

2017

# Strategies for Catalyzing Workforce Engagement in Warehouse Operations

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Jeannette Jackson-Martin

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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2017

Abstract

Strategies for Catalyzing Workforce Engagement

in Warehouse Operations

by

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MBA, University of Phoenix, 2006

BA, Sullivan University, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2017

## Abstract

In 2014, approximately 30% of the global workers viewed experiences in the workplace as positive and fulfilling, which results in increased productivity in the workplace. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies that some warehouse service center managers used to engage employees to higher levels of productivity. The population comprised of 7 warehouse service center managers in 2 companies located in the Riverport area in Louisville, KY. The conceptual framework for this study encompassed Kahn's employee engagement theory. Data were collected through semistructured interviews, organizational procedure handbooks, and direct observation to prompt detailed information about participants' experiences with employee engagement. The data collected was transcribed and member checking completed to validate the credibility and trustworthiness. Data collected from each source supported theme interpretation through triangulation. Three key themes developed: clear and concise communication, creating supportive manager-employee partnerships, and benefits to include incentives to promote employee engagement such as recognition awards, salary increases, additional time off work, flexibility with work schedules, and tuition reimbursement. The findings revealed warehouse service center managers used strategies to promote employee engagement in the workplace. The implications for positive social change include the potential to give managers new insights to promote employee involvement in the workplace through effective communication, partnership and incentives to create a sustainable organization while contributing to the economy and increasing involvement in the community.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate my study to my parents, who always instilled in my siblings and I the importance of an education. My father always said, "Go as far as you are able because you can achieve whatever you put your mind to." He went further to say, "Knowledge is power." I know my parents' eyes would be filled with tears of joy if they were here. God gave them wings to fly down and check on me whenever things got difficult and to say you could do it, baby. I love and miss you dearly.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies managers in warehouse service centers used for successfully engaging employees in the workplace. In Section 1, I present the foundation to discuss why conducting this study may lead to improving employee engagement in warehouse service centers. A background of the study begins followed by a description of the problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, and the qualitative research question. The conceptual framework entails a discussion about the employee engagement framework for this study. A review of the professional and academic literature on employee engagement regarding this study then transitions into Section 2.

### **Background of the Problem**

Organizational leaders in any industry strive to become successful and look for ways to increase productivity and performances. Organizational leaders must understand that employee engagement is vital and helps to higher levels of productivity to the success of the business. Griffin, Bryant, and Koerber (2015) stated the role of employee engagement is critical to maintaining quality service, productivity, and performance to sustain growth within a competitive environment. Griffin et al. also stated that to compete in today's work environment, employers must create an atmosphere to enable employees to engage effectively in the workplace to their full potential.

Emotional commitments play a vital role in employee engagement, and how the effects would impact organizations. According to Shahid and Azhar (2013), engaged

employees have an emotional commitment to the organization and are willing to work hard at increasing productivity to meet organizational goals. Nasomboon (2014) supported the findings of Shahid and Azhar comparing the emotional well-being of employees and organizational commitment as sources to employee engagement. Nasomboon's findings validated employees' need to excel in the workplace when they positively engaged. Kemp, Kopp, and Kemp (2013) also found that emotional connections and employee engagement increase productivity. Kemp et al. stated that if there is confusion about assigned roles and responsibilities, organizational leaders may notice low productivity and performance levels below expectations. Emotional commitment is important in workplace engagement.

### **Problem Statement**

Workforce engagement is critical and vital to profitability of an organization (Diestel, Wegge, & Schmidt, 2014). Approximately 30% of the global workers viewed experiences in the workplace as positive and fulfilling (De Clercq, Bouckenooghe, Raja, & Matsyborska, 2014). The general business problem is that there is a reduction in productivity and performance when employees do not engage emotionally or physically in the workplace. The specific business problem is that some warehouse service center managers lack strategies to engage employees to higher levels of productivity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some warehouse service center managers used to engage employees to higher levels of

productivity. The targeted population was comprised of warehouse service center managers in two companies located in the Riverport area in Louisville, KY, who successfully implemented employee engagement strategies that increased workplace productivity. The implications for social change included providing managers new insights on engagement strategies for employees that may lead to lower voluntary and involuntary employee turnover, thus reducing unemployment within communities. Positively engaged employees contribute to the local economy; they may also support community institutions such as schools and churches, as well as homeless shelters and other charitable programs (Shuck, Twyford, Reio, & Shuck, 2014).

### **Nature of the Study**

The three research methods include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Yin, 2014). I selected the qualitative method to use open-ended questions. Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to discover what is occurring or occurred (Rejno & Berg, 2015). In contrast, quantitative researchers use closed ended questions to test hypotheses (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Mixed methods research includes both a qualitative element and quantitative element (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). To explore strategies for catalyzing workforce engagement in warehouse operations, I did not test hypotheses, which are part of a quantitative study and the quantitative portion of a mixed methods study.

I considered four research designs that one could use for a qualitative study on engaging employees in the workplace: (a) phenomenological, (b) ethnographic, (c)

grounded theory, and (d) case study. Phenomenology is an attempt to gain new insight from real life situations (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015; Gregor & Hevner, 2013). The phenomenology design focuses on human experience through real life situations, which is not the intent of this study. The ethnographic design involves experiences within a culture (Zilber, 2014; Yin, 2014). The focus of this study did not focus on a specific culture, which left the ethnographic design as not appropriate. The grounded theory entails systematic research to create a new theory (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015; Urquhart & Fernández, 2013). The study did not consist of designing a new theory, which excluded the grounded theory as the best approach. A case-study design is suitable for studying organizational and managerial processes (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2014) and exploring a program, event, activity, or a process in-depth (Gregor & Hevner, 2013). Conducting an in-depth analysis and exploring the issues are necessary to find successful engagement strategies some warehouse service center managers developed and implemented (Besieux, Baillien, Verbeke, & Euweman, 2015; Walby, 2013), making a case study the most appropriate design for this study.

### **Qualitative Research Question**

The central question for this research study was as follows: What strategies do some warehouse service center managers use to engage employees to higher levels of workplace productivity?

### **Interview Questions**

1. How do you engage employees?

2. What strategies are most appropriate to increase employee engagement/productivity?
3. How do you measure the success of employee engagement strategies against increased productivity?
4. How do you measure the success of employee engagement strategies on your profitability of the organization?
5. What barriers did you encounter engaging employees to be productive?
6. What else would you like to add to the discussion that we have not already discussed?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Kahn (1990) developed the employee engagement framework that emerged as a concept of individual integration with role activities. Kahn defined employee engagement as the harnessing of employee engagement to their work roles. People employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. The characteristics of employee engagement consist of commitment, putting best efforts forward, bringing fresh ideas and perspectives, and concern with quality, costs, customer service, and safety (Kahn, 1990). Warehouse service center managers may benefit from researchers exploring strategies to effectively engage employees in the workplace. Organizations benefit from engaging employees and establishing relationships to promote involvement (Quintana, Park, & Cabrera, 2015).

## **Operational Definitions**

*Meaning at work:* Littman-Ovadia and Lavy (2015) defined meaning at work as perceiving work as a career.

*Meaning of work:* Beukes and Botha (2013) defined the meaning of work as employees' perceived importance of work to oneself such as the perception of achievement.

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

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are ideas taken for granted attributable to lack of verification (Milbourn, McNamara, & Buchanan, 2014). There were three assumptions in this study. The assumptions in this study were (a) participants selected for the study would provide honest responses to the questions related to the topic (Anyan, 2013); (b) the interview questions I asked would gain the necessary information to answer the research question related to employee engagement; and (c) focusing on ways to improve employee engagement would increase productivity and performance in the workplace.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are possible weaknesses found in the study (Yeatman, Trinitapoli, & Hayford, 2013). Addressing the limitations was necessary to eliminate or minimize the effects on the findings of the study. There were three basic limitations included in this study. The limitations of this study were (a) time constraints to gather and interpret the data because of the accessibility of participants; (b) executives and first level employees

were not a part of this study, and (c) the sample size did not provide adequate representation of the population.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the focal concepts of the study (Josiassen, Assaf, Woo, & Kock, 2016). There were three delimitations in this study. The delimitations in this study were (a) the participants represented managers from two warehouse distribution service centers limiting the viewpoints from other industries; (b) the scope of the study consisted of interviewing two warehouse service centers in the Riverport area in Louisville, Kentucky area and may not be reflective of all warehouse service centers in other United States warehouse operations; and (c) the scope of the study included interviewing managers responsible for implementing strategies, which engaged employees.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The findings from my research may contribute to the effective practice of business and possibly increase an organization's productivity and performance when employees effectively engage in daily activities of the company (Radda, Majidadi, & Akanno, 2015). Measuring the outcome of the effects on businesses could bring attention to different service centers. The research I conducted could create new and revised policies human resource managers and policy makers could review when implementing and creating strategies. The results from research performed may contribute to financial

benefits for organizations through increased effectiveness leading to possible cost reductions, profit gains, and efficient services producing customer satisfaction.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Warehouse service center managers implementing strategies to engage employees to higher levels of productivity may encourage the development of informal social interactions and networks in any workplace environment. The informal social interactions and networks in any workplace environment could contribute to increasing employee engagement and lessen unemployment. Increased employee engagement and increased employment may benefit communities motivating and enabling employees and families to provide continuing support to the community.

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

Employee engagement is vital to organizations. Problems surrounding employee engagement affect organizations regardless of the industry. The literature review includes information from various sources and industries. Engaging employees in the workplace is difficult but important (Diestel et al., 2014).

I used several academic databases to obtain the literature for this study. The use of the search technique through the Walden University Library Databases, Google Scholar, and Ulrich web Global Serials Directory to verify peer-reviewed journal submissions included Business Source Complete, SAGE Premier, Emerald Management, ProQuest, and ABI/INFORM Complete. The following terms were appropriate to use to complete database searches and to understand the relevance for the topic of this study: *employee*

*engagement, barriers of employee engagement, influences of engagement, leader's role on engagement, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership, organizational alignment, the meaning at work, and the meaning of work.* The total number of articles in the literature review is 114, of which 97% were peer reviewed, and 95% were within 5 years required by Walden University. The first area of the literature review focused on employee engagement and different factors of employee engagement. The following sections derived from the main areas in my search.

### **Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement is pertinent to the success of organizations and continues to be the focus in various industries and organizations (Griffin et al., 2015; Oswick, 2015; Saks & Gruman, 2014a). Saks and Gruman (2014a) believed employee engagement is vital to the success of the organization. Organizations and leaders within organizations looked and needed support from employees, and understanding this factor promoted employee engagement to solidify the value of employees. Kahn (1990) developed the personal engagement theory, which researchers used to study employee engagement.

Employee engagement is the commitment level employees provide in reaching the goals of the organization (Kahn, 1990) and how employees feel, think positive, and committed to the organization (Saks & Gruman, 2014a). The more an employee feels valued the more the employee may commit to the assigned role and the more exciting the work environment may become (Kahn, 1990). Engaged employees bring positive emotions, cognition, and positive behaviors to the workplace (Kahn, 1990). Employees

who engaged in the workplace showed connections to the organization: (a) understanding the strategy of the organization, (b) accepting roles and responsibilities assigned, (c) had a high level of commitment and performance, (d) understood the direction of the business, (e) connected to the community, family, and relationships; (f) and portrayed a level of energy, which all led to positive results in the workplace (Menguc, Auh, Fisher, & Haddad, 2013; Saks & Gruman, 2014b; Saunders & Tiwari, 2014; Soane et al., 2013).

Sources agreed creating an environment of engaging employees appeared to create a positive workforce within an organization through the level of commitment (Menguc et al., 2013; Saunders & Tiwari, 2014; Soane et al., 2013). Knowing the commitment of employee engagement promoted value to employees, which supported reaching the vision and goals of the organization, indicated to organizational leaders to create an environment of innovation, shared workloads, encouraged teams, and increased positive behaviors. Creating initiatives to increase employee engagement may benefit organizations and employees in any industry.

Engaged employees are empowered to own the work performed, make decisions, in addition, provide critical thinking without concern of repercussions. Shuck and Reio (2014) defined employee engagement in the human resource development (HRD) as having different types of energy used toward positive outcomes such as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy. Enabling employees to take ownership led to more employees engaging in the workplace increasing positive outcomes, which brought appreciation and value to the individuals. Employee engagement is the satisfaction and

excitement an employee feels when engaging in the workplace (Nasomboon, 2014; Saunders & Tiwari, 2014). Employees showed positive signs of commitment more to the organization and organizational leaders when there was ownership assigned in a given role. Roles and responsibilities with the results of ownership created a feeling of self-worth and pride in employees making individuals feel as part of the team (citation). When there was ownership, employees connected to the assigned roles and responsibilities physically, observant of the performance, and committed to the assigned tasks (Kahn, 1990; Nasomboon, 2014; Saunders & Tiwari, 2014).

Employee engagement is becoming a major focus in different organizational settings because of employees are recognized as vital to the success of the business (Griffin et al., 2015; Oswick, 2015). Griffin et al. (2015) indicated employees are essential to the survival of an organization; therefore, it is important to encourage employee involvement in the workplace. Based on findings from Griffin et al. and Oswick (2015), organizations depend on employees to be successful in the industry. Implementing sustainable strategies to include employees are important. Recognizing employees as valuable stakeholders is critical. A study completed by Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, and Taris (2008) suggested that engaged employees put forth much more effort toward work. When an employee's job has meaning, the employee may show signs of excitement through the performance outcome and want to be at work (Bakker, 2014; Bakker et al., 2008). Employee interactions can affect how organizational processes develop and how to implement change, perceived and evaluated (Georgalis,

Samaratunge, Kimberley, & Lu, 2015; Storch, Makaroff, Pauly, & Newton, 2013).

Promoting employee engagement in the workplace lessened the level of resistance.

Resistance has a considerable engagement value reflecting the level of commitment instead of acceptance to change. Resistance can stem from several variables. Petrou, Demerouti, and Schaufeli (2016) alluded that employee resistance occurs seldom when there is organizational change. According to Jones and Van de Ven (2016), organizational leaders should address resistance immediately to lower the negative impact, which may exist to avoid the spiraling outcomes and might affect the vision and goals of the organization. Resistance to change can become damaging to an organization and various areas in the workplace. Organizational leaders should not ignore change resistance because it may create greater concerns. Organizational leaders should at least try to minimize the amount of employee resistance at early stages of change by creating a fair environment (Kickert, 2014). Resistance from employees can exist if leaders do not communicate organizational change effectively. There are two critical outcomes when there is resistance to change: the level of commitment employees' show toward the organization and the perceptions of how effective an organization handle change and employees resistance to change (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016; Kickert, 2014).

If leadership does not include employees in the implementation phase, employees may encounter some resistance. Employee resistance may lead to increased work time, which leads to overtime, lost time caused by unnecessary work, low productivity, low profits, and little commitment (Andersson, 2015; Nasomboon, 2014). Disengaged

employees withdraw from the physical, emotional, and cognitive factors in the workplace (Kahn, 1990). Employee resistance can have an impact on an organization if leadership fails to implement strategies to engage employees.

Employee engagement in, and commitment to, environmental sustainability may lead to innovative ideas to create environmentally sustainable organizations (Haigh & Hoffman, 2014; Kim, Kim, Han, Jackson, & Ployhart, 2014). Engaged employees were more likely to willing contribute to increasing productivity when there was an emotional attachment and commitment to the organization and leaders (Andersson, 2015; Nasomboon, 2014; Nayak & Sahoo, 2015). Employees engage and commit when there is a clear vision of the expectations and goals (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Shuck, Ghosh, Zigarmi, & Nimon, 2013). Employees who understand the vision and goals are committed to the outcome when the vision and goals were realistic and benefited employees as well as the organization.

The behaviors leaders experiences in the workplace by employees' participation are determined by the delivery of the information provided. How leaders communicate leadership to employees is likely to lessen the potential for resistance leading to sustainable growth (Georgalis et al., 2015; Nayak & Sahoo, 2015). Kickert (2014) suggested that in order to limit resistance to change organizational leaders must provide effective communication. Open communication, support from leadership, and resources could support employee engagement leading to possible increases in productivity.

Relationships between leaders and employees are critical, and can lead to positive outcomes.

Leaders with strong relationships with employees may lead to resources and growth within organizations, communities, and homes (citation). When employees have support and resources from leadership, interaction in the organization is positive which creates cohesiveness and commitment to employee engagement (citation). Leaders can introduce change and apply force or friction to move employees in the desired direction (citation). Effective leaders promote engagement in the workplace to create and influence positive behaviors (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014; Nieberding, 2014; Salerno, Laran, & Janiszewski, 2015). Based on the findings of Whitmore (2004), the effects of managers' actions determine the changes of future business trends and the reactions of employees. Managers who are happy in the way they support employees create happy, supportive employees (Salerno et al., 2015; Whitmore, 2004). Organizations should invest in leadership to ensure the effectiveness of engaging employees, and organizational leadership must be willing and able to promote employee engagement to create sustainable growth. When employees receive consistent support from the leaders in the organization, engagement increases (Mishra et al., 2014; Nieberding, 2014). Organizational leaders may benefit from developing a better understanding of change within the industry and work closely with employees to implement strategies found to be successful in other business practices.

Hargrove, Becker, and Hargrove (2015) and Mercurio (2015) showed a correlation between employee engagement and effective productivity and agreed engaged employees increase productivity while increasing internal and external customer satisfaction. Engaged employees seem to be more productive due to resources, support, and commitment. Church (2013) validated to achieve one of the highest levels of organizational success employee engagement must be present. However, according to Selmer and Luring (2016), when employees do not engage, productivity decreases because work engagement influences organizations' bottom line. When employees do not engage, they may be less likely to commit to the success of the organizational vision and goals. Therefore, organizational leaders must invest in successful strategies to increase employee engagement. Church (2013) and Handa and Gulati (2014) viewed employee engagement and performance as determining the success of the business. Promoting employee engagement may provide a higher than expectancy level of performance.

Salerno et al. (2015) advised there are different factors which lead to employee engagement including but not limited to emotions, pride, appraisals, self-worth, health and wellness, participation, and support. Salerno et al. suggested that the ability to engage in self-regulation is pivotal to individuals' lives. Zeglat, Aljaber, and Alrawabdeh (2014) revealed research that supported structural and psychological empowerment also led to effective and positive employee engagement. When employers empower and support employees, productivity increases and employees are willing to engage to reach the goal of the organizations (Church, 2013; Handa & Gulati, 2014; Zeglat et al., 2014).

Employees want to feel valued, which may lead to acceptable performance, behavior, and engagement. Employees play a critical role in promoting sustainability. Involving employees is pivotal. Employees have the power, flexibility, and ability through the three characteristics of employee engagement (a) vigor, (b) dedication, and (c) absorption (Salerno et al., 2015; Tuss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013). Engaged employees typically perform better than employees who are not engaged in the workplace (Townsend, Wilkinson, & Burgess, 2014; Zeglat et al., 2014) which may lead to barriers.

**Barriers to employee engagement.** Organizational leaders today understand that to achieve sustainability, change must be present (Abdelkafi & Tauscher, 2016) and employees and employee engagement are valuable (Church, 2013; Griffin et al., 2015; Zeglat et al., 2014). To achieve sustainable growth, employees must engage in the day-to-day processes to meet the vision and goals of the company (Griffin et al., 2015; Selmer, & Luring, 2016). Organizational leaders have a corporate responsibility to employees but sometimes encounter barriers influencing employees' behaviors such as internal pressures, external pressures, compliance barriers, and failing to take action. Organizational leaders should come up with strategies to avoid or limit some of these pressures.

Internal pressures within an organization can create low employee engagement due to job demands to reach certain goals or expectations and job insecurity (Karkoulian, Mukaddam, McCarthy, & Messarra, 2013). A healthy work environment is critical if employees are to provide the best service or produce the best performance (Poulsen et al.,

2014). Employees that are over utilized, assigned unrealistic goals and project, or who face job insecurity do not perform at the full potential expected or appointed by leaders (Poulsen et al., 2014). Goals and objectives should be obtainable to promote positive engagement. Satisfied employees increase engagement and increase efficiencies (Abel, 2013; Fearon, McLaughlin, & Morris, 2013). Organizational leaders should determine what resources are necessary to support employees in eliminating the pressures, which exist in the workplace. Assigning responsibilities to create ownership will provide support, which encourages job security to employees (Sieger, Zellweger, & Aquino, 2013). Employees may work harder when accepting ownership and having effective ways of communicating various pressures in the organization.

Griffin et al. (2015) examined numerous external pressures. The findings found in the research indicated that external pressures varied from company to company. Some researchers completed studies indicating it is cost effective for organizational leaders to address issues affecting employee engagement such as political changes, demographic changes, changing expectations, and market demands (Griffin et al., 2015; Norton, Parker, Zacher, & Ashkanasy, 2015; Solnet, Kralj, & Baum, 2015). Being in compliance with environmental policies and procedures through employee engagement programs builds the character of an organization and promotes awareness in the industry. In tight labor markets, competition for new employees could directly affect the ability to attract, retain, or engage employees when examining corporate responsibility activities (Church, 2013; Griffin et al., 2015; Handa & Gulati, 2014). Haigh and Hoffman (2014) completed

a study indicating corporate social responsibility as a benefit to some organizations when engaging employees and other stakeholders. Determining other factors to engage employees may contribute to additional benefits. Another external factor to influence behaviors of employees is the financial stability of an organization (citation). Employees show signs of concern when the financial security of an organization is indefinite. The more capital-intensive a firm, attributable to compliance barriers, the more unlikely the firm would work to strengthen employee engagement (Griffin et al., 2015).

Another barrier is a compliance barrier which some organizations must adhere to such as the Workplace Gender Act, which promotes employee engagement on gender equality organizations are to report as one of the gender equality indicators. Being financially stable enables organizations to meet compliance barriers, which may result in financial disputes. According to Smith (2014), organizations should notify employees of the report and promote communication to help strengthen engagement within the company. Smith also indicated the importance of the act is not to increase legal compliance but to support legislative regulations. Supporting such an act and similar acts may increase employee engagement in the workplace. Employees may willingly support different initiatives when open and honest communication is available and understandable.

Failure to follow up with employees, add to concerns relating to barriers leading to employee engagement. Employees want to know organizational leaders are listening and acting on concerns presented by showing results or following up on the findings.

Sharma (2014) contributed to barriers of employee engagement as failing to take action after asking employees for feedback about a situation. Leaders within organizations should keep employees informed of the process and responses to increasing engagement and build upon employees' confidence (Nayak & Sahoo, 2015; Sharma, 2014). Senior leaders have the responsibility to ensure employee engagement initiatives are successful. HR management must design programs to increase employee engagement and help achieve the highest level of potential and satisfaction within the company, because engaging employees are vital if organizations expect to succeed (Handa & Gulati, 2014; Sharma, 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Various influences could increase workplace engagement. Understanding what influences may increase employee engagement may increase the growth and success of the organization, establish relationships with employees, increase productivity, and create an environment of engagement.

**Influences of engagement.** Several influences give employees reasons to engage in the workplace such as internal communication, participation, incentives, and a trusting climate. Employees feel part of the team with effective communication, playing a role as a contributor, receiving recognition for exceeding expectations and having an environment, which supports trust and fairness throughout the organization. Researchers agreed different elements such as leadership of Justice (Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014); internal communication (Hargrove et al., 2015; Mishra et al., 2014; Mercurio, 2015); and well-being (Salerno et al., 2015; Shuck & Reio, 2014; Zeglal et al., 2014) influences employee engagement in the workplace. Strom et al. (2014) realized the most productive

and functional companies have employees who are physically, emotionally, and cognitively engaged. It is important for organizations' leadership to understand some of the influences to promote a work environment providing support for employees to increase possibly effective engagement. Leadership could create positive workplace engagement (Guay, 2013; Whitmore, 2004). Leadership should understand and embrace the level of positive influence in the scope of the leadership role, which allows anyone in an authoritative position to promote positive engagement.

Quality leadership is another element to improve and enhance levels of employee engagement (Ghadi, Fernando, & Caputi, 2013; Strom et al., 2014). Employees' behaviors stem from the individual's perception of justice within organizations and communities according to some researchers (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Kiersch & Byrne, 2015). Employees are aware when justice stems throughout the organization. Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001), indicated employees consider justice as how the distribution of rewards in the organization is fair known as distributive justice and view the processes of how the company decides to distribute rewards known as procedural justice. Findings from some prior studies suggested leadership styles either promote justice type behaviors or diminish the justice behavior relationship (Kopperud, Martinsen, & Humborstad, 2014; Strom et al., 2014). Both styles of leadership require a form of communication. To create an environment of justice, organizational leaders should ensure the leadership teams implement effectively to promote positive behavior leading to actual engagement in the organization.

Communication is another contributor to influence the behaviors and attitudes of employee engagement as well as the degree of trust and commitment between employees and the leaders within the organization (Downey, Werff, Thomas, & Plaut, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014; Nayak & Sahoo, 2015; Smith, 2014). There are different forms of communication. Internal communication is important, but the method used to communicate is essential (Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, & Lings, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014). Developing a sense of community through internal communication efforts involve establishing and maintaining relationships between an organization, supervisors, and employees. Internal communication is the fundamental influence of employee engagement based on industry research. If communication is not effective, leadership could create obstacles in implementing change through employees, because middle management is the frontline to change (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014). Karanges et al. 2015 and Mishra et al. (2014) continued to validate findings from prior research prove internal communication is key to numerous positive outcomes, including employee commitment, and establishes manager-employee trust. Mishra et al. (2014) described the most reliable way to provide communication is the use of face-to-face communication to include verbal cues to hear the tone of the discussion and non-verbal cues examine the body language and facial expressions. Participating and collaborating in communication with employees may increase engagement (Gerst, 2013).

When employees participate and have a role in some decision-making processes, they are more driven to engage in the workplace (Yoerger, Crowe, & Allen, 2015; Zeglat

et al., 2014). Yoerger et al. (2015) went further to add participation as another influence. Gollan and Xu (2015) and Salerno et al. (2015) added to the body of knowledge indicating employee well-being and participation go hand and hand, and organizations with high work environment quality lead to increased levels of employee participation. The partnership may not benefit organizations at a higher level than when employees do not engage nor have a role in decision-making. Participation at critical stages relates to trust (Downey et al., 2015; Gollan & Xu, 2015). Downey et al. (2015) completed a study consisting of 4,597 participants from the health sector. The in-depth study revealed when employees are in a trusting climate; employee engagement increases (Downey et al., 2015). Trust is vital for engagement and employee well-being. An employee committed to an organization leads to the well-being of the employee in the workplace, community, and home (Downey et al., 2015; Gollan & Xu, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014).

The psychological well-being of employees can lead to negative and positive implications for organizations. Research has proven employee engagement contributes to job attitude (Shuck & Reio, 2014). How employees viewed the work environment was a determining factor on how they experience well-being and the level of engagement (Rothmann & Welsh, 2013; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Employee engagement improves employee productivity, performance (Hargrove et al., 2015; Mercurio, 2015; Salerno et al., 2015), as well as incentives (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015).

Based on experiences and past research, incentives linked to performances increases employee engagement. Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) completed a study linking

engaged employees through the efforts of incentives and rewards to reach the vision and goals set by the organization and leaders. Mirabito and Berry (2015) argued incentives are beneficial to an extent, but employees may show lower levels of engagement when workplace wellness is a concern, which suggests external incentives, are insufficient when some employees are accustomed to resistance. Organizations are beginning to promote incentives engagement (Griffin et al., 2015), and as means to recruit experienced and sometimes a certain level of education. Incentives may not always work if employees are unable or unwilling to establish a relationship with some leaders.

### **Leadership's Role in Employee Engagement**

This section provides an overview of how certain leadership roles affect how employees engage in the workplace. Researchers have found some leadership styles such as transformational, authentic, and servant leadership has a positive impact on employee engagement (Ghadi et al., 2013; Newman, Nielsen, & Miao, 2014). Research completed by Ghadi et al. (2013) and Griffin et al. (2015) indicated leadership styles play a vital role in employee engagement and satisfaction. Leadership is achieving results and resilience with and through employees (Choi & Schnurr, 2014; Jagger & Lewith, 2016).

Human resource development professionals continue to understand the importance of leadership and employee engagement relationships. Carasco-Saul, Kim, and Kim (2015) stated the relationship amongst leadership and employees is imperative. Prior research continues to suggest there remains a gap in understanding how the

behaviors of leadership affect the behaviors of employees (Gollan & Xu, 2015; Mikkelsen, York, & Arritola, 2015; Shuck & Herd, 2012).

Researchers link ethics with moral principles according to Chen (2014), which leads to different behaviors in the workplace such as the way employees behave, making what is known as the right decision to the individual, and explaining why employees do what they do. Leadership styles vary. Employees respond differently based on the type of leadership. Because employees are vital to any organization, it is important to understand the best leadership style required to complete a task (Blaskovics, 2014). Lee and Jensen (2014), Mishra et al. (2014), and Nasomboon (2014) agreed leadership as critical to organizations caused by the impact they play in particular roles. Leadership could lead people to do what is required to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Leadership commitment and development increases support to promoting employee engagement and must be a priority (Burns, Diamond-Vaught, & Bauman, 2015). Lee and Jensen (2014) shared the evolving amount of literature indicates the importance of different leadership styles and employee behaviors in the workplace. Transformational leaders promote employee engagement through motivation (Abel, 2013).

**Transformational leadership.** Transformational leadership provides an important role in organizations, because of the ability to engage followers to reach and go above the expected level of achievement (Abel, 2013; Kura, 2016; McKnight, 2013). Burns (1978) developed the first theory of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is an ongoing relationship between the leaders and employees within the

organization (Burns, 1978; Henker, Sonnentag, & Unger, 2015). Transformational leadership influences positive behavior in the workplace while enabling employees to feel valued (Burns, 1978; Kura, 2016). Pradhan and Pradhan (2016) agreed transformational leadership inspires employees to exceed expectations thanks to the support and encouragement given to employees to create ideas and eliminate the fear of failure. A leader fosters employees' creativity through transformational leadership traits (Henker et al., 2015) while sharing knowledge, trust, and organizational citizenship behavior (Lin & Hsiao, 2014).

Transformational leaders should encourage and support employee engagement. Perko, Kinnunen, and Feldt (2014) mentioned transformational leadership influences employee engagement. According to Sieger et al. (2013), employees feel part of the team when there is collaboration. Everyone wants to contribute to the success of the organizations while gaining a sense of ownership. Ownership may create an atmosphere of trust between the leaders and employees, which may lead to positive behaviors and increase employee engagement. However, Mesu, Riemsdijk, and Sanders (2013) stated management expects employees to meet expectations regardless of ineffective behaviors of leadership.

Caillier (2014) believed that although transformational leadership may benefit organizations, caused by the ability to promote engagement from employees, researchers have failed to determine the correlation of employee engagement with public service, motivation, and mission valence. Caillier addressed the concern because workplace

engagement and mission valence could tie to organization goals. Future studies on the relationship between employee engagement and service motivation and mission valence may benefit organizations to understand what drives employees to engage when considering what strategies to implement.

Kopperud et al. (2014) provided a quantitative study, which included two sample groups in determining the relationship between transformational leadership and service climate linking both to employee engagement in the workplace. Engaging leaders is in the eyes of the person viewing the situation (Kopperud et al., 2014; Mesu et al., 2013). Past studies have provided positive findings linking leaders' ability to engage employees as important in the workplace (Kopperud et al., 2014).

Organizations seem to benefit from transformational leaders in various roles because the leaders can influence employees to reach specific goals and go beyond expectation (Hetland et al., 2015; Kopperud et al., 2014). Transformational leadership has more areas to present positive emotions in the workplace, which may benefit organizations considering making changes for any reason to promote employee engagement. When leaders engage, employees are more likely to engage (Hetland et al., 2015).

Transformational leadership style challenges employees to do more and to become more innovative with support from the leaders. Transformational leaders display high ideals, engage others based on the behaviors, challenge employees in a positive fashion to do the best, and support the team while creating an environment of trust and

confidence, which contributes to building employee engagement (Abel, 2013). Kopperud et al. (2014) admitted transformational leadership goes beyond encouraging individuals but embracing the organizations' climate variables. Kopperud et al.'s (2014) study indicated when employees perceive leaders as transformational leaders; employees are willing to engage. Implications for future studies could understand how employees' perceptions dictate the understanding of transformational leadership. Researchers could consider future studies linking the effects transformational leadership has on workplace engagement and the industry.

Most organizations compete globally to be competitive in the industry, innovation, and employing the best employees (Boverie, Grassberger, & Law, 2013). While organizations are soliciting the workforce for the best talent, people are looking to join organizations with a climate of engagement in the workforce. Boverie et al. (2013) agreed employees like to engage and learn in the workplace. Transformational leadership plays a vital role enabling employees to participate and take ownership in the individual's contribution to the organization. Boverie et al. (2013) study supported Kopperud et al. (2014) findings that leaders must be positive to influence creativity, support, passionate, and positive work engagement.

Organizational changes are sometimes unsuccessful owing to the lack of leaders and employees engagement in the workplace. According to Boverie et al. (2013), often employees are not encouraged to learn and grow preventing engagement in the workplace. Researchers indicated transformational leadership is more effective when

promoting employee engagement than other leadership styles (Doci & Hofmans, 2015; Ghadi et al., 2013; Guay, 2013). Leadership styles make a difference when attempting to increase employee engagement. Organizations benefit from using proven strategies to support human resource development in hiring the right people in specific roles related.

**Authentic leadership.** Organizations must work in the realm of ethics to receive buy-in with employees. Authentic leaders share personal beliefs, show fairness to every employee, and have the commitment to focus on justice (Waite, McKinney, Smith-Glasgow, & Meloy, 2014). Authentic leaders build relationships with employees and remain true to beliefs to one's experiences, which promotes fairness and justice (Waite et al., 2014). Nichols and Erakovich (2013) mentioned ethics as the component of authentic leadership. Employees' behaviors may reflect negatively if the trust does not exist. Eisele, Grohnert, Beausaert, and Segers (2013) completed a study validating engaged employees improve productivity and performance and the workplace. Engaging employees provides a level of pride to exceed in responsibilities, which leads to increased engagement in the workplace (Cerne, Dimovski, Maric, Penger, & Skerlavaj, 2013; Eisele et al., 2013).

Organizational leaders should not overlook ethics when trying to promote engagement in the workplace. Employee engagement stems from authentic leadership (Cerne et al., 2013; Men & Jiang, 2016). Trust establishes relationships between authentic leadership and employees' engagement (Prottas, 2013; Stander, De Beer, & Stander, 2015; Wang, 2014). Nichols and Erakovich believed employees are more critical

in what they desire and expect, therefore, quickly discern if leaders are honest and trustworthy before reciprocating the same behaviors. Trust and employee engagement can dictate the effectiveness of an organization (Nasomboon, 2014; Swarnalatha & Prasanna, 2013). Marques (2015) validated authentic leaders remain true to who they are and the person's purpose and use the skills in leading the team of followers.

Kiersch and Byrne (2015) completed a study indicating authentic leadership creates fairness perceptions in the workplace, which plays a role in some organizational outcomes. Regan, Laschinger, and Wong (2015) findings indicated a number of variables, which led to a relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement to include perceived fairness, supportive, and organizational values. Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014) argued authenticity is problematic because of its self-referential and the repetitive nature of being true to your values because the idea of the authentic leadership style is good because good leadership is authentic. Additional studies may bring value to future studies by examining the perception of what is the perception of good.

Authentic leadership has similar characteristics of transformational leadership and servant leadership. Empowering employees to make decisions and provide creativity are outcomes of authentic leadership. Authentic leadership relates to job satisfaction, commitment in the workplace, focus, and satisfaction from employees (Regan et al., 2015; Waite et al., 2014).

**Servant leadership.** In today's workplace, servant leadership is important, because it displays humility in leaders, which show signs of morality, authenticity, and spirituality (Bambale, 2015; Marques, 2015). Servant leadership is an important factor to how organizations function (Bambale, 2015). Carter and Baghurst (2014) shared servant leadership was a viewpoint relating to the behaviors, experience, and the level of employee engagement between leaders and employees which determines how employees react. Carter and Baghurst were opposed to believing the characteristics of servant leadership affected employee engagement. Spears (1995) created characteristics of servant leadership to include (a) listening, (b) empathy, (c) healing, (d) being alert, (e) persuasion, (f) conceptualization, (g) foresight, (h) stewardship, (i) commitment to others, and (j) establishing a community. Bambale (2015) believed the characteristics were the foundation of servant leadership.

De Clercq et al. (2014) completed a study of four organizations indicating servant leadership had a positive effect on employee engagement. Additional researchers completed studies agreeing with the findings of De Clercq et al. servant leadership affects work engagement (Carter & Baghurst, 2014; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2014). The studies conducted concluded employees engage when there is a sense of ownership and the perception of responsibility (De Clercq et al., 2014). The findings from the research indicated leading by example is one factor employee's value as important in an organization (De Clercq et al., 2014; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2014). Servant

leadership can also lead to employee engagement depending on the employees' perceptions of worth (Beck, 2014).

Bambale (2015) linked organizational behaviors with servant leadership based on some variables as means to intercede. Some variables were commitment to leadership, procedural justice, and ensuring the rules and regulations were appropriate (Bambale, 2015). Trust also stems from servant leadership when discussing procedural justice, rules, and regulations (Liden, et al., 2015; Miao, Newman, Schwarz, & Xu, 2014). Employees who trust leaders have a greater commitment to the organization, responsibilities, and work relationships than some employees who do not show positive signs of engagement (Miao et al., 2014).

### **Organizational Alignment and Employee Engagement**

The ways organizations are structured have an impact on employee engagement. Such alignment dictates the behaviors and fundamentals employees may display (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). According to Alagaraja and Shuck (2015), organizational alignment links the internal functions to the external environment. Understanding the external environment creates synergy amongst different areas, employees, and processes internally possibly increasing effective employee engagement. When there is alignment, HRD could assist with creating roles to promote putting the right employee in a position suitable for the individual's skill set and hiring a person best-suited for an opening position. Such alignment could promote awareness in areas needing additional training and other resources.

Some findings conducted by researchers revealed leaders and followers must have alignment to achieve better organizational performance (Kim & Schachter, 2015; Star, Russ-Eft, Braverman, & Levine, 2016). HRD must continuously incorporate appropriate resources to attain strategic goals throughout the organization to sustain (Alagaraja & Githens, 2016). To create strategic goals, HRD should understand the industry and what is necessary to promote engagement to create sustainable growth trajectory for the organization while increasing employee engagement. All departments within an organization must understand the organizational vision to create strategies leading to employee engagement.

HRD must determine strategies required to support such demand to ensure organizations are successful. Alagaraja and Githens (2016) indicated HRD supports economic development strategies by providing the best possible training and skill development to assist with job growth and employment. Star et al. (2016) believed there is importance amongst organizational alignment and employee engagement, but there is little research about the measurement and effectiveness on interventions related to corporate citizenship and organizational development HRD implement in a strategic manner to increase employee engagement. Some employees may believe organizational alignment plays a role in the manner an employee engage.

### **Meaning at Work**

Littman-Ovadia and Lavy (2015) completed a study to indicate individuals' sense of meaning at work to find character strength associated with job performance and

suggested the meaning at work as perceiving work as a career. The meaning at work is the degree to which an individual experiences meaning and value (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Dik et al. (2014) went further to indicate while some individuals find work to be meaningless; others disagree because of relationships and experiences found at work providing a connection between work and life away from work. Branna, Parsons, and Priola (2015) pointed out employees buy into the meaning such as prestige, success, and quality to cope with usual reasons to go to work. Past studies linked employee engagement as a positive correlation of work performance through positive emotions, meaningful connections, and the willingness to contribute to the success of the organization (Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

### **Meaning of Work**

The level of employee engagement has an impact on employees' dedication to working and the meaning of work (Liu & Liu, 2015). The meaning of work refers to employees' perceived importance of work to oneself such as the perception of achievement (Beukes & Botha, 2013; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015). Long, Buzzanell, and Kuang (2016) completed a study concluding workers base perceptions of meaning of work as a choice, a purpose, value, and significant. Some employees perceive the meaning of work as a job well done creating value in the workplace, which potential leads to employee engagement (Liu & Liu, 2015; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Long et al., 2016).

Some people discover the meaning of work by judging the impact the work has, or have the potential to have, on others (Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Pattakos & Dundon, 2016). Research completed by Liu and Liu (2015) indicated a significant and positive correlation with employees being highly engaged in an organization lead to employees' positive perception regarding the meaning of work. Employees who do a good job have a sense of pride and commitment to the outcome, but employees who do not take pride in the responsibilities assigned are unable to perform at an expected level (Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015).

Some people believe the meaning of work represents discipline, income to support the household and the basic needs to survive, life routine. Strier, Eisikovits, Sigad, and Buchbinder (2015) study consisted of men who believed the meaning of work suggested a level of maturity in life, but see unemployment as a lack of meaning. O'Connor and Raile (2015) completed a study to obtain college students' perception of meaning of work. The outcome of the study indicated 50 of the students suggested the meaning of work was to have a real job as a level of superiority to others in the same age group. The meaning of work defines a particular work position desired and a right granted once the students reach a degreed level of education based on the findings (O'Connor & Raile, 2015). Additional information from the study indicated the meaning of work is a sense of moving into adulthood and something a person waits for in life (O'Connor & Raile, 2015). Based on the various sources and studies completed, the meaning of work is success, what a person wants for self, and the perceptions of success.

## **Transition**

The information in Section 1 comprised of the problems organizations encounter when employees do not engage in the workplace. Section 1 included a specific business response and a research question. The study may benefit managers in warehouse distribution service centers by understanding the importance of employee engagement and discovering possible strategies to implement in the organization. The literature review encompassed an in-depth synthesis of past studies researchers performed to validate why employee engagement is vital to an organization. This research study consists of two additional sections.

Section 2 presents the role of the researcher to ensure the readers understand the responsibility the researcher has when conducting a study to eliminate bias and ensure the protection of the participants. This section presents an explanation of the selection of participants. The methodology and design selected for the study expound on why the chosen method and design were the better choices for this specific study. Section 2 includes a rationale of the data collection process. Section 3 will present the findings of the study, a conclusion, and recommendations for future study.

## Section 2: The Project

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some warehouse service center managers used to engage employees to higher levels of productivity. The targeted population consisted of warehouse service center managers in two companies located in the Riverport area in Louisville, KY, who successfully implemented employee engagement strategies that increased workplace productivity. The implications for social change included providing managers new insights on engagement strategies for employees that may lead to lower voluntary and involuntary employee turnover, thus reducing unemployment within communities. Positively engaged employees contribute to the local economy, they may also support community institutions such as schools and churches, as well as homeless shelters and other charitable programs (Shuck et al., 2014).

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher's role is to collect, protect, and analyze data to identify themes and report findings in an ethical manner. The researcher often acts as the data collection instrument (Yin, 2014). Researchers must treat participants with fairness, ensuring that ethical interview protocols are in place (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979; Yin, 2014). In relations to the Belmont Report protocol, human subjects were not part of the research for my study. The responses to the interview questions in this study allowed me to create themes from the views of the selected participants regarding

strategies to increase and improve employee engagement that resulted in higher levels of workplace productivity. Taking notes about the interview experiences and participant performances, and analyzing participant answers to questions assisted in capturing relevant information (Covell, Sidani, & Ritchie, 2012). Note taking was one process I used to capture participants' responses.

As a leader in the workforce, I have over 28 years of professional experience with employee engagement. My background in managing multiple groups of employees while reporting to executives supported information provided by the participants. This experience enabled me to view the topic of employee engagement in the workplace from the perspectives of both worker and manager. I had no personal or business affiliations to the participants or organizations chosen for this study. Ethical policies for collecting data and the appropriate way to analyze the data through member checking will mitigate the possibility for bias (Yin, 2014).

A researcher has an obligation to protect interviewees' personal information and ensure confidentiality during the data collection process and for no less than 5 years following the completion of the study, at which point participants' data should be destroyed (Covell et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979; Yin, 2014). I completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research Protecting Human Research Participants Certification web-based training course to ensure information received from participants would be safe and confidential. There was continuous monitoring for potential conflicts between the participants and me

by explaining my role as the researcher and the purpose of the study, while advising the participants that a copy of the results would be available to them at the end of the study.

As the researcher, I was obligated to mitigate personal views that may create any form of bias by using an interview protocol, member checking, and identification of data saturation during the data collection process of the study. Bias is the influence of a researcher's experience, background, and culture that may sway the collection and interpretation of data (Bernard, 2013). To eliminate this possibility, a researcher should put measures in place to help avoid bias (Yin, 2014). A researcher must understand bias can play a role during both data collection and interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The interviewer must put aside personal beliefs to eliminate any possible bias (Fung, Chan, & Chien, 2013; Yin, 2014). There was no need to prep any participant before or during the interview to promote desired responses for the study.

A researcher has the responsibility to gain information from the participants. The processes of this study included transcribing and validating the information from each participant through member checking, analyzing the data retrieved, creating themes based on the information discovered from the interviews, and using the results to provide insight into strategies to promote successful employee engagement (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) stated the process consists of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. A researcher must take appropriate steps to ensure the reliability and validity of the collected data (Kemperaj & Chavan, 2013; Yin, 2014). Conducting interviews was the primary data collection method for this study using open-ended

questions to enable participants to fully share their experiences (Yin, 2014). The interview protocol included providing a comfortable environment, thoroughly explaining the purpose of the study, and most importantly, obtaining permission to conduct the interview.

### **Participants**

For this study, I selected participants related to my specific research question to avoid any form of bias. Participants related to the research questions eliminate potential bias by the researcher (Roulston & Shelton, 2015; Yin, 2014). A key component of a qualitative study is to select the appropriate participants on a voluntary basis (Maskara, 2014; Yap & Webber, 2015; Yin, 2014). The eligibility criteria for interview participants were determined through the census sampling to eliminate bias (Asadollahi et al., 2015; Rader et al., 2015; Soroush, Zargham-Boroujeni, & Namnabati, 2016). The participants met the eligibility requirement within the scope of the population. Participants were warehouse service center managers who successfully implemented strategies to engage employees to improve workplace productivity (O'Halloran, Sheilds, Blackstock, Wintle, & Taylor, 2015).

I emailed cooperation letters to two warehouse service center organizations' human resource team requesting their willingness to participate in the study along with a copy of the interview questions in order to assure them that any questions asked would not jeopardize the organization in any way (Fung et al., 2013; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Once the request was accepted and

following approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB), I requested the identity of and introduction to the participants who met certain qualifications for the study. If I did not receive a timely response to the letters, I visited in person to discuss my study and the need for participants with human resource managers.

Establishing a working relationship with the participants helped ensure each participant understood the purpose of the study while gaining trust (Maskara, 2014; Yin, 2014). Olsen, Lehto, and Chan (2016) stated there must be ethical boundaries of the researcher-participant relationship. Ethical boundaries included reminding the participants there were no requirements or stipulations to respond to a question if there were any discomfort and they may opt out of the study at any time without consequence, ensuring participants understand taking part in the study is entirely voluntary (Comi, Bischof, & Eppler, 2014; Maskara, 2014; Yin, 2014).

Participants shared personal details and feelings about their work roles and the strategies implemented. Participants must therefore understand that all information provided during the interview is confidential (Brayda & Boyce, 2014; Morse & Coulehan, 2014; Yin, 2014). Participants understood their names and any personal information linking them to the study would not be published or revealed in any way. I stored all files in a safety deposit box, where they will remain for 5 years to ensure participants' identity and information is secure. Protecting participants' privacy is vital in maintaining research ethics (Morse & Coulehan, 2014; Olsen et al., 2016, Yin, 2014).

## Research Method

Three primary research methodologies are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). I used a qualitative method for the study. The qualitative methodology provides a better understanding of individuals' lived experiences (Bailey, 2014; Rejno & Berg, 2015; Venkatesh et al., 2013), and therefore, as the researcher I acquired useful information in identifying successful strategies to answer the study's research question. I elected to perform a qualitative study as oppose to a quantitative or mixed methods research based on the advantages of understanding individuals' in-depth experiences through semistructured interviews to gather reliable information from participants (Bernard, 2013; Doody & Noonan, 2013; Walsh, 2014).

Researchers use the qualitative methodology to provide an in-depth analysis of a specific topic (Bailey, 2014; Buck & Lady, 2015). Sallee and Flood's (2013) study supported the basis for using the qualitative method to observe and develop knowledge of individuals' behaviors in natural settings. Researchers who use the qualitative method have the option of gaining knowledge from warehouse service center managers via interviews, focus groups, and observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). When researchers use the qualitative method, they are using active listening, observation, and participation skills which may create an empathetic interview (Drabble, Trocki, Salcedo, Walker, & Korcha, 2016; Johnson, 2015).

The quantitative method was not suitable for the use of this study. Researchers do not uncover individuals' lived experiences using the quantitative method. Researchers

use quantitative methods to test theories through a measurement of variables, relationships, and differences via an analysis of numerical data (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Nelson & Evans, 2014). Researchers can analyze numerical data gathered to discover the relationship between two or more variables using the quantitative method (Groeneveld, Tummers, Bronkhorst, Ashikali, & Van Thiel, 2015). My study did not consist of measuring and comparing different variables, comparing numerical data, or determining the relationship amongst two or more variables. The mixed method approach was not suitable for use in this study. The mixed method approach consists of the qualitative and the quantitative methods (Heyvaert, Hannes, Maes, & Onghena, 2013; Patton, 2015; Sparkes, 2014; Venkatesh et al., 2013).

### **Research Design**

There are five designs for qualitative research: case study, phenomenology, ethnography, narrative, and grounded theory (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Yin, 2014). This study has a multiple case study design. There are advantages and disadvantages when using any of the research designs. A researcher must select the design suitable for the purpose of the study (Fletcher & Conley, 2013). Stake (1995) mentioned case studies as evaluation strategies that other researchers may find useful.

Case studies are the preferred strategy researchers employ when asking how or what questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). The purpose of using a case study design is to define a strategy in which the researcher will explore a program, event, activity, or a process in-depth (Brown, Aon Hewitt, & Reilly, 2013;

Gregor & Hevner, 2013; Hughes & Chapel, 2013). These types of studies connect activities and processes over a period (Besieux et al., 2015; Walby, 2013; Yin, 2014). Conducting an extensive analysis to understand the issue and using historical documentation were necessary to find successful strategies some warehouse service center managers developed and implemented. The case study design was appropriate to explore the experiences of the participants in this study.

Researchers use the phenomenological design to explain their knowledge of individuals' lived experiences (Khan, Kolts, Thase, Krishnan, & Brown, 2015; Maree, Parker, Kaplan, & Oosthuizen, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Zahavi and Simionescu-Panait (2014) suggested the phenomenological design builds researchers' comprehension of individuals and groups' experiences. Using the phenomenological design means a researcher must be open and not allow the behaviors or thoughts of participants to interfere with the data collected (Maree et al., 2016).

Researchers elect the use of the ethnographic research design in interpretive analyses to concentrate on specific groups in explaining the behaviors of society (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Ethnographic researchers use extensive research regardless of the increased popularity (Cayla & Arnould, 2013). Ethnographic design was not appropriate for this exploration into strategies to increase employee engagement and workplace productivity.

Researchers use the narrative design to study significant storytelling versions of an individual's experience and view of how circumstances are understood (McGlade,

2014; Tian et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). Researchers ultimately use the narrative design to get the life stories from individuals. The narrative design is not appropriate for determining successful strategies to engage employees (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The narrative design was not a suitable choice for this exploration.

Researchers may use the grounded theory design to develop theories from natural settings using a systematic analysis of data from a specific experience (Johnson, 2015; Lawrence & Tar, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Researchers conducting a qualitative study may use a grounded theory when gathering information from certain questions that are not open-ended to obtain specific responses, and to verify data about a specific trend (Lawrence & Tar, 2013; Stout, Awad, & Guzman, 2013). However, I was attempting to understand the strategies warehouse managers incorporated to increase employee engagement and improve productivity, and therefore a grounded theory design was not appropriate.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population in this study comprised all people that met the participant criteria. This population consisted of seven warehouse service center managers from two organizations located in the Riverport area of Louisville, KY. Each of these participants had implemented successful strategies that they were using to engage employees to improve workplace productivity. I used census sampling, which requires interviewing 100% of the population (Stake, 1995). By doing so, I was able to ensure that my sample size was adequate and that the sample fully represented the population (Dworkin, 2012;

Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2015; Marshall et al., 2013). To participate in the study, participants were required to have grounded knowledge and lived experience regarding the topic, be employed at a warehouse service center currently using employee engagement strategies, have authority to direct and provide resources to employees, and have proven success in implementing successful and current strategies.

Dworkin (2012) found that an adequate number of interview participants ranges from 5 to 20. However, Malterud et al. (2015) completed a study indicating the appropriate sample size primarily depends on the power of the information obtained relevant to the study. While these researchers' recommended sample sizes do not fully align, both have noted that the goal is to reach saturation. Data saturation is the point when no new themes or concepts are identifiable (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014; Marshall et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). Fusch and Ness (2015) reported that key characteristics of data saturation include finding no new data, themes, or coding, and the study's replicability. The study design affects when and how one reaches data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Yin, 2014).

I encountered multiple viewpoints during the interview process, which ensured that I did not overlook vital information when seeking answers to the research question. All interviews took place in a private office at the participants' workplace to eliminate distractions and ensure confidentiality. Given the site specificity of this study, my findings from participant data may not be generalizable to other warehouse service centers.

### **Ethical Research**

To ensure ethical protection of participants and before collecting data, I obtained institutional review board (IRB) approval from representatives of Walden University and the organizations whose managers I intended to interview (see Brown, 2013; Maskara, 2014; Shaw, 2012). Walden University's approval number for this study is 02-17-17-0567748. Once granted permission to proceed, I contacted the appropriate person at each organization to request participation from the management team. After receiving contact information of potential participants, I verified that the participants met the participation criteria. I then contacted participants to schedule appointments, distribute consent forms, highlight the purpose of the study, and began interviews after collecting the signed consent form.

Receiving informed consent enables participants to understand the process of the research, what to expect during the interview and throughout the data collection process, and their rights to opt out of the interview at any time without obligation (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012; Trotter, 2014). That is, informed consent documentation informs participants of their rights, and must meet U. S. regulations (Aguila, Weidmer, Illingworth, & Martinez, 2016). I ensured participants could understand the language in the consent form before proceeding with the research (see Aguila et al., 2016). I completed the National Institute of Health's web-based training course on protecting human participants. Participation in the study did not include incentives, but I will

provide each participant a copy of the final study, including the findings, by certified mail to the authorized signer of the Letter of Cooperation.

Researchers can minimize risk for participants by taking an ethical approach, and protection of private information is critical (Ferguson, Yonge, & Myrick, 2015; Madini & Nooy, 2013). The consent form was one of the steps I took to minimize risk and assure ethical protection of participants. Coding allowed for the elimination of participants' names, organizations, and any recognizable identifiers to protect the identity of each person. The coding method I used consisted of a letter and number (e.g., P1 represented participant 1, and so forth).

Some people participate in studies because they believe the information they share is confidential, and that their privacy and personal information is protected (Reed, Khoshnood, Blankenship, & Fisher, 2014). I will keep all interview material on a password-protected computer and store any backup USBs, notes, and recordings from the interview in a lockable file in a safety deposit box for 5 years after completion of the study. I will destroy all data after 5 years using a shredding machine and deleting all information from the USB (Brown, 2013; Maskara, 2014; Shaw, 2012). I provided Walden IRB approval number to the participants, and kept them updated throughout the interview process.

Anonymity and confidentiality are important because both permit the participant to feel at ease to share certain information (Pezaro, Clyne, & Gerada, 2016). Anonymity is the state of being anonymous (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013; Heffetz & Ligett,

2014). Confidentiality is containing information whose unauthorized disclosure could be prejudicial to the national interest (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013; Heffetz & Ligett, 2014). I used the confidentiality approach because I was responsible for gathering all research data and reaching out to participants; therefore, anonymity was not an option given my need for direct contact with participants. I assured participants that the information gathered would remain confidential, and there was not a need to use specific names of the participants or to note the name of the organization.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Data collection instruments are tools a researcher uses to retrieve information from participants (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Goodman, Cryder, & Cheeman, 2013). As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument. I also used an interview protocol with scripted, open-ended interview questions. Conducting semistructured interviews enabled me to gather useful data for my study, and the open-ended interview questions allowed the participants to share information based on their lived experiences (see Bernard, 2013; Dubé, Schinke, Strasser, & Lightfoot, 2014; Lampropoulou & Myers, 2013).

I also collected data from the organizations' procedures handbooks and via direct observations by attending meetings, observing the interactions between the participants and employees, and note taking (see Yin, 2014). I used the handbooks and documentation to determine if the information was useful to the organization and used by employees performing the task. Yin (2009) identified five sources of useful qualitative evidence

including (a) interviews, (b) archival records, (c) direct observations, (d) participant-observations, and (f) physical artifacts. I analyzed the data from the interviews, procedures handbooks, and observations, and then triangulated the data to ensure trustworthiness of my interpretations. I enhanced the reliability and validity of the data collection instruments and processes with the use of member checking (see Harvey, 2015; Koelsch, 2013; Reilly, 2013).

### **Data Collection Technique**

Before each interview, I reviewed the interview questions to make sure everything was in the appropriate order. I examined the audio recording device to ensure it was working properly, and that an extra set of new batteries was available. I used face-to-face interviews to receive feedback from participants about their lived experiences (Bernard, 2013; Dubé et al., 2014). After securing IRB approval, I emailed consent forms to the potential participants. After receiving signed consent forms, I scheduled interviews with each participant. Using an interview protocol document, I asked each participant the same six interview questions. These open-ended questions allowed the participants to discuss individual strategies and insights, and allowed additional time to explore additional information if it arose (see Cairney & St. Denny, 2015; Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013; Jamshed, 2014). I observed participants' body language while administering the face-to-face interviews (see Doody & Noonan, 2013; Yin, 2014) and observing their interactions with others at the participants' workplaces. Observing participants' verbal and nonverbal responses help add additional value to the study by understanding what the participants

mean versus what is stated (Baskarada, 2016). Using the audio recorder assisted in accurately capturing information and responses provided by the participant, and aided me when transcribing the interview data and organizing them into themes. Ensuring space availability on a USB was vital when downloading transcriptions, forms, and participants' information.

The advantages and disadvantages of the data collection techniques varied based on participants. The advantage of using face-to-face interviews was gaining insights regarding the lived experiences of managers who successfully implemented strategies to increase engagement in the workplace. A disadvantage of interviews was relying on the subjective information, and trusting that participants were honest in their responses. An advantage of conducting direct observation was that it enabled me to gather information from nonverbal responses, while the disadvantage of observing participants was the uncertainty of knowing if the behaviors I observed were true reflections of the day-to-day behaviors of the participants. The advantage of gaining access to organizations' policies and procedures was that it provided me a systematic view of the organizations. The disadvantage reviewing policies and procedure documents included not knowing whether the managers enforced the processes outlined in the document.

I relied on warehouse service center managers to answer applied interview questions, and I used member checking to validate the data (see Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016; Ciemen, Brant, Kersten, Mullette, & Dickerson, 2015; Morse & Coulehan, 2015). Member checking allowed each participant to review the accuracy of

the information obtained during the data collection process to ensure that I properly understood the data gathered (see Mangioni & Mckerchar, 2013).

### **Data Organization Technique**

Organization techniques consisted of keeping data from the interviews reliable during the research. I used journaling to take notes during the interview process and observations. I audio recorded all verbal communication, used my personal computer with the current Microsoft software to transcribe the interviews, and NVivo to input the data. To avoid disclosing participants' identities, I used coding (see Gibson et al., 2013; Wolf et al., 2015). Aligning the participant's code with the interview questions guaranteed a direct reference to the participants in case additional information was necessary.

I also used backup systems to protect all files and information from loss caused by system failure or corruption; these included password protection, a fireproof safe and a locked file to ensure the confidentiality and protection of all participants (Morse & Coulehan, 2014). All files will remain stored for 5 years, after which I will erase all electronic files and shred all hard copy documents.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of reviewing and interpreting the data as a whole (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013; Johnson, Dunlap, & Benoit, 2010). My analysis process included organizing and preparing the information in order to analyze and understand it. I used Yin's 5-step process to key themes, group information

that was alike, and create titles of each theme (see Yin, 2014). I used the NVivo software to help code the data and then identified themes (Alyahmady & Al Abri, 2013; Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014). I used interviews, observations, and documents to develop themes until no new data emerged to ensure data saturation. I derived the themes from reoccurring concepts I discovered throughout the study.

### **Reliability and Validity**

#### **Reliability**

Detailed and accurate documentation is pertinent to address reliability (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Member checking of a researcher's interpretations contributes to the overall reliability of the findings. Member checking is the validation of data received through participant review (see Ciemen, Brant, Kersten, Mullette, & Dickerson, 2015; Harvey, 2015; Reilly, 2013). I used member checking to ensure participants' information provided was reliable by verifying my interpretations of what I received. Reliability derives from the accuracy of interview transcripts, theme coding, and notes (Platt & Skowron, 2013). Researchers rely on data collection techniques to ensure reliability such as interview protocols (Foley & O'Connor, 2013). I used an interview protocol to ensure I provided each participant with the same questions and guidelines.

#### **Validity**

Validity strengthens qualitative research by confirming the results from the analysis (Brown, 2013; Maskara, 2014; Platt & Skowron, 2013). Developing processes such as member checking supports the validity of the research findings (Marshall &

Rossman, 2014; Yin, 2014). Researchers should ensure participants clearly understand the interview questions, and the researcher should ensure there is clear understanding of the responses provided by the participants. I addressed validity by collecting data using the interview protocol process and participants' company documents. I conducted interviews using the same interview questions with each participant. Credibility is equivalent to internal validity (Yin, 2014).

### **Credibility**

A researcher's credibility is pertinent. Credibility ensures research is believable (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). I established alignment among the participants by reviewing the interview transcripts. I used member checking to confirm the participants' responses from my interpretation.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is equivalent to external validity (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Yin, 2014). Transferability relates to how easy the findings could transfer into general information through the lens of other researchers and readers for future research (Elo et al., 2014; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I selected participants based on boundaries and industry type for future researchers to determine the transferability of the findings.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the accuracy of the data and another form of providing validity to the research (Houghton et al., 2013). I first attempted to understand the participants'

lived experienced, and then interpreted the meaning participants provided about their lived experiences. I used member checking to confirm my understanding and interpretations of the data received and confirm no additional data developed. Member checking of the data interpretation ensures saturation. Saturation is when no new data (Marshall et al., 2013). To reach saturation, a sample size appropriate for the study is vital (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

### **Transition**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study was to explore successful strategies warehouse service center managers used to promote employee engagement. The sources for the data consisted of face-to-face semistructured interviews, observation, and document review. The use of member checking validated the reliability and validity of the data collection process. I derived themes from the data analysis process to answer the research question. In Section 3, I present the findings of the study, and offer recommendations for future study.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some warehouse service center managers used to engage employees to higher levels of productivity. Based on the research question, compiling and analyzing the interview responses, and the companies' procedures handbooks, I identified three themes (a) providing clear and concise communication, (b) creating supportive manager-employee partnerships, and (c) benefits to include incentives. Section 3 includes the presentation of the findings and an application to the professional practice of why and how the findings are relevant to improve business practice. Implications for social change, recommendations of action of who should pay attention to the findings, how the results might be disseminated in training, conferences, and contributions to the literature, recommendations for future research, reflections, and conclusion are also included in Section 3.

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

The intent of this qualitative multiple case study was to answer the central research question: What strategies do some warehouse service center managers use to engage employees to higher levels of workplace productivity. To answer the overarching research question, I conducted face-to-face interviews with seven warehouse service center managers from two service center organizations located in Louisville, Kentucky. The three themes, which emerged from the data analyzed in this research study, were (a)

providing clear and concise communication, (b) creating supportive manager-employee partnerships, and (c) including benefits and incentives such as acknowledgments, salary increases, gift cards, time off work, flexibility, tuition reimbursement, and concern about personal well-being.

I completed the five-step process, which Yin (2014) indicated consists of (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. I compiled information learned from the interviews, receiving companies' procedures handbooks, direct observation, and conducting member checking for validation. I imported all data into NVivo 10. I disassembled the data based on information each participant supplied, reassembled according to information similar in content, and finally interpreted creating the three main themes, which answers the research question and strategies business leaders could use to increase employee engagement.

### **Theme 1: Providing Clear and Concise Communication**

Communication is critical in engaging employees in the success of any organization (Handa & Gulati, 2014; Sharma, 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). During the interview process, seven participants (100%) indicated clear and concise communication is a vital strategy for increasing employee engagement. Each participant shared various ways of effective communication but indicated face-to-face is the most efficient way to communicate to enable dialogue and clarity to the discussion. Participant 1 stated "We cannot expect our employees to do their best if management cannot communicate expectations effectively". Participant 3 replied "Without clear and concise

communication, the company will not reach sales expectations. Every leader must attend at least one communication training a year.” Participant 4 stated:

Sometimes we have turnabout days where employees get to act as the leader.

During this time, the employees are to show the leaders what they expect from us or how we should communicate and perform as leaders. Having days like this enables the leaders to see things from the viewpoint of the employees.

Participants in this study were able to validate the importance of effective communication. Participants were able to share their views on how their leaders in the organization promote effective communication. The participating organizations enforce clear and concise communication at every level of the business.

The findings were consistent with the literature from Mishra et al. (2014) who described the most reliable way to provide communication is the use of face-to-face communication to include verbal cues to hear the tone of the discussion and nonverbal cues examine the body language and facial expressions. Five participants suggested the importance of open and honest communication creates support, participation, and increases employee engagement.

These findings aligned with the literature. Nayak and Sahoo (2015) and Sharma (2014) suggested that leaders within organizations should keep employees informed to establish trust and confidence. How leaders communicate can lessen the potential for resistance leading to sustainable growth and increased employee engagement (Georgalis

et al., 2015; Nayak & Sahoo, 2015). Kickert (2014) suggested that organizational leaders must provide effective communication.

## **Theme 2: Creating Supportive Manager-Employee Partnerships**

Leadership styles play a critical role in employee engagement (Ghadi et al., 2013; Griffin et al., 2015). Six participants stressed the importance of how leadership should support the employees. Participant 1 shared “employees who have support from their leaders seemed to be more engaged in the workplace than areas where leadership presence was not visible or supportive”. Participant 6 shared:

Leadership is critical. When he started at the company, employees did not engage and a person coming in could feel the tension upon arrival. However, he earned the employees trust by listening, sharing, leading by example, and supporting some of the ideas and concerns.

These findings were consistent with the literature. According to Lee and Jensen (2014), Mishra et al. (2014), and Nasomboon (2014), leadership is crucial in an organization by the impact they play. Literature from Perko, Kinnunen, and Feldt (2014) mentioned leadership influences employee engagement. Carasco-Saul, Kim, and Kim (2015) stated that the relationship amongst leadership and employees is imperative in establishing employee engagement leading to increased productivity in the workplace. According to Sieger et al. (2013), employees feel part of the team when there is collaboration. The findings from the research indicated employees value leaders who lead by example in an organization (De Clercq et al., 2014; De Sousa & Van Dierendonck,

2014). Findings from this study aligned with the literature suggesting employees are driven to engage when participation in some decision-making processes are present (Yoerger, Crowe, & Allen, 2015; Zeglal et al., 2014). Salerno et al. (2015) contributed to the findings indicating participation and employees' well-being go hand and hand, which leads to increased levels of employee engagement.

### **Theme 3: Benefits to Include Incentives**

During the interview process, each participant shared the importance of incentives, which included but not limited to acknowledgments, salary increases, gift cards, time off work, flexibility, tuition reimbursement, and concern about personal well-being. Each participant agreed simply acknowledging and showing appreciation goes a long way. Participant 2 shared "The budget is limited, which creates difficulties in increasing compensation but finds it easier to give employees time away from work to arrive late or leave early without affecting productivity in the workload". Four participants shared they make a conscious habit to say thank you and a job well done. Participant 5 stated "Writing personal notes to her team individualizes the appreciation to the individual."

The participants incorporated additional benefits to attract employees, which included incentives and various forms of compensation to support employee engagement. Organizations could incorporate the use of this strategy when gaining and retaining employees. Participant 4 mentioned that "the employees' well-being is important, and

including extra benefits in the hiring process creates a sense of self-worth in arriving to work daily, prepared, and eager to be at work.”

The findings aligned with the literature. Salerno et al. (2015) shared in a study some factors that lead to employee engagement included appraisals, health and wellness, participation, support, and self-worth. Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) completed a study linking engaged employees to incentives and rewards to reach the organization's vision and goals. Some organizations promote incentives to recruit experienced and sometimes a certain level of education (Griffin et al., 2015). According to Gupta and Sharma (2016), the meaning at work is the degree to which an individual experiences meaning and value.

The research findings aligned with the significance of the study and related to the conceptual framework, employee engagement. The themes, which emerged facilitated in understanding employee engagement in this qualitative multiple, case study and assisted in addressing the purpose of the study and the research question. Employee engagement emerged as a concept of individual integration with role activities (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990) defined some characteristics of employee engagement as commitment, perspective, putting best efforts forward, and safety. Participant 6 stated:

The past organization did not incorporate any form of incentives, and some employees left the organization because they did not feel valued. If an organization wants to see an improvement in productivity and performance, they have to be willing and find ways to engage the employees.

Participant 7 stated:

Our organization is committed to supporting the well-being of our employees.

Although our budget may not always allow for monetary rewards, we can be creative in giving some form of reward even if it is time away from the office or extended lunches and breaks.

This study has contributed to understanding the strategies business leaders in any organization could use to increase employee engagement in the workplace. An employee committed to an organization leads to the well-being of the employee in the workplace, community, and home (Downey et al., 2015; Gollan & Xu, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014). The findings also contributed to the effective practice of business to increase an organization's productivity and performance when employees effectively engage in the workplace (Radda, Majidadi, & Akanno, 2015).

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings from this study support the idea that Kahn's (1990) employee engagement consists of several characteristics to include commitment, putting best efforts forward, perspectives, and quality, which validates why organizational leaders should promote strategies to increase employee engagement. The strategies could strengthen business relationships within the organization, increase engagement and productivity. Findings from this study added to prior and the existing body of knowledge about the importance of employee engagement.

Theme 1 revealed clear and concise communication could support organizational leaders to receive support, commitment, and creative ideas involving employees.

Researchers agreed internal communication influences employee engagement (Hargrove et al., 2015; Mishra et al., 2014; Mercurio, 2015). Organizational leaders could implement this strategy as evidenced discovered in the findings of the study by participants' responses, prior and current research literature to solidify the need for employees feeling valued in the organization.

Theme 2 revealed creating supportive manager-employee partnerships is critical. Prior research conducted by Kopperud et al. (2014) indicated that leaders must be positive to influence creativity, support, and establish relationships. Organizational leaders could implement this strategy based on the findings from participants' responses, prior and current literature to create relationships enabling employing to feel valued in the organizations.

Theme 3 revealed benefits to include incentives such as acknowledgments, salary increases, gift cards, time off work, flexibility, tuition reimbursement, and concern about personal well-being were important to each participant in implementing strategies, which promoted employee engagement. Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) completed a study linking engaged employees to incentives to reach organizations' visions and goals. Organizational leaders could benefit from implementing incentives to promote employee engagement to increase productivity in the workplace.

Leadership and employee engagement are both necessary to increase productivity. Employee engagement could determine the success of an organization in any industry. It is important for organizational leaders to understand employees are an asset to the

business. Griffin, Bryant, and Koerber (2015) stated the role of employee engagement is critical to maintaining quality service, productivity, and performance to sustain growth within a competitive environment.

The findings of this study provide enriched evidence of past and current research literature of how organizational leaders could benefit from implementing successful strategies to encourage employee engagement through communication, partnership, and incentives. Organizational leaders could use these strategies to remove barriers, which may exist and understand how to monitor and avoid potential obstacles through partnerships. Organizational leaders could also use the strategies to increase productivity and possibly customer satisfactions by implementing strategies to foster employee engagement with the use of financial and nonfinancial incentives. Implementing the various may contribute to social change.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The study could contribute to social change in any organization, primarily warehouse service centers. The participants consisted of warehouse service managers who created and implemented strategies to promote employee engagement, which led to increased productivity in the workplace. Leaders in any organization could incorporate strategies included in this study to support employee engagement. Employees who are likely to engage bring positive emotions, cognition, and positive behaviors to the workplace (Kahn, 1990). Sources agreed creating an environment of engaging employees appeared to create a positive workforce within an organization through the level of

commitment (Menguc et al., 2013; Saunders & Tiwari, 2014; Soane et al., 2013).

According to Menguc, Auh, Fisher, and Haddad (2013) and Saunders and Tiwari (2014), employees who engaged in the workplace showed connections to the organization, community, family, and relationships.

Organizational leaders must understand what influences employee engagement while recognizing some barriers, which may prevent a successful transition and plan accordingly to gain a successful outcome implementing the strategies (Karkoulian, Mukaddam, McCarthy, & Messarra, 2013). The findings are not general to specific locations, industries, settings, or populations, but may increase employee engagement and improve productivity. Implementing the strategies to increase employee engagement could produce positive social change by contributing to the local economy; they may also support community institutions such as schools and churches, as well as homeless shelters and other charitable programs. Employees are valuable to every organization and attempts for organizational leaders to acknowledge this principle may confirm the need to support and implement employee engagement strategies in the workplace, which may lead to lower voluntary and involuntary employee turnover, thus reducing unemployment within communities. Each participant understood the importance of engaging employees and believed employee engagement has different influences in the organization.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Business leaders in any organization should consider if the strategies in this study align with current business initiatives to increase productivity in the workplace. It is vital

for organizational leaders to consider past, current, and new strategies when determining what is in the best interest of reaching the organizations' vision and goals. Based on the findings of the study, I was able to create six recommendations business leaders could consider when implementing strategies to increase employee engagement, which leads to improved productivity. Recommendation of the following steps could improve employee engagement in the work place.

The first recommendation is to provide clear and concise communication by incorporating monthly meetings throughout the organization and departmental meetings to gain input from employees while enforcing open lines of communication. The second recommendation is creating teams, which include a member from each department or essential areas required to address the scope of a project. Creating teams enable participation from various people and groups to bring diversity and creative ideas. Employee engagement is the satisfaction and excitement an employee feels when engaging in the workplace (Nasomboon, 2014; Saunders & Tiwari, 2014).

The third recommendation is promoting manager-employee partnerships to create an environment of trust and support. The fourth recommendation is to create an engagement team, which includes all levels of management, office staff, and warehouse employees to create and implement strategies to increase engagement. Sources agreed creating an environment of engaging employees appeared to create a positive workforce within an organization through the level of commitment (Menguc et al., 2013; Saunders & Tiwari, 2014; Soane et al., 2013). The fifth recommendation is to develop an event

planning committee comprised of different levels of employees to promote activities throughout the organization to increase supportive relationships. The sixth recommendation is to develop an incentive program throughout the organization and within individual departments to support ways of acknowledging a job well done.

Business leaders at all levels in any industry who desires to increase employee engagement should pay attention to the results of this study. Human resource personnel who is considering ways to recruit and higher the best employees should consider the findings of this study. Students completing research may find results from this study beneficial. The results from this study will be disseminated through Walden University scholarly works for academic purposes. I might disseminate the results through future training within various organizations seeking ways to increase employee engagement and presentations in teaching others about the importance of employee engagement. I might consider continuing my research to share my findings in future publications.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings of this study validate prior and current literature. Organizational leaders need to implement successful strategies, which promote employee engagement suitable to their business needs. The recommendations for future studies address some of the limitations of this study. One limitation was not including executives as part of the study. Future research should explore engagement strategies with executives and first level employees to determine if the findings would be similar to findings discovered by warehouse service center managers. Another limitation was the sample size did not

provide adequate representation of the population. Future research should explore organizations and industries outside Louisville, Kentucky Riverport area and outside of warehouse service centers, to determine if different geographic areas have similar or different viewpoints for increasing employee engagement.

I conducted a qualitative multiple case study. I recommend future research could include a quantitative or mixed method approach on employee engagement to gain access to variables, which affects employee engagement such as transformational and transactional leadership. Implications for future studies could help understand how employees' perceptions dictate the understanding of various leadership styles or understanding employees' perception of the meaning of good.

### **Reflections**

Obtaining a doctoral degree was always my dream and desire. I wanted to know how it felt having someone to call me doctor. Although it has taken some time to get to this point, I thank God I made it. The process was sometimes challenging, tiresome, and emotional. Although I did not know what to expect entering into this journey, giving up was never an option.

Completing this study, I gained experience in conducting research, which increased my knowledge tremendously. I learned the meaning of and conducting synthesis amongst multiple sources to create a scholarly voice. I also met wonderful staff and peers along the way gaining a higher level of community.

I believe the process was long, but eventually I realized I was further ahead than many. Waiting for feedback was mainly the most stressful portion of the study then trying to complete the required number of pages for the literature review section of the study. The waiting period to determine if I could move to the next chapter never ceased although I thought it would lessen the next time. The anxiety level never changed.

My personal views on employee engagement are engaging employees from the beginning of employment, throughout the training process, and daily. Often I see employees not willing to engage due to lack of trust, support, communication, resources, understanding, and sometimes employees' personal life. The findings from this study validated my initial thoughts and concerns about employee engagement. I continued to ensure my personal thoughts and views did not create bias with the support of member checking. The findings of the study presented strategies for business leaders in any industry could access to increase employee engagement leading to improved productivity in the workplace.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some warehouse service center managers used to engage employees to higher levels of productivity. Responses from interviews and triangulated data included member checking, direct observation, and archival data provided understanding of employee engagement in the workplace. Organizational leaders should implement strategies to promote employee engagement to influence higher levels of productivity. Three main

themes emerged from this study to include providing (a) clear and concise communication, (b) creating supportive manager-employee partnerships, and (c) benefits to include incentives. The conceptual framework for the research study was employee engagement theory. The findings indicated organizational leaders who implement these strategies have the opportunity to increase employee engagement and might affect social change by lowering voluntary and involuntary employee turnover, thus reducing unemployment within communities.

The findings from this study suggest communication is vital in every aspect of the organization, organizational leaders must lead by example to create manager-employee partnerships, and implementing programs to include incentives and additional compensation could increase employee engagement. I conclude that implementing strategies, which align with organizations' business initiatives, could increase employee engagement leading to customer satisfaction, profitability, higher level of productivity, fewer turnovers, and committed employees. The primary takeaway from this doctoral study was employees are willing to commit to the organization's vision and goal if organizational leaders acknowledge a sense of appreciation, value, and self-worth to the employees.

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