (Harper & Cole, 2012).

**Transferability**

Transferability occurs when research findings are applicable in other contexts or with other participants (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). External validity is synonymous with transferability because the research findings will apply to other circumstances (Harper & Cole, 2012). To ensure transferability, I provided details about the geographic location and industry type. Providing a geographic location and industry type ensured that transferability does not occur.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability occurs at the following three constructs (a) credibility, (b) transferability, and (c) dependability (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Research findings must be objective and show the findings of the participants and not the researcher's preference (Harper & Cole, 2012). To establish confirmability in my study, I disclosed researcher bias and personal issues in the study. The researcher has no biases or personal issues to this study as this is the first time she completed a study on this topic. The researcher eliminated any biases that did occur through member checking, which is a review of the

interview dialogue by the participants to ensure the accuracy of the data collected by the researcher.

The researcher ensured that data saturation occurred in this qualitative single-case study. Data saturation determines the sample size (Walker, 2012). The sample size should not be so large that the researcher is unable to analyze the data gathered, however, adequate to answer the research question (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). The required number of participants to achieve data saturation in a qualitative study ranges from five to 50 (Dworkin, 2012). Guest et al. (2006) achieved data saturation within the first six interviews. The researcher ensured data saturation by interviewing at least six participants for this research study that were engineering managers and met the criteria for the study.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 2 included vital information on the role of the researcher, participants, and the research and design method for this type of study. I explored population and sampling methods, ethical research, and data collection: instruments, techniques, organizations, analysis, and reliability and validity. Section 3 includes the findings of the study and recommendations made to further research and close gaps in the literature on the subject of employee engagement and the relationship to performance in the workplace.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies that business leaders use to engage employees. Section 3 includes the findings of the research study. In addition, Section 3 includes (a) presentation of findings, (b) applications to professional practice, (c) implications for social change, (d) recommendations for action, (e) recommendations for further research, (f) reflections, and (g) summary and study conclusions. The emergent themes extracted from the interviews and triangulated data sources formed the findings of the study. The findings of the study aligned with the research question based on participant responses, member checking, and company documentation that included: newsletters, archival data, and website data, which demonstrated the relationship of the findings to the conceptual framework and the literature. Finally, I concluded the study with recommendations for further research, reflections, and a summary conclusion.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

The intent of this qualitative, single-case study was to answer the central research question: What strategies do business leaders use to increase employee engagement? To answer the question, I conducted face-to-face interviews with six engineering managers in a service organization designated ABC Company (pseudonym) in New England County, Connecticut. ABC Company is a U.S.-based diversified company with \$30 billion in assets and operations in 25 states, created through a merger in December 2015.

Seven engineering managers of ABC Company in New England County, Connecticut, received invitations to participate in the study and six responded. I achieved data saturation with the sixth interview, at which point no new information or concepts were emerging. Data saturation consists of participants with the most knowledge to answer the question on the research topic at which point the quality of data is achieved (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). According to Dworkin (2012), the required number of participants to achieve data saturation in a qualitative study ranges from five to 50. Guest et al. (2006) achieved data saturation within the first six interviews. Data saturation occurred in this study with six interviews as no new data emerged. The sample size in this case study included mitigation through data saturation. A qualitative case study design may provide the understanding of a contemporary phenomenon and requires the collection of data from multiple data sources (Yin, 2014). A case study approach was the most efficient approach for this study that revealed strategies leaders could use to increase employee engagement.

The criteria for selecting participants for the study included engineering managers, who worked for a service company, and were successful in creating strategies to increase employee engagement in the work environment. The engineering managers selected each supervised at least two employees. Interviews took place in a private office where participants could feel comfortable with providing detailed answers to each semistructured interview question and did not last more than 60 minutes. Participants responded to the same 12 open-ended interview questions (Appendix A). Interviews of participants did occur face-to-face and responses were tape-recorded via the smart pen for

the immediacy of data collection. I verified the accuracy of participant responses through a process of member checking as suggested by Harper & Cole (2012). Member checking also provided an opportunity to gain additional data from participants that were not articulated in the initial interview. The purpose of each question was to extract pertinent information from each participant about his experience with employee engagement. Each participant followed the same standardized interview protocol.

Case study research involves the use of methodological triangulation with at least two data sources for data analysis. Methodological triangulation requires the use of multiple data collection methods regarding a case study design (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, (2014). Yin (2014) recommended applying interview data with (a) documentation, (b) archival records, (c) direct observations, (d) participant-observation, or (e) physical artifacts. To triangulate and affirm the data from semistructured face-to-face interviews, I reviewed ABC Company documentation which included, newsletters, archival data, and website data regarding engagement strategies. Data triangulation using in-depth individual interviews in qualitative research may result in a broader understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Carter et al., 2014).

ABC Company used newsletters as a resource to communicate with employees which displayed employee engagement initiatives, accolades of employees, and other company information. Archival data for ABC Company used in this study exhibited employee engagement initiatives, benefits, and assets of the organization. Website data provided rewards, benefits, and compensation, and employee engagement initiatives in this study.

As described in Section 2, the Yin five-step process (2014) formed the basis for qualitative analysis: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. After transcribing interviews and gathering company documentation, I completed a manual analysis. I compiled the interviews, company documents, and member checking. I transferred all data into Microsoft Word. I disassembled the data by each participant for manual analysis. Data was then reassembled and analyzed manually for themes. I then highlighted the themes in Word based on my manual analysis. The data was then imported into NVivo 10, disassembled, reassembled, and interpreted. The interpretation of the data revealed themes that supported the manual analysis. The data concluded with two main themes. The themes that emerged were critical for business leaders who could use these strategies to increase workplace engagement.

Based on the research question, analysis of the data emerged the following two main themes:

1. Communication
2. Rewards, Benefits, Compensation.

The results confirmed the two main themes I identified in my manual assessment and revealed the following strategies that could be used to increase employee engagement including communication and rewards, benefits, and compensation.

The conceptual framework guiding the study was the behavior engineering model theory developed by Gilbert (2007), which researchers used to analyze organizational issues and identify performance gaps. The data from the participants supported the behavior engineering model theory because employee engagement and leadership drive



human performance in the workplace. Leadership is an antecedent of many subsequent factors, including employee engagement, that leads to desirable consequences such as organizational performance (Carasco-Saul et al., 2014). Employee performance might improve with desired results if efforts enhance workplace culture (Fusch & Gillespie, 2012). Organizations that foster a culture of engagement may achieve increased employee performance. Performance in an organization is vital to organizational success for increased profits (Kim & Schachter, 2015). Developing strategies leaders could use to increase employee engagement is critical to business success.

The central research question for the study was as follows: What strategies do business leaders use to increase employee engagement?

The two main themes included communication and rewards, benefits, and compensation that answer the research question and reveal strategies that business leaders could use to increase engagement. The first main theme of communication is vital to organizational success. According to Jiang and Men (2015), employee engagement increases when leaders in organizations enable employees to exert control over information sharing, decision making, and truthfully communicate to the employees. Communication competence and leadership styles are the landscape through which supervisor behavior and the effect on employee outcomes can be examined (Mikkelsen, York, & Arritola, 2015). A total of six out of six participants (100%) indicated that communication was an essential strategy for increasing employee engagement. The majority of the participants believed that face-to-face communication was the most appropriate form of communication compared to e-mail. The participants reported that

with face-to-face communication they could view the body language of the other party. Participants also articulated that with effective communication a culture of caring for employees might increase employee engagement. Caring was an element that extended the knowledge of the literature. Of the six participants, two (33%) explained how caring about their employees could increase employee engagement.

The second theme, rewards, benefits, and compensation was another strategy that included participant responses, company documents, and website data that were essential to employee development and keeping employees on track to increased engagement. Within the second theme is employee engagement initiatives that leaders could use to have employees buy into the concept of employee engagement. One participant explained the company initiated a survey on engagement, and the results showed employee engagement was lacking at his location. Employee engagement initiatives, when implemented, can be vital to the success of the employees and the organization.

### **Theme 1: Communication**

Communication is a valuable strategy for increasing employee engagement. An organization's communication climate is an important factor that affects employee engagement (Jiang & Men, 2015). Leaders who are more effective in communicating with employees might increase employee outcomes of satisfaction, motivation, and engagement (Mikkelsen et al., 2015). Organizations that openly share substantial, relevant, and truthful information with employees encourage employee participation and promote an atmosphere in which employees are likely to feel engaged (Jiang & Men, 2015). Employees may feel valued and motivated in an organization where leadership

communication is substantial, which leads to increased employee engagement (Mikkelsen et al., 2015). Communicating face-to-face was the best form of communication according to the participants in this study. One participant stated,

I grew up in an age with face-to-face conversation. Today's conversation is the smartphone, sending an e-mail, or text. Technology has made it a lot more difficult to communicate. I am old school, so I like face-to-face conversations. If talking about engagement, I want to have a conversation with you to see what you have to say. I want to get your reaction and see your body language. Get rid of e-mail and text to increase employee engagement.

These findings were consistent with the literature. According to Naujokaitiene, Tereseviciene, and Zydziunaite (2015), the support of managers ensures greater resources, enhanced communication between departments, and superior decision-making. In the words of one participant,

We recently had a meeting between two departments and discussed that e-mails would not be an accepted form of communication to close the communication gap between the departments. Employees will physically have to talk to each other, have a conversation, otherwise, they did not communicate. The employees in the two departments can send a follow-up e-mail to notate what the physical conversation was about and any agreed upon ideas. Employee engagement can be costly for today's corporations, due to the expense of finding, hiring, training, especially engineers; you cannot afford to lose the human investment. More

employee engagement sounds great; however, everyone is busy, and therefore, it is a struggle to have a face-to-face conversation.

These findings supported the literature. According to Alagaraja and Shuck (2015), the removal of barriers between departments can facilitate cooperation. Organizational support leads to positive, constructive responses from employees (Naujokaitiene et al., 2015). The cost of retention through proactive talent management programs is less than the cost of turnover; therefore, leaders need to have effective employee retention strategies to avoid losing valued employees (Bhattacharyya, 2015). In the words of one participant,

I like to engage with employees face-to-face instead of e-mail because a lot of conversation is lost in translation. I like face-to-face communication and probing of my people because you can tell when someone is not engaged via body language and eye contact. I always like to make sure I understand each person because everyone has a different personality. I communicate with my employees during the midyear and end of the year by asking them, where they see themselves. Do you have a 5 or 10-year plan? Do you want personal growth and upward mobility? Do you want to get a degree? As a manager, I explain to my employees what they need to do to obtain a degree and achieve upward mobility. I talk to my employees on a daily basis to find out what is on their agenda. I have one-on-one discussions monthly, and I am an active listener. I take notes on what I hear to make their jobs easier.

According to Mikkelsen et al. (2015), supervisors who effectively communicate with employees could increase employee outcomes and benefit the organization with increased productivity and reduced employee turnover. According to one participant, “Communication and establishing mechanisms to increase engagement is vital for good leadership.” In the words of one participant, “Face-to-face conversation is important especially when you receive an e-mail from someone who is in the next cubicle.”

One participant stated,

The company has an internal newsletter for communication throughout the organization. All organizations not only want to communicate but communicate better. I am consistent about verbal, face-to-face communication. If an issue is festering, it is important to communicate to employees to get things out on the table.

One participant explained,

Due to the size of the corporation; it is sometimes hard to communicate face-to-face. Our organization’s current CEO has regular company-wide regular meeting forums for the employees. Employees say we need more communication from our senior leaders. The senior leaders have quarterly forums; however, not everyone can attend. The forum meetings are 45 minutes to 1-hour presentations. The senior leader may ask if anyone has a question in a room of 300 to 400 people. Although there may be questions, usually no one asks a question. Communication is a two-way street. Another strategy I use is over-communication with employees.

These findings were consistent with the literature. According to Jiang and Men (2015), organizational communication is a process that promotes trust and credibility, which drives employee engagement. One participant stated, “The company has always communicated initiatives to the employees. All employees will be concerned with the organizational change; therefore, communication is important, and listening is a very important part of communicating.”

Organizational change is necessary for organizations to grow and prosper (Carter et al., 2013). It is important that leaders of organizations communicate with employees when necessary on all levels. Communication is an essential strategy to increasing employee engagement. Each participant in the study agreed that communication was an important factor in increasing employee engagement. Most of the participants reported that face-to-face communication was an important avenue to use when dealing with employees. Other effective methods of communicating within the organization included newsletters and open forums with senior management. The least effective strategy for communicating within the organization according to the participants was e-mail communication. Participants also explained that with effective communication and a leadership mindset of serving and caring for employees, increased engagement might occur.

**Caring.** A culture of caring for employees promotes hard work and increased levels of employee engagement. Leaders come with the mindset of serving, and they care deeply about employee development and problem-solving for the customers and employees (Chen & Manning, 2015). Service organizations are increasingly using teams

to improve service quality, productivity, and to increase organizational competitiveness (Guchait, 2016). Service-focused leadership appeared to have stronger relationships with service climate than did other forms of leadership (Bowen & Schneider, 2014). Leaders play a vital role creating the social climate for which employee service behavior is enacted, thus increasing customer outcomes, such as, increased employee engagement and team engagement.

Caring was an outlier to me that got my attention as participants provided examples of how employee engagement can be increased through caring which could extend knowledge in the literature with further research. A total of two out of six participants (33%) explained how caring affects employee engagement. In the words of one participant:

If my employees need a tool or have to go to the doctor's office, I am here to assist them. They are here from early morning to late afternoon. I always know where they are because they are in the field, and they have GPS on the trucks. I want to make sure the personal needs of the employees are met and that I am in lockstep with them. I want to be ahead of the curve to meet my employees' needs. The family is important, and I want to ensure that I take care of my employees. I want to ensure I know what my employees feel and that they are happy when they come to work. Employees have family members that are getting older and are caretakers of older parents along with kids that are getting older. I try to understand every aspect of an employee who is working for me. I want to ensure that employees are okay because they might be going through something and their

mind is not at work. It is important that they attend to their personal needs. I try to keep the pulse of what employees are doing during and after work. I call after work hours to find out how employees are doing and if an employee is sick, I send fruit baskets to them. It is nice to be liked and loved (although I do not like these terms). I make sure that I, as a manager, clearly interface and coexist with my employees.

These findings support the literature. According to Chen and Manning (2015), when the philosophy of a leader is service oriented; the belief is, if the leader looks after the employees' interest, they will, in turn, look after the customers' interest and revenue will follow. Mirabito and Berry (2015) suggested, intercommunication between the customer and the provider is often vital to service performance. According to one participant:

People say you have to show that you care about others; however, you actually have to care about them as an individual, their well-being and lead by example. The important part is you cannot act as if you care about others, you have to really care. It will eventually come across to employees. People only perform and are engaged for managers and leaders they know respect and care about them.

Leaders who are supportive and caring implore an engaged staff (Hollis, 2015). A culture of servant leadership leads to success within an organization, where over time there is a positive connection between the company culture and financial profits (Chen & Manning, 2015). Caring is an element that leaders might use to engage employees in the workplace (Chen & Manning, 2015). Caring suggests that an organization values their



employees and cares about their well-being (Hollis, 2015). Organizations that care about employee well-being may experience more engagement from employees (Duffy, Autin, Allan, & Douglass, 2014). Employees that think that they can add value or make a difference in the organization in which they work are cognitively engaged (Shuck & Herd, 2012). Leaders who exhibit an element of caring for employees might experience increased levels of employee engagement in the workplace.

### **Theme 2: Rewards, Benefits, and Compensation**

Relating to rewards, benefits, and compensation, responses from participants as well as company documents and website data confirmed the findings of previous research. A total of two out of six participants (33%) explained how rewards, benefits, and compensation affect employee engagement. Rewards, benefits, and compensation is an essential component of employee engagement (Brown, 2014). Organizational support regarding, both financial and nonfinancial resources, counters the negative effects of stressful job demands and poor working conditions and increases engagement (Jiang & Men, 2015). A lack of job resources might lead to employee disengagement (Jones & King, 2013).

The participants chose an organization based on the types of rewards, benefits, and compensation they receive. The choice of benefits provided by employers must show value to employees, as well as efficiency to the employer (Brown, 2014). These participants assessed the skills and talents they offer an organization and consider the rewards they would receive from an organization.

Employee engagement data and employee thoughts on the type of rewards they could receive should be a key performance metric for any employer (Brown, 2014). These participants assess the financial rewards as well as the nonfinancial rewards. Employers who meet employee needs with rewards might appear to be an organizational norm; however, the needs and rewards of employees have been underrepresented by many employers over the years (Brown, 2014). Designing compensation and benefits strategies with employees of the organization significantly motivates them (Bhattacharyya, 2015).

ABC Company focuses on achieving results, and those who contribute in meaningful ways to results and the company's success, obtain rewards. Meaningful work, flex-timing, and diversity are some of the vital employment practices that contribute to employee retention (Bhattacharyya, 2015). Mau (2015) suggested, competency management involves recognizing the competencies in all areas of organizational activity, which establishes the foundation for (a) recruitment, (b) selection, (c) training and development, and (d) rewards.

Regarding pay, the company offers a compensation package that consists of a base and variable pay. In terms of pay and benefits, there is a widening gap of almost 30% in positive perceptions for those employers with highest levels of employee engagement (Brown, 2014). ABC Company also offers learning and development opportunities to their employees. (Table 1).

Table 1

*Rewards, Benefits, and Compensation for ABC Company*

Theme	Total Rewards for ABC Company
Pay	Base Pay, Variable Pay, and Additional Incentive and Compensation Programs.
Benefits	Healthcare, Retirement Programs, Income Protection Programs, Paid Time Off, and other Policies, Programs, and Resources.
L&D	Performance Management, Training & Seminars, Tuition Assistance, and Transfers.
Work Environment	Sense of Teamwork, Flexible Work Schedules, Tools, Resources, and Technology.

*Note.* L & D means Learning and Development.

The work culture at ABC Company is a positive and collaborative work environment. The work environment is safe, neat, clean, comfortable and friendly. Employees are respectful and enjoy a casual dress policy. Work schedules are flexible and the culture encourages a sense of teamwork. Engagement linked with organizational alignment develops from the promoting of a positive organizational culture (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). The company also offers financial rewards for managers who meet their performance goals. Smart organizations are fully engaging their line managers with rewards (Brown, 2014). One participant stated:

There are scorecards that roll up into an annual bonus for each employee on the management side. Nonbargaining unit employees. Scorecards are goals each department is responsible for achieving annually. The progress for those goals is tracked monthly. At the end of the year, everything flows up to the operating company, and the outcome is an achievement percentage. Employees receive a

targeted percentage of their base pay for the bonus (not called a bonus). These are the financial incentives for each department to reach their goals annually.

These findings were consistent with the literature. Scorecards help to identify the challenges of employees that need to be addressed to achieve their performance goals (Chen & Manning, 2015). In the words of one participant:

Regarding financial compensation, we do have an incentive program, of which you can give an individual a spot award. It does not have to be financial, but an acknowledgment of a coworker who provided good assistance to someone on a project. Employees appreciate financial rewards but also like the acknowledgment. These types of acknowledgments are published in the monthly internal company newsletter. The company newsletter includes the personal accolades of employees. Nonfinancial rewards are as important as financial compensation.

Although financial compensation is important to the employee, the pressure for organizations to reduce or control costs has led to the heightened use of nonfinancial rewards (Chiang & Birtch, 2012). The total compensation package and culture of an organization is a strategy that may invite highly skilled employees. Employee engagement may occur in organizations employees like working for and receive a good compensation package for their abilities, knowledge, and skills (Brown, 2014). ABC Company's Total Rewards package may be a huge recruitment strategy for skilled-professional employees. The pay, benefits, learning and development opportunities, and work environment may attract the best and brightest employees. A superior financial

package includes financial and nonfinancial rewards. Employee compensation is the most effective tool for successful management of human capital (Gupta & Shaw, 2014). A total compensation package which has rewards, benefits, and compensation could be a vital strategy to engaging employees.

**Employee engagement initiatives.** Employee engagement initiatives are methods organizations may use that would allow employees to engage with peers in the work environment (Powis, 2012). Organizational leaders might use employee engagement initiatives to get employees started on the path to employee engagement. Creating activities surrounding employee engagement might provide employees with the opportunity to understand this concept of engagement while at work (Jiang & Men, 2015). Relating to employee engagement initiatives, responses from one out of six participants (16%) as well as company data and website data confirmed the findings of prior and current research. In the words of one participant:

There was some feedback from ABC Company, and one of the issues was the lack of employee engagement within the organization. Sometimes individuals in your area do not know what you are doing. You may work in Finance; however, the people in Treasury do not know what you do. As a company-wide engagement initiative, we did the following: created a poster in each department, which included the employee and their job functions, personal fun facts about each individual in the department, and functions within the unit. The purpose was to increase engagement and to understand that we are all human and have other interest outside of the unit/job. This initiative caused the finance department to

discover other things about people personally within the unit and caused an increase in engagement throughout the company.

These findings were consistent with the literature. The evaluation process is important to the development of instrumentation that explores employee engagement at work (Nimon & Zigarmi, 2015).

One participant further stated:

It was a little difficult to do because employees were concerned about all the work they had to do, and then it became fun. Employees realized that people do have lives outside of the company, and they value the organization in which they work. It was an opportunity to promote the finance department, and I like to toot our horn all day. I will be at the beginning of the band stepping for my department. Each week a different department was posted in the lunch area, and then there was a trivia, asking, what an employee in a particular department liked to do while not at work. There are also department meetings that deal with engagement, which include a celebrity square initiative with trivia to increase employee engagement.

These types of employee engagement initiatives are the beginning of getting employees to collaborate on a project. Organizations may begin with individually engaging employees; however, in a team culture such as ABC Company, team engagement is necessary. According to Guchait (2016), team engagement occurs when team members are collectively involved with collaborative work duties and are emotionally connected with teammates', task-work, and teamwork. Additionally, the

company website has a link on employee engagement, and it explains how the employees and organization engage in different types of volunteer activities that have an effect on the community (Table 2).

*Table 2*

Employee Engagement Initiatives for ABC Company

Theme	ABC Company Employee Engagement
Community	ABC Company is devoted to the community and is active personally and professionally in Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, Chamber of Commerce, schools, and nonprofit organizations.
Campaign	ABC Company conducts a company-wide campaign to support nonprofit organizations in the service territory. Employees give to address the needs of the communities in which they work and live. In addition, executives and managers campaign, serve on boards lending expertise and providing guidance to organizations within the community.
Speaker's Bureau	Employees are experts in their fields and can address community groups, civic clubs, associations and other organizations.
Matching Gifts	Matching Gifts to Education Program, the company matches dollar for dollar employee donations to any eligible educational institution in Connecticut. The company provides a 50% match to out-of-state institutions.

Source: Company website.

Another engagement initiative is the ABC Company newsletter that reported a meet and greet by the Chairman with the employees. The company newsletter explained how the ABC Company Chairman went to visit and greet employees in one of the Connecticut locations. He greeted employees with a handshake and asked questions about department functions. He stated in the newsletter the company values honesty, effort, and responsibility.

The Chairman further explained that the company believes in the integration of people and cultures and sharing the economic benefits with stakeholders, and the enthusiasm he felt about the strong growth potential in America. The employees were surprised at his visit and delighted that he engaged in conversation with them. The support of top leaders ensures richer resources, better communication, and superior decision-making (Naujokaitiene et al., 2015). Organizations must implement employee engagement initiatives which are a critical method that can be used to begin the process of engaging employees in the work environment.

### **Conclusion**

The research findings were consistent with the purpose and significance of the study and related to the conceptual framework for this study, the behavior engineering model theory. All the main themes that emerged formed through participant interviews and triangulated data helped to understand the research phenomenon of employee engagement in this single-case study, in addition, to addressing the central research question. This study has contributed to understanding the strategies business leaders could use to increase employee engagement. According to Carasco-Saul et al. (2014), many organizations invest significant resources in retaining, developing, and engaging employees; therefore, it is vital for leaders to develop and deliver engagement strategies effectively.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

This research applies to business practice, as it provides business leaders with strategies to increase employee engagement. Understanding these strategies can assist



organizations with employee and leadership development, and increase performance and productivity. According to Tracey et al. (2015), one reason organizations performed well in the recent recession is because they implemented policies, practices, and systems designed to create and sustain high levels of employee engagement and performance. Findings from this study have added to the existing body of knowledge and prior research on employee engagement.

Theme 1 revealed communication as a strategy leaders can use to increase employee engagement. Leadership behaviors and specific communication are significantly related to employee outcomes (Mikkelsen et al., 2015). Business leaders can use the above strategy to increase engagement as evidenced by participant responses and confirmed by prior and current research literature.

Theme 2 revealed the final theme of rewards, benefits, and compensation. Engagement initiatives is another method derived from theme 2. A total rewards package including rewards, benefits, and compensation is a strategy that can be used to attract talented employees, which could lead to increased engagement. Once hired, employee engagement initiatives will begin the internal process of increasing employee engagement. These findings are supported by participant responses, company documents, and website data.

The importance of organizations hiring a specific leader increasing employee engagement in the workplace may be the most critical driver for organizational success. Leadership is the fundamental component to managing worker behavior. Although workers can have a psychological commitment to work and effect leadership

engagement, it is up to the leader to manage the employee, not the other way around. According to Carasco-Saul et al. (2014), leadership is one of the most studied topics in organizational research, and employee engagement is not a new topic to organizational behavioral science. Leadership and employee engagement are both necessary to increase performance.

Organizational performance occurs when both leadership and employee engagement are present. The conceptual framework for this study supports this conclusion. Gilbert (2007) explained human performance based on the premise that performance in an organization is dependent upon employee behavior and environmental issues. In addition to the key constructs above that affect performance in an organization, the general areas that affect performance include (a) information, (b) instrumentation, and (c) motivation (Gilbert, 2007). The following six conditions may identify deficiencies and areas for performance improvement that include (a) data, (b) instruments, (c) incentives, (d) knowledge, (e) capacity, and (f) motives (Gilbert, 2007). Employees depend on managers to stimulate motivation to perform well, and managers' expectations' of these employees affect their leadership and motivational strategies (Hu, Wayne, Bauer, Erdogan, & Liden, 2016). Thus, the findings of this study could be used to identify strategies business leaders can use to increase engagement.

Increased engagement, relates to increased performance, productivity, and job satisfaction. Engaged individuals are satisfied with their job and typically have higher quality work performance and productivity (Mikkelsen et al., 2015). Business leaders who implement the strategies revealed in the findings of this study might have a more

productive workforce. Organizational support leads to, positive, productive responses from employees (Naujokaitiene et al., 2015).

The findings of this study could explain how to increase employee engagement through the following strategies of communication, and rewards, benefits, and compensation. Leaders can fit what strategies to use to turn around a disengaged employee within their organization, to put the employee back on track to increased engagement. The main barrier to leaders increasing employee engagement is disengagement (Alagaraja & Schuck, 2015). Finally, success could occur in organizations that understand how to use the findings of this study to improve business practice through strategies that could increase employee engagement and performance. Employee engagement should be managed at all organizational levels and should be reflected in the strategic plan of the organization (Naujokaitiene et al., 2015).

### **Implications for Social Change**

The study could contribute to social change in any organization, mainly service organizations. The study is unique and important because engineering managers in a service organization were the participants in this study and were successful in creating strategies that would increase employee engagement; however, the findings are not general to all settings, industries, or populations. A case study was conducted as the investigator was able to ask “how” questions with little control over the responses. According to Yin (2014), the case study method is appropriate when the research is a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life setting. The strategies provided to business leaders may increase employee engagement in the work environment and increase

performance. Leaders in organizations might have a better understanding of how to handle disengaged employees who are unproductive and nonperforming. The adoption of the strategies could also affect positive social change by (a) providing economic stability within the community, (b) influencing employees to maintain employment, thus increasing retention, (c) inducing greater job satisfaction for employees, (d) influencing business leaders to build a valuable workforce, and (e) promoting company profitability.

Engagement strategies could have a positive effect on employee commitment, individual performance, and increased productivity (Ployhart, Nyberg, Reilly, & Maltarich, 2014). Many of the most pressing challenges facing firms are human capital challenges (Carasco-Saul et al., 2014). Employees could be the most important asset in any organization. Most organizations believe employees are the company's greatest asset. (Gupta & Shaw, 2014). Employees provide to the organization the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics that affect individual performance (Ployhart et al., 2014). Individuals who can realize their job fit in the world of employment often experience a perfect fit between skill, interests, and requirements of the job (Hagmaier & Abele, 2015). According to Hollis (2015) leaders that invest in the well-being of employees through employee engagement initiatives experience increased engagement.

Leaders in organizations could use the findings of this study to affect social change through improvements to individuals, communities, and organizations. The findings of this study might contribute to social change by assisting business leaders in reducing employee attrition and improving organizational success. The more highly engaged the employees, the more likely they will contribute to the development of (a)

positive employer brand, (b) reduce turnover, (c) service quality, (d) customer satisfaction, (e) productivity, (f) sales, and (g) profitability (Carasco-Saul et al., 2014). Employer branding is concerned with creating the image of an organization as an employer or great place to work (Saini, Gopal, & Kumari, 2015). According to Berger-Remy and Michel (2015), the more employees can convey brand worth in their individual way of working, the more important the brand becomes a motivational tool. Leaders of organizations could use the findings in this study to develop a better understanding of engagement strategies that leaders could use to increase employee engagement.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Employee engagement has become a desired outcome for organizational success (Jiang & Men, 2013). Business leaders should consider whether the strategies in this study align with their own business strategies and organizational commitment to employee engagement. Engagement connected with organizational alignment develops from the fostering of a positive work culture and from monitoring each component of the organization's strategy (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). It is vital for business leaders to monitor current engagement strategies and develop new strategies that would align with their organization's strategic mission. Increased engagement leads to employee satisfaction, reduced turnover, increased performance, and productivity.

Strategic goals and objectives provide business organizations with an opportunity to develop action plans for improvement and implementation (Cattermole et al., 2014). I would recommend the following steps to improve employee engagement: (a) create an engagement committee made of senior managers, front-line employees, and other staff

that could develop and implement strategies to increase engagement; (b) develop engagement rewards that support the organization's strategic mission that may be financial or nonfinancial; (c) develop hiring strategies to improve the hiring process; (d) develop a strategic plan for disengaged employees; (e) include engagement strategies in the employee appraisal process; and (f) ensure that senior leaders are held accountable for improving employee engagement and communicating the initiatives to employees.

According to Mishra et al. (2014), leadership strategies for employee engagement begin with the CEO and Chief Financial Officer (CFO). The CEO and CFO are then responsible for motivating the senior leadership team to encourage the front-line supervisors to provide employees with engagement strategies and initiatives (Mishra et al., 2014). The goal of top leaders is getting all employees to buy-in to the development and implementation of engagement strategies to create a culture of engagement (Chen & Manning, 2015). I might disseminate the results of this study through presentations, conferences, scholarly journals, and business journals. Additionally, I might circulate the findings of this study by way of training and seminars to organizations that need strategies to increase employee engagement in their organization.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings of this study confirm to prior and current research literature. The study also sanctions additional exploration of engagement strategies. Leaders need to develop engagement committees to meet the needs of the employees and the organization to implement the most effective engagement strategies that fit organizational needs. The recommendations for future studies involve addressing some of the limitations of this

study, specifically, the small sample size and demographics. Limitations in this study included six engineering managers in New England County, Connecticut and did not permit a mixed demographic outside of this area. Future research should explore engagement strategies with a broader sample size and larger geographic location. Organizations outside of New England County, Connecticut, in different geographic locations, may have similarities or differences in organizational culture for increasing employee engagement.

The qualitative case study is limited because the research was for a single organization. I recommend exploration of a multi-case study on engagement for future research. Future research could include a quantitative, or mixed methods approach on engagement, which could provide a heightened level of detail on employee engagement. Another limitation was the results of this research study were not general to all settings, industries, and populations. This study was limited to the service industry, which deals with employee engagement based on the premise that leadership will set the standard for employee engagement. I recommend extending employee engagement to all industries.

Finally, the findings of this study warrant further exploration to examine elements such as caring and engagement. This research study found that caring about your employees is vital to employee engagement and organizational success. Leaders that care about employee well-being create an engaged work environment (Hollis, 2015).

### **Reflections**

Obtaining a doctoral degree, which is one of my life goals, was emotionally challenging. I was not sure what to expect at the beginning of my doctoral journey.

Initially, I researched the DBA because I had not heard of this type of degree in the United States. The information I gathered showed the DBA was popular outside of the United States but fairly new to the states. My research indicated that there was a traditional university in New England who offered the DBA degree. This information helped me to make the decision to obtain my degree from Walden University.

The DBA process included uncertainty and ambiguity. I had to complete this process, section by section. I was not certain how quickly I could find my organization for data collection and was concerned about this stage of the process. To my surprise, I was able to find a company with one phone call and able to collect data from the participants over the following 2 weeks. The participants were willing and excited about participation in the doctoral process. I am extremely grateful that a major service company in New England County, Connecticut, would allow me access to employees in their organization. Additionally, upon review of the company website I found that one of their engagement initiatives was to provide economic development to the community. The DBA process is a long process, but anything you want to accomplish and achieve requires goals and tenacity.

My personal views on employee engagement are when an employee is initially hired to work for an organization, they are usually excited and start by putting their best foot forward. My opinion was that employees begin to disengage because of management, training, culture, vision, or other employees. My outlook on engagement and disengagement has changed, as I understand that there could be many reasons why an employee engages or disengages from the work environment, including their own



personal reasons outside of the workplace. Finally, this entire study was a journey, and the data collection and analysis process provided insight into employee engagement and disengagement in the work environment. The findings of the study provided strategies for business leaders to increase engagement, thus increasing performance in the workplace.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies business leaders could use to increase engagement. Responses from the personal interviews and triangulated data that included member checking, company documents, and website data provided an understanding into the aspects of engagement while at work. After collecting and analyzing data, two main themes emerged from the data that included communication and rewards, benefits, and compensation. The findings indicated that business leaders in this company play a critical role in the engagement of employees in the work environment.

Business leaders in this study are a vital component to increasing employee engagement in the workplace. The engaged workforce includes support and care from the leader and an atmosphere of safety in the environment to make mistakes and potentially create innovation (Hollis, 2015). Employee engagement is a phenomenon that should be managed at all levels within the organization (Naujokaitiene et al., 2015). It is critical for leaders to use strategies to increase employee engagement.

In contrast, disengagement occurs when employees withdraw from their work role and is simply going through the motions (Hollis, 2015). Dysfunctional leadership leads to employee disengagement (Oswick, 2015). Leadership in these organizations allow a

hostile and abusive work environment and often lack care or concern for the employees (Hollis, 2015). Protecting employees from dysfunctional situations creates a safe work environment for them to contribute to fully to provide tangible outcomes for the organization (Rose, Shuck, Twyford, & Bergman, 2015)a. Leaders have a responsibility to ensure that employees feel safe and have the necessary resources to complete their jobs (Men & Stacks, 2013). Negative politics prevail in unhealthy work environments, which suppress opinions and creativity (Hollis, 2015). Therefore, it is critical that leadership creates a safe and healthy work environment that promotes employee engagement. A leader's behavior accounts for almost a quarter percent of why employees feel productive, motivated, effective, and committed to the work environment as a whole (Mikkelson et al., 2015).

The main takeaway from this doctoral study was that employee engagement starts with the leader and leads to individual employee engagement, which could be increased by way of leadership behavior. The study also revealed communication and rewards, benefits, and compensation that promotes a work culture of increased employee engagement. Increased engagement leads to a healthy, safe, and productive work environment.

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## Appendix A: Semistructured Interview Questions

## Interview Questions

1. How do you define employee engagement?
2. How do you increase employee engagement?
3. How do you define performance in the workplace?
4. How do you increase employee performance in the workplace?
5. How do you define productivity in the workplace?
6. How do you increase productivity?
7. How do you define disengaged employees?
8. How have disengaged employees affected performance?
9. How have disengaged employees affected the work environment?
10. How does an engaged employee become disengaged?
11. What strategies do you currently use to increase employee engagement?
12. What additional information would you like to provide that you have not already addressed?

## Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in the Study

As part of my doctoral study research at Walden University, I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting. The purpose being to explore strategies business leaders use to increase employee engagement within their organization. I contacted you to participate because you are an engineering manager in a service organization. Participation in the research study is voluntary and is confidential.

Please read the enclosed consent form carefully and ask any questions that you may have before acting on the invitation to participate. To achieve the objectives of the research study, your participation depends on satisfying certain criteria in addition to being an engineering manager in a service organization, which include (a) managing at least 2 employees, (b) experience with employee engagement, and (c) participants must be 18 years of age, with no maximum age requirement. If you satisfy these criteria and would like to participate in this study, please call me at (xxx) xxx-xxx or e-mail to schedule a convenient time for an interview.

I anticipate that the total time required for each interview will span no more than one hour. The interviews will be audio recorded, and participants will have the opportunity to review the transcribed interview for accuracy prior to inclusion in the study. I sincerely appreciate your valuable time and thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

*Jonia A. Walker*