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Engagement Strategies for Catalyzing IT Sales Team Performance in Asia

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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2017

Abstract

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MBA, University of Pittsburgh, 1983

BSBA, Gannon University, 1980

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Sales leaders who can foster sales team engagement drive an organization's sales performance. Some information technology sales leaders lack team engagement strategies that support revenue results above market growth rates. The purpose of this qualitative, single-case study was to explore the team engagement strategies of 6 sales leaders, in various offices in the Asia-Pacific region of a single, public information technology company, who demonstrated the ability to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. Participants demonstrated the ability to foster team engagement and consistently deliver year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. The conceptual framework for this study was self-determination theory, a macro theory of motivation. Data collection included semistructured interviews with the sales leaders and a review of company documents, including sales plans, sales results by country, and training and recognition programs. Data analysis included keyword coding, category development, and theme identification. Three themes emerged: using extrinsic motivators, activating intrinsic motivators, and catalyzing team engagement. Extrinsic motivators included both tangible and intangible rewards. Intrinsic motivators included encouraging sales team autonomy, developing sales team competence, and fostering sales team relatedness. Implications for positive social change include providing organizations with engagement strategies that sales leaders could use to offer better employee work-life experiences. When sales leaders improve sales team engagement, team members experience psychological benefits, which may enhance the quality of their personal lives as well as the quality of life for members of their families and communities.

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Dedication

This journey began with the encouragement of my partner, muse, soulmate, and spouse. Through her unflagging optimism, willingness to sacrifice many weekends, and never give up attitude, I found the inspiration and energy to accomplish this goal. Elena made my doctoral program our doctoral program, and in doing so created a shared goal and labor of love. Mom, you and dad instilled in me a deep belief in the power of education and lifetime learning that motivated me to take on this challenge. And to my daughter, Devan, and my brothers Jay, Jeff, and Bill, thank you for your words of encouragement. They made a difference.

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A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step – Lau Tzu. While not measured in miles, the path to earning my DBA has been a remarkable journey. As with most journeys, this one had its share of twists and turns. I would like to thank Dr. Freda Turner for her help in navigating the path forward, and ensuring that I had the support I needed to complete my journey. That support began with Dr. Greg Banks, who stepped in at a critical turning point as I worked to complete my Proposal, followed by the appointment of Dr. Dorothy Della Noce as my Chairperson. Her energy, commitment, and perseverance epitomize the role of doctoral committee chairperson. Working with Dr.D was not only a personal and professional pleasure, but took my study to the next level. I would like to acknowledge my committee members Dr. Richard (Boyd) Johnson and Dr. Judith Blando. Their valuable suggestions and constructive feedback contributed significantly to my study. Finally, I want to thank Dr. Susan Fan for stepping in during the last mile and getting me across the finish line.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

As the nature of work evolves and becomes more complex, organizational leaders confront an increasing need to understand the sources of work-related motivation and engagement (Dysvik, Kuvaas, & Gagné, 2013). Both academics and practitioners have recognized the connections between motivation, engagement, and individual and organizational performance (Evans, McFarland, Dietz, & Jaramillo, 2012; Shuck & Herd, 2012). The focus of this study was to explore the sales team engagement strategies that information technology (IT) sales leaders used to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. The findings and recommendations of this study may contribute to business practice by providing sales leaders with strategies to improve team engagement.

Background of the Problem

Globalization has increased competitiveness and complexity for organizations that depend upon sales teams to drive business results (Brown, 2014). As the nature of work within organizations becomes more complex, the need to understand and influence the forces that drive work-related motivation increases (Dysvik et al., 2013). Researchers have identified universal motivational drivers associated with people's core psycho-logical needs, and provided evidence of a connection between engagement and multiple dimensions of performance at the individual, team, and organizational levels (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Shuck & Herd, 2012). To maximize employee performance, leaders must create engaging experiences that meet employees' core needs (DeCooman, Stynen, Van den Broeck, Sels, & De Witte, 2013). To generate superior sales performance, sales leaders must develop strategies to engage and motivate their teams (Brown, 2014). Given the evidence of a positive relationship between leaders' actions and engagement, leaders who can foster salesperson engagement may be essential to delivering sales results (Edmondson & Boyer, 2013). The challenge for sales leaders is to identify the optimal strategies that engage their teams to deliver superior performance.

Problem Statement

Salesperson performance is critical to organizational success. Sales leaders who foster higher salesperson engagement may improve sales performance (Matthews, Zablah, Hair, & Marshall, 2016). In a study about sales success that included 285 sales managers and 1528 salespeople, the level of engagement between sales manager and salesperson explained 20% of the variance in sales performance (Ahearne, Haumann, Kraus, & Wieseke, 2013). The general business problem is that IT sales leaders may not be pursuing strategies that sufficiently engage sales teams to deliver required revenue results. The specific business problem is that some IT sales leaders lack sales team engagement strategies to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, single-case study was to explore the sales team engagement strategies that IT sales leaders used to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. This research study included a target population of sales leaders in a large IT company in the Asia-Pacific region who demonstrated their ability to engage their teams and consistently deliver year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. This study could contribute to social change as I identified strategies that leaders used to foster team engagement strategies that other leaders could use to create more humane, open-minded, and culturally intelligent workplaces. By engendering more open-mindedness in workplaces, leaders may also offer opportunities to increase diversity, strengthen local economies, and bring about social cohesion.

Nature of the Study

In this doctoral study, I used a qualitative research method to understand people and processes that are both emergent and intuitive, and that result in rich descriptions of the essence of people's experiences (Yilmaz, 2013). I chose the qualitative method because I wanted to explore and develop rich descriptions of IT sales leaders' sales team engagement strategies. Neither quantitative nor mixed-method approaches are appropriate for exploring complex experiences (Punch, 2013). The genesis of quantitative research is a theory and set of hypotheses followed by a comprehensive description of all relevant models, measurements, and equations used to evaluate the variables (Madrigal & McClain, 2012). I did not choose a quantitative method because I was not beginning the study with a theory or hypothesis or evaluating any variables. Researchers use mixed methods to enhance either qualitative or quantitative approaches to a research study by combining both methods, at the cost of length and complexity (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Because there was no quantitative component to this study, I did not choose mixed methods.

I considered multiple qualitative designs for this study, including phenomenology, historical narrative, and case study. To make a design choice, researchers consider the type of research question, the degree of control over participant behavior, and the focus on a current situation (Yin, 2014). Researchers use phenomenology to study the nature of a lived experience (Finlay, 2013). Phenomenology was not an optimal design choice for this study because I was not studying a lived experience. I also considered the use of an historical narrative. An historical narrative is appropriate when the relevant persons are inaccessible (Yin, 2014). I eliminated historical narrative as an option because I had access to relevant participants. A case study is appropriate when the researcher wants to explore a contemporary social phenomenon and gather data through interviews (Yin, 2014). Given the research question, the focus of the research on a contemporary situation, and the plan to use interviews to gather data, I selected a case study design for this study.

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was: What sales team engagement strategies do IT sales leaders use to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates?

Interview Questions

I developed the interview questions for this study during my review of the literature and in the context of my central research question.

1. What team engagement strategies do you use to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates?
2. What techniques or systems do you use to motivate salespeople?
3. What are the challenges you face in motivating your sales team to deliver year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates?

4. How do you overcome challenges to motivating your sales team to achieve peak performance?
5. What expectations have your salespeople expressed to you concerning your role as their team leader?
6. What actions, if any, have you taken to meet the expectations expressed to you by your salespeople in your capacity as their team leader?
7. What additional information can you share regarding the strategies you use to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates?

Conceptual Framework

Developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1985), self-determination theory (SDT) is a macro-theory of motivation. Deci and Ryan described the conditions under which people may realize their potential and optimize their development, performance, and well-being. Within the SDT framework, people derive high motivation levels from connections with others, resulting in a commitment to a target outcome (Battistelli, Galletta, Portoghese, & Vandenberghe, 2013). Over time, SDT researchers consistently showed that engaged, motivated individuals experienced improved physical and psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Deci and Ryan (2012) introduced the concept of basic psychological needs, specifically people’s need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. All are related to psychological health and well-being. Within SDT, when people meet their core need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, they become motivated and engaged. The work environment also affects employees’ level of motivation, encouraging or inhibiting personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2000; van Beek, Hu, Schaufeli, Taris, & Schreurs, 2012). SDT is an appropriate framework in this study and the concept of core needs underlying human motivation is relevant because the research question is about exploring sales leaders' team engagement strategies.

Operational Definitions

This section includes context-specific terms or jargon used throughout this study. The definition of each term reflects the cited author's use of the term.

Amotivation: Amotivation is an individual's state when there is no motivation for action (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Autonomous motivation: Autonomous motivation occurs when a person's intrinsic motivators and extrinsic motivators have sufficient meaning to become intrinsic in their expression (Sisley & Smollan, 2012).

Basic psychological needs: Basic psychological needs are the universal human needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Engagement: Engagement exists when work context aligns with the favored physical, cognitive, and emotional expression of a given role (Kahn, 1990).

Extrinsic motivation: When an individual takes action to gain external rewards, or avoid punishment, the individual is acting on extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Intrinsic motivation: When an individual takes action to gain internal rewards, the individual is acting on intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Regulation (external, introjected, identified, and *integrated):* Regulation is a means of differentiating extrinsic motivations based upon the degree of individual internalization of the motivator (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

An assumption is that which one believes to be true without proof (Johnson, 2012). In this study, I assumed that the participants would respond to my open-ended questions in a candid and forthright manner. As I planned to record the interviews, I assumed that the participants would not object to being recorded. Last, I assumed that my experience and expertise in leading business organizations, including sales teams in the Asia-Pacific region, would not bias my research.

Limitations

This study was subject to four limitations, also known as deficiencies or shortcomings (Johnson, 2012). (a) A small number of sales leaders participated in the study, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other IT sales organizations. (b) Only sales leaders participated in the study—not the salespeople on their teams. The conclusions about engagement do not reflect the perceptions or experiences of the salespeople. (c) The only data sources were the semistructured interviews and collected documents. Relying on interviews introduced the risk of interviewee bias and imperfect recollection of actions and other events. The results of the study depended upon the participants candidly answering the open-ended interview questions. Throughout the interview process, and in the post interview member checking process, I saw no indication that the questions were not answered candidly. (d) All interviewees were employees of the same global IT company, and may have had similar backgrounds and points of view. I mitigated this limitation by choosing participants from each of the six countries that made up the Asia Pacific region, ensuring that the interviewees represented diverse cultural and experiential backgrounds. In my analysis of the interview data, I uncovered multiple points of view, which alleviated my concern about this limitation.

Delimitations

Delimitations define the boundaries and generalizability of the study population (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2014). The participants in this study consisted entirely of male sales leaders in the Asia-Pacific region. I further narrowed the scope of the study with a purposive sample from within a single global IT technology and services company. I screened each participant to ensure that he had held the role of sales leader in the Asia-Pacific region for a minimum of 2 years. These steps helped ensure that the sales leaders had sufficient time working with their salespeople to consider actions that affected employee engagement.

Significance of the Study

Members of the business community may learn valuable insights from this study. Sales leaders may learn strategies to improve engagement and motivation in IT sales teams across the Asia-Pacific region. An engaged, motivated team is a top priority—and a challenge—for IT sales leaders under pressure to deliver exceptional results (Shuck & Herd, 2012).

Contribution to Business Practice

The boundary-spanning nature of the salesperson job entails unique challenges and stresses. Sales leaders have a critical role in ensuring the well-being of a sales team (Kemp, Aberdeen, & Ricks, 2013). To be effective in facilitating superior performance, sales leaders must develop emotional awareness and exhibit the leadership behaviors that engage and motivate sales teams (Brown, 2014). Through my findings and recommendations from this study, I may contribute to business practice by providing sales leaders with strategies to stimulate sales team engagement.

Implications for Social Change

Beyond the contributions to business practice, when leaders use strategies to improve employee engagement, they may benefit their employees. By improving employee engagement, leaders can produce cognitive benefits that lead to increased psychological health for employees (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Engaged employees experience curiosity, vitality, and a proactive approach to life (Ryan & Deci, 2000). By using insights from this study, business leaders may help their firms improve employee engagement, which may meet employees' primary psychological needs, fulfill employees' desire for autonomy, and enhance employees' ability to support their ambition for personal and professional growth. By using strategies that improve employee engagement, business leaders might also develop more humane, open-minded, and culturally intelligent workplaces, which, in turn, may provide opportunities to increase diversity, strengthen local economies, and encourage social cohesion.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In this literature review, I explore previous research pertaining to the antecedents and mediators of sales team outcomes, such as task performance and revenue results. I also examine the dimensions of human motivation as described in the conceptual framework of self-determination theory (SDT), the theory and practice of employee engagement, and the intrinsic and behavioral drivers of sales performance. I begin with a discussion of the foundations of SDT, followed by an exploration of the motivational, leadership, and performance dimensions of SDT in a work context. In the next section, I introduce engagement, investigate its history and psychological antecedents, and its relationship to motivation, leader behavior, and performance. The last section of this literature review includes an exploration of the relationships between sales outcomes and intrinsic and behavioral drivers of salesperson performance, as well as sales leader competencies and behaviors relevant to salesperson and sales team engagement and performance.

I developed my search strategy for this literature review based upon the need to address a specific business problem: that some IT sales leaders lack sales team engagement strategies to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. My first step was to identify factors underlying the business problem. Based on my business experience, I selected *human motivation*, *engagement*, and *drivers of sales outcomes* as the factors. I performed a preliminary literature search using those factors, and, based on that search, chose three primary search terms: *self-determination theory*, *employee engagement*, and *sales performance*. Using those primary terms, I developed a set of related search topics. I display the behavioral factors and the associated search topics that I used for this literature review in Table 1.

Table 1

Literature Review Search Terms

Factors	Motivation	Engagement	Outcomes
Primary Topic	Self-determination theory	Employee engagement	Sales performance
Related Topics	• Human motivation • Work motivation • Job demands • Autonomous motivation	• Work engagement • Team engagement • Organizational engagement • Employee performance	• Sales effectiveness • Salesperson performance • Sales leadership • Sales management

To narrow the search, I focused on peer-reviewed research in English, published during or after 2012. I made an exception for seminal works or significant meta-analyses that contributed to the development and understanding of the primary search topics. I accessed Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM, SAGE Premier, Emerald Management, and PsycINFO. I also used Google Scholar to provide a broad-based search engine capability. After annotating the initial volume of literature and placing it into an Excel database, I coded each entry to ensure that I examined the topics to saturation. By eliminating redundant and less relevant literature, I reduced my literature review source count to 82 articles. The final source count of peer-reviewed articles cited in the literature review is 79, comprising 96% of the cited references in the literature review. Of 127 sources in the study, 92% have a publication date of 2012 or later. Peer-reviewed articles comprise over 85% of the total. Last, I organized the articles by topic and subtopic into a detailed outline that formed the basis of my literature review.

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore the sales team engagement strategies that IT sales leaders in the Asia-Pacific region used to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. The target population consisted of six IT sales leaders in a large IT company in the Asia-Pacific region who demonstrated their ability to engage their teams and consistently deliver year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. The overarching research question for this study was: What sales team engagement strategies do IT sales leaders use to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates?

Self-Determination Theory

From the turn of the 19th century through the decade following World War II, Western experimental and applied psychologists studied behavioral and psychodynamic motivational drive theories. With the advent of cognitive motivation theories, scholars lost interest in behavioral and psychodynamic motivational drive constructs (Deci & Ryan, 1985). During the latter part of the 20th century and the early part of the 21st century, researchers showed interest in evolved and acquired needs, and intrinsic motivation, and revived scholarship on motivational theories (Ryan, 2012). During this revival, Deci and Ryan (1985) articulated a macro-theory of motivation: self-determination theory (SDT). Deci and Ryan (2000) differentiated SDT from other motivational constructs by distinguishing types and quality of motivation versus singular, additive concepts that focused on the total amount of motivation. In subsequent studies, researchers confirmed the validity of the core idea that motivational type or quality predicts performance, well-being, and other outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Two central concepts of SDT are human need–satisfaction and need-frustration. Scholars examine the satisfaction-frustration continuum in the context of autonomous and controlled work motivation (Vandercammen, Hofmans, & Theuns, 2014). According to SDT, people are, by nature, intellectually and experientially active, and driven by the desire to find purpose and realize possibilities (Dysvik et al., 2013). SDT scholars assume that people are proactive in their desire to optimize their life situation (Vansteenkite & Ryan, 2013). Autonomous motivation includes a blend of intrinsic motivators, plus extrinsic motivators that have sufficient meaning to become intrinsic in their expression. According to SDT, people internalize extrinsic motivation across a continuum in varying degrees, with a correlated effect on perceived autonomy (Sisley & Smollan, 2012). The SDT continuum (Figure 1) depicts the spectrum from amotivation to intrinsic motivation.

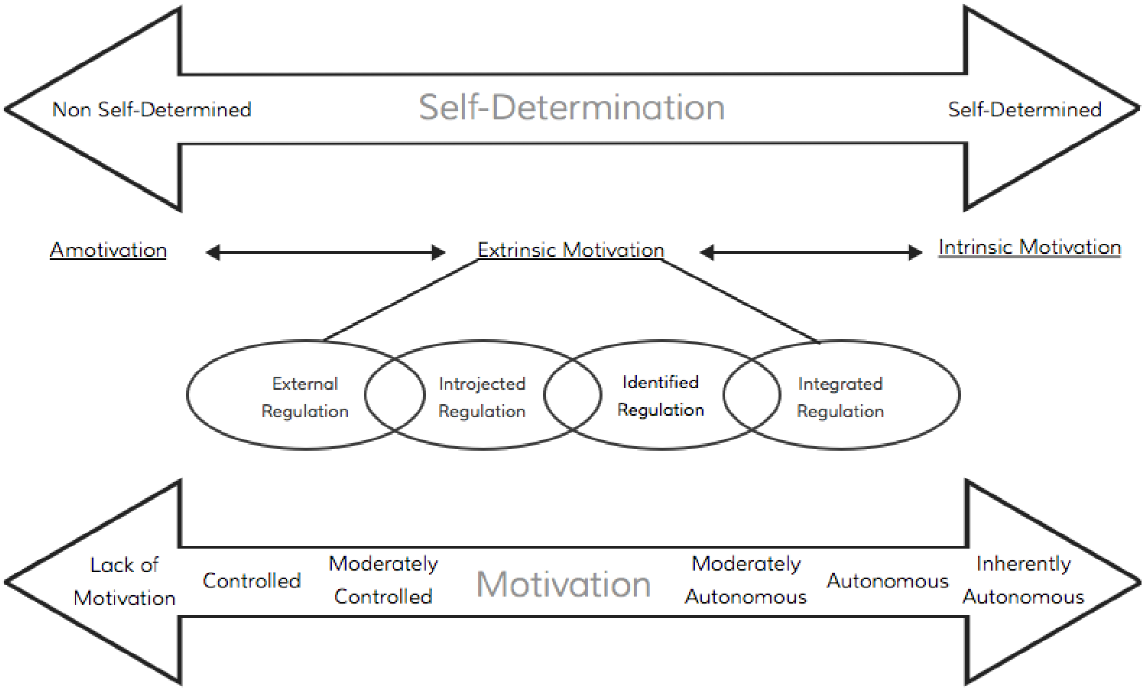

Figure 1. The spectrum of motivation types and subtypes within SDT. Regulatory subtypes are: external, introjected, identified, and integrated. Amotivation describes a state without action or intent. Intrinsic motivation describes autonomous, self-actualized energy and behavior. The four subtypes of extrinsic motivation represent states that range from low autonomy and internal motivation (external regulation), to highly autonomous and fully absorbed behavior, though still outside of intrinsically motivated action (integrated regulation). Adapted with permission from "Self-Determination Theory and The Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being," by R. M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, 2000, *American Psychologist*, *55*, p. 72. Copyright 2000 by the American Psychological Association.

Within SDT, satisfaction of three basic, universal psychological needs, *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness*, is related to intrinsic motivation (Dysvik et al., 2013). Deci and Ryan (1985) elaborated on these three basic needs within two SDT sub-theories they termed cognitive evaluation theory (CET) and organismic integration theory (OIT). Autonomy refers to people's sense of control over their own behavior and its outcomes. Researchers found that autonomous motivation indicates and predicts positive affect (Gillet, Vallerand, Lafrenière, & Bureau, 2012). Competence refers to people's need to acquire and demonstrate capabilities and capacities. Because they need to perceive themselves as competent, people engage in actions and behaviors that bolster their sense of competence (Fay & Sonnentag, 2012). Relatedness refers to people's need to belong to a broader community, as well as to believe that they contribute to that community and the individuals within it (Dysvik et al., 2013).

Deci and Ryan (1985) proposed that the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are universal and operate across cultures. Testing this assertion, Church et al. (2013) conducted an eight-culture study covering the United States, Australia, Mexico, Venezuela, Japan, China, Malaysia, and the Philippines. They found that, while people's perceptions of need-satisfaction show variations across cultures, the core SDT needs are cross-culturally consistent and important to need-fulfillment. Earlier, van Beek et al. (2012) found, in their research in China, that autonomy, competence, and relatedness were core motivational drivers. Roche and Haar (2013) conducted research in New Zealand across 250 organizations to test the full SDT metamodel, and found a significant relationship among the elements of SDT related to the facilitator variables of aspirations, motivations, and mindfulness. In testing the full SDT metamodel, the researchers also identified a significant relationship between the elements of SDT and the core psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Roche & Haar, 2013).

Self-Determination Theory at Work

Because of the global demand for talent, many organizations view attracting and retaining employees as an important business objective (Dysvik et al., 2013). To deliver experiences that meet employee expectations of role and work environment, leaders within organizations must understand and address their employees' core needs (DeCooman et al., 2013). As the nature of work within an organizational environment becomes more complex, so does the leader's need to understand and influence the forces that encourage work-related motivation (Dysvik et al., 2013).

Within SDT, the relationship between employees and their organizational environment predicts individual behavior and motivation. Van Beek et al. (2012) found a relationship between the type of motivation, the basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and employee behavior. Figure 1 depicts this relationship within SDT across a spectrum, which ranges from amotivation to autonomous, self-determined motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Researchers have given the SDT construct of motivation quality the most attention as they searched for the determinants of autonomous, self-determined work motivation (Gillet, Gagné, Sauvagère, & Fouquereau, 2013). As Gagné and Deci (2005) envisioned, the outcome of the employee's range of behavioral regulation reflects the quality of motivation. For example, in a Swiss study of 201 insurance industry employees, Guntert (2014) found a significant relationship between positive work outcomes and both extrinsic identified regulation and intrinsic motivation. More specifically, Guntert demonstrated that the CET and OIT sub-theories of SDT were distinct, yet complementary, cross-culturally relevant predictors of positive work outcomes. Those work outcomes included job satisfaction, turnover intent, and organizational citizenship behavior.

Within the context of SDT, Gagné and Deci (2005) defined autonomously motivated employees as people who performed because they found purpose and meaning in their work. Conversely, the researchers viewed employees who acted primarily because of external (extrinsic) demands as controlled and lacking autonomous motivation. Fernet, Austin, and Vallerand (2012) conducted a longitudinal study with 586 participants in which they examined both autonomous and controlled motivation in relation to work motivation. The authors concluded that organizational support of autonomous motivation promoted employee work motivation in the form of higher levels of commitment and lower exhaustion from work. Supporting those results, researchers conducted multiple studies showing that employees who experience high-quality, autonomous motivation exhibit positive performance, increased satisfaction, and higher levels of commitment (Trépanier, Fernet, & Austin, 2013).

Contrasting Theories and Models of Work Motivation

SDT is only one of several psychological models that facilitate the observation, testing, and description of the forces behind motivated behavior (Ryan, 2012). The motivation theories I discuss in the following comparative review are representative, not exhaustive. Other researchers have provided comprehensive coverage of these theories (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Grant & Shin, 2012; Ryan, 2012). Grant and Shin (2012) divided work motivation theories between those primarily focused on internal, intrinsic explanations, and those focused on external, extrinsic factors. The primary difference between SDT and other theories and models of work motivation is that SDT scholars focus on the relative strength of motivation versus the accumulated level of motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005). A review of several theories, including goal-setting theory, job characteristics theory, and theories of work motivation, illustrates these differences.

According to goal-setting theory (GST), clear, challenging goals motivate people to achieve exceptional performance (Grant & Shin, 2012). The principal distinction between SDT and GST is that, unlike SDT, GST does not include a distinction between types of motivation or the quality of performance (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Like GST, job characteristics theory (also known as job design) is an externally focused motivational theory. According to job characteristics theory, well-designed jobs have a clear purpose, and a structure that supports an employee's basic need for autonomy (Grant & Shin, 2012). The principles of SDT align with job characteristics theory concerning the positive influence of thoughtful job design on autonomous motivation. Yet, unlike job characteristics theory, SDT indicates the importance of leadership in providing support for autonomy, with a focus on the differences in basic psychological needs versus the strength of those needs (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Foundational theorists of organizational behavior and work motivation, including Maslow (1954), Herzberg (1966), and Alderfer (1972), identified universal psychological needs and asserted that the satisfaction of those needs was important for motivation and well-being (Gagné & Deci, 2005). The difference between SDT and the foundational theories of Maslow, Herzberg, and Alderfer is the manner in which motivation is regulated and directed across a continuum. Researchers developed SDT through a process of continuous empirical validation, giving it substantial depth and breadth as a theory of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Self-Determination Theory, Transformational Leadership, and Performance

Organizational leaders play a significant role in fostering the satisfaction of employee needs and outcomes (Graves & Luciano, 2013). As SDT indicates, employee behavior moves along a continuum (see Figure 1) from controlled, externally regulated behavior to leader-supported autonomy (Guntert, 2014). In the range of leadership theories, transformational leadership is notable for linking employee psychological needs to well-being and work outcomes. A central premise of transformational leadership theory is that leaders drive actions through behaviors that include a mix of personal charisma, inspiration, intellectual energy, and concern for the individual (Trépanier et al., 2013). Transformational leaders act to satisfy employees' needs for individual expression, purpose, and feelings of confidence and self-efficacy, which parallel the basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness that are central to SDT (Kovjanic, Schuh, & Jonas, 2013).

Kovjanic, Schuh, Jonas, Van Quaquebeke, and Van Dick (2012) conducted a two-study research project to test the relationship between transformational leadership and fulfilling basic employee psychological needs as defined in SDT. In the first study, the authors integrated SDT and transformational leadership theory into a single model, which they tested with 862 employees across a diverse range of companies in Germany and Switzerland. Kovjanic et al. (2012) found a significant relationship between transformational leadership behavior and employees' perceptions that managers were addressing their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the second study, the authors tested the relationship between transformational leadership behavior and basic psychological needs via an online experiment. The 190 participants completed one of two simulations of a transformational or non-transformational leadership scenario, followed by a series of needs and engagement measures. Kovjanic et al. found that a transformational leadership approach was an important influence on basic employee psychological need fulfillment, as defined in SDT.

Scholars throughout the SDT literature highlighted the importance of leadership behavior in influencing employee motivation and performance outcomes. SDT theorists posited that the internalized values that drive individual autonomous motivation should stimulate higher levels of performance (Gillet et al., 2012). Amoura, Berjot, Gillet, Caruana, and Finez (2015) contended that a self-determined (autonomy-supportive) leadership style fostered employee self-regulation via autonomy-satisfying choices. Battistelli et al. (2013) found, through their research, that intrinsic and identified forms of autonomous motivational support correlated with higher levels of employee-to-organization emotional bonds, resulting in positive performance behaviors. Throughout the extant literature, researchers found a significant relationship between intrinsic motivation, autonomy-supportive leadership styles such as transformational leadership, and positive employee outcomes. The degree to which intrinsic motivation was predictive of employee performance, along with the role of extrinsic factors in the interplay between motivation and performance, was less clear (Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014). In a meta-analysis, in which they used SDT as the conceptual framework and built upon nine prior meta-analyses and more than 40 years of prior research, Cerasoli et al. (2014) examined the relationship between intrinsic motivation, extrinsic incentives, and employee performance. The authors confirmed the importance of intrinsic motivation to predict employee performance. They identified that quality of performance was an important variable to predict intrinsic performance, and extrinsic incentives were a better predictor of the quantity of performance. Significantly, the authors concluded that organizations should consider intrinsic motivation and extrinsic incentives in parallel, and as potentially complementary, when predicting performance (Cerasoli et al., 2014). Building upon the Cerasoli et al. meta-analysis, Cerasoli and Ford (2014) conducted a three-wave panel study to examine the relationship between intrinsic motivation, as defined within SDT, and performance. The authors hypothesized that, while intrinsic motivation positively correlated with performance, the relationship was not causal. Cerasoli and Ford found that an individual's focus on mastering specific goals explained the relationship between motivation and levels of performance.

SDT is an approach to understanding what motivates people to seek purpose and take action based upon the proposition that people have universal psychological needs. In the organizational and work context, researchers use SDT to explain the relationship between employee needs and work motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). While people's perceptions of need-satisfaction vary across cultures, the concepts of needs in SDT are cross-culturally consistent and important to need-satisfaction (Church et al., 2013). In their research exploring the integration of transformational leadership, basic psychological needs as defined in SDT, and work engagement, Kovjanic et al. (2013) provided additional empirical support for Deci and Ryan's (2000) assertion of the relationship between employee needs and work motivation. Kovjanic et al. demonstrated the link between the fulfillment of the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and employee engagement and performance.

Engagement

At the intersection of employee well-being and performance lies the concept of engagement. Frequently, scholars used the term engagement interchangeably with the terms *employee engagement* or *work engagement* (Schaufeli, 2013). Consistent with Schaufeli (2013), throughout this study I used the term *engagement* interchangeably with *employee engagement* or *work engagement* unless otherwise noted. Engagement has become a ubiquitous construct within both business and academia (Yalabik, Popaitoon, Chowne, & Rayton, 2013). Using *employee engagement* as a search term, I found more than 94,000 citation instances in ABI/Inform (Medlin & Green, 2014). In a seminal paper on personal engagement and disengagement at work, Kahn (1990) conceptualized engagement as the release of individual energy when context aligns with a person's favored physical, cognitive, and emotional expression of a given role. In contrast, Kahn described disengagement as being at the opposite end of an engagement spectrum, representing the diminishment of individual energy and self-expression.

As the volume of research about the positive individual and organizational outcomes attributable to engagement grew, the concept became embedded in the lexicon of both business and academia (Rana, Ardichvili, & Tkachenko, 2014). Yet, despite the pervasiveness of the concept of engagement, scholars did not agree on its definition. In a synthesis of both business and academic literature, Schaufeli (2013) identified three common definitions of the term engagement in business use, and four definitions in academic use. In business use, engagement meant job contentment, effort expanded beyond role expectations, or dedication to the organization. In academic use, researchers described engagement as (a) the satisfaction of employee needs, (b) the opposite of employee burnout, (c) a function of energy and attitude toward work and satisfaction with one’s job, and (d) engagement within a specific role versus engagement with the broader organization (Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013).

The contrast between the lack of consensus around a definition of engagement and the pervasiveness and popularity of the concept may reflect the wide-ranging and varied antecedents of the concept. Kahn (1990) proposed a descriptive grounded theory of work engagement and disengagement built upon three core psychological states. Kahn inductively derived those states—meaningfulness, safety, and availability—from peoples’ observed and expressed experiences, versus their implicit and explicit expectations, in the context of their work role performance. Table 2 presents the three psychological states and their influencing factors.

Table 2

Psychological States and Influencing Factors

Dimension	Meaningfulness	Safety	Availability
Description	Sense of return on investments of self in role performance	Believing that one can show and be oneself without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career.	Sense of possessing the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary for investing self in role performances.
Factors	• Tasks • Roles • Work interactions	• Interpersonal relationships • Group and intergroup dynamics • Management style and process • Organizational norms	• Physical energies • Emotional energies • Insecurity • Outside life

Note. Adapted from "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work," by W. A. Kahn, 1990. *Academy of Management Journal*, p. 705. Copyright 1990 by the Academy of Management Journal.

Rana et al. (2014) developed a theoretical model to address engagement antecedents. The authors proposed that job design, primary work relationships (supervisor and coworker), the work environment, and employee development practices were primary engagement drivers. Relating their model back to Kahn (1990), Rana et al. posited that meaningfulness within the job design construct generated engagement. The authors also maintained that psychological safety, as Kahn described, was central to supervisor and coworker relationships that facilitated engagement. Rees, Alfes, and Gatenby (2013) added employees' perception of having the freedom to voice their views regarding their work role and context to the engagement antecedents. Rees et al. related employee voice to Kahn's (1990) work, noting that Kahn emphasized the importance of employee presence in all aspects of role performance, and asserting that voice was an important component of presence. Jose and Mampilly (2014) further refined the psychological needs construct that Kahn (1990) articulated. Focusing on the relationship between psychological empowerment and engagement, Jose and Mampilly conducted an empirical study of 439 employees from three organizations in Southern India. In that study, Jose and Mampilly examined the importance of meaning, competence, self-determination, and influence on engagement. The authors found a significant relationship between the aforementioned factors and engagement.

Shuck and Reio (2014) examined the role of psychological workplace climate in relation to engagement. In a study of 216 employees in the United States, Canada, and Japan, the authors investigated the relationship between engagement and workplace climate factors, such as well-being and accomplishment, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization. The authors found a significant interaction effect between the psychological workplace climate factors and engagement, which reinforced the importance of a workplace climate that empowers and acknowledges accomplishment to bring about engagement. Liao, Yang, Wang, Drown, and Shi (2013) expanded upon the psychological antecedents of engagement by examining the effects of work environment and personality traits. In a longitudinal study of 2,365 Chinese employees, Liao et al. found significant support for the hypothesis that individual personality and the employee's work environment predict the level of work engagement. The authors also found empirical evidence of the relationship between peer relationships and work engagement.

Revisiting Kahn's (1990) central premise that basic psychological needs and context drove personal engagement, Shuck and Rose (2013) examined the energy that fueled engagement through an affective-cognitive construct. The authors contended that the intensity of work engagement reflected potential energy, transitioning to applied energy, in the context of the work situation. Employees' cognitive expectations emerged from framing engagement in the context of their interpretation of the meaning and purpose of their work (Shuck & Rose, 2013). Shuck and Rose proposed that engagement was an outcome of the meaning and purpose people found in their work role and context.

Jenkins and Delbridge (2013) highlighted that external and internal organizational context were important to employee engagement. Through two case studies, they identified six common engagement drivers: values, job design, support, relationships, voice, and integrity/trust. Jenkins and Delbridge concluded that organizational context could be fundamental to engendering improved engagement in practice. They hypothesized that an organization's approach to strategy, business model, and people management might explain the higher or lower levels of employee engagement with their work and the organization.

Alternative Constructs, Criticisms, and Gaps

Despite the lack of a clear definition and the multiplicity of proposed antecedents, both business leaders and scholars continue to show interest in the concept of engagement (Robertson, Ales, & Cooper, 2012). Organizational metatrends may be a partial explanation for the interest in the concept of engagement. Those metatrends include: (a) the incorporation of human capital management into business strategy; (b) the favoring of positive psychology, and its emphasis on employee well-being; and (c) knowledge work accelerating the shift from collective to individualized work (Guest, 2014).

A primary criticism of the engagement concept is that the concept is a reformulation of existing, validated constructs – specifically, job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment (Shuck, Ghosh, Zigarmi, & Nimon, 2012). In a literature review regarding those specific criticisms, Shuck et al. (2012) identified several possible reasons for the seeming conflict across constructs. First, the authors highlighted that the many definitions led to descriptive overlap. Second, they contended that the generalization of engagement as an end-state, with little sensitivity to the dynamic contexts in which engagement develops, resulted in derived (versus operational) definitions that overlapped with existing constructs. Last, Shuck et al. showed that the use of generalized terms in engagement measures resulted in concept overlap. Shuck et al. concluded that, while they found conceptual and descriptive overlap between the terms engagement, job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment, they could discriminate the constructs from one another.

In their meta-analysis of engagement and burnout constructs, Cole, Walter, Bedeian, and O'Boyle (2012) questioned the theoretical meaning and uniqueness of the engagement construct. The authors examined whether engagement was the antithesis of burnout or a distinct construct. Cole et al. found significant construct redundancy when work engagement was defined and measured, as Schaufeli (2013) proposed. Notably, Cole et al. also concluded that Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of engagement, as a product of the alignment of context and preferred self-expression, offered a theoretical foundation that was distinct from burnout.

Guest (2014) and Purcell (2014) looked beyond the difference in engagement constructs to debate the concepts of work engagement versus organizational engagement, and work engagement versus employee engagement, respectively. Both authors claimed the definition of engagement, and the manner of its use, was incorrect. Guest (2014) contended that organizational engagement, with its focus on performance, was distinct from the well-being oriented work engagement. Purcell (2014) claimed that work engagement applied to an elite sub-segment of the work population, and was of little relevance to practitioners, whereas employee engagement, while potentially relevant in the workplace, lacked clear definition and a consistent means of operationalization.

Guchait (2016) identified an additional gap in the engagement literature: most scholars focused on the individual level of engagement, leaving team-level engagement as an under-researched motivational construct. Costa, Passos, and Bakker (2014b) posited that team-level engagement was an independent construct, separate from individual engagement, based upon the concept of team engagement as a collective emergent state. In their development of a theoretical model of team engagement, Costa et al. described team engagement as an emergent state characterized by shared workplace motivations, feelings, and positive well-being. In a two-part study, the authors tested that definition and their hypothesis that team engagement could be empirically differentiated from individual engagement. Costa et al. concluded from their research that team engagement was a distinct, valid construct, independent of individual engagement.

According to Saks and Gruman (2014), scholars have produced a robust body of research about the definitions, drivers, and outcomes of engagement. Only the passage of time will show whether engagement is an enduring organizational and management concept (Guest, 2014). From a business practice perspective, business leaders were interested in the relationship between engagement and performance (DeCooman et al., 2013).

Engagement and Performance

Despite the many perspectives on and descriptions of engagement, scholars have continued to investigate performance outcome assertions and the approaches to achieve them (Yalabik et al., 2013). Those performance outcomes may range from psychological conditions, such as well-being, to organizational results such as profits and productivity (Yalabik et al., 2013). In a review of the literature pertaining to work engagement and performance outcome, Kim, Kolb, and Kim (2012) asserted that, in many instances, researchers deduced the performance outcomes instead of empirically deriving them. Yalabik et al. (2013) provided an example of this deductive logic, tracing a path from the energy, focus, and positive affect associated with engagement, to increased internal resources, to employees applying those resources for improved performance. In a study of UK bank employees, Yalabik et al. explored the antecedents of work engagement and their relationship to performance, based upon a measure of salesperson job performance in year-end appraisals by their sales manager. The authors found that employee emotion and satisfaction precipitated engagement, which, in turn, affected job performance. To examine the relationship between job attitudes and employee performance, Dalal, Baysinger, Brummel, and LeBreton (2012) surveyed a cross-section of 191 employees in the Midwestern United States. They found that job satisfaction predicted task performance.

Expanding beyond attitudinal factors that lead to engagement and improved performance, Albrecht (2012) tested the path from multiple levels of resources (organizational, team, and job) to engagement, and from engagement to extra-role performance. The author surveyed 3,515 employees across Asia-Pacific. The employees assessed their own performance by completing a 42-item questionnaire on a broad range of organizational-culture and organizational-climate factors. Albrecht demonstrated that the level of available resources is significantly related to engagement, as is engagement to role performance. Furthering the understanding of the relationship between engagement, role performance, and organizational effectiveness, Kataria, Rastogi, and Garg (2013) surveyed 304 IT industry managers. The authors found a meaningful relationship between engagement and organizational effectiveness.

Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, and Courtright (2015) moved beyond individual role performance to examine the effect of organizational level engagement and its relationship to organizational performance. The authors proposed that the organizational resources associated with job design, human resource practices, and transformational leadership, were related to the core psychological needs that Kahn (1990) identified: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. These organizational resources activated organizational engagement and performance. Barrick et al. (2015) surveyed 903 bank employees across the United States. The researchers determined organizational performance by measuring a return on assets over a 6-month period following the close of the survey. In their analysis of the data, the authors demonstrated a significant relationship between organizational resources, organizational engagement, and organizational performance.

Despite the range of research on engagement, the extant literature provided little evidence of specific, quantifiable relationships between engagement and individual or organizational performance (Saks & Gruman, 2014). In their literature review, Kim et al. (2012) noted the scarcity of engagement-to-organization performance literature. To substantiate their assertion concerning the paucity of available peer-reviewed literature regarding engagement-to-organization performance, I used the search terms *employee engagement and financial performance*, and *employee engagement and sales performance* in three global database searches. The search produced 21 results from Google Scholar, 11 from ABI/INFORM Complete, and 5 from PsycINFO. This cursory search of the literature underscored the gap in research connecting the employee engagement construct with objective, quantitative individual or organizational performance data.

Engagement and Leadership

Globalization has increased competitiveness and complexity for organizations, altering the role and nature of leadership. The most recent generation of employees has significantly different expectations of their work experience (Brown, 2014). These changes make engagement an important strategic option for leaders to use in positioning their organization for success (Shuck & Herd, 2012). As described earlier, organizational leaders play a significant role in nurturing the satisfaction of employee needs and outcomes (Graves & Luciano, 2013). However, Shuck and Herd (2012) noted the limited peer-reviewed literature on the relationship between leader behavior and engagement.

Carasco-Saul, Kim, and Kim (2014) conducted a literature review of conceptual and empirical research pertaining to the leadership-engagement relationship. Using the most common variants of engagement, including employee, work, job, role, and personal engagement, the authors identified 81 candidate articles. After screening for quality and duplications, the authors included 20 studies in the final review. Across the studies, the authors identified transformational leadership as the predominant leadership style, leading to consistent conclusions about correlations. None of the authors conducted longitudinal studies, which led to unconvincing arguments concerning causality (Carasco-Saul et al., 2014). Carasco-Saul et al. recommended that future research should incorporate a variety of leadership styles, measured over time, to assess more fully the dynamic between leader behavior and engagement. The authors also suggested that, to more closely approximate real-world conditions, future research on the leader style-engagement relationship should include interaction effects of factors such as age, gender, and culture.

A number of researchers explored the cross-cultural leadership-engagement dynamic. Li and Qi (2015) examined the relationship between leader power sharing, engagement, and task performance. The authors surveyed 65 managers, and 311 of their subordinates, at an IT firm in northern China. To ensure continuity with Western studies, Li and Qi took into consideration the potential moderating relationship of Chinese cultural values with respect to authority. Li and Qi found that engagement was a significant mediator, bridging power sharing and improved task performance, and the significance of engagement as a mediator diminished as the strength of traditional deference to authority grew. Wang and Hsieh (2013), in a study of 386 Taiwanese manufacturing and service employees, demonstrated the significant relationship between the trust and behavioral consistency attributes of authentic leadership and engagement. Song, Kolb, Lee, and Kim (2012) tested the effect of transformational leadership on engagement, and the outcome of organizational learning, in a Korean context. The authors concluded that the level of employee engagement had a strong, measurable effect regarding organizational learning. Song et al. showed that, in the collectivist cultural context of Korean business, transformational leadership practices were significant to engender employee engagement. In a study in South Asia, Jauhari, Sehgal, and Sehgal (2013) examined the relationship between leadership's approach to talent management and employee engagement in the context of the IT industry in India. The authors studied employee engagement practices at Infotech Enterprises, a large Indian IT firm, and determined that leaders' focus on employee engagement practices and measurement resulted in higher levels of engagement within the organization.

The preceding literature indicates the global application of the engagement-leadership relationship construct, and some evidence of a relationship between leader actions and engagement reactions. Questions about the specific leader behaviors and processes that trigger engagement remain (Shuck & Herd, 2012). Since Kahn (1990) articulated the concept of engagement, both academics and practitioners have explored its applications (Yalabik et al., 2013). Despite the intensity of research efforts, scholars have not yet achieved consensus about the definition of the engagement construct, the underlying causes of engagement, or its specific effect on performance (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Sales Performance

In a dynamic global marketplace characterized by rapid product and pricing information transparency, short product life-cycles, and intense competition, sales performance is integral to organizational success. Because of the strategic importance of sales performance, researchers and practitioners have made it a topic of extensive study (Evans et al., 2012). Despite this focus, researchers cannot fully describe or explain the drivers and predictors of sales performance across industries and sales situations (Evans et al., 2012). In their seminal meta-analysis of the history of sales performance antecedents from 1918 to 1982, Churchill, Ford, Hartley, and Walker (1985) identified six significant sales performance predictors: role perception, skill, aptitude, motivation, personal attributes, and organizational factors. The authors suggested that future researchers investigate the changing nature of the sales performance narrative by focusing less on the individual salesperson and taking a more expansive view of sales performance antecedents. Twenty-five years after Churchill et al. published their paper, Verbeke, Dietz, and Verwaal (2011) completed an updated meta-analysis of sales performance drivers. The authors identified knowledge, adaptiveness, role clarity, aptitude, and work engagement as performance factors. Verbeke et al. concluded that, despite the overlap in the descriptions of the sales performance antecedents between their study and the study conducted by Churchill et al. (1985), there were significant differences in the implications. For Verbeke et al. (2011), salespeople required a level of knowledge to sell effectively, which significantly shifted the nature of the sales role. Relationship quality, team-level selling, and complexity factors contributed to a new definition of sales performance. Evans et al. (2012) proposed that future researchers should examine four under-researched factors related to sales performance: managing customer relationships in complex solution sales environment, creativity, ethics, and team-selling. Cron, Baldorf, Leigh, and Grossenbacher (2014) interviewed 74 senior business-to-business sales executives. Based on the results of their study, the authors suggested that future researchers should examine sales performance in a broader, more integrated organizational context that emphasized cross-organizational interaction, as well as customer-oriented sales capabilities.

The preceding studies and meta-analyses of sales performance antecedents represent almost 90 years of research. While various researchers highlighted the complex and dynamic context that characterized the current sales environments, they placed less focus on uncovering the underlying motivational and engagement drivers of sales performance. Churchill et al. (1985) identified motivation as a sales-performance predictor, and Verbeke et al. (2011) identified work engagement as having a significant relationship with sales performance. Both Churchill et al. (1985) and Verbeke et al. (2011) noted the lack of empirical research on the topic of the intrinsic drivers of engagement and sales performance.

Intrinsic Drivers of Salesperson Performance

In a rapidly changing environment, many sales organizations seek to maximize salesperson performance and effectiveness (Kumar, Sunder, & Leone, 2014). As the complexity of sales jobs has increased because of the need for knowledge transfer, integrated solutions, and long-term relationships, traditional extrinsic incentives such as short-term commissions could become counterproductive (Zoltners, Sinha, & Lorimer, 2012). In their meta-analysis of sales force performance, Samaraweera and Gelb (2015) examined the effect of incentive-oriented controls (outcome-oriented) and behavior-oriented controls (salesperson activities and capabilities) on revenue performance. The authors concluded that behavior-oriented controls had a more significant effect on salesperson revenue performance than incentive-based controls. Because this effect was stronger in a complex sales context, the authors urged that salespeople increase their focus on customer relationship orientation. Miao and Evans (2012) surveyed 195 industrial salespersons–sales manager dyads in the United States to examine the effects of varied approaches to salesperson and sales team control. The authors found a significant relationship between sales control styles and motivation. More specifically, the authors determined that salespeople had higher levels of intrinsic motivation when given a combination of salesperson capability development (as part of behavioral-control) and well-balanced outcome-control.

Conflicts and inconsistencies between research findings concerning the relationship between outcome and behavioral sales force controls and salesperson performance appeared in the extant literature. Yet, the literature contained a clear bias toward the effectiveness of intrinsically motivating behaviors (Samaraweera & Gelb, 2015). Singh and Venugopal (2015) asserted that a salesperson's degree of concern for satisfying customer needs, solving problems, and building long-term relationships (customer orientation) may relate to sales performance. In a meta-analysis of selling orientation and sales performance covering 78-empirical studies, Goad and Jaramillo (2014) found that salespeople with a customer orientation showed improved performance through a combination of attitude, affect, engagement, and an adaptive approach to sales. Singh and Venugopal (2015) conducted a 286-salesperson study in a large Indian media firm. The authors concluded that, through the mechanisms of customer need understanding, knowledge, and emotion regulation, salespeople who engaged in customer-oriented selling produced superior sales performance. In their study of 278 business-to-business industrial salespeople, Mallin, Ragland, and Finkle (2014) examined salesperson-customer need understanding, value creation, and sales results. The authors found a significant relationship between intrinsic motivation, proactive behavior, and sales performance.

Researchers have also examined the relationship between salesperson performance and salesperson personality, emotions, intuition, cognition, and self-perception. Goad and Jaramillo (2014) described underlying constructs, such as customer orientation, proactivity, and goal-orientation, as basic psychological personality-performance relationships. The authors included in their personality-performance model both general traits across selling contexts and state-like measures that could adapt to the selling situation. Goad and Jaramillo concluded that each salesperson achieved sales performance through a complex process unique to each salesperson and that, while researchers agreed that personality influenced performance, they did not understand the mechanics. In a survey of 279 salespeople, Locander, Mulki, and Weinberg (2014) examined the interactions between intuition, affect, and cognition in the sales decision-making process. The researchers found that intuition had a significant role in improved performance as an input to both rational, deliberative decision-making and affectively driven adaptive decision-making. Locander et al. asserted that, through their findings, they provided unique insights into the antecedents of sales performance, contending that enhancing intuitive, experience-based insights could improve both rational and instinctive decision-making and lead to enhanced sales performance. In a mixed-methods study of field salespeople, Hall, Ahearne, and Sujan (2015) also evaluated the relationship between salesperson intuition and cognition in decision-making and salesperson performance. Like Locander et al., Hall et al. found that salespeople blended intuition and deliberation in their face-to-face sales interactions, and accurate intuition was significantly related to improved selling performance. Last, in their survey of 245 salespeople, Pettijohn, Schaefer, and Burnett (2014) examined the challenge faced by salespeople charged with delivering both sales revenue and customer satisfaction. The authors concluded that a combination of role clarity, freedom to act, and self-confidence must converge for salespeople to deliver on what could be conflicting performance objectives between sales results and customer satisfaction.

Researchers have shown that complex intrinsic factors underlie salesperson performance. This complexity is a product of the three-way intersection of fundamental human motivations for behavior, the characteristics of the boundary-spanning nature of the sales role, and the varied, rapidly changing contexts in which the sales process takes place. At the center of this evolving sales ecosystem, with responsibility for building sales force capabilities, nurturing customer relationships, and delivering sales results, is the sales leader (Busch, 2013).

Sales Leadership and Salesperson Performance

Sales leaders have a unique role in many organizations. Sales leaders must simultaneously convey a compelling vision; set clear, ambitious (but achievable) targets; hire, develop, and align sales teams; and deliver immediate results (Boyatzis, Good, & Massa, 2012). Sales leaders must deliver those results while simultaneously spanning the boundaries of their internal organization and external ecosystem. For sales leaders to deliver superior performance in a complex, boundary-spanning environment, they require a broad set of competencies (Edmonson & Boyer, 2013). In a three-round Delphi study, utilizing a panel of 35 sales experts, Busch (2013) developed a sales manager competency model. Busch identified three competency categories: (a) team effectiveness, (b) personal effectiveness, and (c) execution and results. Busch then identified competency clusters within each category and ranked each competency cluster by importance (Table 3).

Table 3

Competency Cluster Ranking by Importance

Competency Cluster	Importance Rank
Manages as a leader	1
Coaches for sales results	2
Manages performance	3
Influences to achieve goals	4
Builds talent	5
Builds and maintains relationships	6
Manages the sales process	7
Develops self to achieve goals	8
Manages sales strategy and results	9

Note. Adapted from "Determining Competencies in Frontline Sales Managers in For-profit Organizations," by T. K. Busch, 2013. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 15*(3) p. 306. Copyright 2013 by The Author.

In the competency model, Busch (2013) highlighted intrinsic, perceptual, and behavioral competencies of sales managers. Smith, Andras, and Rosenbloom (2012) voiced a similar point-of-view in their study of 132 sales manager–salesperson dyad relationships. The authors concluded that a sales manager's understanding of the team's expectations and the experience the manager delivered as a leader were central to cultivating sales performance, and noted that managing this experience–expectation dynamic was inherent to a transformational approach to sales leadership. Brown (2014) examined a number of leadership approaches, including trait-based, style theory, and contingency theory. The author observed that effective sales leadership and salesperson selling performance shared common attributes, including the need to motivate change, inspire trust, and provide a return on investment (effort). Brown noted that effective sales leaders blended both transformational and transactional styles to maximize sales team performance. In a survey of 345 business-to-business salespeople, Schwepker and Good (2013) examined the specific relationship between a transformational style of sales leadership, salesperson trust, and sales performance. The authors found a significant relationship between the three variables, and concluded that sales leaders should be deliberate in their actions to create both trust and sales performance.

Some researchers have studied the relationship between sales leader coaching competencies and salesperson performance. Shannahan, Bush, and Shannahan (2013) examined the relationship between sales leader style, salesperson coaching, and sales performance. In their study of 271 salespeople, the authors identified a significant positive relationship between high levels of transformational leader behaviors, focused coaching, and superior sales results. Focusing specifically on the sales coaching competency, Badrinarayanan, Dixon, West, and Zank (2015) combined a literature review with in-depth, comprehensive sales manager interviews. The authors found a consensus in the literature and interviews that sales coaching had a positive influence on selling skills, behaviors, and outcomes. In their conclusion, however, the authors noted the limited number of empirical studies in the academic literature on this subject.

Busch (2013) identified the ability of a sales leader to influence sales teams to achieve their goals as another important behavioral competency. Ahearne et al. (2013) examined salesperson relatedness needs and their interpersonal identification with their manager. Through a survey of 285 sales managers and 1,528 salespeople, the authors revealed that a balanced, interpersonal connection between a sales manager and a salesperson related to heightened customer orientation and improved sales results. Ahearne et al. emphasized that sales managers should address the relatedness needs of their salespeople. Further exploring the sales manager–salesperson relationship, Kemp, Aberdeen, and Ricks (2013) investigated the dynamic of salesperson emotional health and sales manager support. In their survey of 154 salespeople in the United States, Kemp et al. found that sales managers who focused on the affectively positive implications of their actions, along with setting clear expectations, positively influenced salesperson motivation.

Researchers across many sales performance studies suggested a connection with behavioral theories from other research domains (Moncrief, Marshall, Lee, & Cron, 2014). However, I found a lack of cross-disciplinary studies of sales performance when I conducted a literature search on *engagement*, *sales leadership*, and *sales performance*. When I used each of these three terms as an individual search term, I found a significant number of scholarly articles. When I combined the three terms, and filtered the results to display only recent peer-reviewed articles, I found fewer than 10 articles in both ABI/INFORM and PsycINFO databases. Based on this limited literature search, I conclude, consistent with Moncrief et al. (2014), that an opportunity exists for cross-domain sales performance research into the relationship between sales leader engagement strategies and sales team performance.

Summary and Transition

In Section 1, I identified a business problem and an associated research question, along with the supporting foundational elements of the study. In the literature review, I explored previous research pertaining to the antecedents and mediators of sales team outcomes, including the conceptual framework of SDT; the theory and practice of employee engagement; and the intrinsic and behavioral drivers of sales performance. This review included an historic perspective of each topic, as well as a review of contemporary theories and research.

Section 2 includes a description of the role of the researcher and participants, and a discussion of data collection, organization, and analysis, as well as reliability and validity. In Section 3, I present the findings from my study and discuss how the findings relate to professional practice.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 1, I identified a contemporary business problem, provided a foundation for that business problem in the relevant literature, and proposed a research question specific to the business problem. In Section 2, I describe the research project, beginning by restating the purpose statement. I then discuss the role of the researcher, the participants, the research method and design, population and sampling, data collection and analysis, and reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore the sales team engagement strategies that IT sales leaders used to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. The study included a target population of sales leaders in a large IT company, in the Asia-Pacific region, who demonstrated their ability to engage their teams and consistently deliver year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. This study could contribute to social change. If others used the several strategies I identified leaders using to foster team engagement, more humane, open-minded, and culturally intelligent workplaces could result. By fostering open-mindedness in workplaces, leaders may also provide opportunities to increase diversity, strengthen local economies, and precipitate social cohesion.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is to provide context, to understand the underlying dynamics within that context, and to interpret the experiences of the participants (Pettigrew, 2013). To be effective, a researcher conducting a case study should (a) demonstrate the ability to ask pertinent questions and actively listen to the answers; (b) thoroughly understand the context of the study question and adapt to emergent opportunities raised by the interview questions; and (c) avoid bias through self-awareness and ethical practices (Yin, 2014).

I have spent my career in the IT industry and held a wide range of roles, including sales and sales management positions. I held senior business roles in both global IT companies and technology start-up ventures, all of which had operations, suppliers, or customers in the Asia-Pacific region. During a significant portion of my career, I lived or worked in the Asia-Pacific region. At the time of this study, I worked in the same global Fortune 100 IT company as the study participants. None of the participants reported directly to me, nor did I have any responsibilities toward them regarding task assignments, performance reviews, promotions, salaries, bonuses, or any other form of incentive. The participants (country sales general managers) were my peers in the organizational structure, at the same organizational level. The participants worked at different office sites, in countries different than mine. We did not interact daily. Hofmeyer, Scott, and Lagendyk (2012) suggested that, to mitigate potential ethical or procedural issues associated with working in the same organization as the study participants, a researcher should set clear expectations with the participants about the objectives and scope of the study. I clearly described the objectives and scope of the study to the participants.

As I conducted the study, I followed the ethical principles for the protection of human subjects set forth in the Belmont Report: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. I explained my role as the researcher, ensured voluntary participation, obtained informed consent from each participant, and provided assurances of the confidentiality of the interview data. I also submitted an application for a research ethics review to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

To mitigate bias, I used bracketing as a means of suspending my personal experiences and judgment, and focused on the data the participants presented. Yin (2014) stated that remaining open to contrary points of view is crucial to mitigate bias. Therefore, I strived to remain open to contrary points of view. I developed an interview protocol to ensure consistency and quality in the interview process across all participants. Using the same in-depth interview with open-ended questions for all participants helps ensure rich, thick responses (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I also used member checking to provide participants with an opportunity to review and modify my interpretation of their interview data.

Participants

In qualitative research, the researcher purposefully selects participants who can provide the sought-after insights (Bernard, 2013). The number of participants depends more upon the topic and availability of eligible participants, as well as participants' ability to provide the richness of information required to answer the research questions, than on any absolute number requirement (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). The six participants for this single case study, all male, were sales leaders for one large, global Fortune 100 IT company. The six sales leader participants represented all countries in the Asia-Pacific region of the company, including The People's Republic of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the countries of South East Asia. I determined the number of participants based upon their positions with the company, their expertise, and their ability to provide the richness of information required to answer the research question. The six sales leader participants represented the entire population of the case. Yin (2014) asserted that a case is not a sample intended for statistical generalization. Fusch and Ness (2015) emphasized that the quality (richness) and quantity (thickness) of the data may be more important than the absolute number of participants in a study. A selected group of experts may provide a saturation level of information specific to the research topic (Trotter, 2012). As eligibility criteria for participation in the study, I required that, at the time of the study, the participants held a sales leadership role for IT Co. in the Asia-Pacific region. The participants must have been in their sales leader role for no less than 2 years, with a minimum of 5 years of sales leadership experience in the IT industry.

Because I worked in the same organization as the study participants, I had access to the participants and could contact them via internal communications. In complex settings, building trusting relationships requires time (Krot & Lewicka, 2012). Prior to this study, I had developed a working relationship with each of the study participants. My eligibility criteria ensured that the participants were experienced IT sales leaders with the company, holding current sales leadership roles in the Asia-Pacific region. These criteria aligned with my overarching research question: What sales team engagement strategies do IT sales leaders use to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates?

Research Method and Design

Contemporary views on social research methods and design have many antecedents. Starting with the work of Rene Descartes in the 1637 *Discourse on Methodology*, to David Hume (1711-76) and Auguste Comte (1798-1857), people began developing an understanding of the world from both objective, empirical data, as well as data gathered from direct observation, versus views developed from abstract deduction (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2013). The essence of research design is a cogent path from the overarching research question to the results of the study (Yin, 2014).

Research Method

The researcher chooses a research method that aligns with the researcher's philosophical assumptions, the research problem, and researcher experience (Punch, 2013). I used a qualitative method for this study. By using qualitative research, a researcher has the flexibility to understand people and processes in a manner that is both emergent and intuitive, and to elicit rich descriptions of the essence of the participant's experiences (Yilmaz, 2013). Qualitative researchers use an inductive process for analysis, and compose a rich narrative to convey the essence of the research findings (Corley, 2012). Quantitative researchers begin with a theory and set of hypotheses, followed by a comprehensive description of all relevant models, measurements, and equations used to evaluate the variables (Madrigal & McClain, 2012). Quantitative methods are appropriate when researchers want to answer questions about relationships between variables (Freis & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Researchers use a mixed-methods approach when they want to enhance either a qualitative or quantitative approach to a research study by combining both methods (Venkatesh et al., 2013); however, a novice researcher may have difficulty using mixed-methods research because of the method's complexity and lack of clear structure (Larkin, Begley, & Devane, 2014; Trafimew, 2014).

The type of research question is an important differentiator of research methods (Yin, 2014). Because my research question was about exploring strategies that sales leaders use in a real-world context, qualitative research was an appropriate method for my study. I was not testing a relationship among variables, so quantitative research was not appropriate for my study. Because there was no quantitative component to my study, a mixed methods approach was not an appropriate choice. To capture the essence of the participants' experiences, neither quantitative nor mixed methods research is appropriate (Punch, 2013). Last, I based my choice of a qualitative method on my experience and training in conducting interviews, identifying patterns, and storytelling.

Research Design

A researcher chooses a research design to ensure that the data links to the research question and then to the findings (Yin, 2014). To make a design choice, researchers consider the type of research question, the degree of control over participant behavior, and the focus on a current situation (Yin, 2014). Ormston et al. (2013) suggested that a researcher base a design choice upon the nature of the overarching research question. My overarching research question focused on a contemporary business situation: specifically, exploring what team engagement strategies IT sales leaders used to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates.

I considered several qualitative designs, including case study, phenomenology, and historical narrative. Researchers use phenomenology when they seek a holistic explication of a lived experience (Finlay, 2013). Because I wanted to explore strategies, not lived experiences, phenomenology was not an optimal design choice. I also considered the use of an historical narrative. A historical narrative is appropriate when the relevant persons are inaccessible (Yin, 2014). I eliminated historical narrative as an option because I had access to relevant participants. A case study is appropriate when the researcher gathers data through interviews (Yin, 2014). Given my research question, my focus on a contemporary situation, and my plan to use interviews to gather data, I determined that a case study design was the optimal approach.

Data saturation means the researcher is no longer discovering or generating new information or patterns from the data (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Fusch and Ness (2015) noted the importance of data saturation for validity of the findings, and emphasized that the quality (richness) and quantity (thickness) of the data may be more important than the absolute number of participants in a study. To ensure data saturation in this study, I established criteria that ensured the participation of qualified sales leaders who could provide rich and thick data pertinent to the research question. By using the same in-depth interview protocol with open-ended questions for all participants, the researcher gathers rich, thick data, and is more likely to achieve data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used the same in-depth interview protocol with open-ended questions for all participants. Fusch and Ness (2015) also recommended that researchers use methodological triangulation to ensure data saturation. I used methodological triangulation by including two data sources: semistructured interviews of sales leaders and document collection. I collected company documents, which included information regarding year-over-year percentage based sales results by country, and sales leader strategies that promoted engagement, including training and recognition programs. As a general manager in the company, I had unrestricted access to the business sales data. I obtained a letter of cooperation from my company to confirm their authorization to use the documents as part of my study. I included the letter of cooperation in Appendix A.

Population and Sampling

By using purposive selection, a researcher acquires study participants who meet certain specific criteria pertinent to answering the research question (Bernard, 2013). I conducted this study using a non-random, purposively selected group of six sales leaders working in the Asia-Pacific region for a global Fortune 100 IT company. The six sales leader participants, all male, represented all countries in the company’s Asia-Pacific region, including The People’s Republic of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the countries of South East Asia. The six sales leader participants represented the entire population of the case. Yin (2014) asserted that a case is not a sample intended for statistical generalization. Fusch and Ness (2015) emphasized that the quality (richness) and quantity (thickness) of the data may be more important than the absolute number of participants in a study. This group of sales leaders met a set of interview selection criteria that aligned with the research question, including holding, at the time of the study, a current sales leadership role in the company and leading a sales team in the Asia-Pacific region. The participants must have been in their current sales leadership role with the company for no less than 2 years, with a minimum of 5 years of sales leadership experience in the IT industry. The group members fit the criteria for participating in the study and understood the research and interview questions.

A qualitative researcher chooses the number of participants based upon the participants' ability to provide the richness of information required to answer the research question (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). I did not intend that the sample size of this single case study would enable statistical generalization. Yin (2014) asserted that a case is not a sample intended for statistical generalization. Fusch and Ness (2015) emphasized that the quality (richness) and quantity (thickness) of the data may be more important than the absolute number of participants in a study. A selected group of experts may provide a saturation level of information specific to the research topic (Trotter, 2012). I determined the number of participants based upon their positions with the company, their expertise, and their ability to provide the richness of information required to answer the research question. The six sales leader participants represented the entire population of the case, and provided a breadth and depth of experience that helped ensure rich, thick responses to the interview questions.

I worked in the same organization as the study participants, so I had access to the participants and could contact them via internal communications. By using the same in-depth interview protocol with open-ended questions for all participants, the researcher helps ensure rich, thick responses and the achievement of data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used the same open-ended questions for all participants. Because the participants worked at different office sites in different countries, I conducted the interviews via

Internet telephony (Skype) at a time convenient for the participants that allowed for privacy and minimal interruptions.

Ethical Research

In research involving human participants, the researcher has an ethical obligation to conduct the research with particular concern for the well-being of the subjects (Yin, 2014). Before I could begin data collection, the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) evaluated and approved my research proposal as meeting ethical protection standards. I followed the guidelines established by Walden University's IRB. This study includes the Walden University IRB approval notification and approval number (see Appendix B).

I sent each of the participants an informed consent form through e-mail. I asked each participant to read the consent form, and to acknowledge their consent by providing their signature via return e-mail. The consent form included a description of the study, the study's purpose, the interview procedure, the voluntary nature of the study, a privacy statement, and the IRB approval number for the research study. The consent form included a statement that the participants had the right to withdraw from the study before, during, and after the interviews, and up until my study results were published in UMI/ProQuest. Participants did not receive any incentive offers for participation.

Following guidelines that protect participants and ensure an ethical study is essential (Murray, 2014). I kept respondent results in strict confidence, collected data on a password-protected personal laptop computer, and stored the data on an encrypted hard-drive. I informed all participants that I would keep their personal information and the name of the organization confidential. I identified each participant using only an alphanumeric code (P1 through P6) and used a pseudonym for the organization name: IT Co. I downloaded all information related to participants' results to an encrypted, off-line storage device and will continue to store it until 5 years after my completion date. I will store the paper data in a locked filing cabinet and will continue to store it until 5 years after my completion date.

Data Collection Instruments

Qualitative research design practices do not specify a data collection process or required criteria for specific instruments (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative studies (Yin, 2014). I gathered data via semistructured in-depth interviews and document collection. Interview questions should reflect an understanding of the concepts being explored (Eide & Showalter, 2012). I designed my interview questions to explore, with the participants, concepts pertinent to the research question. The interview questions are in Appendix C. To effectively use interviews for gathering data, the researcher must apply a mix of skills and practices, including asking appropriate questions, actively listening, showing flexibility, having a solid understanding of the context, and avoiding bias (Yin, 2014). I incorporated these skills and practices into my interview process.

For quality research, a researcher must use a mix of strategies to increase reliability and validity (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) recommended that researchers use a case study protocol. I increased the reliability of this case study by following a case study protocol (see Appendix C). The elements of the protocol included the objectives of the study and the relevant readings covered in the literature review; the data collection procedures; the interview questions; and the presentation of the research. Findings supported by more than one data source strengthen the construct validity of a case (Yin, 2014). My approach to ensuring construct validity included both methodological triangulation and member checking. Through member checking, participants have the opportunity to clarify the researcher's interpretations or add additional perspective (Harper & Cole, 2012; Yin, 2014). Data sources for methodological triangulation included semistructured interviews of sales leaders and company documents. Company documents included information about company sales performance results by country, as well as sales leader practices and strategies that promoted engagement including training, recognition, and rewards programs.

Data Collection Technique

Interviews are one of the most commonly used means of collecting data in qualitative research because researchers can collect rich, thick data through interviews (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Through good interview practices, researchers may obtain rich, high-quality information from study participants (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). By using semistructured, in-depth interviews, researchers can develop researcher-respondent rapport and natural interaction, both of which are important to gathering rich information (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013). I used semistructured, in-depth interviews to gain insights into the sales team engagement strategies of six sales leaders in one IT company in the Asia-Pacific region. Because the participants worked at different office sites in different countries, I conducted the interviews via Internet telephony (Skype). The disadvantage of using Skype as a data collection technique is that I was unable to use body language and other non-verbal cues to assess the level of rapport with the participants. I digitally recorded the interviews via the Skype graphical user interface (GUI) and the Skype proprietary audio file compression and decompression algorithm. By using this technology, I converted the data into a .wav audio file, which I transferred and stored on my laptop solid state memory via a secure LAN connection. I took notes throughout the interview process to augment the recorded conversation and highlight specific points that I wanted to focus on during the coding and theme development process. The researcher should structure the data collection process into stages (Yeo et al., 2013). I structured the data collection process into stages that included an introduction, a review of the research and the research process, as well as privacy and data security information, and asked open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, thick affective and cognitive responses as the core of the interview process.

Through member checking, participants have the opportunity to clarify the researcher's interpretations or add additional perspective (Harper & Cole, 2012; Yin, 2014). I conducted member checking of the interviews via telephone conversations with each participant to give participants the opportunity to review and modify my interpretation of their interview data. Prior to synthesizing the data, I sent a written copy of my interpretation of the interview to each participant via email before the telephone conversation. Each participant had three days to review the information prior to our call. I considered member-checking after synthesizing all the interview data; however, as Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) asserted, when researchers present synthesized data from multiple sources, individual contributions are unrecognizable. Fusch and Ness (2015) recommended that researchers use methodological triangulation to ensure data saturation. I used methodological triangulation that included company document collection as a data collection technique. Document collection included year-over-year percentage based sales results by country, as well as sales leader strategies that promoted engagement, including training and recognition programs.

Data Organization Technique

For robust and trustworthy data analysis, researchers begin with determining the optimal data collection method for a study, followed by reliable data organization (Elo et al., 2014). Researchers organize and manage data to ensure dependability, which is essential to successful research outcomes (White, Oelke, & Friesen, 2012). My objective in the data organization process for this study was to ensure that I could conduct efficient and effective data analysis. I created digital file labels using participant codes P1 through P6. After summarizing the interview data, I copied each participant interview file into a Word table that contained columns for codes and themes, which allowed me to include digital highlighting and color coding, as well as handwritten notes.

I created a database in Word containing a data input section and a research output section. The input database contained the digital interview summaries and corresponding audio files from participants. The input database also contained interview notes and supporting documentation from document collection, such as sales leader practices and strategies that promoted engagement, including training, recognition, and rewards programs. The research output database contained my coding workbooks, data analysis, and study drafts. Researchers must protect participant's data, and keep study results in strict confidence (Murray, 2014). I will continue to store the data until 5 years after my completion date. I will store the digital data on a password protected solid-state flash memory storage device. I will store the paper data in a locked filing cabinet. After 5 years, I will permanently erase the digital files and shred all paper files.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis lacks a set of pre-defined approaches, instructions, or guidelines, and is as much art as science (Elo et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). Researchers generate new insights from qualitative case study data by using a mix of critical thinking and imagination, as well as an analytic strategy and process (Yin, 2014). My research question—what sales team engagement strategies do IT sales leaders use to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates—framed my data analysis strategy for this single case study.

A phased, step-by-step approach to data analysis is important to ensure robust results (White et al., 2012). After completing the data collection phase, I summarized the interviews, re-read each one, and wrote a brief annotation that captured the primary concepts from each narrative. I repeated the read-review-annotate cycle to reduce the risk of overlooking any concepts. I chose to conduct the coding and theme development process manually, without the use of software. Coding involved an iterative process of reading and re-reading the interview summaries, identifying primary and secondary codes, until no new codes emerged (Elo et al., 2014). Based upon the concepts that I identified from the initial analysis, I developed a preliminary list of codes.

Through the coding process, I associated codes (primary and secondary) with the relevant data in a coding workbook to identify themes, and I color coded data for clarity. I then developed a set of initial themes, and through the process of supporting those themes with the data, refined them into the final set that I used in my study results.
I analyzed the themes in the context of the study's conceptual framework, self-determination theory, and the literature, including literature published after the submission and approval of my study proposal. Data analysis should result in a rich description of themes, followed by extracting their essence into the findings (Elo et al., 2014). I focused on the most compelling themes, incorporating the available data in my analysis and interpretation, and demonstrated my knowledge of the contemporary thinking and debates related to the study topic.

Reliability and Validity

Because qualitative research lacks the objective rigor of statistical methods, demonstrating the trustworthiness of qualitative research results is challenging for a researcher (Noble & Smith, 2015). Researchers use a mix of strategies to enhance the reliability and validity of a research study (Yin, 2014). The repeatability of the research process determines the dependability of a study, making a detailed description of the process essential (Elingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012). By using a case study protocol and performing member checking, researchers can improve reliability and dependability (Yin, 2014). The elements of my case study protocol included the objectives of the study and the relevant readings covered in the literature review; the data collection procedures; the interview questions; and the presentation of the research (see Appendix C). I increased dependability by creating a comprehensive database of all case related data input, analysis, and output. It is also important to describe the role of the researcher, and to perform data quality checks for bias (Yilmaz, 2013). I clearly described my role as the researcher, and performed data quality checks for bias through member checking of the interview summaries.

The credibility of a study is a function of its perceived or accepted trustworthiness, and member checking improves the credibility of the data collected during interviews, thereby increasing the level of trust in the results of the study (Harper & Cole, 2012). My approach to ensuring credibility began with a commonsense appraisal of the plausibility of the study results based upon my years of experience in sales leadership. Through member checking, participants have the opportunity to clarify interpretations or add additional perspectives (Harper & Cole, 2012; Yin, 2014). I conducted member checking of the interviews via telephone conversations to give participants the opportunity to review and modify my interpretation of their interview data. Prior to synthesizing the data, I sent a written copy of my interpretation of the interview to each participant before the telephone conversation. I considered conducting member checking after synthesizing the data; however, when a researcher reduces data to its essence, the participants have difficulty recognizing their individual contributions (Houghton et al., 2013).

In a qualitative study, researchers can achieve transferability of data, in part, by providing a rich, thick narrative (Ali & Yusof, 2011). Researchers assess transferability by determining the extent to which qualitative data could apply to a new context or similar situation (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). I provided a detailed presentation of the study's findings to enable the reader to make an informed judgment about the transferability of the study conclusions to other business situations. Last, I considered alternative conclusions from the participants and provided an explanation for any inconsistencies between the responses from the participants and my findings.

The confirmability of a study refers to assurance that the study results reflect the participant's intent, not the researcher's interests or bias (Elingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012). Because of my experience working with sales teams in the Asia-Pacific region, I was at risk of introducing personal bias or preconceived ideas into the doctoral study process. Bracketing is a means by which a qualitative researcher acknowledges his history and perspective to put aside assumptions, despite subject matter expertise (Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Astedt-Kurki, 2015). My strategy for mitigating the risk of bias in this study was a three-step bracketing process. First, during the interviews, I maintained a posture of intense curiosity, asking clarifying questions with no critique. Second, I approached data analysis as an iterative, emergent process, conducting six rounds of coding and theme development. Last, as I described the findings, I deferred to the voice of the participants and the lens of the literature to guide the development of the applications to practice and recommendations.

Multiple definitions of *data saturation* were available in the extant literature, along with questions concerning the applicability of saturation to qualitative research. The generally accepted definition of the term *saturation* was that the data sources were not generating any new information or patterns (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Fusch and

Ness (2015) noted the importance of data saturation for validity of the findings, and emphasized that the quality (richness) and quantity (thickness) of the data may be more important than the absolute number of participants in a study. To ensure data saturation in this study, I established participation criteria that ensured the participation of qualified sales leaders who could provide rich and thick data pertinent to the research question. By using the same in-depth interview protocol with open-ended questions for all participants, the researcher gathers rich, thick data, and is more likely to achieve data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used the same in-depth interview protocol with open-ended questions for all participants. Fusch and Ness (2015) also recommended that researchers use methodological triangulation to ensure data saturation. I used methodological triangulation by including two data sources: semistructured interviews of sales leaders and document collection. I collected company documents, which included information regarding year-over-year percentage based sales results by country, and sales leader strategies that promoted engagement, including training and recognition programs.

Summary and Transition

In Section 2, I reiterated the purpose statement, described my role as the researcher, provided a description of the eligibility criteria for the participants, and detailed my relationship to the topic and participants. I also discussed my research method and design, the study population, ethical research, and data collection and analysis techniques. Last, I addressed my approach to ensuring reliability and validity within the study.

In Section 3, I present the findings of my research and discuss how the findings relate to the conceptual framework and extant literature. I also discuss the applicability of the findings to business practice, the implications for social change, recommendations for action and further research, my reflections, and the conclusion of the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The objective of this qualitative, single case study was to explore the sales team engagement strategies that IT sales leaders from the Asia-Pacific region used to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. Data collection included interviews conducted with sales leaders and company documents. The findings indicated that sales team leaders who delivered year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates used a variety of strategies to foster sales team engagement, including extrinsic motivators, intrinsic motivators, and catalyzing team engagement.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was as follows: What sales team engagement strategies do IT sales leaders use to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates? Analysis of the data revealed three themes: (a) using extrinsic motivators, (b) activating intrinsic motivators, and (c) catalyzing team engagement. In their articulation of engagement strategies, the participants emphasized the importance of tangible and intangible rewards, team autonomy, competence and relatedness, and leader-team trust and communications.

Theme 1: Using Extrinsic Motivators

External (extrinsic) motivation originates outside an individual, and refers to reward seeking or punishment avoidance behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Extrinsic motivators refer to devices such as sales targets, compensation, sales commissions, and performance recognition (Zoltners et al., 2012). In the interviews, all sales leaders described using such reward devices as sales targets, compensation, commissions, and recognition to incite engagement among their sales teams. Notably, none of the participants described using punishments as extrinsic motivators. A review of company documents, such as biannual sales plans, revealed that the company provided sales team leaders with rewards to use as extrinsic motivators, and that sales team leaders used the extrinsic motivators that the company made available to them. For example, company documents showed that all the participants used biannual sales compensation plans with sales targets, as well as quarterly “on-top” bonus plans to incent their sales teams. None of the company documents contained evidence of any form of punishment as a method for extrinsically motivating a sales team. Table 4 displays the categories and codes that comprise Theme 1.

Table 4
Theme 1 with Associated Categories and Codes

Theme	Categories	Codes
Using extrinsic motivators	Tangible rewards	• Targets • Compensation • Commission • Incentives • Monetary value
	Intangible rewards	• Recognition • Thanks • Praise • Public acknowledgement

Tangible rewards. Of all the participants, P1 and P3 placed the greatest emphasis on the role of tangible rewards in engaging their sales teams. P1 stated that salespeople wanted to see how much money they would earn if they achieved their targets, “If we can meet the target by achieving 120%, then this is the financial reward you are potentially getting.” P3 echoed P1, saying he believed “the one most prominent effect on motivating the sales team is monetary reward.” P3 also emphasized the importance of other material rewards, for example, incentive trips for the top salespeople. P4 framed sales targets in the context of what his team could achieve given a realistic picture of the market. “If my team understands where we are [in the market], and where I am coming from, they get to understand that this is achievable…. After that, we can internalize it and then look at the dollar value.” During member checking, P2 added that setting challenging targets associated with monetary rewards played an important part in generating sales team engagement.

Intangible rewards. The sales leaders also discussed that they used intangible rewards. P4 emphasized the role of intangible rewards, stating "We need to keep recognizing our teams so that they are doing the right things. Once they know this is the right thing to do, basically they do more." P2 and P6 supported the tangible rewards associated with the achievement of targets with the intangible reward of recognition. For P2, this recognition took the form of celebrating a team member's "will to win." Similarly, P6 took time every week to call out someone who achieved something extraordinary. P6 used this as part of his strategy to motivate the individual and inspire the team. The way P2 and P6 used recognition to motivate the entire team supports recent research by Li, Zheng, Harris, Liu, and Kirkman (2016). Li et al. hypothesized that individual team member recognition would positively affect team performance. Upon completing three studies across a total of 116 teams, the authors concluded that formal, individual recognition leads to the internalization of that reward by the team, resulting in positive changes in team motivation.

Notably, none of the sales leaders viewed extrinsic motivators as the only strategy to drive engagement. P5 characterized extrinsic motivators, such as sales compensation, as a "ticket to the game," framing it as a necessary element, but insufficient for energizing and engaging his team. Through member checking, P2 and P6 reaffirmed that a balanced approach to the use of tangible and intangible rewards was an essential aspect of their sales team engagement strategy. Cerasoli et al. (2014), through a meta-analysis, concluded that organizations should consider extrinsic motivators in parallel with intrinsic motivators to stimulate employee engagement. The participants of this study demonstrated that balanced approach when they took actions to activate their team member's intrinsic motivators.

Theme 2: Activating Intrinsic Motivators

Activating intrinsic motivators refers to leaders' actions that encourage engagement based upon what people find to be inherently interesting and internally rewarding (Cerasoli & Ford, 2014). Within SDT, people experience intrinsic motivation when they meet three basic, universal psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Dysvik et al., 2013). In their interviews, the sales leader participants described using such approaches as encouraging sales team autonomy, developing sales team competence, and fostering sales team relatedness to develop engagement among their sales teams. Through my review of company documents, such as training plans, I found that the company made various programs and workshops available to sales team leaders to help them activate intrinsic motivation among team members, and the sales team leaders used the programs and workshops the company made available to them. For example, company documents showed that all the interviewees participated in a quarterly leadership training program designed to provide methods of fostering motivation and engagement among their sales teams. Consistent with the Samaraweera and Gelb (2015) meta-analysis of effective sales rewards, all the sales leaders varied their sales team engagement strategies to optimize the activation of intrinsic motivators within their team. Table 5 displays the categories and codes that comprise Theme 2.

Table 5

Theme 2 with Associated Categories and Codes

Theme	Categories	Codes
Activating intrinsic motivators	Encouraging sales team autonomy	• Decision making empowerment • Knowledge • Freedom
	Developing sales team competence	• Training • Skills • Support • Confidence • Coaching • Resources • Capabilities
	Fostering sales team relatedness	• Purpose • Role clarity • Relationships

Encouraging sales team autonomy. Within SDT, autonomy refers to people's sense that they have control over their own behavior (Dysvik et al., 2013). A self-determined (autonomy-supportive) leadership style engenders employee engagement (Gillet, Fouquereau, Lafreniere, & Huyghebaert, 2016). Leaders demonstrate autonomy-supportive behaviors by giving employees' decision-making freedom and limiting the degree to which leaders manage how employees think and feel (Amoura et al., 2015). Using SDT as their theoretical foundation, Gillet et al. (2016) showed that the encouragement of work autonomous motivation has a positive effect on work engagement. After analyzing the feedback from 698 workers, Gillet et al. recommended that leaders should focus on autonomy-supportive behaviors, such as emphasizing decision choice. P2 characterized his sales team as being “Well-developed to make their own decisions.” P2 expressed his support for his team’s autonomy saying that, “Even if I am not comfortable, I try to accept their decisions.” For P3, autonomy-supportive behaviors included empowering decision-making. P3 stated that, “It [sales decisions] is no one else’s, you need to bring it.” P4 placed emphasis on building team engagement by giving the people a sense of their own power over decision-making. “Basically, I give them more responsibilities and ownership so they can make decisions.” P5 emphasized that he focuses on making sure the sales team members feel they have the flexibility to control the sales situation. He summarized his view saying, “People who are not empowered, that are micromanaged, that every decision they make they need to pick up the phone to get approval, I think that is a killer.” P6 expressed a similarly strong view about the role of decision-making empowerment in engendering a sense of autonomy to motivate his sales team saying, “It was complete empowerment. It was 100% power to the people in terms of making decisions.” In a study of the antecedents of employee engagement, Rana (2015) demonstrated the connection between empowering work practices, such as providing employees with decision-making autonomy, and higher levels of employee engagement. The participants in this study described empowering work practices that were consistent with Rana’s findings, including support of employee decision-making.

P6 focused on developing his sales team’s strengths and knowledge to facilitate giving them additional autonomy as part of his engagement strategy. Kong and Ho (2016) studied 194 employee-supervisor dyads, examining the relationship between autonomy support, strengths, and performance. The authors used SDT as their theoretical framework, and they demonstrated that strengths development, focusing on positive traits and refining them with knowledge, is an autonomy-supportive behavior that encourages independent decision-making and enhances intrinsic motivation. P2, P5, and P6 placed significant focus on building sales team knowledge as part of their strategies to drive sales team engagement. P3 stated "This is a place where you learn your stuff… make sure you gain the knowledge." Verbeke et al. (2011), in their seminal meta-analysis of sales performance drivers, supported a focus on knowledge and empowerment, identifying knowledge as one of the drivers of sales performance. The sales team leaders in this study described strategies consistent with previous research findings, which show that employees who have a need for autonomy, and who have control over their work and work outcomes, demonstrate higher levels of engagement. Organizational leaders play a significant role in fostering the satisfaction of the needs that lead to improved engagement (Graves & Luciano, 2013; Trepanier et al., 2013). In our member checking discussion, P5 reiterated the importance of sales person knowledge in giving him the confidence to support salesperson role autonomy.

Developing sales team competence. Within SDT, competence is the need to feel and demonstrate one's capabilities and capacities (Dysvik et al., 2013). People who value a sense of competency engage in actions and behaviors to feed that need (Fay & Sonnentag, 2012). All six of the participants emphasized the importance of building sales team competence. The sales leaders described the training and coaching support they provided to build their salespeople's competence. P3 summarized his view of training by saying, "Sales guys need to acquire competency." P1 talked about the influence a sales person's competence has on building credibility with the customer. He indicated that one of his first actions with a new salesperson is to "baseline them to see if they need training." P2 echoed this early focus on skills, saying, "I took a lot of time and made it a serious effort to look for the really capable people. In all stages of building the team, I always emphasize the development of all the employees." P5 and P6 were also adamant that training and competency development were essential to sales team confidence and, in turn, engagement and performance. P5 placed training and competency in the context of execution excellence, saying, "It's being professional, it's understanding what you need to understand as a sales person, both the sales acumen as well as the professional part of it, and being able to combine those two things to execute." P6 stated, "We do a lot of training every time we get a local opportunity—either sales or soft skills—it helps, and it helps big time." Badrinarayanan et al. (2015), through an extensive review of the sales coaching literature and exploratory interviews with 10 sales managers, emphasized the importance of sales leaders supporting training and development to keep salespeople competitive and engaged. During our member checking conversation, P4 placed additional emphasis on the importance of training and development for his team, saying "It is something people need to think about every day. If they are not working on developing a prospect or closing a deal, they should be in training or training our channel partners."

My analysis of organizational documents describing sales training and development programs showed that the organization supported the emphasis on training and development described by the participants. For example, each sales leader had access to an online sales university that offered a full curriculum of selling skills programs. Each sales leader had access to an advanced complex solutions sales program. Through member checking, the sales leaders reiterated the importance of taking multiple actions to develop sales team competence as part of their strategy to generate engagement. P1 noted how his salespeople needed to feel confident of their eventual success, and that training and coaching were essential to developing that confidence.

Fostering sales team relatedness. Within SDT, relatedness refers to both belonging to a broader community and feeling that one has a purpose that contributes to that community and the individuals within it (Dysvik et al., 2013). Leaders support relatedness through interpersonal identification with their employees, setting clear expectations concerning purpose and goals, and ensuring role clarity (Ahearne et al., 2013; Kemp et al., 2013). The sales leaders in this study articulated how they nurtured engagement by ensuring that their team members found purpose in their work. P2 focused on creating a strong identity and purpose within his team by focusing on the competition, saying that “I tried to build up some issue on the external so that they can connect to that and unite to fight against the competition.” When discussing team motivation, P5 articulated the importance of people seeing a “greater purpose.” He characterized this as “The feeling that you’re really making a difference, that you’re really doing something that is changing the lives of the person that you’re selling to.” P5 went on to say that he had witnessed sales situations when a customer said to the salesperson “Listen, you’ve completely turned around my business.” The findings from interviews with P2 and P5 supported a recent study by Allan, Autin, and Duffy (2016). With SDT as their framework, Allan et al. showed the significant, positive correlation between meaningful work and intrinsic motivators. During member checking, P5 reiterated the importance of clarity of purpose, saying that one of his primary responsibilities was “making sure that the sales guys understand and feel that they’re making a difference.”

The participants in this study also described how they encouraged engagement by ensuring that their teams had clarity in their roles and tasks. Gillet et al. (2016) showed that the encouragement of work autonomous motivation via task clarity has a positive influence on work engagement. When discussing engagement strategies in the context of people’s roles, P4 stated, “We need to set clear roles.” P5 articulated the importance of setting and prioritizing roles and tasks saying that, “prioritization is essential.” P6 emphasized the importance of role clarity in the context of a young and ambitious team, and that his team look to him to define roles that give them clear responsibilities and options. Costa, Passos, and Bakker (2016), using a two-sample survey involving 1192 participants, found a significant positive relationship between leaders defining meaningful tasks and emphasizing the purpose of people’s work, work involvement, and engagement. During the follow-up member checking discussion with P5, he added that ensuring role clarity was a critical team leader task.

For employees with a strong relatedness need, managers who offer social relationship support drive engagement (Van Yperen, Worther, & De Jonge, 2016). P1 emphasized the importance of interpersonal connections with his team, saying that, “I try as much as possible to close the gap between business role and personal—the support that salespeople need—mentor, friend, someone to talk with, whatever they need to be successful.” As P2 was building his team, he described his relationship with his people as “they treat me as a father.” P6 also highlighted the role of interpersonal relationships in building an engaged team, commenting that, “I have this huge amount of friendship between the team and the team members. For me, that strong bonding and friendship is a God send to me for my team.” In a cross-sectional study of 1254 employees, Dysvik et al. (2013) explored the relationship between SDT’s framework of psychological need satisfaction and intrinsic motivation. The authors concluded that work environments that are conducive to team member interrelationships are important to activate intrinsic motivation. During my member-checking conversation with P3, he noted that encouraging connectedness among his team was an important part of his team engagement strategy.

Theme 3: Catalyzing Team Engagement

Team engagement is “a shared, positive and fulfilling, motivational emergent state of work-related well-being within a team” (Costa, Passos, & Bakker, 2014b). The emergent dimensions of team engagement include team self-belief, team values, and team behaviors that occur as team members and their leader interact (Costa et al., 2014b). The theme of catalyzing team engagement evolved as the sales leaders described engagement strategies they developed based upon the behaviors their teams expected of them. Those behaviors included cultivating trust, ensuring psychological safety, and providing regular communications and feedback. Webber and Webber (2015) identified trust, communications, and psychological safety as fundamental values that effective leaders instill in their teams. Through my review of company documents, such as annual employee engagement surveys and regular team engagement surveys, I found that the company provided sales team leaders with data to help them refine their strategies to power team engagement. For example, company documents showed the engagement scores of their people across multiple indicators of work engagement, and also contained qualitative data that provided insights into what actions could improve team engagement. Table 6 displays the categories and codes that comprise Theme 3.

Table 6

Theme 3 with Associated Categories and Codes

Theme	Categories	Codes
Catalyzing team engagement	Leader-team trust	• Psychological safety • Fairness • Consistency
	Team communications	• Feedback • Mindset • Attitude

Leader-team trust. All the sales leader participants mentioned trust as a team value that was essential to their engagement strategy. P1 expressed the importance of trust being bi-directional, with the salespeople feeling they could trust their manager, and the sales leader having trust and confidence in his sales team. Building trust, for P1, was a matter of supporting his team "hands-on, side-by-side, to show them that I am there supporting them, to instill trust and confidence that we can do it." P2 combined a focus on trust with psychological safety, stating that he wanted to establish team values that emphasized that, so long as his people were taking ownership and action, they should feel safe and know he trusted them. Kahn (1990), in his seminal paper on work engagement, proposed that psychological safety—a sense of being able to show and be one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career—is central to work role engagement. P3, who placed the most emphasis on external motivators, said he balanced his extrinsic focus with building trust by being very fair and consistent. For P6, the values of trust and psychological safety were central to an engaged team. He believed that his strong focus on team values and behaviors played a significant part in his team being a top performing team in the Asia-Pacific region. In describing his team values, P6 emphasized the trust that comes with friendships, noting that "There is this huge amount of friendship between the team members. These people really feel privileged to be part of the team." In their study of the role of psychological safety in engagement and performance, Idris, Dollard, and Tuckey (2015) concluded that team level psychological safety was essential to work engagement. During member checking, P1 emphasized that instilling trust and consistency in his behavior was fundamental to his strategy for engaging his team. P2 focused on the importance of psychological safety, saying that he wanted everyone on his team to feel that they could voice their ideas and feelings at any time.

Team communications. Teams develop a level of mutual engagement based upon a combination of team processes and interpersonal dynamics, with communications being one of the critical processes for team engagement (Costa, Passos, & Bakker, 2014a). P6 spoke about his team's disciplined communications process of weekly face-to-face (in person or virtual) meetings of two and a half to three hours. P4 saw communications as the essential to building trust that leads to engagement and team performance. He encouraged feedback in weekly individual conversations, as well as team meetings. For P5, team communications were an essential part of his engagement strategy. He focused on communications processes as well as the mindset associated with the communications, noting that empathy within the communications built trust. Like P5, P2 emphasized the importance of regular communications and a "winning" mindset. During member-checking, P2 explained that building engagement for his team was also a matter of thought leadership and ensuring that the communications helped develop positive attitudes. A review of company documents, such as leadership training and development programs, showed that the company gave sales leaders tools and methods to help ensure effective team communications. For example, every team member was assessed regarding his or her strengths, and provided with a communications program that encouraged regular strengths building conversations between the sales leaders and their sales teams. As a second example, the company developed a sales excellence program for the sales teams. This program provided the sales leaders and their teams with a set of solution sales methodologies, as well as communication best practices, to aid in the development and management of sales funnels.

Driven by the overarching research question for this study, I identified three themes that reflected the participants' strategies to cultivate sales team engagement. These findings were consistent with, and supported, a cross-section of the relevant literature on self-determination theory, employee engagement, and the intrinsic drivers of sales performance, as reflected in my literature review and in new studies that I examined after proposal completion. My findings in this study also extend the literature by highlighting how the sales leader participants used multi-dimensional engagement strategies to catalyze sales team engagement. Much of the extant literature focused on individual level engagement (Guchait, 2016). The participants, facing a specific, real-world business challenge of driving year-over-year revenue growth above market rates, employed multiple strategies simultaneously to stimulate team engagement.

Application to Professional Practice

The findings I reported in this study addressed the specific business problem that some IT sales leaders lack team engagement strategies to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. With salesperson performance being critical to organizational success, sales leaders who foster salesperson engagement may spur improved sales performance (Matthews et al., 2016). I identified strategies in this study that may help sales team leaders to stimulate engagement among their sales teams.

The sales leaders who participated in this study managed sales teams that reported year-over-year percentage growth higher than the market growth rate. In their engagement strategies, all the participants employed extrinsic motivators, activated intrinsic motivators, and catalyzed team engagement. While each of the participants used a unique combination of strategies with their teams, they all employed engagement strategies across the three themes that I discussed in this study. Company documents pertaining to training, recognition, and rewards programs also reflected this mixed-strategy approach. For example, each sales leader had access to templates, tools, and training to support their development of engaged sales teams. Each team leader optimized and deployed sales, employee development, and team communication plans specifically for his team.

Based upon the three themes I identified, as well as the extant literature, I suggest three strategies that apply to professional practice. These strategies may be relevant to other sales leaders who desire to improve business practice by bringing about increased engagement among their sales teams:

- Align business processes to extrinsic motivators that stimulate engagement.
- Focus on actions that activate intrinsic motivation and engagement.
- Encourage values and behaviors that nurture team engagement.

Because of globalization and the pace of innovation, organizations that depend upon sales teams to drive growth must be increasingly competitive, and make the effort to understand the drivers of engagement (Brown, 2014; Dysvik et al., 2013). The findings of this study, and the suggested engagement strategies, apply to sales leaders seeking to improve engagement among their teams.

Implications for Social Change

My findings, conclusions, and recommendations from this study may contribute to positive social change by assisting leaders in using engagement strategies that lead to improved work-life experiences for team members. Engagement taps into the intrinsic power of the human spirit, fostering curiosity, vitality, and a proactive approach to life (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Elevated employee engagement can bestow cognitive benefits that lead to increased psychological health (Shuck & Reio, 2014). The insights from this study may also help firms meet employees' psychological needs through heightened engagement, fulfilling their desire for autonomy, and enhancing employees' ability to support their ambitions for personal and professional growth. According to SDT, people are naturally intellectually and experientially active and driven by the desire to find purpose and realize possibilities in their lives (Dysvik et al., 2013).

The findings from this study highlighted the importance of team engagement strategies. Business leaders who elevate the employee experience by helping employees to find purpose and realize their ambitions may extend the benefits of increased work engagement into employee's personal lives and communities. A central tenet of SDT is that people are proactive in their desire to optimize their life situation (Vansteenkite & Ryan, 2013). Having a strong sense of work engagement may spill over into improved life satisfaction and motivation for community engagement (Eldor, 2016).

Recommendations for Action

Based upon my study findings and the relevant literature, my recommendations address the specific business problem that some sales team leaders lack team engagement strategies to support year-on-year revenue growth above market rates. Sales team leaders in highly competitive, complex, B2B sales environments in need of strategies to engage their sales teams could benefit from these recommendations. I associated each of my recommended actions with one of the three team engagement strategies identified in the findings, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Recommended Team Engagement Strategies and Actions

Team Engagement Strategies	Actions to be Taken By Sales Team Leaders
Align business processes to extrinsic motivators that stimulate engagement.	• Develop a set of tangible rewards aligned with sales targets. • Balance tangible rewards with regular intangible rewards such as recognition programs.
Focus on actions that activate intrinsic motivation and engagement.	• Establish clear purpose and ensure role clarity for the team and team members. • Invest in training, knowledge building, and career development for each team member.
Encourage values and behaviors that nurture team engagement.	• Emphasize trust and psychological safety among the sales team. • Establish a system of regular communications for individual team members as well as for the team as a group.

I can disseminate the findings of this study and its associated recommendations through several methods. I could publish articles in a peer-reviewed academic journal or a business-oriented periodical such as *Harvard Business Review*. I could present my findings at IT or human resource development industry conferences and, with some modification, via a TED talk. I could also design and offer training programs for sales team leaders, sales team coaches, and coaching organizations.

Recommendations for Further Research

I conducted a qualitative single case study to explore the sales team engagement strategies that IT sales leaders use to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. This study had several limitations. First, the sales leader participants were a purposive sample and did not represent a sample of significant enough size for generalization to a broader population. Although each sales leader participant and his team were in a different country, the participants all worked in the same global IT organization. When a researcher collects empirical data from a random sample of a population, the researcher can draw inferences from the statistical generalization of that population (Yin, 2014). The participants in this single case study were not a sample of a larger population, as they represented the entire population of the case. Future researchers could employ a quantitative method using a survey research design and a random sample of a population to provide a statistically generalizable answer to the question of engagement strategies used by sales team leaders to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. By using this method and design, future researchers could overcome the limitation of the purposive sample and the small sample size, and generalize their results to a larger population.

Second, as I conducted this study with sales leaders only, and did not include members of their sales teams, the findings reflect only the team leaders' perspectives. Engagement is a contextual phenomenon that involves both leaders and employees. Leaders must understand and respond to employee expectations to stimulate engagement (Rana, 2015). I recommend future researchers focus on the sales leader-team member dyad to capture the perspectives of both groups concerning engagement strategies. By doing so, future researchers could address the limitation caused by my conducting this study with sales leaders only, and not including members of their sales teams, resulting in the findings reflecting only the team leaders' perspectives.

A third limitation is that I used semistructured interviews as the data source for this study, which may have introduced the risk of interviewee bias and imperfect recollection of their actions and other events. I recommend future researchers use a survey to gather data. Last, I chose a qualitative method, which eliminated the option of using a quantitative measure of salesperson engagement. Future researchers could employ a quantitative method to measure salesperson engagement.

Reflections

I have spent my career in the IT industry and have held a wide range of roles including senior business roles in both global IT companies and technology start-up ventures, all of which operated in the Asia-Pacific region. I have participated in many leader development programs, including training conducted by The Center for Creative Leadership, The Aspen Institute, and Harvard Business School. From those experiences, I have observed that highly effective teams are at the core of organizational success, yet many teams do not live up to their promise or potential. Because of those experiences, however, I was also at risk of introducing personal bias or preconceived ideas into the doctoral study process.

Bracketing is a means by which a qualitative researcher acknowledges his history and perspective to put aside assumptions, despite subject matter expertise (Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Astedt-Kurki, 2015). My strategy for mitigating the risk of bias in this study was a three-step bracketing process. First, during the interviews, I maintained a posture of intense curiosity, asking clarifying questions with no critique. Second, I approached data analysis as an iterative, emergent process, conducting six rounds of coding and theme development. Last, as I described the findings, I deferred to the voice of the participants and the lens of the literature to guide the development of the applications to practice and recommendations.

The most significant change in my thinking resulting from my study concerned the essence of engagement and team performance. Prior to my doctoral study, I saw motivation, engagement, and team leadership as a complex web of processes and behaviors. As I delved deeply across the domains of human motivation, employee engagement, and the intrinsic drivers of sales team performance, while researching and writing my literature review and the presentation of findings from this study, I came to realize that, in its essence, engagement is a function of the strength of important relationships. Through the entire DBA journey, I have had the opportunity to complement a broad set of career experiences with a deeper understanding of a business discipline in which I find both personal and professional meaning and purpose. Most significantly for me, the completion of my doctoral study represents not an end, but the beginning of a new journey.

Conclusion

For global IT organizations that rely upon sales teams to drive the growth of their business, the demand for engaged sales teams is unrelenting. The findings from this study addressed the question of what sales team engagement strategies do IT sales leaders use to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates. The primary strategies for sales team leaders are using both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators of engagement, and encouraging values and behaviors that nurture team engagement. By employing the recommended strategies from this study, sales leaders may not only improve sales performance but may enhance employees' personal lives and quality of life.

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Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

[redacted]

30 November 2016

Dear Jeb,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Engagement Strategies for Catalyzing IT Sales Team Performance in Asia within the [redacted] business. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct interviews with sales leader participants covering the countries in the Asia-Pacific and Japan region. This group of sales leaders will meet a set of interview selection criteria that includes currently holding a sales leadership role, and leading a sales team located in the Asia-Pacific and Japan region. As the participants are located at different office sites in different countries, the interviews will be conducted via internet telephony (Skype). You will conduct member-checking (follow-up interviews) via telephone (Skype) conversations to give participants the opportunity to review and modify your interpretation of their interview data. Each participant will be sent a written copy of your interpretation of the interview before the telephone conversation. You are approved to use in the study:
year-over-year percentage based sales results for the country managed by a participant
sales leader strategies that promote engagement including training programs
any relevant country recognition programs which promote engagement

You will inform all participants of the confidentiality of their personal information and the name of the organization. You will identify each participant using only an alphanumeric code, and will use a pseudonym for the organization name. Aggregate study results will be made available if requested by the participants and/or the stakeholders within the [redacted] business. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities only include giving permission to conduct interviews with sales leader participants covering the countries in the Asia-Pacific and Japan region if they choose to participate, and supporting your document collection which is limited to year-over-year percentage based sales results for the country managed by a participant, sales leader strategies that promote engagement including training programs, and any relevant country recognition programs which promote engagement. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

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

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

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).

Appendix B: IRB Materials Approval

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the application for the study entitled, "Engagement Strategies for Catalyzing IT Sales Team Performance in Asia."

Approval date: **December 22, 2016**

Approval number: **12-21-16-0508219**

IRB approval expiration: **December 20, 2017**

Appendix C: Interview Protocol and Questions

The purpose of the interview protocol is to ensure consistency and quality in the interview process across all participants.

Protocol

1. Review the purpose of the interview with the participant.
2. Review privacy protections and confirm consent with the participant.
3. Turn on Skype electronic recording.
4. Begin the interview with the first question and continue through the last question.
5. End interview. Discuss member checking procedure and rationale with the participant.
6. Turn off skype electronic recording. End protocol.

Interview Questions

The interview questions for this study were developed during my review of the extant literature, and in the context of my central research question.

1. What team engagement strategies do you use to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates?
2. What techniques or systems do you use to motivate salespeople?
3. What are the challenges you face in motivating your sales team to deliver year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates?
4. How do you overcome challenges to motivating your sales team to achieve peak performance?

5. What expectations have your salespeople expressed to you concerning your role as their team leader?
6. What actions, if any, have you taken to meet the expectations expressed to you by your salespeople in your capacity as their team leader?
7. What additional information can you share regarding the strategies you use to support year-on-year revenue results above market growth rates?