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# Employee Engagement Processes and Productivity among Las Vegas Five-Star Hospitality Organizations

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Robert White

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Walden University  
2017

Abstract

Employee Engagement Processes and Productivity among Las Vegas Five-Star  
Hospitality Organizations

by

Robert White

MBA, Strayer University, 2010

BS, Morgan State University, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

February 2017

## Abstract

Employee disengagement creates an unhealthy working environment. Disengagement rates among Las Vegas hospitality industry organizations led to dissatisfaction among employees and resulted in low productivity and profitability. This qualitative descriptive study involved exploring employee engagement strategies that hospitality industry supervisors and managers used to implement programs, thereby solving the employee engagement problems of their organizations. The conceptual framework for the study was leader-member exchange theory. Twenty participants with 5 or more years of Las Vegas hospitality experience who had already successfully implemented engagement programs answered open-ended questions in semistructured interviews. Company documents constituted an additional data source. Analyzing the data involved triangulation using multiple data sources in identifying themes such as interaction effects of employee engagement programs on employees, mutual respect between leaders and subordinates, and organizational benefits. Better engagement could lead to positive social change through increased job satisfaction and improved customer service, thereby engendering increased social interactions among members of the local community. The former could reduce stress and contribute to the quality of life of community members including the families of the workers. The latter could lead to greater profits for the employers, thus potentially increasing the tax base in the community.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to my loving grandmother, Ernestine, for her unwavering faith and belief in the fulfilling of a personal aspiration of mine. Although you are no longer physically present, not once did I lose sight of the plan we discussed. I also would like to dedicate this study to my Uncle, Wilbur who not only supported me throughout this venture, but also during the most significant moments of my life. I would like this doctoral study to be a representation of when sheer will carefully directs an earnest desire, your resolve will materialize into that which is desired.

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to thank the Supreme Being for providing me with the strength, courage, and knowledge to embark on this journey.

I would like to also thank my family and friends for their continuous support during this demanding period in my life. Special acknowledgement goes to Dr. Frederick Nwosu, my Committee Chairperson for providing me with the necessary tools to be successful. Your mantra, “time is of the essence,” and “we have to keep moving!” was always a source of encouragement throughout this entire process. A sincere appreciation goes to Dr. Moutaz Abou-Robieh my second committee member; Dr. Gail Ferreira, the university research reviewer (URR); and Dr. Reginald Taylor, the methodologist for their continued feedback and support.

Lastly, I want to thank Dr. Freda Turner and Fred Walker for their unwavering dedication and commitment to ensuring that Walden University’s Doctor of Business Administration program remains well respected among universities and organizations.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Exploring the perceptions and experiences of employees and leadership within hospitality organizations such as hotels, casinos, and restaurants led to identifying ways engagement strategies increased employee and organizational productivity. According to a study of challenges faced by the hospitality industry where semistructured interviews of diverse HR practitioners occurred in India, the hospitality sector is the fastest growing industry worldwide in spite of recessive economic conditions that have negatively affected tourism (Bharwani & Butt, 2012).

In this study, I focused on employee engagement in hospitality companies in Las Vegas, Nevada and explored the perceptions of hospitality industry employees about these processes. Areas of interest included engagement in their respective companies and organizations, planning and implementation of strategies, and employee perceived value on employee attitudes/behaviors and company outcomes.

### **Background of the Problem**

Economic turbulence is a factor in motivating organizations in diverse industries to develop new strategies to maximize organizational performance (Watson, 2012). The financial crisis of 2009, for instance, caused one of the largest global meltdowns in economies (Kelemen & Rumens, 2012). Under such economic conditions, individuals suffered severe losses not limited to financial investments, but also to homes, and most importantly, their jobs (Wei, Frankwick, & Nguyen, 2012). Demand for inessential products drastically dropped (Abdul-Rahamon & Adejare, 2014). Consumers chose to discontinue their spending on durable goods and purchase of services, and turned to

cheaper alternative products (Abdul-Rahamon & Adejare, 2014). Not only does consumer behavior affect organizational productivity, corporate stakeholders suffer negative fiscal and psychological effects (Maner, Gailliot, Menzel, & Kunstman, 2012). Environmental factors that induce distress, depression, and negatively affect a person's wellbeing could have adverse effect on how the individual performs at work (Andersson & Ohman, 2015; Dhammika, Ahmad, & Sam, 2012). The average individual spends as much as a third of their life at work (Brown & Reilly, 2013); organizational leaders should pay attention to them instead of overlooking them.

Moreover, when considering the effects of uncertain conditions at the microeconomic level, the Las Vegas hospitality casino industry is among those industries that have suffered severely because of the reliance of the industry on tourism (Watson, 2012). Global conditions have caused tourism levels to decline dramatically (Dhammika et al., 2012).

In 2009, following the announcement of recession conditions in 2008, the visitation rate to Las Vegas declined by 2.8 million people compared to 2007; whereas in prior years, there was a consistent increase that averaged 2% annually (Las Vegas Convention And Visitors Authority [LVCVA], 2012). With the substantial decline in travelers, organizations had to reevaluate their organizational structure. Goyal, Rahman, and Kazmi (2015) stated that organizational processes would take precedence over human capital related expenses in tough economic times. Because of tough economic times, mass layoffs, adjustments to employee compensation plans, and reduced benefits became the prevalent practice (Goyal et al., 2015). The Nevada hospitality industry

showed a reduction in jobs of 32,700 between 2007 and 2010 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013), but according to Brown (2012), the hospitality industry was the most valuable industry to Nevada's economy, accounting for 26.8% of all jobs. The effects of tough economic times in Nevada included high unemployment rates such as the 12% rate that surpassed the national unemployment rate of 8.2% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

Even though organizations succumb to uncontrollable factors such as economic conditions, the consequences can be detrimental to the organizational climate (Hassard, 2012). Such deficiencies include a decline in employee satisfaction, job uncertainty, turnover, and willingness of employees to perform, which ultimately results in declined organizational performance (Brown, 2012). However, to avoid these undesirable outcomes resulting from external factors, employers look at practices that positively influence human capital as means to increase performance and productivity (Brown, 2012).

Literature exists on employee engagement in the hospitality industry (Galea, Houkes, & De Rijk, 2014; Sakiru, D'Silva, Othman, DaudSilong, & Busayo, 2013; Yang, Wan, & Fu, 2012; Yu, 2013). However, searches did not yield any studies identifying the drivers of engagement and the associated individual and organizational outcome in the Las Vegas casino and gaming industry under economic distress. Furthermore, although a substantial amount of research is available that measures engagement levels using employee surveys, only a small portion used interviews as means for gaining an in-depth understanding of the strategies for employee engagement.

### **Problem Statement**

Research on employee engagement involving 41 multinational companies contained revelations of high levels of engagement increased organizational performance on average by 4%, whereas, organizations with low engagement levels showed a 2% decline in performance (Watson, 2012). A study by the Gallop Organization found that 68.5% of American workers are either not engaged or actively disengaged on their job (Adkins, 2015).

The general business problem for this study was that employee disengagement significantly affected organizations by reducing productivity and increasing operational costs, which cost US organizations \$319 billion to \$398 billion annually (Adkins, 2015). The specific business problem was that some hospitality industry supervisors and managers in Las Vegas lacked strategies for implementing employee engagement programs.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore the strategies hospitality industry supervisors and managers used for implementing employee engagement programs. I collected data from managers and supervisors of five-star hospitality entities in Las Vegas that have successfully implemented employee engagement programs. The findings from this study could contribute to business practice by providing a positive workforce climate among companies in the hospitality industry. The results from this study could lead to positive social change by providing leaders with

knowledge and skills to implement employee engagement programs with ease while creating awareness and engendering interest among local communities members.

### **Nature of the Study**

Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because engagement among employees in the hospitality industry of Las Vegas would be visible only through direct contact with the managers and supervisors. Qualitative research allows for an in depth and detailed exploration of individual thoughts, experiences, feelings, and interpretations (Opsal et al., 2015). Quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study because quantitative methods users characteristically assign numerical values to factors and variables in order to weigh or calculate relationships or causes and effects (Kelemen & Rumens, 2012). Mixed methodology was not appropriate for the study because mixed methods require a combination of the characteristics of quantitative and qualitative methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This combination would not be suitable for exploring the strategies research participants used. Furthermore, using the mixed methodology would involve spending more time than this research required due to the process of combining quantitative and qualitative elements in the same research. The extra time would not have given extra value to the study.

I used the qualitative descriptive research design for this study to capture, notate, and summarize participants' employee engagement experiences. According to Sandelowski (2000), the descriptive research design is noticeable in rich verbiage; this aspect of the design was useful in conveying participants' comments. Furthermore, Nayelof, Fuchs, and Moreira (2012) postulated that rich descriptive data would



characteristically facilitate meta-analyses, and such a resource was in alignment with digital logbooks and spreadsheets. Lambert and Lambert (2012) asserted that qualitative descriptive researchers aim to understand specific events that individuals have experienced. Finlay (2012) defined an experience as being a comprehensive unit that significantly affects a person's life.

In this qualitative descriptive study, employee engagement was the specific event and the strategies that hospitality companies implemented to encourage engagement constituted the experience. In addition, qualitative descriptive analysis allowed for a detailed understanding of the strategies supervisors and managers used with employees in their company over a period. Smith et al. (2009) stated that there is a need for a concerted effort in exploring the experiences of participants.

Other qualitative research designs such as case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and narrative are not appropriate for this study because none of the designs lead to exploring the strategies participants had used. Case study design deals with the ramifications of a specific event, entity, or a case (Yin, 2014). Ethnography deals with the study of a people in their natural environment with a goal of finding out what they do, how they do those things, and why they do such things (Nwosu, 2013). Grounded theory deals with researching into phenomena in an effort to determining what lessons, processes, concepts, and theories emerge from the process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Narrative design involves story lines that reveal sequences, specific activities, causes, effects, and other aspects of the object of research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). In a qualitative descriptive research design, the stories are not necessary.

### **Research Question**

The objective of this study was to explore hospitality industry supervisors and managers experiences in implementing employee engagement programs. This study constituted an effort to learn about the strategies that might help the hospitality business managers and supervisors facing difficulties in solving employee disengagement problems among workers within the hospitality industry. Research activities involved conducting inquiries in Las Vegas by interviewing 20 managers and supervisors of hospitality companies. The primary research question for this study was: What strategies do hospitality industry supervisors and managers use for implementing employee engagement programs? The secondary research question was: How do Las Vegas hospitality industry managers and supervisors strategize employee engagement initiatives that might enhance organizational performance?

The participants answered the following questions in a semistructured interview format to assess whether or not participants met the selection criteria. Demographics and participant selection criteria consisted of the following:

1. Which of the following best describes the hospitality industry in which you have worked in the last 5 years, that is, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014?
  - a. Luxury Hotel Casino Resort
  - b. Hotel Resort without a Casino
  - c. Budget Hotel Casino Resort
  - d. Boutique Hotel
2. Is your company publicly traded or private?

- a. Publicly Traded
  - b. Private
3. How many persons does the company currently employ?
- a. Less than 500 (1-499)
  - b. 500-1000
  - c. 1001-2000
  - d. More than 2000 (2001 and over)
4. How long have you worked for the company?
- a. 1 – 11 months
  - b. > 11 months and < 18 months
  - c. 18 – 23 months
  - d. > 23 months and < 30 months
  - e. 30 – 35 months
  - f. > 30 months and < 42 months
  - g. 42 – 47 months
  - h. > 47 months and < 54 months
  - i. 54 – 59 months
  - j. > 59 months
5. If no longer employed, how long was your tenure prior to your departure?
- a. 1 – 11 months
  - b. > 11 months and < 18 months
  - c. 18 – 23 months

- d. > 23 months and < 30 months
  - e. 30 – 35 months
  - f. >35 months and < 42 months
  - g. 42 – 47 months
  - h. > 47 months and < 54 months
  - i. 54 – 59 months
  - j. > 59 months
6. Have you heard the term employee engagement used within your company?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
7. If yes, what was the context of its usage?
- Please give details.
8. If 'No', has reference been made to another term, which resembles employee engagement based on your understanding?
- Please give details.
9. What does the term, “employee engagement” mean to you?

### **Interview Questions**

The participants answered the following open-ended questions in a semistructured interview format to elicit any details arising from participant knowledge:

1. How does leader-member exchange within your organization enhance employee engagement?

2. In what ways might formal engagement programs in your company show the level of interaction between the employers and employees?
3. In what way has employee engagement affected you in your performance as an employee?
4. In what way has employee engagement affected the overall performance of your company?
5. How might your company's current and potential practices and strategies provide insight in employee engagement and interaction?
6. How does your company's employee survey process reflect mutual exchange among all the people in the organization?
7. What employee engagement initiatives help the overall performance of your organization?
8. In what ways does your company solicit or gain insight from employees on company programs, supervisors or management, and feedback pertaining to attitudinal and behavioral opinions?
9. Leader-member exchange focuses on the dyadic connections among people. How would you describe leader-member exchange in the context of your organization's operations?
10. Since the last employee survey or previously discussed method, have you seen any specific actions by the organization, leadership, and management?
11. How successful or unsuccessful were employee engagement post-survey actions?

12. If your organization communicated results, how did they do it; and if it did not, what was the organization's result communication process?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that undergirded this study was the leader-member exchange theory. D. Katz and R. Kahn developed this theory in 1966 (Katz & Kahn, 1966). The main constructs of this theory are (a) mutual interaction; (b) growth through emulation; (c) successor simulation; and (d) organizational relationship building. The main resultant ideas of this theory are: (a) leaders should be able to inspire their followers, which would mean for this study that hospitality leaders should create an atmosphere that generates interest among employees; (b) followers would become so interested in the actions of the leader that any negative feelings the followers had would dissipate over time, which would mean for this study that employees would become so inspired that they forget any dissatisfaction they might have had prior to the introduction of the new employee engagement approach; and (c) leaders would instill in followers new perspectives, which would mean for this study that employees would begin to see the organization from the lens of the organizational leaders.

Key constructs/propositions underlying the theory are (a) mutual interaction, (b) growth through emulation, (c) successor simulation, and (d) organizational relationship building. The expected relationships with regard to engagement were that leaders would inspire their followers, thereby creating a healthy working environment; followers and leaders would share mutual interests, and perspectives would be the same on the parts of

leaders and followers. Moreover, the leader-member exchange theory holds that follower motivation is instrumental to results (Jackson & Johnson, 2012).

### **Definition of Terms**

*Attitudinal outcome:* Attitudinal outcome refers to the internal feelings that employees feel towards their peers, leadership, or the organization (Kehoe & Wright, 2013).

*Behavioral outcome:* Behavioral outcome represents the actions displayed by employees within the workplace because of their attitude (Karatepe, 2013).

*Business outcome:* Business outcome means any benefit organizational functionaries experience (Weinzimmer & Nystrom, 2015).

*Stakeholder:* Any person or entity holding an interest in an organization (Hayibor, 2012).

*Employee engagement (EE):* A strategy used by top-down management to improve employee and organizational processes and performance in hospitality companies of Las Vegas (Hai, Jing, & Jintong, 2013).

*Hospitality:* Services rendered by hotels, restaurants, casino gaming, and industry participants who provide a combination of services and activities to cater to the needs of Las Vegas visitors (Brown, 2012).

*Institute of Employment Studies Survey (IES):* The Institute of Employment Studies Survey (IES) is an engagement survey tool constructed around organizational values, using a 12-question indicator to gauge engagement, and revolving around the attitudes of employees and less on business outcomes (Wageeh, 2016).

*Utrecht Work Engagement Survey (UWES)*: The Utrecht Work Engagement Survey (UWES) is a measurement of employees' feelings for and toward their work (Culbertson, Mills, & Fullagar, 2012).

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

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are imagined situations that appear realistic, and individuals may make decisions on such imaginations to steer a study in a certain direction (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). In my principal investigator role, I maintained objectivity and mitigated any biases by relying only on data from participants. However, there are several assumptions that should be noted. The first assumption was that using snowball sampling for gathering participants would yield broader perspectives of engagement throughout the Las Vegas hospitality companies. With the high number of hospitality organizations in Las Vegas—the largest employing industry within the state—and the increasingly high turnover, I assumed that participants could recommend ideal candidates to participate who would also be subject-matter experts working within different companies.

Nondiscriminative snowball sampling is helpful in identifying participants within different companies. This sampling method was instrumental to identifying participants who were capable of providing multiple perspectives. The emergence of the specific participants arose from the ranking of these participants within the industry. Additionally, another assumption was participants would have actively participated in the development of (or exposed to) engagement activities within a hospitality organization.



Finally, although snowball sampling served well, the participants responded based on their experiences and not the experiences of others. To mitigate the possibility of collusion, the participants answered identical questions, and a comparison of responses helped to identify possible collusion.

### **Limitations**

A possible limitation to the study was that I did not include all hospitality organizations because of the reliance on participants using the snowball sampling strategy. By not including all hospitality organizations in the study, the results potentially could be skewed based on the star ratings of the organizations. The assumption embodies the specific criteria required by rating agencies to attain certain star levels. For this reason, an organization with a two-star rating may not emphasize the importance of their employees, as would a five-star property given the potential consequence such as a downgrade of their star rating.

Additionally, conducting interviews is a potential weakness of the study given a potential bias an interviewee can have towards the organization. Walker (2012) postulated that interviews pose varying shortcomings in the depth of information that is provided from the interviewee. Also, Walker (2012) argued that participants' rationalization of interview questions determine the quality of data received by the interviewer; however, by circumstance, participants respond to interview questions as suspected of the interviewer given the nature of the interview.

Lastly, the misconception of the term employee engagement could also be a potential weakness. Given the above construct, employee engagement touches a vast

number of human resource concepts such as employee satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior (Fadzilar, Anwar, Maslina, & Zaharah, 2012). Individuals working in an organization that does not promote the concept word for word can easily misinterpret EE.

### **Delimitations**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), a researcher must clarify elements outside the scope of a research study. Consequently, the study scope would be narrow enough to allow deep exploration. This study dealt with the specific parameters of employee engagement, namely mentoring programs, recognition and reward systems, communication, learning and development, corporate culture, and the promotion of employee engagement within the company. Additionally, the qualitative descriptive study explored the perceptions of employee engagement within their organizations. Important considerations included what strategies were successful, and what were the perceived individual and organizational benefits of employee engagement. Participants were in close proximity of researcher, which allowed for face-to-face interviews. In addition, interview questions were open-ended to encourage participants to respond freely. Such freedom unveiled additional information that could benefit users of this study. Based on the nature of this study, every required element was within the scope of the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Reduction of Gaps**

The results of this study could contribute to the body of knowledge focusing on employee engagement in the hotel sector (Shepard, 2013; Yu, 2013). Analysis of the results of the study could provide insight into the ramifications of employee engagement in Las Vegas hospitality organizations. In addition, recent literature is available exploring the associations among employee engagement, organizational productivity, and employee job performance in hotel organizations (Li, Sanders, & Frenkel, 2012). Furthermore, the hospitality industry in Las Vegas includes hotels. However, hotels in Las Vegas are corporate components of the casinos along with restaurants and nightclubs. This combination makes Las Vegas hospitality a unique industry in comparison to others. Finally, this study pertained to an essential industry within the State of Nevada, to wit, hospitality, which is the number one employing industry in the state (Brown, 2012).

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include the potential to set a stage for the local community to increase their personal or business interactions based on lessons from this study. This potential is the outcome of hospitality employee assimilation of findings from this study, and consequently demonstrating engagement within the community. Such community interaction will return dividends to the hospitality industry through a better understanding of the impact of their engagement efforts. Also, engaging employees in an already saturated industry could help minimize the potential loss of top performers to competing organizations. Therefore, by sharing the results in the hospitality industry, organizations might have a better understanding of how impactful engagement efforts could be.

Better engagement could lead to greater job satisfaction and improvement of customer service. The former could reduce stress and contribute to the quality of life of members of the community including the families of the workers. The latter could lead to greater profits for the employers, thus potentially increasing the tax base in the community.

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

Scholarly sources formed part of the materials for laying a foundation for this study. Peer-reviewed articles, articles, and other sources were instrumental to the understanding of employee engagement in diverse industries. Hospitality business might not be conceptually distant from other businesses, but the industry has elements that might not exist in the others. Those different elements are factors of geographic location and business etiquettes that have lasted several years and thus become connotative of hospitality in Las Vegas.

Despite myriad definitions of the construct employee engagement, collectively there is a clearer depiction of the concept. I organized the literature review into four sections. The first section is a review of the many definitions of employee engagement and the perceived employee and organizational benefits resultant from highly engaged workers. The second section is a historical perspective of prior concepts that shaped employee engagement. The third section is an examination of the presence of employee engagement in service industries globally and the effect it has on business results within the organization. The fourth section is a review of existing instruments used to measure engagement levels within organizations.

## **Leader-Member Exchange Theory**

The conceptual framework for this study hinges on leader-member exchange (LMX), which focuses on the dyadic relationship between the leader and a subordinate (DeConinck, 2011). The leader-member exchange theory of leadership focuses on the two-way relationship between supervisors and subordinates. The theory assumes that leaders develop an exchange with each of their subordinates, and that the quality of these leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships influences subordinates' responsibility, decision influence, access to resources and performance (Erdogan, Bauer, Truxillo, & Mansfield, 2012). LMX theory asserts that the positive relationship between the leader and subordinate results in positive organizational outcomes (Magee & Smith, 2013).

Research has suggested that the quality of the leader-subordinate relationship relates to job outcomes such as satisfaction, performance, organizational commitment, and citizenship behaviors (Klassen & Chiu, 2012). Researchers such as Li et al. (2012) found a positive relationship between LMX theory and employee engagement. Moreover, the dyadic relationship expressed by the LMX theory is characterized by the liking, mutual trust (DeConinck, 2011), and respect for one another's capabilities (Martinez, Kane, Ferris, & Brooks, 2012), which directly affects organizational productivity and employee performance levels due to the relationship quality between individuals.

A closer examination of LMX theory fundamentals begins with the subordinates' perception of their leader (Dansereau et al., 1975). There can be many reasons a subordinate may develop a positive perception of their leader such as leniency

tendencies, admirable characteristics, or affiliations; however, it would be safe to assert that personality similarities would be at the forefront of positive perceptions a subordinate may cultivate about their leader (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012). It can be assumed that personality similarities could increase the likelihood of a mutual liking or appeal between individuals. In addition, the mutual bond between the leader and subordinate could potentially have a positive influence on the working relationship. A study of personality congruence and performance and satisfaction in a manufacturing setting contained revelations that when the leader and subordinate had similar personalities, the subordinates' satisfaction levels with their supervision improved along with the type of work performed and overall job satisfaction (Ahmad, 2010).

In addition to the characteristic of appeal, DeConinck (2011) asserted that mutual trust is another building block of the LMX theory. Individuals who have trust in their peers or subordinates would likely have a certain level of satisfaction for their job, which would ultimately result in increased organizational outcomes (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Additionally, Han's (2010), study of trust and career satisfaction among employees at a U.S.-based Fortune 500 company, found bilateral trust between peers and subordinates to be a determinant for career satisfaction and advancement within the organization. In addition, studies of manager trust and business unit outcomes in diverse entities revealed a positive relationship between trust and performance (Al-alak, 2014; Delmar, McKelvie, & Wennberg, 2013; Jang, Zippay, & Park, 2012; Maghnati, Choon Ling, & Nasermodeli, 2012). Managers who appeared to have higher trust levels within their workforce achieved higher sales and profits over their counterparts. Furthermore, as

Martinez et al. (2012) asserted, respect for each other's capabilities is also a characteristic of the LMX theory.

Gregory and Levy (2011) suggested that the attitudes and individual differences of the subordinate and leader influence the effectiveness of the working relationship. In addition, when both individuals acknowledge and accept their varying abilities, and utilize their differences, productive coaching, and improvements in processes, performance, and personal development results (Gregory & Levy, 2011; Ucbasaran, Shepherd, Lockett, & Lyon, 2013).

LMX theory was essential to my study given that a key component of the employee engagement concept is based on the relationship between subordinates and leaders of the organization. In addition, based on the notion that the employee-supervisor relationship positively influences employee engagement and organizational performance (Sange & Srivasatava, 2012), the components in the LMX theory are necessary for the development of a successful employee engagement program. Therefore, the conceptual framework for this study hinged on LMX, and focused on the dyadic relationship between the leader and subordinate.

Hoppock (1935), Matta, Scott, Koopman, and Conlon (2015), Russ (2011), Weisbord (2011) and Vroom (1964) offered explanations on leadership based upon the premise that leaders are able to inspire followers to change expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work toward common goals. They suggested that such inspirations could take place under conditions of interaction between leader and member (subordinate). When followers ascertain the outcome of their behaviors, they decide whether to repeat

that behavior (Weisbord, 2011; Thorndike, 1898). As applied to this study, the propositions advanced by the LMX theory allowed an adequate exploration of participant perceptions and experiences regarding leaders' characteristics in the context of employee engagement.

### **Definitions of Employee Engagement**

There are many definitions that contribute to the characteristics that make up the multifaceted construct employee engagement. The pioneer of employee engagement viewed engagement as the harnessing the availability of the organization's members to their work roles; in engagement, people express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990) further asserted that engagement is the psychological and physical presence expressed when occupying and performing an organizational role. Cenkeci and Özçelik (2015) supported this view and proposed that engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Zacher, Pearce, Rooney, and McKenna (2014) asserted that engagement is the involvement, commitment, passion, and empowered outlook expressed by and demonstrated in an employee's work behaviors. For the purposes of this study, the definition of employee engagement was a top-down management interaction with employees to improve organizational productivity and employee performance.

While many scholars mentioned that engagement is the psychological attachment between an employee and their work, Chinomona (2013) argued that engagement goes beyond commitment and enthusiasm for the job, and asserted that engagement is also an



emotional attachment to colleagues and the organization (Martin & MacDonnell, 2012; Karatepe, 2013). Fischer (2013) posited that the workplace is a place where people look to find personal meaning, stability, and a sense of community and identity. Additionally, having an emotional attachment to the organization would increase an employee's desire to achieve the organizations interests and live by the values of the company (Watson, 2012). Many scholars agree that engagement involves the expression of the self through work and other employee-role activities (Wei, Frankwick, & Nguyen, 2012) with the outcome being organizational success (Coad, 2014).

Employee engagement is a two-way process between the employer and the employee (Coad, 2014). Employees desire positive feelings and emotions toward their work experiences (Prajogo, McDermott, & McDermott, 2013) and employers want to be economically profitable and improve shareholder value (Benson & Dundis, 2012). Researchers continue to find that being in a positive emotional state has a significant influence on behavior and creativity (Sam, Tahir, & Abu Bakar, 2012). The broaden-and-build theory confirms this by suggesting that positive emotions impel people to broaden their ways of thinking, which creates a sense of possibility that prompts them to engage in activities such as learning and building new skills, connecting with new people, and experimenting with new ways of being (Heyne & Anderson, 2012).

Fredrickson (2013) agreed with the broaden-and-build theory and noted that engagement propels employees to increase productivity levels, exert more effort, improve quality of work, and promote innovation. Engagement inspires employees to demonstrate behaviors such as persistence in tasks, being proactive, and taking on

additional responsibilities when needed (Jones & Lentz, 2013). Similarly, Palmer and Gignac (2012) noted that engagement is influential in causing an employee to perform above and beyond what is expected of them, however, they asserted that there is also a commitment benefit associated with engagement. Based on their study of 440 employees from three US- and India-based organizations, they posited that engagement compels employees to remain committed to their organization even during a period of economic uncertainty.

This study examined individual and organizational benefits of employee engagement within the hospitality casino-gaming industry in Las Vegas, Nevada. Research participants articulated their perception of employee engagement (EE) among the workforce of hospitality companies in Las Vegas. The participants had occasions to indicate if EE strategies affect employee behaviors and performance. Smith et al. (2009) explained that participants would always seize the opportunity of providing information to convey the knowledge a researcher wants. To achieve objective information for this study required a qualitative descriptive design similar to the study Brown (2012) conducted. During this study, an analysis of participant responses aimed to identify common themes that revealed the ramifications of levels of engagement among hospitality workers. Meng and Berger (2012) advised researchers to ensure themes reflected the factors of the study.

There is strong growth in tourism and hospitality (Halabi & Lussier, 2014). However, companies face a variety of challenges that are detrimental to business. These challenges include attracting and retaining employees, training and development, and

meeting consumer demands; all of these factors are associated with employee engagement (Bharwani & Butt, 2012).

Prior research has determined that in the service industry, employees give the company a competitive edge over those providing a similar service (Karatepe, 2013). According to a study of customer perceptions of service quality and loyalty in casinos where focus group interviews took place with gamblers from multiple segments, overall service quality was unsatisfactory among each segment (Prentice, 2013). Employee behaviors such as being responsive and showing empathy towards customers constituted major determinants for future patronage and loyalty toward the casino (Prentice, 2013; Wieseke, Geigenmuller, Kraus, 2012). Conversely, while employees are at the forefront of consumer appeal for a company, companies that intertwined humane principles with strategic objectives in their business model characteristically gave the company a competitive edge in attracting and retaining high quality talent (Dimitrov, 2012; Karatepe, 2013).

### **Organizational Performance and Absenteeism**

Researchers have found that attitudinal and behavioral outcomes have significant correlation to work engagement (Goyal et al., 2015; Karatepe, 2013). Cole, Walter, Bedeian, and O'Boyle (2012) examined quantitatively the predictors of voluntary absenteeism. The results found that work engagement is a key predictor of future voluntary absenteeism; more specifically, the more engaged the employee, the fewer the frequency of voluntary absenteeism (Navid, Majid, & Akbar, 2012). Hoxsey (2010),

however, argued that a generalization suggesting a correlation between engagement and absenteeism should not be made and asserted that specific aspects of engagement and an operationalization of variables for absenteeism such as a company benefit plan needs to be taken into consideration when trying to determine a correlation between the two.

Lower absenteeism has direct association with engagement (Harrington, 2012). Prior research identified that one in five employees had admitted to missing work not related to illnesses, but due to the psychological detachment from the organization (Harrington, 2012).

Prior research revealed that during an economic downturn resulting in a company downsizing, voluntary turnover rates of employees tend to increase following the downscaling as opposed to decrease despite economic conditions (Goyal et al., 2015; Karatepe, 2013). Organizational commitment, implicit to engagement, could mitigate voluntary turnover and organizational downsizing (Hacioglu, Eren, Eren, & Celikkan, 2012; Jussila, Kärkkäinen, & Aramo-Immonen, 2014; Malmstrom, 2014). As previously stated, employee engagement is a two-way benefit to the organization and employee. In addition to the employee behaviors associated with engagement, there are a number of perceived organizational benefits as well. Recent studies showed that organizations with highly engaged employees have higher net income, higher operating income, and higher earnings per share. Eccles, Perkins, and Serafeim (2012) posited that organizations with higher levels of engagement not only post higher profits they are also more sustainable compared to companies with lower levels of engagement. Furthermore, the increase in financial performance is in part due to the preparedness of employees to exceed the

expectations of their job descriptions and establish loyalty with organizational stakeholders (Halabi & Lussier, 2014; Mazzei, Flynn, & Haynie, 2016).

Finally, from the initial discussions, many scholars and practitioners agreed that there are three types of employees, engaged, disengaged, and actively disengaged (Benza, 2012). Engaged employees are those who go above and beyond their job description (Coad, 2014) and display behaviors that promote the success of the organization (Bhattacharya, 2013). Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) stated that engaged employees tend to have a sound understanding of business processes and continuously look for ways to improve their performance and the performance of others. Conversely, disengaged employees are uninterested in their work and the organization and their productivity levels reflect their disinterest (Amanche, 2013). Disengaged workers do the bare minimum, which allowed them to maintain their employment with the organization (Srivastava, 2013). However, the actively disengaged employee is the most malignant of all engagement states. Actively disengaged employees are unhappy with their jobs; they act on their dislike for the organization by infecting their peers with negativity and create turmoil throughout the workplace (Palmer & Gignac, 2012). Additionally, actively disengaged employees have found reason to intentionally sabotage the integration of engagement initiatives within the organization. Also, actively disengaged employees undermine the work of coworkers and attempt to convince outside stakeholders to take part in their corruption; however, actively disengaged workers chose not to quit given they are motivated to perform these duties (Jain, 2012).

### **Historical Perspective on Employee Engagement**

Historically, employee engagement dated back to the early 1900s (Blake & Moseley, 2011). Many notable scholars have developed human relation theories that have led to the development of the construct employee engagement (Bhatti, Maitlo, Shaikh, Hashmi, & Shaikh, 2012; Matz, Wells, Minor, & Angel, 2013). The subsequent section contains a review of the ramifications of employee engagement. The hospitality sector in Las Vegas was an industry of interest, particularly because of the impact the current recession had on hospitality companies in Las Vegas. When the recession hit, tourism halted resulting in closures of hotel casinos and mass layoffs citywide. As the economy begins to pick up momentum, it is imperative for hospitality companies to have awareness around employee engagement.

### **Employee Engagement Behaviors**

There has been an influx of social science research surrounding organizational behavior and maximizing employee performance (Fagbohunge, 2012; Park, Spitzmuller, & DeShon, 2013; Tongo, 2012). The plethora of recent research created many human capital concepts, some in which have undergone replacements. One of the most recognized concepts in modern behavioral science is job satisfaction. Although job satisfaction may not appear to be a modern concept given its strong roots in classical theory (Roushdy, 2012), job satisfaction is a concept currently used by modern organizations and management. The concept was the focal point of a significant amount of research; accounting for, what some might consider the largest percentage of organizational research (Wood, Van Veldhoven, Croon, & De Menezes, 2013). The concept had been a variable in such research associated with employee productivity,

turnover and commitment, customer service, organizational performance, and leadership to name a few (Bhatti et al., 2012; Matz et al., 2013; Wood et al., 2012; Zhai, Lindorf, & Cooper, 2012).

Historically, researchers and practitioners had developed many definitions in an attempt to describe job satisfaction. The conceptualization of concept has been an ongoing topic for debate. After countless interpretations, the concept had been dubbed two distinct perspectives, cognitive and affective based (Şahin, 2012; Zhu, 2012).

Affection-oriented job satisfaction utilized a person's emotion as a basis for determining a person's feelings towards their job (Thompson & Phua, 2012). Conversely, Thompson and Phua (2012) asserted that cognitive based job satisfaction measured satisfaction levels based on specific attributes or conditions people experienced in the workplace.

Moreover, after much debate, job satisfaction is agreeably the overall feeling people had for their job (Roushdy, 2012) and the degree of satisfaction employees experienced with their job (Banwo, Du, & Onokala, 2015). Additionally, researchers argued that job satisfaction is directly associated with job related factors, which had been identified as predictors of satisfaction levels within the workplace (Karatepe, 2013). Zahari, Bin, and Shurbagi (2012) postulated that intrinsic and extrinsic factors influenced job satisfaction.

Ahuja and Gautam's (2012) research on employee satisfaction as a predictor of organizational effectiveness in IT data centers found training, conducive work environment, and promotion based on achievements to be factors that affected worker satisfaction. Additionally, varying leadership styles used by management contributed to

worker satisfaction (Du, Swaen, Lindgreen, & Sen, 2013; Othman & Rahman, 2014; Randeree & Chaudry, 2012; Yang, 2015). Similarly, Moors (2012) believed leadership style influenced job satisfaction, however, extended this viewpoint by asserting that a proficiency in conflict management moderated job satisfaction. Also, reward systems inclusive of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards such as salary increases, bonuses, flexible schedule, and vacation influenced job satisfaction if distributed properly throughout the workplace (Down, 2012; Wolever, Bobinet, McCabe, Mackenzie, Fekete, Kusnick, & Baime, 2012). However, Wood et al. (2012) argued that reward systems alone do not increase job satisfaction, as they do not mediate internal factors of the job. They postulated that rewards merely serve as a benefit for exerting more effort, but fail to resolve issues such as negative wellbeing resulting from the job, which ultimately led to dissatisfaction (Wood et al., 2012).

As previously stated, research had drawn connections between job satisfaction and an employee's willingness to remain committed to the organization (Anaza, 2012). This idea is depicted in the construct organizational commitment, which too had roots in employee engagement. Organizational commitment is often described as an employee's dedication towards the organization by displaying discretionary effort (Yamaguchi, 2013). Liu and Wang (2013) asserted that organizational commitment is a psychological attachment between the employee and the organization.

Researchers found that multiple psychological states determined why workers chose to be committed to the organization. Meyer, Stanley, Jackson, McInnis, Maltin, and Sheppard (2012) identified three psychological states that measured organizational



commitment as affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Affective commitment is the emotional attachment the employee had with the organization on the basis of values and goals the employees shared (Onuoha & Tolulope, 2013). Essentially, affective commitment is what most organizations strived to achieve given the positive implications it had on individual performance (Chun, Shin, Choi, & Kim, 2013). Contrary to affective commitment, those sharing a continuance psychological state have more of an extrinsic identification with the organization. Continuance committed employee's stayed with their organization based on the material benefits and potential cons of leaving the company for another (Konja, Grubic-Nesic, & Lalic, 2012). Jha (2011) asserted that people who remained with their organization based on coworker relationships, tenure, and acquired skills shared the mindset of continuance commitment. Moreover, normative commitment, which was most often displayed in older generation employees (Tang, Cunningham, Frauman, Ivy, & Perry, 2012), is commitment to the organization due to the obligatory feeling of loyalty towards the organization (Vandenberghe, Mignonac, & Manville, 2014). Jha (2011) postulated that normative commitment stemmed from social encounters people experienced within society.

While as equally important as the abovementioned concepts, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) constituted a contributory factor in EE. Researchers had suggested that the combination of organizational commitment and OCB are the primary elements that made up EE (Miao, Newman, Schwarz, & Xu, 2013). Bergeron, Shipp, Rosen, and Furst (2013) defined OCB as a discretionary effort shown by employees without regards to a rewards or recognition system. These behaviors indirectly benefitted

the organization as they increased the overall efficiency of the organization. Research had also suggested that OCB was an antecedent to turnover intention and job satisfaction (Benza, 2012; Karatepe, 2013; Sampaio, Thomas, & Font, 2012), service standards (Ma, Qu, Wilson, & Eastman, 2013), and company revenue (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012).

Moreover, researchers had typically identified OCB as a two dimensional concept, interpersonally and organizationally directed (Chun et al., 2013). Essentially, interpersonally directed OCB is discretionary behaviors with primary intent being to help or assist others. Whereas, the focal point of organizationally directed OCB is doing what is right for the organization from a compliance standpoint (Chun et al., 2013). While not quite popularized, Raub and Robert (2013) argued that voice behavior is a form of OCB. They postulated that unlike interpersonal or organizational OCB, voice behavior is a discretionary effort or willingness to vocally admit to problems within the organization and propose solutions to address the problem, which typically is outside the scope of their job. However, contrary to traditional OCB, Raub and Robert (2013) noted that voice behavior OCB could be socially detrimental to persons displaying the behavior due to the fact that it can be perceived as acting outside of boundaries (Oettingen, Marquardt, & Gollwitzer, 2012; Raub & Robert, 2013).

While a significant number of researchers had linked OCB to positive organizational outcomes (Chun et al., 2013; Miao, 2013; Shuck & Herd, 2012), others had conflicting views. Bergeron et al. (2013) argued that OCB is only assessed as a positive attribute under certain work conditions. They postulated that in job roles where performance is measured by outcome such as sales or production, OCB would not be

assessed as a positive attribute. Bergeron et al. (2013) asserted that in an outcome-based work environment where the focal point is individual performance, OCB might inadvertently penalize those engaging in associated behaviors due to the fact that evaluations and recognition is not based on behavior, but instead the final outcome. However, according to research on OCB and in-role behavior (IRB) performance of salespeople, when OCB was displayed by salespeople their IRB performance increased (Engelen, Gupta, Strenger, & Brettel, 2015). IRB performance referred to the essential behaviors required to be successful in a job role. In this case, IRB implied teamwork and sales support systems within the organization. By increasing IRB performance, salesperson outcome performance increased given the salesperson is provided a network of support that better enabled them to perform their job (Engelen et al., 2015). While maintaining a similar viewpoint, Nielsen, Bachrach, Sundstrom, and Halfhill (2012) asserted that the fluidity of knowledge sharing among coworkers was a product of OCB, which as result potentiates a person's capability to perform at greater levels.

Since the development of these initial constructs, researchers had continued exploring human behavior and organizational performance in hope of developing a broader yet more concise method for maximizing employees' full potential. Many researchers believed that the emergence of EE had bridged the gap that existed between similar constructs such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and the effect they have on performance levels of employees and the organization (Shuck, Ghosh, Zigarmi, & Nimon, 2012). In the next section, I explored in detail the presence of EE in

service industries globally and the effects EE had on organizational performance using prevalent literature.

### **Presence and Effect of Employee Engagement**

Since the development of EE, a significant amount of research had taken place connecting engagement and business performance outcomes. Much research has shown that engagement can have a profound effect on operational and financial performance (McNay, 2012). Based on a global survey conducted by International Survey Research, companies with higher levels of engagement reported increased net profit margin and operating margin over a three-year span compared to companies with lower levels of engagement (Fadzilar, Anwar, Maslina, & Zaharah, 2012). A study on global engagement revealed companies in the top 25 percentile of their engagement index had higher return on assets, profitability, and nearly doubled their shareholder value (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012).

Although researchers have demonstrated a correlation between engagement and performance (Choo, Mat, & Al-Omari, 2013), the measurement of engagement to organizational success has always been the topic for debate. Researchers have argued that performance outcomes such as employee retention, customer satisfaction, productivity, and employee well-being are all indicators of measuring engagement (Benza, 2012; Spreitzer & Porath, 2012; Slatten & Mehmetoglu, 2011). However, understanding non-financial indicators in measuring financial performance or ROI (Meng & Berger, 2012) has presented challenges in measuring the effectiveness of engagement (Amat, Renart, & Garcia, 2013). Ebaid (2012) described non-financial indicators as

value-relevant measures as they have more connection with the values of the company than the accounting figures do. Additionally, Meng and Berger (2012) asserted that non-financial indicators do not result in an immediate ROI; rather, non-financial indicators provide a return on expectations (ROE), which presumably leads to a ROI.

Customer-focused engagement is an effective indicator for measuring EE value to organizational performance (Frey, Bayon, & Totzek, 2013). Awwad (2012) surveyed the perceptions employees had of their peers' customer service levels. Other elements in the study included employees from 44 companies in the service industry and data from the American Customer Service Index (ACSI), which predicted potential ROI, market value, and future cash flows based on customer perceptions of service quality, expectation, and value in comparison with customer loyalty and complaints (Awwad, 2012). The results of the study indicated that a significant correlation existed between the employee peer surveys and ACSI data.

Additionally, Schneider et al. (2009) compared the results of their customer-focused engagement study with the ratings of service quality in Fortune 500 companies as determined by financial analysts from Fortune magazine. The results from the comparison analysis revealed that companies with higher engagement levels based on survey and ACSI data had rankings in the upper percentile of the Fortune rankings; whereas, companies perceived to have lower engagement levels fell within the lower ranked companies on the Fortune 500 service quality list (Schneider et al., 2009).

In addition, Kia Automotive partook in an engagement study of their employees after experiencing poor financial performance and high turnover that cost the company an

estimated £600,000 in legal, recruitment, and exit costs by year-end (Tomlinson, 2010). Kia administered surveys to 2500 employees to gauge where the shortfalls in people management occurred. The findings from the survey showed poor internal communication, low awareness of company strategy, and recognition were prominent factors that influenced employees intent to stay and willingness to perform (Tomlinson, 2010). As a result, the company instituted a mandatory training program for management that focused on soft skills, driving performance, people management, self-management, and communication, where 360-degree assessments later occurred for effectiveness.

Additionally, Tomlinson (2010) postulated that by having EE as the focal point of Kia Automotive, the company's financial performance drastically improved the company's outlook over a four-year period following the engagement initiative. Kia reported a reduction in employee turnover from 31 percent in 2006 to fewer than 2 percent in 2009. Also, employee costs fell by more than £400,000 or 71 percent within the first year engagement was at the forefront (Tomlinson, 2010).

Similarly, while effective leadership is an antecedent of EE (Zhu, Wang, Zheng, Liu, & Miao, 2012), studies on the ROI of leadership development and training programs revealed that leadership training would normally have a lasting effect ROI (Arham, Boucher, & Muenjohn, 2013; Blumenthal, Bernard, Bohnen, & Bohmer, 2012; Chaudhry, Javed, & Sabir, 2012). A study with 133 participants each of whom participated in 18-month training programs corroborated other cross-sectional surveys and participant observations. A panel study helped in understanding the structure of such training programs, the information presented, and how understandable the course

presentations were to each participant (Arham, Boucher, & Muenjohn, 2013; Blumenthal, Bernard, Bohnen, & Bohmer, 2012; Chaudhry, Javed, & Sabir, 2012).

Based on participant post-training survey responses, leaders were more equipped to create a vision for their teams that were more in line with expected business results. Additionally, participants asserted that improvements in their abilities to communicate with team members, established better relationships with employees, and increased efficiency were products of the course (Arham, Boucher, & Muenjohn, 2013; Blumenthal, Bernard, Bohnen, & Bohmer, 2012; Chaudhry, Javed, & Sabir, 2012). Although training results might not provide direct financial returns, the outcomes would constitute indirect ROI or ROE (Meng & Berger, 2012), because they lead to positive business outcomes.

SYSCO Corporation, a foodservice marketing and distribution company, conducted a company analysis of human capital within multiple business units to understand how to measure HR practices to business results (Benza, 2012). SYSCO identified three HR metrics that served to guide their analysis, work climate and satisfaction, productivity, and employee retention. Findings from the analysis determined that business units with high levels of satisfaction amongst employees had higher revenues, lower costs, and higher retention rates (Karatepe, 2013). Additionally, these same business units reported significantly higher levels of customer loyalty.

Furthermore, SYSCO extrapolated from their analysis that engagement, rewards for performance, leadership support, and effectiveness of front-line supervisors, quality of life, diversity, and customer focus are catalyst for satisfaction and constituted effective

measurement of business performance (Sampaio et al., 2012). Since EE encompasses certain aspects of employee satisfaction, the use of engagement as an antecedent of satisfaction is an acceptable measure of EE to business outcomes. Moreover, SYSCO's improved understanding of measuring HR processes to business results has allowed the company to increase retention rates by 20 percent over six years, which saved an estimated 50 million in hiring and training cost (Benza, 2012; Karatepe, 2013; Sampaio et al., 2012).

As previously stated, research has shown a correlation between EE and employee well-being (Arham, Boucher, & Muenjohn, 2013; Blumenthal, Bernard, Bohnen, & Bohmer, 2012; Chaudhry, Javed, & Sabir, 2012; Harrington, 2012). By understanding the existence of this relationship, some organizations had been able to successfully measure the financial impact of engagement and well-being. As a part of engagement initiatives, increased efforts were placed on improving communication between supervisors and employees (Kossek, Kalliath, & Kalliath, 2012). According to Schneider, Macey, Barbera, and Martin (2009) improving communication between supervisors and employees allowed Harrah's Inc. to identify needs that were essential to employees and issues employees were experiencing outside the workplace, all in which contributed to satisfaction levels within the workplace.

Consequent upon the entire search for correlation, on-site facilities for preventive-care visits were visible (Kossek et al., 2012). Analytics reports demonstrated not only improvements in satisfaction levels of employees, reports revealed that some companies saved millions in health care expenses within a year's time (Kossek et al., 2012).



Similarly, some companies have attributed financial savings to their wellness programs. Companies such as Johnson & Johnson and Safeway reportedly saved millions in health care and other expense categories due to the instituting of their wellness program (Connolly, & Myers, 2012; Howard, 2012). Additionally, Safeway was able to reduce health care expenses by 13% with their wellness program; however, the company noted that employees also experienced savings on their premiums of more than 20% with the companies wellness program (Connolly, & Myers, 2012; Howard, 2012).

Furthermore, while most researchers agreed with the notion, engagement leads to positive business outcomes, some researchers had a different perspective of engagement. While engagement is important to the workplace, the drivers of engagement are not in line with the drivers of business outcomes, which as a result are not an adequate measurement of business outcomes (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012). They postulated that the top drivers of engagement and business results do not coincide with one another, hypothesizing that focusing solely on engagement would ultimately not result in business results and could potentially cause the organization to regress further from the performance goals. Research users could base their assumptions on Gallup Organization that found that only one store out of a group of stores that portrayed highly engaged work environments reported having both highly engaged employees and high customer engagement (Ainin, Parveen, Moghavvemi, Jaafar, & Mohd Shuib, 2015). Essentially, these results provided evidence that their customer did not reap the benefit of the initiatives used to create an engaged workforce, based on feedback provided from customer surveys (Ainin et al., 2015; Jiang et al., 2012).

Similarly, Suzy Dale conducted a study on the perception service workers at The Prison Service had of their supervisors (Ireland & Fisher, 2010). How their perception influenced their work performance constituted part of the study. The researcher found that workers with the highest performance levels appeared to have the most negative perception of their supervisors (Ireland & Fisher, 2010). These findings conflict with traditional research on engagement, which postulates that worker perception of supervisors is a predictor of performance and that negative perceptions generally lead to lower levels of performance (Srivastava, 2013). Ireland and Fisher (2010) argued that based on their findings, performance can potentially be a result of sound organizational operations and not that of engagement.

Furthermore, whether practitioners and researchers are in full agreement with the potential business outcomes resulting from engagement, a significant amount of instruments have served in measuring engagement levels within the workplace. Some instruments measured broad quantities of the phenomena. Others measured through exploring human interface with the phenomena. The subsequent section contains discussions on commonly used instruments organizations have adopted to determine engagement levels within the workplace.

### **Existing Measurement Instruments**

Over time, researchers and consultancy firms have debated the most efficient means to measuring engagement levels of employees. Much importance was placed on these methods due to the plethora of information that can be extrapolated from employees such as perception of the organization, adequate support systems, and the likelihood to go

above and beyond their job description (Powis, 2012). At the time, the most common form of measuring engagement was by way of survey. Wiley (2012) postulated that surveys are the most beneficial means to measuring engagement levels given their ability to strategically measure for talent management and business strategy collectively.

Moreover, while the survey was the most commonly used instrument for measuring engagement levels, differences amongst organizations required surveys that identified specific information. For this reason, research based firms developed an array of survey instruments. However, each instrument has proprietary indicators that served in gauging engagement levels.

One of the most notable survey instruments for understanding engagement levels is the Gallup Workplace Audit or q12. The q12 survey from Gallup was a way of measuring the relationship between engagement and business outcomes (Navid et al., 2012). The survey was an adaptation of work from Buckingham and Coffman (1999) who developed 12 questions to measure employee engagement across 2,500 businesses in multiple industries globally (Badal & Harter, 2014). Gallup's q12 instrument included an overall satisfaction indicator that a researcher could use to determine employee satisfaction levels within the organization. Additionally, a set of 12 questions measured employee perceptions on issues such as communication, receiving feedback, role fit, and feeling appreciated (Harter, Schmidt, Agrawal, & Plowman, 2013). Additionally, the questions from the q12 then undergo measurement with nine business outcomes that Gallup considered prominent areas to gauge business success such as customer loyalty, profitability, turnover, and absenteeism (Harter et al., 2013).

However, Hewitt Associates took a different approach when developing their engagement survey. Unlike the q12 by Gallup that focused on the actionable work behaviors of management, Hewitt Associates approached engagement from the employee standpoint (Srivastava, 2013). The Hewitt Engagement Model focused on the actionable behaviors of employees. Their engagement model consisted of a six-item survey that measured engagement using the three S's: *say*, *stay*, and *strive* (Winborg, 2015). Essentially, the model measured engagement based on whether the employee embraced the organization by speaking positively about it internally and externally, or simply had a desire to remain employed at the organization, and have a willingness to go above and beyond to perform in ways that promoted business success (Brown & Reilly, 2013).

Similarly, the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) developed a survey that measured engagement using organizational commitment and citizenship behavior as the focal points (Wageeh, 2016). Comparably to Gallup's q12, the IES engagement survey tool utilized a 12-question indicator to gauge engagement, however, their survey instrument pertained more to employee attitudes than business outcomes; instead, the IES survey pertained to organizational values (Wageeh, 2016).

Finally, the Utrecht Work Engagement Survey (UWES) measured engagement based on three assumptions of work engagement, vigor, dedication, and absorption (Miao, 2013). The most common form of the UWES was the UWES-9, which is a nine-item scale that individually measured each of the three components of work engagement (Culbertson et al., 2012). Unlike Hewitt Associates 'say', 'stay', and 'strive' model, which measured actionable employee behaviors; UWES is a measurement of employees

feelings for and toward their work (Culbertson et al., 2012). Moreover, the UWES measured vigor, dedication, and absorption by posing questions such as, *At my work, I feel bursting with energy*, *My job inspires me*, and *When I'm at work, I forget everything else around me*. Moreover, these strategies were adaptable in the design of participant interview questions.

### **Human Capital Considerations**

Human capital is the most valuable resource an organization possesses (Field & Johann, 2012). Additionally, a review by The Bureau of Labor, which consisted of more than 100 studies, found that people practices positively impacted financial performance, productivity, and employee satisfaction (Baptista, Karaöz, & Mendonça, 2014). For this reason, organizations invested in a relatively innovative human resource concept called employee engagement. While there might be no generally accepted definition for the term, scholars and practitioners developed their own interpretations of employee engagement based on various studies (Sange & Srivasatava, 2012; Field & Johannm, 2012). Sange and Srivasatava (2012) asserted that employee engagement is an approach used by organizational leadership that has a positive psychological effect on an employee, which resulted in alternate behaviors and performance. However, Zacher et al. (2014) defined employee engagement as the development of a work environment where employees feel empowered, involved, passionate, and committed to the organization; and their job performance reflected these behaviors.

Hewitt Associates, a global human resources consulting firm, showed evidence that global engagement scores have continuously been on the decrease; however, recent

scores show engagement levels have dropped to their lowest point in 15 years (Field & Johann, 2012). Li et al. (2012) asserted that maintaining an engaging workplace was critical to the overall quality of work performed by the employee. In addition, Li et al. (2012) said engaged employees, particularly those working in service organizations, outperformed their counterparts by being more proactive, frequently take initiative, and developed a sense of ownership for the work performed, which directly affected the output quality.

As employee engagement gains popularity among practitioners and in academia, research on employee engagement and organizational performance has yielded varying results (Shaffer, Hassan, & Zhou, 2015; Shepard, 2013; Yu, 2013). A study conducted by the Corporate Leadership Council concluded that organizations that increased engagement levels throughout their organizations could potentially see increases in performance up to 20% in conjunction with an 87% reduction in the perception employees had regarding leaving the organization (Sange & Srivasatava, 2012). Additionally, Shuck and Reio (2011) conducted a correlational study consisting of 283 participants from multiple industries. The correlation between the predictor and dependent variable was positive. Therefore, the result was significant. A critical analysis of the study revealed that among the factors, *relationship between job fit, commitment, psychological climate, and discretionary efforts*, and the *construct employee*, the higher the engagement, the higher the organizational performance.

In addition to research on engagement and performance outcomes, substantial research had been dedicated to identifying the drivers of engagement. Grumman and

Saks (2011) researched into drivers of employee engagement that contributed to increased performance. In that process, they developed the Employee Engagement Management Model (EEMM). The EEMM identified performance agreement, engagement facilitation, performance and engagement appraisal, and feedback as drivers of organizational engagement (Grumman & Saks, 2011). Conversely, 3M, a technology company, developed a four-pronged approach which focused on top-level engagement and trust in management (Collins & Cooper, 2014). 3M's four-pronged approach identified training on emotional intelligence, involvement in company and community programs, and innovation through increased channels of communication as drivers to increase organizational engagement and business performance (Collins & Cooper, 2014).

As previously stated, a significant amount of research (Odoardi, Battistelli, & Montani, 2013; Shuck et al., 2012) had taken place in the area of employee engagement. However, only a paucity of empirical research existed on employee engagement and individual and organizational performance in the hospitality industry. Yu (2013) revealed there was a lack of empirical research on employee engagement in the hospitality industry.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 1 of the study, a detailed review of concepts and theories that have shaped EE were available from extant literature. The section also included discussions on the perceived relationship between EE and business outcomes along with a review of current techniques to measure engagement levels from existing research. Additionally, Section 1 contained summaries of the conceptual framework, nature of the study, and

proposed methodologies. Furthermore, section 2 contains the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, the participants of the study, the research method and design, population sampling, data collection, data analysis technique, and reliability and validity. The final section includes an overview of the study, presentation of findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, reflections, and the study summary and conclusions.



## Section 2: The Project

This section contains a detailed review of the methodology for the study. The section includes an overview of the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, a review of the selection process for participants, the research method and design, data collection and analysis, and an examination of validity. Exploring the strategies of a research participant entails a deep immersion into the participant's world. The qualitative descriptive design served in accessing the circumstances under which the participants strategized and executed employee engagement processes.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore the strategies that hospitality industry supervisors and managers used for implementing employee engagement programs. The population for this study consisted of managers and supervisors of five-star hospitality companies, including gaming and casino entities in Las Vegas, Nevada. To capture the employee engagement strategies that hospitality functionaries used, I spoke to individuals who had operated in that system over a length of time and were knowledgeable of employee engagement practices. These individuals were the leaders of five-star hospitality companies and they received solicitation for participation in the study. Las Vegas has attained the status of a major hospitality city. An understanding of the strategies the managers and supervisors of hospitality businesses used involved seeking out the individuals who operate such businesses in Las Vegas.

Successful employee engagement could bring about social change through the creation of a flourishing business society that engulfs other business types within that

geographic area of this study. Such positive influence could become instrumental in changing the business landscape across Las Vegas, and potentially Nevada as a whole, leading to increased job satisfaction and improved customer service, consequently contributing to the quality of life of community members, and growth in the community.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher includes recruiting participants, establishing a good working relationship with them, scheduling their interview appointments, and interviewing the participants (Azeem & Salfi, 2012). I analyzed and presented the results and recommendations objectively. Feedback from the interview questions was verified to ensure consistency with responses across all participants (Harper & Cole, 2012).

In preparing for the interviews, I followed detailed protocol to ensure that each interview was the same (Yin, 2014). These protocols contained steps for gaining permission to interview each participant. Moreover, this protocol is vital in that it aids in strengthening the validity of the research by ensuring each interview is identical (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Azeem and Salfi (2012) stated that qualitative data should be organized into themes. Therefore, at the completion of the interview process, I used NVivo10 software to analyze the data and identifying common themes and subthemes that existed in each interviewee's transcript.

My relationship with the topic stems from my observations among counterparts in other companies, as well as casual comments referring to faulty employee engagement in organizations within Las Vegas. My relationship with the participants arose from interactions at work, after which I began to correspond with the new contacts. I also

developed working relationships while employed within the hospitality industry in the Las Vegas area. That intercorrespondence built trust and confidence. My connection with the geographic area is that I have worked within the hospitality industry in Las Vegas for 5 years in a leadership capacity, and possess a background in human capital management. All participants, with the exception of the first participant, were accessible from a list of referrals solicited through other participants in a snowball sampling method. Prospecting and recruiting the first participant arose from interaction at the social events. Thereafter, recommendations from the first participant helped in prospecting and recruiting subsequent participants. Consequently, I had no direct working relationships with any participants.

### **Participants**

Strategy for gaining access to participants included raising the issue of employee engagement when I attend the many social events that took place in Las Vegas. Individuals who indicated interest became prospects. I took steps to qualify them and recruit those who met the criteria for participation. Establishing a working relationship with participants involved maintaining constant communication with my existing contacts. When the time came to recruit participants, I used the snowball sampling method, and prospects emerged from my established contacts prior to the snowball referral.

I used the snowball sampling method for this study. Due to the prevalence of casual discussions among hospitality industry employees (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), it was easy to ask the first recruit to refer someone he or she knows who might have the

experience in the subject area of this study. The population for the study consisted of managers and supervisors of five-star hospitality companies within Las Vegas. Scholarly research revealed 75 hospitality companies operate in the city of Las Vegas (Brown, 2012). I used the hospitality industry as the population for the study due to the industry being the largest employer in the Las Vegas workforce (Brown, 2012).

A diverse group of service entities define the hospitality industry. Businesses such as restaurants, nightclubs and lounges, casinos, retail outlets, and hotels make up the industry. However, in Las Vegas, these business entities are usually constituents of one organization where the differing businesses would have the same owner and operate under one roof. Such a conglomerate is usually a resort, and resorts are a significant percentage of the hospitality industry in Las Vegas.

In order to avoid data saturation (Moustakas, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014), I used a sample size of twenty participants. According to Moustakas (1994), achieving breadth and depth in a qualitative study requires interviewing a number of participants that was not too high (to face saturation problems), or too low (to lead to scanty data) to answer the research question. Therefore, twenty participants were enough to participate in this qualitative descriptive study using a nondiscriminative snowball sampling method, which allowed for a diverse group of participants across the broad hospitality industry spectrum.

All participants were in active employment within the hospitality industry or previously employed within 5 years of the study. Participants who had worked in a managerial or supervisory capacity progressed from prospect to participant. Utilizing

participants at managerial and supervisory levels across operations and human resource departments increased the depth of the data by exploring their strategies in EE within hospitality through multiple levels of the organization.

Once all invitees responded accordingly and the 20 participants became available, the process of appointment scheduling became necessary for interviewing each person during an agreed-upon time and location. Due to the nature of the hospitality industry, if conflicting schedules warranted scheduling more interviews or arranging remote location interviews, the affected participants were accommodated. Once all interviews and analysis were complete, I stored data from the interviews in a secure safe that only I had access to. The safe will remain in a filing cabinet under lock and key for a period of 5 years following the completion of the study.

Assuring ethical protection of participants involved providing prospective participants with the consent letter. The document contained extensive information on the participant's rights to participate, withdraw, answer all questions, answer few or no questions, or ask questions without penalty. The prospects read and signed the document before entering the interview phase.

### **Research Method and Design**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore the strategies hospitality industry supervisors and managers used for implementing employee engagement programs. This study also was an avenue to explore the EE strategies managers and supervisors implemented in five-star hospitality organizations in Las Vegas.

During the data analysis, potential commonalities in themes became clear from participant perceptions through the emergence of word frequencies. During the analysis exercise, meanings and participant-by-participant response similarities were discovered. Observation of themes also provided a basis for future examinations of the subject of employee engagement within either Las Vegas or other geographies. For this reason, a qualitative descriptive method would lay a good foundation for future explorations to gain an in-depth understanding of employee perceptions of EE through managerial and supervisory strategies. Smith et al. (2009) stated that the activities of participants usually give an idea of activities of others in the participants' worlds. Consequently, researchers would focus exploration efforts on participants and their experiences. According to Harper and Cole (2012), one of the unique aspects of qualitative research is being able to conduct interviews to understand how participants perceive a particular topic. However, in keeping up with the instructions of Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, and Altman (2012), and to increase the trustworthiness and reliability of the study, creating verbatim extracts became necessary, especially for comparison with themes that emerged from the interviews.

## **Method**

The qualitative method facilitated the achievement of breadth and depth of data in determining the ramifications of employee engagement within the hospitality industry in Las Vegas. Walker (2012) postulated that the qualitative research method provides a richer scope of detail by providing verbal dialogue within the study. The depth of detail in this study could prove useful for future studies. Additionally, the qualitative data in

this study substantiated the need for hospitality organizations to spearhead engagement programs, provided the potential overall effect on business was positive.

The quantitative method does not focus on personal narratives, lived experiences, or human angles of cases (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Being that the significance of the proposed study focuses on the uniqueness of the individual participants' experiences, a quantitative research method would not suffice. Measures for quantitative research are not capable of capturing interactions between people (Salehi & Golafshani, 2013). In addition, quantitative research can determine trends, associations, and relationships. However, quantitative research fails to explain the reasons behind participants' responses (Salehi & Golafshani, 2013). For this reason, a qualitative methodology employing a qualitative descriptive design was the ideal approach to explore the strategies managers and supervisors used to implement employee engagement in the hospitality casino industry. Therefore, using the quantitative methodology would have prevented this study from reaching the core of participant circumstances to uncover their experiences in the topic of the study. Quantitative analysis fails to fully reveal circumstantial issues and events (Verdonk, Röntzsch, de Vries, & Houkes, 2014; Walker, 2012), which made it not suitable for this study. Quantitative studies are useful in measuring and quantifying relationships of a phenomenon (Kelemen & Rumens, 2012; Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013).

The phenomena under study were EE and performance. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, mathematical or statistical conclusions were inapplicable. Rather,

common themes that emerged during the research process allowed me to answer the research questions.

A mixed method approach was inappropriate for this study even though it could be applicable. Mixed method approach adds rigor and credibility to research by simultaneously paralleling qualitative and quantitative research (Vaitkevicious, & Kazokiene, 2013). Although the mixed method could have been applicable for this research, the time required for that methodology was not in alignment with the purpose of this study.

After determining a qualitative method would be best suited for this study, a consideration of qualitative research designs became necessary. The qualitative descriptive research design became the choice as it allowed for a richer view of individual perceptions and experiences, which led to the categorization of common themes for a more in-depth understanding of EE and perceived business outcomes.

Given that the purpose of the study was to understand the strategies managers and supervisors used to implement employee engagement and achieve organizational performance, a grounded theory approach was not suitable. Although grounded theory is a qualitative research approach, the intent of the method is to develop explanatory theories or build on current theories of a phenomenon (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014; Wisdom, Cavaleri, Onwuegbuzie, & Green, 2012; Yilmaz, 2015).



## **Research Design**

This research study involved the use of a qualitative descriptive design. According to Lambert and Lambert (2012), a qualitative descriptive study provides a deeper view of an individuals' perception based on their life-world experiences. Semistructured interviews garner the unique individual experiences, and provide greater depths of understanding by identifying emerging themes (Moher et al., 2012). However, several qualitative research designs exist that could align with learning about the presence of EE in hospitality.

Other designs that include ethnography, single case study, descriptive study, multiple case study, and grounded theory. However, none of these designs passed the selection test due to diverse restrictions that each of the designs could place on the study. The single case study placed a limitation on the population. The multiple-case study involved gathering data from specific entities or groups to understand perceptions on processes, actions, or events within the select population under study (Yin, 2014).

The ethnographic design would involve dwelling with the prospective participants for an extended period to discover their world. Grounded theory would involve participating in the activities of the prospects to learn why, in the case of this study, employee engagement was not high enough to lead corporations to higher performance. Due to the nature of the study, only the qualitative descriptive design became appropriate for this study to explore the naturalistic experiences of participants. The qualitative descriptive design helped in comprehending the occupational life experiences of employees in any particular Las Vegas hospitality company, classification of employee,

or demographic. Furthermore, the study featured a narrow base approach that focused strictly on any qualified employee of a company operating in Las Vegas under the hospitality classification. One advantage of a qualitative approach is that perceptions, facial expressions, non-verbal cues, and other body language elements can become visible for ease of analysis and interpretation, especially from an unbounded group (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Population and Sampling**

Due to the nature of the study, the population for the study consisted of industry supervisors and managers of hospitality companies in Las Vegas. On the other hand, the sample consisted of 20 individuals who are serving, or have served as owners, managers, or supervisors within Las Vegas hospitality industry. A snowball sampling procedure aided access to participants. Snowball sampling is the ideal procedure for ensuring that participants are truly representative of the appropriate research population (Ahuja & Gautam, 2012; Robinson, 2014). Snowball procedure enables a researcher to identify participants that are key informants to a topic under study. However, Yin (2014) asserted that in order to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research when using snowball sampling, a researcher must use a documented set of parameters during participant selections. The above considerations helped in determining the final population and sample for this study.

According to Brown (2012), hospitality ranked first as the largest employer within the State of Nevada. In terms of research designs, Englander (2012) posited that a qualitative research study does not require a specific number of participants as long as the

quantity is capable of adequately depicting the population; however, the suggestion was the study should include three participants, at the very least. That number would constitute part of the factors in determining the number of participants in the study. However, rather than use only three participants and risk shallowness of research, the choice of 20 participants meant the presence of buffers.

Through snowball sampling, the selection of 20 participants from the hospitality industry occurred. Factors for interviewee selection included industry knowledge and experience, as Pechlaner and Volgger (2012) recommended. Ensuring a diverse group of participants was an important element in the research, given varied perspectives of EE. Diversity arose from including all facets of the hospitality industry such as hotel, nightlife, and restaurants as part of the sample group. Additionally, the inclusion of employees with experiences from various departments, occupations, pay grades, and star-rated organizations assured diversity in participant selection. The 20 participants fell into the following categories: (a) ten managers, and (b) ten supervisors. Five of them respectively came from human resource, restaurant, hotel, and nightlife. All of them had their experiences in those varying areas of hospitality operations within multiple hospitality companies.

The knowledge of managers and supervisors helped in gaining a deeper understanding of EE from the perspective of those who implemented, or are still implementing employee engagement protocols in comparison with the primary beneficiaries of engagement. Additionally, the diversity in management level participants, more specifically the addition of HR management, added depth to the

research. This advantage occurred because HR departments typically develop and execute employee engagement throughout organizations by departmental leadership. While only 20 participants faced interviews among thousands within that population, the results would still not allow for generalizations across all hospitality organizations in Las Vegas. Herein is the responsibility of readers and research users to determine transfer criteria.

The sample size must adequately represent the population of those experiencing the phenomena under study (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014). Moreover, interviews helped in accessing detailed in depth understanding of the participants' employee engagement strategies. In line with Sandelowski (2000) recommendations, themes emerged and charted the course for the remaining part of the research activity. In several instances, themes also do emerge during data analysis of interview responses. Commonalities among the themes also constitute clues as to the firmness of the study. Participant response similarities existed as commonalities. Word frequencies emerging from one participant's responses incrementally matched those emerging from another's responses. At the point of data saturation, those commonalities became clues of study firmness. These elements were present in the process of managing the data in this substantive study.

### **Ethical Research**

The consenting process involved providing each prospective participant with a consent letter. The participants read the document and consented before undergoing the interview process. Participants had the option to exercise the right to withdraw from the

study by merely indicating a desire to do so whether verbally or in writing, as Yin (2014) prescribed. Participants had the opportunity to withdraw from the study as soon as they had such a desire. Participants knew they would not receive any incentives to take part in the study. The research data and related media stayed in a secure storage to protect the rights of participants. After 5 years, all the research media in storage will undergo destruction by incineration, shredding, and smashing.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Instruments**

This study was an effort to pursue an understanding of strategies Las Vegas hospitality industry managers and supervisors use to implement EE. An understanding of performance outcomes was critical to the investigation. This effort served as a foundation for increasing employer awareness on the value behind EE. The data collection instrument was a set of open-ended interview questions (Appendix B) for a face-to-face delivery in a semistructured format. Each interview followed a protocol to ensure consistency in the process (Yin, 2014).

Shadowing Yin's (2014) protocol, a consent letter went out to prospective interviewees explaining the purpose and intent of the study. The consent letter went to each participant by email, fax, or surface mail prior to the interview. In some instances, a participant, read and signed the participant consent form at an agreed upon location just before the commencement of interviews. This process included a reiteration the purpose of the study, and provided specific detail by which the participant agreed. At that stage, participants had the opportunity to ask questions regarding the information on the

consent form. Then, the formal interview commenced using the research protocol and interview questions. During the interview, detailed note making occurred along with an audio recording of each interview. The audio recording served to ensure the accuracy of notes.

The instrument measured no concepts, since this was a qualitative study. Furthermore, numerical values did not characterize this research (Stierand & Dorfler, 2012). Therefore, calculation of scores was inapplicable. The reliability and validity of the instrument came from ensuring the questions were correct, participant responses were accurate, and the audio recording device was working properly. The procedure for participants to complete the interview activity was sequential, as Pechlaner and Volgger (2012) recommended for researchers. Some raw data are within the text reporting the findings. Since this was not a quantitative study, variables did not exist. Slatten and Mehmetoglu (2011). Furthermore, as qualitative research, test and retest of instrument were not part of the process. A need did not exist to test hypotheses. The instrument for this study was a set of open-ended questions. The administration of the questions followed a semistructured interview format. Therefore, no instrument required revisions.

### **Data Collection Technique**

The technique for collecting data included administering open-ended questions on participants in a semistructured interview atmosphere. An audio recording device captured participant responses. Journal notes also assisted in capturing other nonverbal nuances. Data also arose from observation notes. I observed the participants' nonverbal cues. A participant's body language in the face of an interview question constituted

additional raw data. Finally, voice inflections and facial expressions were critical to the collection of data.

As Sandelowski (2000) asserted, several different ways existed to collect data for a qualitative descriptive study such as observation and participant interviewing. Based on the nature of the study, both techniques were appropriate for data collection. The interviews took place on locations that the participants choose; such locations had minimal distractions. The data collection procedures followed a sequence to ensure all aspects of the investigative activity were valid.

At the time and place of the interview, I welcomed the participant to the agreed interview location. We exchanged pleasantries to set the tone for the interview. Participant signed the consent form, if he or she had not already done so. Interviewer commenced asking the questions. Participants had the latitude to include any details that he or she deemed necessary; qualitative descriptive designs characteristically offer that latitude (Sandelowski, 2000). At the end of the interview, I thanked the participant for assisting me in the research.

All 20 participants received exposure to the usage of these preliminary procedures. Moreover, participant semistructured interviews took place in a way to eliminate and avoid interviewer bias in participant responses. At the conclusion of each interview, participants agreed to receive follow-up telephone calls or emails with regard to their responses.

Interview respondents provided their strategies for implementing employee engagement within their organizations. Respondents also identified the strategies that

succeeded and those that failed. Data arose from a diverse group of 20 participants from various Las Vegas casinos using a non-discriminative snowball sampling method.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) explained that a qualitative researcher participates in the gathering of information through inductive methods such as interviews, discussions, and participant observation. Furthermore, the qualitative researcher would represent it from the perspective of the research participants. In addition, the data analysis led to identifying additional themes that emerged.

This qualitative descriptive study now contains strategies managers and supervisors use to implement employee engagement programs within the hospitality industry. The corresponding performance outcomes in five star Las Vegas hospitality industry organizations were antecedent to the investigation. Above all, the qualification and knowledge of the participants necessitated the investigation to understand the strategies participants used to implement EE. The data was from 20 face-to-face interviews. Each of the 20 participants fell under (10) managers and (10) supervisors both of whom constitute business leaders in the hospitality industry. Five participants were from each of the four areas of hospitality: HR, restaurant, hotel, and nightlife. The organizations under study included a diverse group of hospitality companies: luxury hotel and casino resort, hotel resort without a casino, and boutique hotel.

The data collection activity, which consisted of the 20 face-to-face interviews, occurred between December 20, 2014 and February 10, 2015. Each face-to-face interview took place in a private conference room, which provided a quiet professional atmosphere with minimal distractions. All participant interviews passed through audio



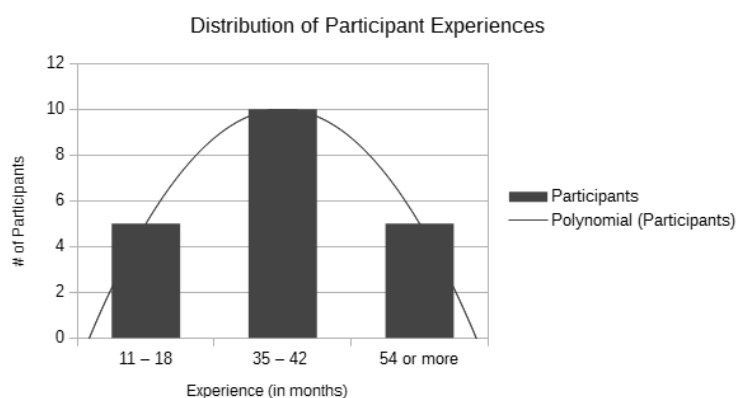
recording in conjunction with hand-written notes. The purpose of the audio recording was to ensure the accuracy of the handwritten notes. Additionally, each participant responded to each of the 12 open-ended interview questions. At the conclusion of the interview process, a review of the audio recordings from each interview took place to guarantee the accuracy of details in the handwritten notes. Subsequently, I created a typed transcription of all participant data from written notes and audio recordings. To ensure confidentiality, I coded data corresponding to participant identities as EP1, EP2, EP3, and so forth up to EP20 representing *EnlistedParticipant*.

Each participant interview began with an informal conversation to set the tone for the interview. The review and signing of the participant consent letter followed (Appendix C) for those who did not sign prior to the interview date. I gave the participants the opportunity to ask questions pertaining to the study, should any question arise. Each participant had the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the study. Participants answered nine preliminary demographic questions before answering the 12 open-ended interview questions. The questions pertained to the strategies participants used to implement employee engagement. In addition to the 12 interview questions, participants answered supporting questions to gain clarification on the information they received. Moreover, each participant answered all the questions. The duration of the interviews ranged between 30 and 45 minutes.

I executed the plan of interviewing 10 managers and 10 supervisors each coming from a diverse group of hospitality organizations in Las Vegas as participants in this qualitative descriptive study. Responses from enlisted participants represented primary

data. The data transcripts became Microsoft word files. More data arose from the audio recordings of the interviews. Observation notes s factored into the data analysis process. The NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software received all analysis-ready data. Data coding and organization yielded the themes, (a) effect on employees, (b) effect on supervisor-employee relationship, and (c) effect on organization performance.

Based on demographic and participant criteria, each of the 20 participants reported working for a publicly traded company. All participants identified themselves as having worked in a luxury hotel casino resort that employe more than 2000 employee. Additionally, all participants stated the company under study currently employs them. Of the 20 participants, five participants worked with the company for greater than 11 months and less than 18 months; 10 participants greater than 35 months and less than 42 months; five participants greater than 54 months. The figure below shows the distribution of employee experiences.



*Figure 1.* Participant work experience in hospitality. Chart showing a distribution of participant work experience

Research participants were within the same geographic location and industry in line with the prescriptions of DeLyser (2013). Furthermore, the participants were either currently employed with the companies or had already worked for a period greater than 12 months. Therefore, participants were at similar stages of understanding of employee engagement, and were of similar organizational sizes. This structure mitigated any analytical extremities that could have arisen had these parameters been immensely different. Upon completion of the interviews, EP1 received only one follow-up phone call to clarify the meaning of employee engagement.

### **Data Organization Techniques**

A systematic approach helped in keeping track of data as well as emerging themes. Research log took the form of Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for recording and following up with prospects until the prospects became participants. Journaling took place in both MS Excel and notepads. Raw data were two forms such as (a) data for reporting the findings, and (b) data for destruction after the research. Some of the data for reporting findings featured in Section 3 to support text explanations. Data for destruction already reside in a secure filing system (digital and analog) where they will be for 5 years before incineration, smashing, burning or otherwise destruction. Data from the interviews served as input into NVivo10 analytical software to gain a deeper understanding of the data (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2015). Additionally, data from audio recordings followed the same process. Reflective journals and notes were useful in the entire process.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

Data reliability is of paramount importance in research, and Yin's (2014) prescription involving compiling data, disassembling data, reassembling data, interpreting data, and making conclusions became important in the analysis exercise. Data for the analysis in this study came from multiple sources for the purposes of methodological triangulation such as face-to-face interviews and company documents in line with the suggestions from Fusch and Ness (2015). This triangulation exercise was also in line with the postulations of Denzin (2012) and Jamshed (2014) to achieve methodological triangulation through multiple data sources. I gained full interpretation of participant presentations through the triangulation exercise. According to Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012), Marshall and Rossman (2016), methodological triangulation helps to achieve richness and depth in data. The conceptual framework of leader-member exchange theory was useful in interpreting participant responses from the viewpoint of Dansereau et al. (1975), revealing connections between the activities of the hospitality business leaders and the employees who participated in the engagement programs.

Research participants answered the following open-ended questions in a semistructured interview format to elicit any details arising from participant knowledge:

1. How does leader-member exchange within your organization enhance employee engagement?
2. In what ways might formal engagement programs in your company show the level of interaction between the employers and employees?

3. In what way has employee engagement impacted you in your performance as an employee?
4. In what way has employee engagement impacted the overall performance of your company?
5. How does your company's employee survey process reflect mutual exchange among all the people in the organization?
6. How might your company's current and potential practices and strategies provide insight in employee engagement and interaction?
7. What employee engagement initiatives help the overall performance of your organization?
8. In what ways does your company solicit or gain insight from employees on company programs, supervisors or management, and feedback pertaining to attitudinal and behavioral opinions?
9. Leader-Member exchange focuses on the dyadic connections among people. How would you describe leader-member exchange in the context of your organization's operations?
10. Since the last employee survey or previously discussed method, have you seen any specific actions by the organization, leadership, and management?
11. How successful are employee engagement post-survey actions?
12. How, if at all, did your organization communicate results of employee engagement survey?

As the main purpose was to develop a greater understanding of the research data, specific processes and techniques helped in ensuring that data yield usable results. The final interview transcripts for all 20 participants constituted data input into NVivo10 qualitative research analysis software to determine common themes amongst responses (Azeem & Salfi, 2012; Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs, 2014). Data processing should involve using a thematic and narrative analysis (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2015). The above suggestion guided the process in this study.

The software possesses the capacity to process textual expressions by grouping words and phrases in frequencies of use, as well as to reveal other high and low occurrences during participant interviews. Once the common themes from the data emerged with their nodes with NVivo10, key dialogue from participant responses demonstrating similarities and differences in individual perceptions formed items under primary themes that circumscribed them.

Subsequently, overlapping and interchangeable themes that emerged from the data served as annotations, and the common characteristics of the themes lined up for comparison with related theory from existing literature. Next, a narrative analysis became necessary to further the understanding of the primary themes and antecedent data as they relate to primary and secondary questions of the study respectively as follows:

*What are the strategies hospitality industry supervisors and managers used to create employee engagement programs? How do hospitality employees perceive the engagement initiatives and programs their supervisors and managers initiate?* NVivo10 is the qualitative research analysis software that served to process and maintains research logs

and inputs because of the functionality of the software. The research log function in NVivo10 includes enabled links from internal and external sources. Webpages and other research related media link to each log entry for seamless access (Elo et al., 2014; Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2015). This functionality enables the software to simplify the analysis process.

Open and axial coding helped in streamlining participants and their responses. This coding process started with the listing of prospects in MS Excel, using PR1 to denote *Prospect 1*, for instance. When each prospect became a participant, a higher-level code list reflected P1 to denote *Participant 1* (for the prospect to convert to participant). This was necessary because the first prospect might not necessarily make up his or her mind to join the study before the subsequent prospects.

For purposes of participant privacy rights, participant names existed only on the MS Excel coding spreadsheet. Proposal and final report texts did not reveal names of the participants. As soon as a participant went through interview scheduling, interview meeting, consent form clearance, and formal interview, the identities of each of the 20 participants showed as EP1, EP2, EP3 and so forth to indicate Enlisted *Participant 1, 2, 3, and on to 20*. As a record-keeping requisite, the date and times of each interview was part of the records on the spreadsheet along with emerging ideas, reflections, or personal thoughts concerning the unfolding data. Those records aligned with specific names of the participants as very high-level identifiers, and all supporting data were part of serial compilations that directly showed which participant owned the record. Elo et al. (2014) and Woods, Paulus, Atkins, and Macklin, (2015) stipulated that as much masking as a

researcher can do would be appropriate to guarantee privacy protections. Throughout the research, the research log continuously played a vital role in accuracy audits using the applicable NVivo software features.

Utilizing this analytical technique provided significant detail into the perceptions of engagement, which led to a better interpretation of the types of relationships and environment that foster an engaged workplace. Nevertheless, the increased understanding of engagement that emerges from this analysis may not only be conducive to satisfaction levels of employees, but also impactful to bottom-line profits of organizations. A comprehensive report containing the thematic coding and narrative descriptions represents organized responses to the research questions. Finally, recommendations for further studies pertaining to EE and hospitality companies in Las Vegas, NV emerged in the process of final reporting. Findings from the data analysis formed part of the final report, which included recommendations for further study regarding EE in Las Vegas hospitality.

In tying data to the conceptual framework for this study, the importance of leader-member exchange (LMX) was instrumental to an interpretation of associations between employee engagement and high organizational performance. Those associations were noticeable in the participant responses to interview questions. Since the LMX concept deals with the interaction between leaders and their followers (members) (Dansereau et al., 1975), hospitality industry leaders and their employees constituted good parallel elements for effective simulations. The performance of the industry leaders became clear when participants answered interview questions. The applicability of the guiding theory



to this study revealed the dyadic extents of the relationship between Las Vegas hospitality company managers and their subordinate. LMX theory asserts that the positive relationship between both the leader and subordinate results in positive organizational outcomes (DeConinck, 2011). Interview responses constituted the only opportunity for readers and research users to know if the LMX assertion was applicable in the situation of hospitality industry functionaries.

### **Reliability and Validity**

#### **Reliability**

In qualitative research, the processes and procedures gauge the reliability of the study for conducting the research as against the replication of the findings arising from a quantitative study (Salehi & Golafshani, 2013). Qualitative studies must exhibit the characteristics of *dependability*, *credibility*, *confirmability*, and *transferability* since the quantitative measures that characterize quantitative studies are absent in the qualitative studies. Rigor is inherent in the four elements to deliver acceptability of a study to users.

A study achieves dependability when the data is consistent and trustworthy (Elo et al., 2014). According to Lambert and Lambert (2012), in qualitative descriptive research studies, participant interviews are the primary techniques for data collection. Therefore, a study would constitute a reliable venture because the interviews in qualitative descriptive studies deepen the understanding of the unique experiences of social phenomena. According to Baillie (2015), the study would be reliable if other could repeat the study and get similar results. Additionally, the study would be reliable if other researchers confirm the consistency of the parameters of the study.

Furthermore, descriptive qualitative approach is acceptable and determines to be a legitimate way of collecting data (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). With qualitative descriptive design, a researcher could capture regular data as well as personal elements peculiar to the research participant (Sandelowski, 2000). Although, the specific research instrument for this study consisted of open-ended questions, adhering to the steps and procedures to conduct this qualitative descriptive research led to reliability. The findings also satisfied unique requirements of other scholars regarding the reliability of this study for future researchers (Yin, 2014). Additionally, member checking of transcripts contributed to clarifications for the purposes of reliability. Creditability is achievable through member checking and transcript review (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). The above quality measures characterized this substantive study in a bid to achieve creditability and trustworthiness.

### **Validity**

According to Morse (2015), validity in qualitative research is assessed based on the trustworthiness, rigor, and credibility of the research. The primary focus of this qualitative study is to learn about employee engagement strategies that Las Vegas hospitality business managers and operators might be lacking. Therefore, ensuring the accuracy and creditability of the information in this study is critical to the achievement of validity. Validity in qualitative research ensures the research instrument for collecting data elicits adequate detail to produce legitimate results (Salehi & Golafshani, 2013). This validity element represents confirmability, and is achievable by avoiding bias (Houghton et al., 2013). Therefore, the issue of confirmability was important during the

prosecution of this study. I made every effort to mitigate bias, in spite of my understanding of the industry.

A perceived weakness of qualitative research as being detecting risks of bias in the research. To mitigate these shortcomings, I implement an electronic audit trail containing detailed descriptions of all procedural processes used throughout the lifecycle of this research. Scholars advised against procedural inconsistency, and instructed researchers to incorporate all possible audit steps throughout the process (Ayan, 2013; Basurto & Speer, 2012; Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2015).

Each participant received a summary of the transcript of his or her interview to ensure the accuracy and clarity in responses. This process gave participants the opportunity to provide clarification for any misinterpretation in the responses they provided during the interview. Of critical importance also is the issue of transferability. Houghton et al. (2013) explained the researcher was in no position to insist that the study was transferable. Other readers and research users were in the best position to make that determination. Since a study must take such takes steps to be usable, I implemented those steps. The transferability of this study is now the responsibility of any individuals or entities that deem the study appropriate to apply to other platforms.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 2 contains the research methodology, sampling, data collection techniques, data organization techniques, and data analysis techniques. This section also includes the procedure for determining the reliability and validity of the research instrument. I served as the main data collection instrument. Managers and supervisors at

hospitality industry companies participated and corroborated the points their former colleagues made in answering the same questions. While three participants should be enough for a descriptive qualitative study, I sought dependability, creditability, confirmability, and transferability through not only following the rigorous steps, but also to relied on 20 individuals with knowledge of strategies for implementing employee engagement in the industry of the study. The participants revealed the strategies they used to implement employee engagement as well as the performance outcomes that arose from their implementation.

Section 3 contains the research findings from the study. Significance of the study to professional constitutes part of the content in that section. The potential effect on social change in the hospitality industry, recommendations for action, suggested research for future, summary and study conclusion constitute parts of Section 3.

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

This section includes the results and the analyses of this study. This section also includes a discussion of the application to professional practice, the implications for social change, the recommendations for action, and recommendations for further study. A personal reflection of the overall research process is included at the conclusion of the study.

#### **Overview of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore the strategies hospitality industry supervisors and managers used for implementing employee engagement programs. Based on the findings of the study, most participants noted varying degrees of experience in implementing employee engagement initiatives in their organization. The majority of participants acknowledged that the term employee engagement is a concept that is frequently referred to by hospitality companies. However, two of the 20 participants cited employee satisfaction, which is a precursor to employee engagement (Spitzmuller & DeShon, 2013). There was an overall consensus among all participants that the engagement initiatives used to enhance organizational performance focused on improving working relationships between employees and leaders and creating a harmonious work environment; however, most participants had mixed perceptions as to the overall effect engagement has on the organization's performance. Generally, participants noted that their organizations have structured employee engagement programs that are in use company-wide. The participants from the who worked in the hotel industry further stated that, in addition to the company-wide

engagement programs, leadership has developed an engagement program specific to department employees.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

In this study, I sought to answer the following research questions. The first question was: What are the strategies hospitality industry supervisors and managers used to create employee engagement programs? The second question was: How do Las Vegas hospitality industry managers and supervisors perceive employee engagement initiatives that might enhance organizational performance? Three themes arose from the study and included: (a) interaction effects of EE programs on employees, (b) mutual respect between leaders and subordinates, and (c) organizational benefits.

#### **Theme 1: Interaction Effects of EE Programs on Employees**

Emerging themes included participant revelations that when employees interacted with one another as well as with the supervisors, the cross-pollination of ideas created the necessary synergy for organizational strength (Christian, Eisenkraft, & Kapadia, 2015). Participants generally implied that there was a need to understand the concept of employee engagement programs from employee standpoint. The centerpiece of such programs is synergy, according to participants. In keeping with the assertion of Christian et al. (2015), the majority of the participants understood the overall premise of EE as being a method that improves employee behaviors and increases discretionary efforts; however, not all the participants defined EE from multiple angles. Three participants insisted on explaining EE to answer the interview questions. Each of them specifically requested that readers of this study understand EE as a catalyst to interaction effects. The

three participants' statements are as follows: "Employee engagement is being able to connect with employees on a personal level for employee and organizational gains" (EP5). "Employee engagement is upper management's ability to understand employees' feelings in order to make better usage of the workforce" (EP4). "Engagement is a motivational strategy to get employees to perform at maximum capacity for the benefit of customers" (EP15). Furthermore, the majority of participants cited their understanding of EE as being in-line with the organizations usage of the term.

All of the participants cited the employee as being a key influencer in employee engagement initiatives. All participants noted that employee involvement was of critical importance in determining the type of engagement initiatives organizations implement. In addition, each participant cited that the opportunity to be a contributor in determining corporate activities is capable of being a morale builder. However, although each participant perceived this as encouraging, five participants cited that the insight from employees rarely culminated in implementation. "Garnering opinions from employees can have a positive effect on engagement; however, not following through with the suggestions can have an adverse effect" (EP1).

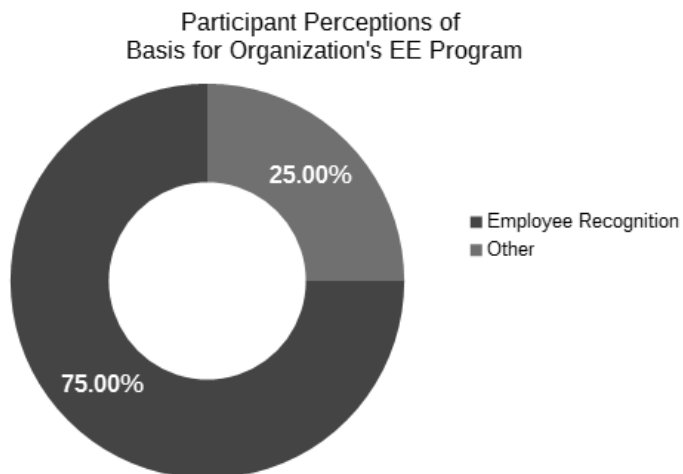
The majority of participants stated they believed the employee was the primary beneficiary of EE because of their involvement in the engagement process. All participants' asserted EE had a direct impact on employee performance and indirectly influenced the organizations' performances. All participants were able to draw a direct connection between EE and the leader-member relationship. The majority of participants stated that EE had a positive influence on the leader-member relationship.

Among the EE initiatives cited by participants was the development of a company social media website for use by employees. The social media site allows employees to communicate with all levels of employees within the company. According to EP2, internal social media has the ability to highlight individual or group achievements, share positive thoughts and suggestions, and share pictures from activities and events the employee participated to name a few. Ten participants reported internal communication outlets had resulted in great benefits for team cohesion. “The company Intranet has created an environment where employees and leadership are considered equal, which has made it easier to learn about my fellow co-workers, network with them, and participate in activities both in and out of work” (EP2).

Ten participants stated that an improved company wellness program developed as part of the company’s EE program. Prottas (2013) asserted that companies that support the wellbeing of employees typically have employees that perform at higher levels. Participant EP14 noted, “My companies improved wellness program now includes an onsite workout facility for employee use. Additionally, the onsite facility also provides fitness classes and yoga, a swimming pool, a sauna, and nutritional seminars.” Participant EP6 posited, “My company provides employees with discount options to surrounding athletic centers.” Another participant asserted that in addition to access to a fitness center, his or her organization now provides an onsite infirmary as an addition to the company wellness program. “The onsite health center has been heavily valued and appreciated by employees with the increasing healthcare costs” (EP20). Figure 2 below



shows the basis of employee engagement. The chart reveals participant experience in EE programming based on employee recognition.



*Figure 2.* Basis of employee engagement. Chart showing participant experience in EE programming based on employee recognition

Keeping in line with Navid et al. (2012), 15 participants cited that employee recognition was a basis for their companies EE programs. Several participants referenced new recognition programs, such as a quarterly employee newsletter highlighting employee achievements and accomplishments, community service events, and a spotlight section. Participant EP1 posited, “Each quarter my companies leadership team will nominate individual employees that display exemplary behaviors in any given area of the business, to be featured in the company newsletter.” Participant EP5 expressed that, “In the past, my company had a structured newsletter for employee recognition; however, that concept did not include employee involvement. The revamped newsletter now allows employees’ to submit engaging photos that will be eligible for use in the newsletter.” Participant EP6 asserted, “My company’s newsletter now includes a section that allows

employees to submit short testimonials on business related topics such as leadership, customer service, and marketing.” One participant expressed that being publicly recognized for their contribution at work significantly influences their performance.

EP13 noted the following:

We all have that small desire to be recognized for our efforts. Some people prefer public recognition and others on a one on one basis. I believe the subtle recognition style of an employee newsletter is a happy median. We have the ability to now showcase what we consider personal achievements and fulfillments. The gratifying thing about the newsletter is that it encourages us as employees to improve our work ethic so that we can be featured.

Among the EE activities participants cited, four participants acknowledged employee support services. EP10 asserted, “HR developed a new learning and development program to support self-improvement, career development, advanced education support, and mentorship.” Participant EP17 cited, “My Company developed a new employee assistance program that provides employees and their immediate families with access to counseling services in areas such as stress management, mental and behavioral health, and financial preparedness.” However, among the four participants citing an addition of counseling services, there were some opposing views on the effectiveness of the programs on engagement levels. Three participants with the shortest tenure among the four had a more optimistic view of the program. “The availability of a stress management program may increase productivity, and show less absenteeism: a positive effect—maybe not an immediate impact, but provide a plausible long-term

solution to an ongoing issue” (EP12). Contrary to this viewpoint, the participant with the longest tenure was not as optimistic and viewed this as another failed attempt to utilize company benefits as a way to increase employee satisfaction. “In the past, company programs that were deemed not a success resulted in reductions and cutbacks in other sectors of the business as a way to recoup financial losses as a result” (EP4).

Maintaining a similar viewpoint as Luring and Selmer (2015), five participants asserted that they believe engagement starts at the time a person is hired. Based on this assumption, participants cited the addition of a modified new-hire orientation. According to Participant EP8, previous models of orientation were conducted primarily in a classroom setting with a training coordinator reviewing policies and procedures. However, the new model encourages communication between existing and new employees. EP8 stated the following:

A significant change to the new hire orientation was the addition of an on-site treasure hunt. Employees are required to locate key areas throughout the property. In order to successfully complete this task, new employees must elicit the assistance from current staff at all levels of the organization. Additionally, there is a rewards program associated with this task, which provides the first three new-hires to complete the treasure hunt a complementary pair of show tickets.

New and existing employees have perceived this positively. (EP8)

Another participant noted similar effects because of trusting relationships among co-workers. “Simply because employees feel comfortable around their coworkers, they have become more of a resource and support system for one another. This connection has

increased the voluntary actions and attitudes employees' display toward each other" (EP7).

Among the common views participants expressed was that when employers perceived EE as a necessity, companies encouraged the development of new introductory activities among coworkers. According to five participants, new employees were more apt to learn, communicate with coworkers, and eager to seek promotional opportunities in an engagement atmosphere. Participant EP19 asserted, "The positive energy shown by new employees definitely assisted in the revival of workforce morale" (EP19).

Additionally, a majority of participants also perceived that when senior management communicated the meaning of engagement as well as the rationale for encouraging active participation in certain programs, the employees better understood the personal and collective benefit of their involvement. A participant emphasized the need for a conducive environment to facilitate employee engagement and grow personal interaction thus:

When you are able to see the personal gain and understand how direct involvement can improve the climate of the workplace as well as make your job easier, you're enthusiasm to participate is higher and the likelihood to immediately dismiss the idea is decreased. (EP16)

Such an atmosphere appeared to be important to some other participants whose responses also conveyed their perceptions of the effect on supervisor-employee relationships, which constituted the second theme.

## **Theme 2: Mutual Respect between Leaders and Subordinates**

Diverse manifestations circumscribe the relationship between the employees and supervisors (Erdogan et al., 2012). Mutual respect between leaders and subordinates contribute to successful employee engagement if the stakeholders harness those mixed effects. Some of those mixed effects are (a) trust, (b) professional relationship, (c) mutual understanding, and (d) commitment to one another. In keeping with the assertion made by Erdogan et al. (2012), all participants asserted that employee engagement influences the relationship between employees and supervisors. Participants noted that when EE appeared as a company initiative, the disparity between leadership and employees reduced. “When we implemented several EE programs that focused on workplace communication, employee confidence in the leadership team increased dramatically” (EP6). However, another participant asserted that several employees perceived leadership’s effort to develop a closer relationship with their teams as an opportunity to micromanage employees (EP12). The participant expressed concerns over the possibility of micromanagement, which was counterproductive to EE.

Participants further stated that leaders should utilize professional relationships with employees. They argued that this opportunity would consequently arise to (a) mutual understanding of behaviors and attitudes, personality types, and motivators; and (b) provide constructive coaching. Under such circumstances, the opportunities to improve performance would likely occur. All participants’ affirmed that EE practices that emphasized bilateral communication improved the perceived trust levels between both supervisors and employees.

EP17 stated that “When my immediate supervisors show a genuine self-interest in my professional and personal development, I am more willing to communicate my true feeling towards work related situations” (EP17). Participant EP11 posited that the “workplace became more transparent because of EE. Employers openly communicate company initiatives with employees and in many cases request their input prior to implementing many programs” (EP11).

According to EP12, the open communication from the leadership team helps employees to be better equipped to perform in their role. In the discussion of the dyadic connections among people in the organization, several participants believed that the relationships that were built among immediate supervisors and employees provided deeper connections that extended beyond the workplace. One participant noted that EE helped to recognize similar interests that existed between supervisors and employees. EP1 stated that “Sometimes when you’re able to connect with someone on a deeper level other than the typical work relationship, there is an added level of mutual respect” (EP1). Another participant posited that mutual interests between supervisors and employees contributed to the development of one of the most successful EE initiatives. “When it was determined that there was mutual interest in baseball between our team and supervisor, the team proposed an engagement initiative that included softball as a team builder” (EP20).

Actually, although, most participants agree that stronger relationships with their superiors are critical to improving work efficiency, however, all participants cited that the supervisor-employee relationship should remain professional. According to EP5, the

primary purpose of developing closer working relationships is to increase trust so that an accurate assessment of the strengths and weaknesses can be made. Another participant cited that supervisor-employee relationships that become too personal could become counterproductive in that they allow emotional tendencies to enter into the decision making process (EP6). Therefore, consensus by the majority of participants is that supervisors and the employees must make efforts to control emotions that may arise from the supervisor-employee relationship; however, supervisors are primarily responsible for displaying constructive reactions to circumstance under employee dispositional deficiencies. In the discussion of EE and how the leader-member relationship relates to personal performance, all participants expressed the belief that mutual respect between all levels of employees is critical in positive performance outcomes. Most participants asserted that supervisors that showed heightened levels of respect towards their employees and consistently nurtured the relationships, experienced higher levels of performance from their employees. Several employees cited that feeling highly respected by their superiors produced a psychological feeling of empowerment to perform their job.

Our supervisor initially received much drawback from employees when they first started in their role. A large percentage of employees felt the supervisor was overstepping the work and personal life balance. However, once they learned to trust us and give us the space we requested of them, we were more eager to display our abilities. (EP2)

Another participant asserted that supervisors within their organization make it a top priority to engage with each employee on a daily basis. “The leadership team has implemented a new practice of recognizing and providing constructive feedback to employees in the moment instead of allowing the behavior to go unnoticed or unaddressed” (EP18). Leader-member relationship mattered to many participants because such a relationship would strengthen the ties among all parties. The figure below sheds light on the dynamics of leader-member relationship.



*Figure 3.* Leader-Member relationship dynamic. Chart revealing the intersections of leaders and members on three levels

In keeping with the assertions of Reddy and Karim (2013), 75% (15 participants) of participants seemed to subscribe to the view that relationships that include a mutual exchange of incentives between the supervisor and employee are more beneficial. According to EP2, once an adequate rewards system was in place, employee dedication within the department increased significantly. Employee dependability, productivity, and team collaboration represented areas of improvement after the implementation of a



reasonable rewards system. Although EP10 agreed with the notion that providing employees with a suitable rewards system is conducive to establishing a trusting relationship, they further posited that this system provides a bilateral benefit. EP10 stated that “Supervisors that gained the buy-in from their employees typically maintained an ample rewards system for their team. These supervisors were often recognized and highly respected companywide for their leadership ability” (EP10).

While maintaining the similar viewpoint as EP10, EP5 posited that this bilateral relationship between employee and supervisor extends beyond the traditional extrinsic rewards system. EP5 affirmed the following:

Supervisors that established the strongest relationships with their employees developed purposeful rewards systems. These rewards systems did not include monetary or tangible rewards; instead, these systems fulfilled a deeper purpose that instilled a sense of meaningfulness in the employee. Employees reported that under these rewards systems their efforts were contributing to something bigger than just the task being performed. Employees felt a sense of ownership in their tasks and felt a sense of worth and value. Supervisors in turn said their jobs became more gratifying (EP5).

According to EP20, “several employees in their department said the most valuable contribution made by their immediate supervisor was the idea of acceptability as an individual”. EP9 stated the following:

When I first joined a new department within the casino, the first thing that my

supervisor asked was what are my personal values. He then developed an action plan for professional growth that tied in my personal values with that of the department goals. This type of acknowledgment provided me with a sense of self-identity in that the supervisor encouraged me to use my personal values as a form of creativity and expression in my work. (EP9)

In keeping with the assertions of Zacher, Pearce, Ronney, and McKenna (2014), four participants cited that employee engagement provided employees with a more individualized influence. One participant noted that support and encouragement from their supervisor had a significant influence in their overall quality of life. EP3 posited that many employees lack positive influences in their lives, “We have found through company workshops that a startling number of entry-level employees don’t possess individuals in their direct social groups that they consider role models” (EP3). According to EP5, “supervisors that embraced their employee relationships were viewed as role models for many employees because of the trust and respect they had for these individuals. In turn, employees often emulated the work ethics and behaviors of supervisors.” Additionally, EP5 also posited that this type of bilateral relationship is fulfilling to the employee and the supervisor in that it provides both individuals with a deeper sense of purpose in their work and daily lives. Participants’ responses also contained their perceptions of the effect on organization performance constituting the third theme in the following section.

### **Theme 3: Organizational Benefits**

In keeping with Zhai et al.'s (2012) assertion that all participants must acknowledge the reality of the phenomenon under investigation, the participants in this substantive study acknowledged that EE had a significant influence on the organizations performance. All participants asserted that EE has better equipped senior management to understand the driving forces behind the organizations workforce. According to EP4, the implementations of improved EE initiatives fostered the evolution in how the organization solicits employee insights. EP4 noted the following:

Initially, our organization administered annual employee surveys as a way to conduct a temperature check for the satisfaction levels of employees. Essentially, these surveys would seek to identify the basics such as employer loyalty, supervisor perceptions, and the employees overall satisfaction with the organization. However, although the company continues to use surveys as a way of gaining insight from employees, surveys now allow employees to provide greater insight into policies and procedures, company programs, and behavioral insight while still preserving previous solicitations.

According to EP2, their company has introduced a face-to-face program in addition to the annual engagement survey.

Our President hosts a two-day town hall event each quarter. The town hall is an open forum where employees are welcomed to ask any questions or concerns they have in regards to company policy and programs in which the President will provide personal feedback. In addition, the president makes this an opportunity

for employees to make suggestions for ways to improve operations, human resources, and employee programs, to name a few. (EP2)

In maintaining the same viewpoint as EP2, EP1 posited that their organization uses semiannual employee focus groups to gain greater insight from staff. EP1 stated that “members from the executive leadership team hosted focus groups with the intent being to develop a better understanding of employee attitudes toward company policies and current and potential future programs” (EP1). According to EP7, “supervisors conducted quarterly Power Hour sessions in which select groups of employees engage in a round table discussion on various topics such as performance, productivity, and process improvement” (EP7). However, another participant shared a different viewpoint from all other participants. According to Zweber et al. (2015), emphasizing an employee’s well-being could have a significant positive influence on organizational performance. EP5 expressed that their company uses surveys for specific detail in behavioral feedback from employees; however, division management engages employees in small workgroup forums with a unique approach.

Instead of the leadership team using workgroup meetings as a means to solicit operational information from employees, this time is designed to gain insight into the nature of the individual’s present state. These meetings are very informal and focus on current emotional and physical feelings, assist employees with acknowledging current mental attitudes, transmuting negative attitudes into positive attitudes, and assisting employees with identifying instances of appreciation. (EP5)

According to EP5, the company employed this strategy to engage the spiritual well-being of employees—or more specifically, as a way to encourage a purposeful work environment.

In the discussion of EE and how responsive organizations implemented feedback from employee insights, all participants noted that organizations conducted an engagement survey, at least, once per year while another participant noted that their organization conducted an engagement survey semi-annually. However, there were varying perceptions as to the transparency of the results. According to EP4, in their role as retail sales, survey results were not communicated to them directly. EP4 said “The organization did not formally communicate post-survey results to line level employees in our department. However, several months following completing the survey during one of our pre-shift meetings our direct supervisor did introduce new focus areas and company initiatives” (EP4). In maintaining a similar viewpoint, EP9 posited that post-survey results and feedback pertaining to employee focus groups always received communication through their department manager.

According to EP20, their organizations preferred method of communication was during their quarterly management meetings. EP20 stated that “The President, CEO, and other members of executive leadership conducted quarterly management meetings to present shareholder information, which included new initiatives and feedback from employee communication. Whereby, management in attendance is responsible for communicating this information to their direct reports” (EP20). Similarly, EP6 posited that senior level management communicated the results of the engagement survey at

companywide management meetings in which the top three focal areas are on the discussion agenda. EP6 said that “After the management meeting, division managers developed action plans to address the three focal points determined from the engagement survey. In most cases, an action plan was developed based on employee feedback within the specific departments” (EP6).

Moreover, according to EP17, when asked how successful or unsuccessful post-survey actions were, the participant posited that company actions were not as successful as the users had hoped. “The organization understood much of the concern employees shared regarding improving the number of employees to be recognized each quarter. However, the leadership team failed to advance any suggestions solicited from employees or alternatives to those suggestions” (EP17). Participant EP15 maintained a similar viewpoint; however, they asserted that the organization failed to implement any post-survey actions within a reasonable period from the time the results were communicated. “There was a breakdown in the communication between the executive team and department supervisors as to the protocol to be used during the implementation phase” (EP15). However, EP2 asserted that they believe the post-survey actions shown by the organization were a success. EP2 noted the following:

According to engagement survey results, having more channels of communication was the top concern among employees. Since the release of this information, the company has developed a social media style web portal, which allows an open forum of communication among employees within the organization. To our

surprise, the intranet-based website was fully functional within three months of survey details being communicated to the management team.

In keeping with the discussion of specific actions seen on behalf of the organization since the last survey, all participants noted that changes have taken place. However, as aforementioned, there is no consistency in the periods in which organizations implemented changes among participants. Moreover, a significant number of participants asserted varying degrees in the actions taken by the organization. According to EP4, moderate change in management style was noticeable throughout the department. “Managers are more interconnected with employees regarding their well-being” (EP4). EP5 posited that a major concern employees voiced on surveys was leadership’s inability to listen and accept the opinions of employees.

Although as an employee, I understand that any decision made is ultimately up to the company, however, the perception that our manager at least considers our opinion has a gratifying appeal. Since our last survey, our direct supervisor has taken the initiative to be more inviting and open to many of the suggestions and concerns we have as a team. In fact, our entire division has implemented a new open-door policy that allows employees to communicate directly with any supervisor of their choice. (EP5)

Moreover, while the majority of participants noted behavioral changes in leadership, several participants maintained a different viewpoint by stating specific changes made to the operation of the organization. EP11 posited, “The human resource team authorized a corporate expense that allows employees to engage in team building functions.”

Similarly, EP15 asserted that their organization took an approach that involved a restructuring of employee compensation plans. “Compensation in this tense is not merely guaranteed wages, instead, compensation included merit increases, bonus eligibility, and benefit plans, more specifically, healthcare benefits” (EP15). Similarly, EP20 asserted that their organization developed a flexible scheduling option, which gives employees more control over their work life balance. EP11 noted, “Corporate revised the organizations vision and mission statements to possess a more people-centered meaning.”

In the discussion of how employee engagement has impacted the overall performance of the company, all participants shared a similar viewpoint as Meng and Berger (2012) in that minimal financial data exists that directly measures the impact of EE on organizational performance. However, all participants asserted that EE modifiers influenced existing performance indicators, which indirectly results in a return on investment to the organization. This discussion produced an array of ideas regarding the effectiveness of EE on operational outcomes. According to Awwad (2012), customer perceptions of service quality, expectation, and value compared with customer loyalty and complaints served as indicators to measure EE outcomes. Five participants noted that customer satisfaction and loyalty were gauges of the effectiveness of engagement. According to EP8, improvements in employee attitudes had a positive influence on customer satisfaction. “A company scorecard showed a 3.5-point increase in employee attitudes resulting in a 2.5% customer satisfaction increase. According to our VP of Finance, this increase in customer satisfaction resulted in a 0.2% approximate gain in total revenue” (EP8). Similarly, EP3 noted that feedback from customer surveys showed



steady improvements in the attentiveness of the staff since the time of the last engagement focus group. Participant EP6 expressed, “In the last six months, I have received far less customer complaint notifications that required me to address directly” (EP6). Contrary to the participants in this study highlighting customer behavior as a performance indicator of EE, customer satisfaction is not an adequate representation of the effectiveness of EE given positive customer perceptions can be the result of other operational functions, and additional factors may prevent customers from reaping the benefits of positive engagement levels (Ainin, Parveen, Moghavvemi, Jaafar, & Mohd Shuib, 2015).

Palmer and Gignac (2012) posited that turnover and the intention of the employee to stay with the organization is a key indicator of engagement. According to a study conducted by the Corporate Leadership Council, a positive correlation exists between engagement and intention to stay (Sange & Srivasatava, 2012). Based on their study, organizations that were shown to have high engagement levels reported having the potential for an 87% reduction in the perception employees have regarding leaving the organization (Sange & Srivasatava, 2012). Ten participants expressed that employee turnover is an indicator used to gauge the effectiveness of EE in their company. EP2 noted that the overall cost of employee training has declined despite the addition of new training resources. EP7 asserted, “In spite of the growing competition in Vegas hospitality, I personally have no desire to look for opportunities outside my current company. Of course, this has much to do with my overall opinion of how I feel I am

being treated by the company.” EP19 was very adamant about supporting the idea that employee turnover is an effective criteria to measure engagement.

Since I’ve been in a leadership capacity, I have always expressed to my colleagues that when you have the right people doing the right job, you will have a work environment that consists of happy and driven employees, with the payoff being profitability. I’ve personally noticed that employees who are actively engaged report to work earlier and stay longer, request less time off, driven to achieve, and voluntarily assist in the training of new employees. In contrast, employees who are disengaged possess a more self-centered attitude regarding their work. They often show up late, call off from work more frequently, request time off during inopportune business times, and show a lack of concern for coworkers and leadership. However, these disengaged employees usually display behaviors that allow them to get by—not extreme enough to be involuntarily dismissed from the company, yet do not provide an essential impact for growth.

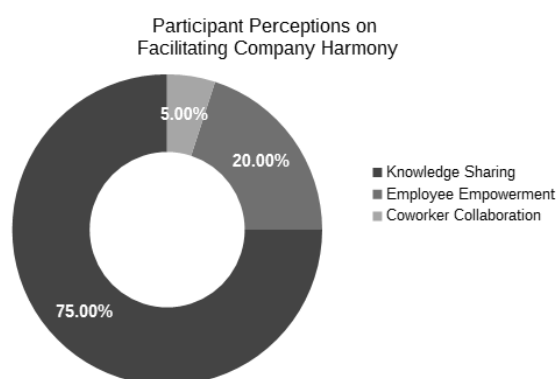
(EP19)

Comparative to the results of research by Nielsen et al. (2012) on occupational citizenship behavior and EE, participants in this study posited that the fluidity of knowledge sharing among employees is indicative of the successes of EE. Fifteen participants expressed that knowledge sharing from the top-down created a harmonious affect within the company, and indirectly influenced overall performance. Participant EP9 stated, “Employees find it empowering when they can positively influence others”

(EP9). Participant EP7 expressed, “I personally feel more enthusiastic about my long-term success given I feel better prepared to excel.” Existing literature asserted companies where employees displayed behaviors associated with OCB experienced improvements in service standards (Ma et al., 2013). Participant EP10 offered the following description of harmonious employee involvement:

One thing that I have noticed has been the increased involvement of coworkers to collaboratively assist guests in problem solving. Employees openly admit to not knowing an adequate resolution to a problem will seek assistance from their coworkers. Instead of avoiding responsibility by passing the guest from person to person, both colleagues will work together to resolve the guests concern. Keep in mind that the employee that was brought into the situation had no obligation to assist given this is a commission driven independent work environment. (EP10)

The importance of harmony to employees emerged from the interviewing of participants. The figure below conveys the harmony element.



*Figure 4.* Company harmony chart. Chart indicating participant involvement in three elements of harmony

Contrary to responses from study participants, Bergeron et al. (2013) asserted that employees who partake in OCB in an outcome-based work environment where performance is based on individual efforts, OCB could result in negative repercussions to those involved. “I feel that if the guest is happy and satisfied, it will have a direct reflection on the team, and guests will more likely refer their friends” (EP9). Likewise, EP7 expressed, “The most important outcome is a positive guest experience. I personally have never seen anyone get into trouble for going out of their way to fulfill a guest’s request” (EP17). Participant EP11 stated, “As a five-star resort, I feel it is our duty and responsibility to go out of our way to do what is necessary to ensure each and every guest has a memorable experience. This is why guests pay top dollar to stay at our resort” (EP11). Consistent with responses from participants in this study, Radojevic, Stanic, and Stanic (2015) noted the customer experience is the most influential factor associated with hospitality ratings. In order to maintain high hospitality ratings, companies must have employees that are willing to display behaviors that promote the success of the business (Bhattacharya, 2013), which inevitably would result in increased revenues for the company (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012).

### **Tie to the Conceptual Framework**

Leader-member exchange (LMX) was the conceptual framework for this study. LMX theory involves postulations pertaining to the two-way relationship (dyadic relationships) between the leader and the subordinate. The above theoretical postulations extend to the quality of the leader-subordinate relationship in influencing subordinates’ responsibility, judgment, resourcefulness, and performance (Erdogan et al., 2012).

Components of the leader-member relationship included the existence of leader behavior that resulted in mutual affection, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect between the leader and follower, and subsequent positive behavior and performance by the follower (Herrera & Duncan, 2015).

Fusch and Fusch (2015) suggested high quality dyadic relationships result in positive outcomes. By extension, five-star hospitality companies would witness positive organizational outcomes under high quality dyadic relationships. For example, Magnini et al. (2013) found a positive relationship between LMX and organizational outcomes such as satisfaction, performance, organizational commitment, and citizenship behaviors. Two of the three themes outlined in this study revealing ties with the conceptual framework are “mutual respect between leaders and subordinate and organizational benefits.” According to Fusch and Fusch (2015), human resource constitutes the backbone of organization. Such human resource would normally thrive in an environment where performance leads to rewards.

According to Huang (2015), LMX is often expressed by the liking and mutual trust between the leader and subordinate. This mutual trust often hinges on the subordinates perception of the leader. Dulebohn et al. (2012) asserted that similarities in personality between the leader and subordinate could be a significant influence in the positive perception of the leader. Theme 2, *mutual respect between leaders and subordinates*, contained elements of LMX theory. One of the key elements to positively influencing people is the characteristic of appeal. Additionally, in order to develop and nurture any relationship there must be a mutual level of trust between individuals. All

participants (20 participants) asserted that employee engagement improved the trust levels between leaders and subordinates because of bilateral communication. Abii, Ogula, and Rose (2013) asserted that bilateral trust between peers, subordinates, and superiors has a significant impact on job satisfaction and career advancement within the organization. Moreover, work environments with caring and trusting leaders are conducive for highly functional employees (Tuan, 2012).

Martinez et al. (2012) posited, respect for each other's capabilities as being another component of LMX theory. Theme 2, *mutual respect between leaders and subordinates*, constituted major considerations in effective implementation of EE programs. Results from this study indicate that most participants posited, mutual respect between leaders and subordinates resulted in increased performance by subordinates. According to Gregory and Levy (2011), the effectiveness of the working relationship is manifest whenever the acceptance of individual differences among leaders and subordinates is mutual.

Theme 3, *organizational benefits*, discussed organizational benefits of EE. Of the various organizational benefits expressed by participants, employee turnover and loyalty, a component of LMX, was the common element. Biron and Boon (2013) asserted poor communication between leaders and subordinates as a primary influencer of an employee's intent to remain loyal to the organization and perform. Results from this study indicate that 50% of participants expressed that turnover and an employee's intent to stay with the organization is influenced by EE. Twenty-five percent, or five

participants, stated the perception they have of their supervisor's behavior and attitudes influenced their loyalty to the company.

Leaders subscribing to LMX theory sought to develop an environment that embraced transparency in the communication of company values, goals, and constructive feedback on employee performance (Men & Stacks, 2013). Results from the study indicated that all participants (20 participants) believed the bi-lateral communication between leaders and subordinates is essential to building trust and driving employee performance. Participants also discussed the importance of providing basic skills training to leaders. According to Hess and Bacigalupo (2013), training in areas such as emotional intelligence, listening skills, and top-down communication had a positive effect on leader-member engagement.

### **Tie to Existing Literature on Effective Business Practice**

To promote employee productivity, companies should focus on developing a culture that is supportive of effective leadership (Zhu et al., 2012). Companies that encouraged leadership development produced supervisors that communicated more effectively with employees, established better relationships with team members, and showed increased efficiency (Mason, Griffin, & Parker, 2014). All participants (20 participants) stated that communication is a prominent factor in employee and organizational performance. Also, all participants (20 participants) expressed that EE increases the effective communication between the leader and subordinate, which inevitably improved trust. A high level of trust significantly improved the willingness of supervisors and team-members to openly share knowledge (Nielsen et al., 2012). Study

participant responses support this idea, as 75% (15 participants) described information sharing between supervisors and subordinates as potentially increasing overall performance by promoting a harmonious environment.

Leadership must commit to promoting a work climate that is both caring and supportive of employees, to influence overall performance (Tuan, 2012). Bhattacharya (2013), Cenkci and Özçelik(2015), and Fischer (2013), have shown that supervisors who seek to inspire team members, empower employees to make decisions, and encourages individual creativity have a greater influence on productivity, employee satisfaction, and financial performance (Srivastava, 2013). All participants expressed that being personally involved in decision-making that has a direct impact on company procedures has a morale building effect that promotes positive performance. The idea of personal involvement in decision-making aligns with Tabiti's (2015) postulation that engaged employees are more inclined to understand business processes and routinely look for innovative ways to improve their performance and the performance of others. Four participants stated that EE positively influenced the overall quality of life of subordinates based on leaders showing a deeper concern for the well-being of team-members, and displaying qualities of a positive role-model. Working within an organization that promotes EE increased employee commitment to the organization and induced the shared values and goals of the employee with those of the organization (Onuoha & Tolulope, 2013). Engaged employees perform at higher levels and subsequently display behaviors that promote the success of the organization (Bhattacharya, 2013).



### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Hospitality leaders can apply the findings of this study to business practice by strategizing to create meaningful relationships between leaders and subordinates. These meaningful relationships could boost the overall performance of the company.

Improvements in employee engagement could arise from communication and trust levels across hospitality practice. Hospitality industry companies could institute management-training programs focusing on (a) soft skills, (b) driving performance, (c) people management, (d) self-management, and (e) communication. Such programs could enhance the relationship between supervisors and subordinates.

Improving communication and trust levels across professional practice would bring benefits to hospitality companies. The perception employees' possess about their supervisors is a contributing factor to the behaviors they would display and subsequently how they would perform (Bhattacharya, 2013; Srivastava, 2013). Mason et al. (2014) posited management-training programs that focus on soft skills, driving performance, people management, self-management, and communication could enhance the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. Therefore, employee direct involvement in the development of the engagement process with their individual styles could expedite performance improvements. Randeree and Chaudhry (2012) confirmed varying leadership styles have an effect on the satisfaction levels of employees. Palmer and Gignac (2012) mentioned from their study on emotionally intelligent leadership that employees demonstrate active engagement through organizational commitment and talent retention.

Organizational commitment is often a description of an employee's dedication towards the organization by displaying discretionary effort (Yamaguchi, 2013). Data from this study contained advancements to the existing body of literature on employee engagement in the hospitality industry, by focusing on the value-added benefits of employee engagement on performance. I explored how hospitality industry supervisors and managers harnessed dyadic relationships with employees to improve employee and organizational performance.

All participants expressed effective EE initiatives had a positive effect on the supervisor and subordinate relationships, and subsequently would improve performance. One hundred percent (20) of participants reported having direct involvement in providing insight into the type of engagement programs companies would use.

Innovations to company employee recognition programs would be a way to better showcase employee efforts. This display would emerge from new employee support services. Enhancements to current services subsist in efforts to provide employees more opportunities for learning and development, and social and economic support. These applications are in accord with four-pronged approaches pertaining to top-level engagement. Accordingly, training on various people practices such as emotional intelligence, top-down communication, and specific actions to measure and track engagement (Armache, 2013; Collins & Cooper, 2014; Eisenberg, Johnson, & Pieteron, 2015; Saucet & Cova, 2015; Xie, Wu, Luo, Hu, 2012). These practices are influential in how employees perceive supervisors and companies. Consequently, a combination of the

above factors would positively influence financial performance, productivity, and employee satisfaction, as an overall outcome.

Investigation of the leader-member relationship in Las Vegas hospitality industry revealed the integration of using both a survey instrument and semi-structured face-to-face meetings as primary means of gaining insight into organizational engagement levels. Wiley (2012) suggested surveys are the most beneficial means to measuring engagement levels. The suggestion arose from the nature of a survey to strategically measure for talent management and business strategy collectively. Professional practice should include replicating Wiley's (2012) study.

The professional practice of regularly surveying employees would aid in organizational performance. Each hospitality company should decide which of these methods to adopt: (a) employee surveys, (b) customer satisfaction surveys, (c) employee focus groups, and (d) executive and management open forums. Zhai et al. (2012) suggested a positive correlation between employee engagement and organizational performance, which supports the above applications to professional practice. Furthermore, hospitality companies could implement initiatives to garner insight into engagement level. Zhai et al. (2012) also supported behaviors that align with employee engagement. Some of the behaviors are: (a) transparent two-way communication, (b) transformational leadership behaviors, (c) employee benefits, (d) reward and incentive programs, (e) employee well-being, and (f) recognition. Hospitality leaders must vigorously devote substantial energy in cultivating trusting and sustainable relationships with employees in order to maximize business success (Bhattacharya, 2013).

### **Implications for Social Change**

Implications of this study for social change involve the potential to provide leaders of hospitality companies in Las Vegas, Nevada an improved understanding of how actively engaged employees provide a positive benefit to organizational performance. Therefore, communities within Las Vegas would have the opportunity of witnessing positive behaviors and attitudes that could contribute to societal progress. The employees are members of the local communities within Las Vegas. These members of the society stand the chance of manifesting new knowledge arising from the employee engagement program tenets they imbibe. Such manifestations may inspire non-hospitality professionals in the areas surrounding Las Vegas. When employee engagement within an organization leads to engagements among neighbors in a community, the implications may include safer communities, active friendships, neighborhood collaborations, and dissemination of new paradigms.

How social change may occur would include discouraging individuality among community members through engagement activities. The lessons hospitality company employees learn from the implementation of EE programs may serve as a template for such community members to replicate. Therefore, rather than lead community members to the stifling of social growth, members of the society would imbibe the tenets of mutual trust and cooperation. Consistent with research postulations, when professionals and nonprofessionals assimilate the same principles within a community, social change becomes visible (Arham, Boucher, & Muenjohn, 2013; Blumenthal, Bernard, Bohnen, & Bohmer, 2012; Chaudhry, Javed, & Sabir, 2012; Harrington, 2012). Since the

community is hosting multiple hospitality companies, knowledge dissemination from this study may form a basis for cooperative activities outside of neighborhood members' workplaces.

Why people in the surrounding communities may benefit from EE programs is that social change can be contagious. Community members identify ways to enhance the collaborative effort among co-inhabitants to increase the effectiveness of these relationships. Onuoha and Tolulope (2013) posited on affective commitment that engaged individuals develop emotional attachment to the systems conveying shared values and goals. Such a commitment underscores the reason for social change in the applicable communities, in particular, Las Vegas. Members of society may enjoy the benefits having established mutual respect in relationships amongst themselves. Members of the community will realize the recognition and inclusion of their voices in decision-making would make communal life more oriented to the community members than otherwise. With the above social ramifications, communities within Las Vegas would have the opportunity of witnessing positive behaviors and attitudes that could contribute to societal progress.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Several recommendations for action exist arising from this study. The first recommendation is hospitality organizations and their leaders should develop a concise definition for the term EE for use throughout the organization. A standardized definition of EE within the company would consequently provide clarity amongst employees. Such clarity would prove beneficial when pursuing employee buy-in.

The second recommendation is that hospitality industry entities may rely on this study to establish a process for incorporating employee creativity in standard operations. Industry leaders may use findings from this study to design standard operating procedures specific to EE. Such a step would give employees something to expect. Furthermore, employees would inspire one another because those whose ideas go into operation would know that they would eventually contribute a workable idea.

Hospitality companies should increase the opportunities to elicit employee feedback for future changes in procedures and practices. Companies may accomplish this feedback system by providing more avenues for employees to submit suggestions. Placing suggestion boxes in common areas would be a useful process for entrenching performance improvement. Holding meetings solely dedicated to addressing employee concerns and recommendations would be critical to organizational performance.

A recommendation to hospitality industry supervisors would be to thoroughly consider the suggestions of employees. Hospitality business leaders should make concerted efforts to implement recommendations that are in line with organizational goals. If feedback is not utilizable during the implementation phase, communication with employees should be transparent as to the reasoning for such a decision. Supervisors in hospitality companies could use internal social media outlets as a way to increase communication and establish synergy among supervisors and employees throughout the entire organization. Several participants supported their company's use of social media channels as an avenue to increase the collaborative efforts of employees. Nielsen et al. (2012) conducted research on occupational citizenship behavior (OCB), which is a

component of EE; and found when coworkers receive permission to share information freely, their performance levels improve. That improvement occurs especially when the lines of communication among coworkers increase or multiply. Comparative to research by Sange and Srivasatava (2012), the findings in this study contain suggestions that increased engagement would mitigate an employee's negative perception towards leaving the organization. Therefore, by sharing these results in the hospitality industry, companies might be equipped to retain the top-performing employees.

Multiple research participants also noted organizational and departmental goals were often unclear, hindering employees from understanding management expectations. A recommendation to counter this at the organizational level would be to ensure the values and goals of the organization revolve around people-related principles. Additionally, as one participant noted, hospitality companies can implement semi-annual leadership training programs that focus on effective communication and goal setting. Through this focus the supervisors would continuously stay abreast of essential and new techniques to effectively develop, verbalize, and motivate employees. According to Carroll and Simpson (2012) on leadership development, companies that invest in leadership training found that supervisors were (a) more effective in their communication, (b) more adept in goal development and vision setting, and (c) fostered solid relationships with employees. To create a work environment supportive of actively engaged employees, effective communication is a necessity at all levels of the organization.

Publication of this study could provide useful in future studies focusing on leadership, employee engagement, and hospitality performance. I will pursue publication in the following journals: (a) *The American Journal of Business and Management*, (b) *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, and (c) *International Journal of Hospitality Management*. Additionally, I will consider future opportunities to present the study findings at appropriate seminars, hospitality conferences, and human resources-related events.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Opportunities for future research exist regarding employee engagement in business and hospitality environments. My research method was qualitative, and the design was descriptive, focusing on in-depth individual qualification, knowledge, and experience of study participants. The LMX theory undergirded the study and set the stage for interpreting data from participant interview responses and company documents.

Additionally, the use of a quantitative research method could extend the frontiers of the research findings regarding employee engagement and performance. An examination of variables using a quantitative method may identify significant correlations between employee engagement principles and performance outcome. Similarly, a mixed method research method may be beneficial in that it will provide the researcher with descriptive data and statistical data for the exploration and examination of the significance of employee engagement in the hospitality environment. Furthermore, such methodological engagement would be necessary when a researcher decides to consider broader spectra than I considered in this study.



Several limitations existed in this doctoral study. Primarily, the research study focused only on the hospitality industry in Las Vegas, Nevada. A recommendation would be to either focus solely on a specific hospitality company within the Las Vegas, Nevada hospitality industry or select a specific operating unit in the hospitality industry, such as a hotel, casino, or a single retail entity. Additionally, further research could consider an additional geographic location, as this study only focused on Las Vegas, Nevada. Review of diverse geographic locations can provide a richer depiction of employee engagement and its overall significance in the hospitality arena. From this dataset, comparisons of employee engagement processes can occur, and associations among demographics and processes may be determinable.

### **Reflections**

The doctoral study experience and the Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) degree at Walden University were both challenging to pursue and rewarding. The relationships established throughout this journey have been invaluable. While I consider myself thoughtful, this research process forced me to expand and evolve on the spectrum of many ideas I once held. Because of my independent nature, this study challenged me to be more open to allowing the assistance of course mates, supporting instructors, and committee members.

Throughout this process, my intent was to limit any potential influence on research participants by avoiding bias during the interview process. Given the nature of the study and my personal experience in the subject matter, I noticed several occurrences while reviewing the raw data. However, I consider these occurrences proof of deep

exploration, contributing to the dependability, confirmability, and creditability of this study. I have consequently learned that journal entries and field notes are important in qualitative research. Major and minor influences allow for a better understanding of interview questions and response, subsequently providing a greater depth of information from participants.

The research process afforded me an opportunity to engage with like-minded professionals who have a passion for people development and business strategy. Study participants represented a diverse group of leaders from the Las Vegas, Nevada hospitality industry, possessing varying levels of experience developing and implementing people strategies for business success. I hope study participants were able to gain value through this thought provoking research study.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

The purpose of this doctoral study was to explore the strategies managers and supervisors of hospitality industry companies use to implement employee engagement and achieve profitable performance outcomes. Twenty supervisors and managers located in Las Vegas, Nevada partook in semistructured interviews to explore this topic. To facilitate data collection, all twenty interviews were face-to-face with study participants.

I utilized NVivo10 qualitative research software to analyze and code the collected data. Research findings revealed three themes: (a) effect on employees, (b) effect on supervisor-employee relationship, and (c) effect on organizational performance. Included in each of the three themes, were hospitality employee's perceptions about employee engagement and performance, and a demonstration of the dyadic relationship of the

leader-member in the hospitality industry. Participants confirmed the relevance of employee engagement as an essential component for employee performance, and subsequently organizational performance. However, participants indicated employee satisfaction related to the topic of engagement.

Hospitality industry leaders had consensus on the idea of developing and maintaining trusting relationships with employees. Participants emphasized open communication, employee well-being, empowerment and inspiration, opportunities for learning and development, regular feedback and follow-through, fair and consistent recognition, and total rewards structure, as necessities for fostering this relationship. Using employee engagement principles, hospitality leaders can positively influence employee's performance, and consequently experience higher levels of organizational success.

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