

2017

# Strategies to Improve Employee Engagement in a U.S. Federal Government Agency

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Patrick Hyde

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2017

Abstract

Strategies to Improve Employee Engagement in a U.S. Federal Government Agency

by

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MBA, University of Maryland University College, 2009

MS, University of Maryland University College, 2008

BS, George Washington University, 2006

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

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## Abstract

Nearly half of all frontline leaders in U.S. federal agencies during 2015 were unprepared to improve employee engagement. The lack of successful strategies to improve employee engagement in federal government agencies has led to decreased operational performance. Guided by the employee engagement theory as the conceptual framework, the single case study design was selected to explore the successful strategies that frontline leaders use to improve employee engagement at a federal agency in central Maryland. Data collection involved face-to-face, semistructured interviews with 4 frontline leaders and federal agency documents indicating employee engagement. The data analysis process included Yin's 5-step method and revealed 2 major themes: effective organizational communication, and enhancing employee development. Employee engagement improves if frontline leaders use strategies that involve effective organizational communication and enhancing employee development to promote open, transparent communication, teamwork, collaboration, skills development, incentives, rewards, and improved work-life balance. The implications for social change include the potential to implement successful engagement strategies in the federal agency, because employees who are more engaged generate better performance and productivity, build valuable work relationships, enhance career, and increase wages to improve the well-being and prosperity of themselves and their families. Improved performance and productivity could help to lower operating cost at the federal agency; thus, creating opportunities to reinvest savings into local community outreach programs that contribute to healthy living, well-being, and economic prosperity.

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## Dedication

The dedication of this doctoral study represents a small token of gratitude that I am offering to the loved ones who stood alongside me throughout this remarkable journey. To my beautiful wife, friend, and life skills coach, Katherine, who, without her encouragement, I might have abandoned this mission and given up on the lifelong dream to obtain my doctoral degree. I also extend the dedication to my mom, Leila, who instilled the values, discipline, and the inspiration to face difficult challenges. I would like to extend special appreciation to Zalika, Sydney, Lois, and Tina-T440 (my adopted military working dog) for the unwavering encouragements and supports during this incredible journey.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Employee engagement is a top priority for the U.S. federal government (Jin & McDonald, 2016). Federal government agencies are essential to economic development and the security of the nation. They require a highly skilled workforce to meet emerging and complex challenges (U.S. Government Accountability Office [U.S. GAO], 2015). Despite the strong argument for employee engagement in federal government agencies, implementing effective strategies for enhancing employee engagement is challenging for many federal government agency leaders (Jin & McDonald, 2016; U.S. Office of Personnel Management [U.S. OPM], 2015). Federal government agency leaders' implementation of employee engagement strategies is vital for promoting higher employee engagement and avoiding the failure to meet organizational performance objectives and public service obligations (Vigoda-Gadot, Eldor, & Schohat, 2012). Exploring the successful strategies that frontline leaders in a federal government agency use to improve engagement may help to improve organizational effectiveness and productivity, which may be beneficial to federal government agencies and the local community.

### **Background of the Problem**

Enhancing employee engagement is a top priority for federal government officials. The federal government employs the largest workforce in the nation, which composes more than 20 million employees (Naff, Riccucci, & Freyss, 2014). Improving employee engagement in the workplace is central to organizational effectiveness and productivity (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). However, because of unsuccessful

implementation of employee engagement strategies in some federal government agencies, the federal government did not achieve the critical employee engagement related outcomes (Jin & McDonald, 2016; U.S. OPM, 2015). Improving employee engagement constitutes promoting the work environment and process that directly influence employees to accomplish critical personal and organizational objectives, such as improved performance, higher productivity, and meeting customers' expectations.

### **Problem Statement**

Palguta (2015) noted a decline in federal government agency leaders' efforts to improve employee engagement. In 2015, fifty-one percent of federal government employees who participated in a study stated that their leaders failed to implement strategies aimed at increasing employee engagement (U.S. OPM, 2015). The general business problem is that federal government agencies face decreased productivity due to ineffective employee engagement strategies. The specific business problem is that some frontline leaders lack strategies to improve employee engagement.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore successful strategies that frontline leaders use to improve employee engagement in their organizations. The targeted population was composed of four frontline leaders who worked in a small federal government agency in central Maryland and used successful strategies to improve employee engagement. Federal government agency leaders might use the findings from this study to facilitate positive social change. Adopting and implementing effective employee engagement strategies may lead to enhanced

performance and productivity in meeting the needs and expectations of customers.

Furthermore, federal government agency leaders may save significant resources and use the savings to invest in the vital services and products of economic and social value to customers.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used the qualitative methodology for this study. Researchers use the qualitative method to explore and analyze processes, practices, and events related to participants' insight and experiences in the context of their everyday lives and settings (Bettis, Gambardella, Helfat, & Mitchell, 2014; Koch, Niesz, & McCarthy, 2014). Qualitative research is essential for exploring and understanding the nuances of phenomena through the viewpoint of the participants (Trainor & Graue, 2014). Qualitative researchers use a naturalistic and interpretive approach to obtain in-depth descriptions and understandings about a phenomenon occurring within participants' natural environments (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). In contrast, quantitative researchers use statistical analysis and manipulating variables to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses by focusing on the causality or relationships between dependent and the independent variables (Haegele & Hodge, 2015; Pozzebon, Rodriguez, & Petrini, 2014). Mixed-method research involves the integration of two methodologies, quantitative and qualitative, into the same study. I did not examine data or use statistical analysis in my study. Instead, I explored strategies used by frontline leaders; therefore, a qualitative method was appropriate for my study.

I used the case study design for this study. Abma and Stakes (2014) mentioned that the case study design is well suited for a rich description of an event by focusing on

the time and context of the event. Case studies allow for concentrating on real-world events and practices and gaining a thorough understanding of events and practices (Yin, 2014). The study did not include the phenomenological or ethnographic designs because neither phenomenology nor the ethnography was appropriate for the study. The phenomenological design is useful for obtaining rich nuance regarding participants lived experience with unexplored phenomena and for exploring meaning and essence of participants lived experiences (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). Exploring and uncovering participants lived experiences or making sense of the lived experiences of participants who improved employee engagement was not the focus of this study. The ethnographic design was not suitable for this study because I did not explore events of cultural importance, and an ethnographic study requires a substantial amount of time in participants' cultural setting to describe the cultural phenomena (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). The case study design was the best design for exploring strategies for improving employee engagement in the natural setting.

### **Research Question**

The research question for this study was as follows: What strategies do federal government agency frontline leaders use to improve employee engagement?

### **Interview Questions**

The following were the interview questions:

1. How do you determine the level of employee engagement?
2. What strategies do you use to improve employee engagement?

3. What engagement strategies work best to improve employee performance and productivity?
4. What engagement strategies are least effective for improving employee engagement?
5. What are the benefits of having employees who are highly engaged in their work-related roles in your agency?
6. What strategies do you use to sustain the momentum of employee engagement improvements in your agency?
7. What additional information would you like to share about the employee engagement strategies leaders use to improve employee engagement?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was the employee engagement theory. Kahn introduced the employee engagement concept in 1990 and concluded that employees invest themselves at work physically, cognitively, and emotionally to commit to work roles and organizational effectiveness. Meaningfulness, safety, and availability influence workers' personal engagement or disengagement (Kahn, 1990). The differences in personal engagement levels closely align with how employees perceive a benefit (meaningfulness) to optimizing work performance, guaranteed safety, and the availability of the necessary resources to achieve work obligations (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015; Kahn, 1990). Investing in employee engagement strategies that inspire employees to optimize job performance, creating a safe workplace, and providing relevant resources is critical to improving employee engagement in the workplace.



The employee engagement conceptual framework was important to this study. Qualitative researchers employ a conceptual framework to help focus the study and align key elements, such as the primary research question, data collection and analysis processes, and elucidation of the findings (Kumar & Antonenko, 2014). Albrecht et al. (2015) indicated that researchers and scholars had used the employee engagement conceptual framework to explore employee engagement practices that have successfully improved both employee and organizational effectiveness.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Employee disengagement:* Employees who were once high performers, withdrawing from work cognitively, physically, and emotionally (Kahn, 1990; Saunders & Tiwari, 2014).

*Employee engagement:* Level of commitment and involvement an employee gives to an organization and its values (Anitha, 2014).

*Employee performance:* Work-related outcomes and achievements of an employee (Anitha, 2014).

*Organizational commitment:* An employee's attitude toward an organization (Peng et al., 2016).

*Psychological availability:* Underlying distractions that preoccupy individuals and leave them with little or no room in which to engage in work roles (Kahn, 1990).

*Psychological meaningfulness:* Work structures that facilitate the impetus or lack of impetus to engage in work roles (Kahn, 1990).

*Psychological safety*: Drivers within social structures that foster or decrease the opportunities for people to engage (Kahn, 1990).

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

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are statements within a study established as truths without verification (Koch et al., 2014). Assumptions and beliefs shape a researcher's methodological approach (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). Two assumptions applied to this study. The first assumption was that the participants met the criteria to participate and had implemented successful strategies to improve employee engagement. The second assumption was that participants responded to the interview questions openly and honestly.

#### **Limitations**

Limitations are the weaknesses of a study beyond the control of the researcher (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013). Lack of generalizability of results was a limitation in this study. I chose the qualitative methodology and a single case study design to explore a phenomenon within a single organization; therefore, generalizability was limited beyond this specific type of organization. Furthermore, I chose a purposive sampling strategy to select frontline leaders from a targeted population within a single setting rather than using a random sampling strategy to select frontline leaders from two or more settings, which limited generalizability to other populations.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations represent the strategies researchers use to narrow the scope and boundary of a study (Svensson & Doumas, 2013). This study had two delimitations. First, rather than broadening the study's population to include all frontline leaders, I focused on frontline leaders in one agency. The data collected from the participants include specific details about the successful strategies used by frontline leaders to improve employee engagement. Second, I delimited the geographical boundary of the study to central Maryland as opposed to including frontline leaders from agencies in other states.

## **Significance of the Study**

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The contribution to business practice may include promoting investments in effective employee engagement strategies, which may improve productivity. Consistent with Kahn's (1990) conceptualization, employee engagement is central to employees' work performances and organizational outcomes. Gupta and Sharma (2016) established that improving employee engagement within the workplace helps the employee to develop the attitudes and capabilities essential for promoting organizational effectiveness and achieving higher productivity. Employees who are highly engaged in their profession will accomplish the goals of the organization, increase productivity, and meet the needs of the customers (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Investments made in the improvements of employee engagement within the workplace may maximize performance and improving productivity.

Additional contributions to business practices include federal government agency leaders using the findings to design a systematic review process to assess existing employee engagement practices. The advantage of the systemic review of existing employee engagement practices includes the ability to recognize ineffective employee engagement practices and quantifying economic costs and benefits of the practices to employees, internal processes, and customers (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). Business leaders who increased spending on employee engagement practices and employed measures to monitor the effectiveness of the practices achieved higher performance and productivity (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Furthermore, leaders who implemented effective employee engagement strategies yielded a higher overall return on investments (Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings from this study may have significant positive social change implications. Federal government leaders may use the findings to formulate the effective strategies for enhancing employee engagement within the organization. The enhancement of employee engagement may result in employees who are more productive and who foster the productivity and goal attainment, which may be instrumental to positive social change of value to the local community. Individuals in the local community might experience higher-quality services, enhanced relationships, network, and trust among employees in the federal government agency. Without effective strategies to improve employee engagement, business leaders may fail to create an engaging workforce that

enhances the financial performance and the reputation of their organizations (Besieux, Baillien, Verbeke, & Euwema, 2015; Men & Stacks, 2013).

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

In my search for relevant literature to enrich the understanding and exploration of the topic under study, I conducted an in-depth search of electronic databases of academic journals to find current, peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, books, websites, and publicly released federal government documents. Paulus, Lester, and Britt (2013) recommended searching academic databases for reliable sources rather than Internet search engines, which might produce popular articles. The search of online academic databases included EBSCOhost, Emerald Management Journal, ProQuest Central, Sage Publications, and ScienceDirect; I also searched online government databases. Keywords served to guide the database search primarily for peer-reviewed professional literature based on the purpose of the study. The search terms used to find academic and professional sources that included *employee engagement*, *work engagement*, and *U.S. federal government*. I organized the literature into three sections. The first section consists of the theory and practices of employee engagement, which is the conceptual framework for this study, where I expanded the theoretical viewpoints and contributions to the employee engagement concepts. The second section includes relevant context about the principles for improving employee engagement. In the third section, I expand the antecedents of employee engagement and the linkages to performance and productivity for both the organization and individuals. This study consists of 193 professional, academic journal articles, books, and government sources that I reviewed

for the study, of which, 179 (92.75%) are peer-reviewed sources. Furthermore, 183 (94.82%) are sources published within 5 years of my expected completion date in 2017.

## **Theories**

**Employee engagement.** Researchers, scholars, and practitioners have used many terms to describe engagement, including work engagement, job engagement, and employee engagement (Anitha, 2014; Steger, Littman-Ovadia, Miller, Menger, & Rothmann, 2013). Meyer (2013) noted the existence and availability of a plethora of theory and research that business leaders might leverage to foster higher levels of engagement in the workplace. For this study, I chose Kahn's (1990) employee engagement theory as the primary theory to ground the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework serves as a guide that structures a study and the following key elements (a) the design of a study, (b) the central research question, (c) the data collection and analysis approach, and (d) the interpretation of data (Kumar & Antonenko, 2014). Employee engagement theory originated in the 1990s by Kahn who conceptualized that employees devote, detach, or defend themselves in their work roles physically, cognitively, and emotionally (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Jose & Mampilly, 2015). Kahn's theory of employee engagement relates to how forces within organizations influence employee engagement to the extent that employees immerse themselves into their work performance in pursuit of the organizational objectives (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Kahn (1990) mentioned that meaningfulness, safety, and availability play a pivotal role in shaping employee's engagement in their work responsibilities.

Kahn's (1990) employee engagement conceptual model included the terms *personal engagement and disengagement*. Kahn (1990) concluded that employee engagement plays a crucial role in employees' personal investment in their work roles through physical involvement, cognitive awareness, and emotional connection. In contrast, disengagement influenced employees to personally disconnect and insulate themselves cognitively, physically, and emotionally from their work roles to the detriment of the organization (Kahn, 1990). Bettis et al. (2014) indicated that researchers often challenge, rebut, extend, or disprove theories, depending on their length in existence or application in research. Bettis et al. (2014) noted that building on existing theory is vital to advancing the discipline. As a departure from traditional settings, theory building includes opportunities to further the theoretical knowledge and understanding of assumptions, concepts, and relationships relevant for understanding business activities, events, and individuals (Bettis et al., 2014).

Researchers, scholars, and practitioners historically focused on engagement behaviors by employees that influenced performance outcomes (Yalabik, Popaitoon, Chowne, & Rayton, 2013). From the viewpoints of Freeney and Fellenz (2013), researchers have contributed significant focus on studying on the role job resources play in engagement behaviors. Shuck and Herd (2012) proposed that scholars, researchers, and practitioners depart from the traditional approach and not just consider engagement behaviors that influence performance outcomes but also consider how characteristics of the organization and leadership affect employee engagement practices. Specifically, the

approach in this study involves exploring employee engagement by focusing on the organizational and antecedents that foster high employee engagement in the workplace.

Fostering high employee engagement is instrumental to many achievements in diverse industries (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Medlin & Green, 2014). By taking advantage of employee engagement, business leaders create a window of opportunity to address adverse threats to their organization interests, such as sustainability, competitive advantage, human resource management, and valuable services and contributions to the population (Saunders & Tiwari, 2014). Furthermore, researchers have established that employee engagement is relevant to corporate social responsibility (CSR; Slack, Corlett, & Morris, 2015) and organizational citizenship behaviors (Soieb, Othman, & D'Silva, 2013). Slack et al. (2015) concluded that employees have different assumptions of organizational CSR and level of engagement: (a) employees who fully engage at work, (b) employees who feel that CSR lacks value, and (c) employees who have a regard for CSR engagement outside of work roles. Soieb et al. (2013) concluded disengaged employees lack organizational citizenship behaviors, which leads to frequent conflicts with leaders.

Employee engagement is an essential business strategy that draws the interest of researchers, practitioners, and scholars because it influences organizational effectiveness and is the source of employees' performance outcomes (Dagher, Chapa, & Junaid, 2015). Employee engagement is important to business leaders and employees (Steger et al., 2013). However, Shuck and Rose (2013) mentioned that practitioners often encounter challenges when implementing employee engagement as the strategy for increasing



profitability and productivity. Business leaders benefit because employees engaged in their work roles are not merely present at work, but they are investing a significant amount of self to further the interest of the organization (Shuck & Herd, 2012). Jose and Mampilly (2015) summarized that availability, meaningfulness, and safety is the primary means by which employees go beyond expectations and help push organizations toward goal achievements.

Employee disengagement has detrimental effects on organization effectiveness (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). Employees can demonstrate either passive or active disengagement, and disengagement can have a considerable negative effect on economic and psychological productivity (Kerns, 2014). Hence, the strategies leaders employ to influence and foster engagement behaviors, and attitudes at individual and collective settings are important (Kerns, 2014). Anitha (2014) concluded that employee disengagement leads to poor alignment with organizational goals, results in failure to meet performance expectations, and impedes the engagement attitudes of employees who strive for organizational excellence. Therefore, recognizing employee engagement as a strategy for improving performance necessitates implementing engagement strategies designed to inspire employees to increase work performance and productivity.

Focusing on the processes that improve employee engagement, in exchange, motivates employees to invest more into their work. Lee, Kim, and Kim (2014) and Anitha (2014) studied employee engagement in the business enterprise and shared valuable perspectives. Lee et al. conducted a study involving 12 five-star and four-star South Korean hotels and concluded that employees working in the hotels, when fully

engaged in their work role, were loyal to the internal branding and played a major role delivering and fulfilling the brand of services promised to the customers. Anitha (2014) conducted a study related to middle managers and lower-level managers from small organizations in India and revealed seven important work-related processes that supported successful employee engagement. The work-related processes were (a) the workplace, (b) leadership, (c) interpersonal relationships, (d) learning opportunities and career growth, (e) pay, (f) company guidelines, and (g) well-being (Anitha, 2014). Well-being, remuneration, interpersonal relationships, leadership, the work environment, policies and procedures, and learning opportunities and career growth led to high employee engagement (Anitha, 2014). Implicit in many of viewpoints, the employee engagement framework has practical implication for generating new knowledge germane to employee engagement, which is pivotal to designing the strategies for managing employee engagement.

### **Principles for Improving Employee Engagement**

Promoting employee engagement provides federal leaders with the essential strategies to enhance productivity. Employee engagement initiatives in the federal government are instrumental to influencing and sustaining the retention and attraction of talented employees, improving work performance, and increasing productivity through employees' individualized investment into an organization's core missions (Jin & McDonald, 2016). However, leaders' involvement in enhancing employee engagement within the federal government has fallen short of anticipated expectations (U.S. OPM, 2015). Federal government leaders are the key differentiators for the success of employee

engagement. Leaders create the environment, provide the resources that influence employee engagement and the behaviors that are essential for employees to invest in the organization, and help deliver quality products and services (Carasco-Saul, Kim, & Kim, 2015). Thus, leaders should leverage proven leadership styles to implement the employee engagement strategies that is central to maximizing employees' performance and influencing higher productivity.

**Engagement contributions to knowledge transfer and retention.** Hallmarks of effective employee engagement strategies include knowledge sharing, retention, and productivity. Institutional knowledge retention and knowledge sharing contributed to the success of the knowledge driven process and enhanced productivity (Dewah & Mutula, 2016). Implementing effective strategies for improving employee engagement is paramount to harnessing institutional knowledge retention and knowledge sharing, in turn, increases productivity. Wynen and Op de Beeck (2014) noted that institutional knowledge and knowledge sharing play vital roles in the economic and stability of the nation. Ertas (2015) indicated that federal government leaders seek to make employee engagement a priority to align business process, address the potential loss of institutional knowledge, and anticipated reduction of a talented workforce.

The significant loss of talented employees to retirement and the surge of employees born after 1980 entering the federal workforce contributed to disengagement (Ertas, 2015). As such, leaders face the challenge of attracting, training, and enhancing the engagement of the next wave of federal employees (Ertas, 2015). Overcoming the challenges of a retiring talented workforce and benefiting from a workforce with

sufficient institutional knowledge to advance the mission of the nation is essential for federal government leaders (Ertas, 2015; U.S. GAO, 2015). To improve organizational effectiveness, alleviate the problem of institutional loss of knowledge, and retain and attract talented human capital, federal government leaders have considered strengthening employee engagement practices (Ertas, 2015; U.S. GAO, 2015). Popli and Rizvi (2015) noted that organizational leaders' investment into employee engagement improves employee performance and productivity. Albrecht et al. (2015) found that employee engagement practices embedded into organizational strategies would influence employee engagement and performance outcomes through three established experiential conditions (meaningfulness, safety, and availability).

Employee engagement may serve as the potential strategy rectifying recruitment and retention. Retaining and attracting a talented workforce, and addressing the needs of a multigenerational workforce, is one of the main objectives of the federal government (Ertas, 2015) and other organizational leaders' ongoing employee engagement efforts. Mencl and Lester (2014) noted the benefits of a multigenerational workforce. The workplaces consist of workers from the baby boom generation, Generation X, and Generation Y who will continue to work alongside each other for another decade (Mencl & Lester, 2014). Among the many advantages of a multigenerational workforce are the diverse perspectives that contribute to innovative decision making and increased customer services (Mencl & Lester, 2014). In addition, the multigenerational workforce is a challenge for leaders because a multigenerational workforce requires leaders to develop and implement different human capital strategies to influence employees in ways

that benefit the organization (U.S. GAO, 2015). Addressing the challenges faced by employees in federal government agencies may contribute to improved organizational performance and efficiency (Ayers, 2015; Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget, & Varone, 2013). Although federal government officials have implemented programs to increase employee engagement, studies have revealed that many federal government agency leaders' improvements of employee engagement lacked priority and revealed employees' perceptions of leaders' inconsistency with leading effective employee engagement practices (U.S. OPM, 2015).

**Engagement extends beyond the workplace.** Work productivity increases when employee engagement leads to improvements in the quality of work life. Federal government implemented family-friendly programs that include (a) flexible work schedule, (b) dependent care programs, and (c) health-related assistance programs (Caillier, 2016). The quality of work–life strategies is uniquely positioned to foster employee engagement and improve productivity. Federal government leaders found that aligning quality work–life strategies with employee engagement were instrumental in promoting the resources for employees to perform better and in achieving high-performance organizational objectives (Ayers, 2015). Employee engagement connects employees to the organization (Saunders & Tiwari, 2014). Nayak and Sahoo (2015) contended that quality of work life plays an important role in employees' well-being and work performance, which are antecedents to employee engagement. Furthermore, Nayak and Sahoo indicated that key components that influence employees' quality of work life

include (a) work environment, (b) occupational stress, (c) opportunities for development, (d) social support, (e) compensation and rewards, and (f) work–life balance.

Work–life enrichment is paramount to employee engagement and organizational success. Thus, federal government officials have developed and implemented family-friendly policies and practices to balance work and family demands (Bae & Kim, 2016; Caillier, 2013). Compared with local, state, and nonprofit organizations, the federal government has the most family friendly policies (Kim & Mullins, 2016). To improve employee performance and balance work and personal life demands, federal government leaders promote telework (Caillier, 2013; 2016). As a family-oriented practice, telework involves federal government employees and leaders agreeing to flexible work, job share, or compressed work week while maximizing employees' productivity and continue to meet the demands of the organization. Tims, Bakker, Derks, and Rhenen (2013) referred to *telework* as an agreement between employees and leaders as an employee engagement strategy to accommodate individual needs, skills, and preferences on the job, an important approach to consider when designing employee engagement strategy.

Some business leaders implement telework to improve work–life balance, which fosters an engaging work environment and increased productivity. By offering employees the opportunity to telework, which in turn, improve employee engagement levels, leaders increase retention, productivity, and performance (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Caillier (2013, 2016) studied telework and found no decrease in turnover intention when employees teleworked. The findings revealed similarities in the turnover intentions of both teleworkers and nonteleworkers, which is instrumental to employee engagement,

productivity, and performance in the federal government (Caillier, 2013, 2016). Despite these findings, Caillier offered that federal government agency leaders to continue telework practices because of the benefits, which include reduced overhead expenses, reduced travel costs, increased work–life balance, and improved recruitment.

Communication influences work–life enrichment and employee engagement.

When discussing telework, Caillier (2013) mentioned that effective communication and advanced communication technologies are important sources to geographically dispersed federal government employees who are collaborating with individuals and teams across different agencies. Hart (2016) conducted a case study to explore the influence of management communication behaviors on employees. Hart recruited and conducted semistructured interviews with 11 managers and 12 nonmanagerial employees who work in the local government. Hart bounded the study to local government offices located in Tidewater, Virginia. Hart’s research question was: What communication behaviors do managers use with their employees to improve employee engagement and productivity? Hart revealed four important findings. First, communication between managers and employees that involved openness, transparency, and respect improved employee engagement (Hart, 2016). Second, positive communication among managers and employees improved employee engagement (Hart, 2016). Third, favorable exchanges among managers and employees contributed to increased engagement and productivity (Hart, 2016). Fourth, Hart found that the lack of communication among managers and employees weakened employee engagement, in turn, weakened productivity. Hart’s findings was consistent with the findings and recommendations proposed by Jiang and

Men (2015). Organizational leaders who promote a transparent climate influence employee engagement through the free flow of information and providing wholesome, substantive, and vital information on time to employees (Jiang & Men, 2015). Furthermore, promoting open and honest feedback, regardless of whether the feedback involves commendation, criticism, or complaints, improves employee engagement and organizational success (Jiang & Men, 2015).

**Leaders promote employee engagement.** Leaders promote and enhance engagement that benefits organizational productivity and profitability (Shuck & Herd, 2012). By adopting key employee engagement strategies, federal government agency leaders might increase the performance of employees, teamwork and communication among employees, and productivity of organizations (Jin & McDonald, 2016). Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014) noted that employees intensely engaged in their work performance contribute to a high-performance organization. *High-performance working organizations* refer to organizations in which leaders employ wide-ranging integrated human resources strategies to help shape the performance effectiveness and efficiency of the organization (Giauque et al., 2013; Robineau, Ohana, & Swaton, 2015).

The findings from the literature review revealed that leadership characteristics are essential to employee engagement. Leadership styles that empower employees and influence the perception of a positive organizational reputation improve employee engagement (Men & Stacks, 2013). Creating and fostering the employee engagement culture will require leaders to contribute significant attention to work conditions that are reassuring to employees and promote work structures appropriate for the physical,



cognitive, and emotional enablers of employee engagement (Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014). Other findings from the literature review showed that identifying meaningful work as a strategy for employee engagement (Munn, 2013). These studies support Kahn's (1990) viewpoint that employees' interpretation of the meaningfulness of work is integral to the workers' engagement and contribution to broader personal and organizational outcomes.

Leaders are responsible for stimulating and inspiring followers to obtain goals, thus providing employees with clearly articulated roles and responsibilities within an organization and alignment between employee goals and organizational goals (Steger et al., 2013). Meaningful work promotes higher employee engagement (Shuck & Herd, 2012). Employees need meaningful work to increase the intensity of their engagement, which increase productivity (Steger et al., 2013). Meaningful work instills a sense of purpose and a driving force to contribute to the greater good, which are principles of employee engagement (Steger et al., 2013).

Leaders contribute in many ways to improving employee engagement. Leaders promote and maintain an engaging workforce (Zhang, Avery, Bergsteiner, & More, 2014a, 2014b). Kopperud, Martinsen, and Humborstad (2014) indicated that transformational leaders increase employee engagement by effectively communicating the organizational vision, encouraging knowledge sharing, and outlining the purpose of work. Leadership's influence over employees' contribution to the decision-making process and autonomy and control over work-related processes increases their willingness to engage in their work roles (Kopperud et al., 2014). Kumar and Sia (2012) recognized

that leaders who have adopted a fully integrated feedback strategy help to build a foundation to improve engagement. Lack of communication, particularly not sharing feedback about work performance, contributes to employee disengagement (Kumar & Sia, 2012). Albrecht et al. (2015) conducted a comprehensive review of literature about employee engagement and noted that intervention strategies, such as training and development were instrumental in building the skills to foster employee engagement. The interventions might involve training that includes aspects of the transformational leadership style and emphasizing individual consideration and intellectual stimulation to enable engagement and job performance (Albrecht et al., 2015).

### **Antecedents of Employee Engagement**

Focusing on the antecedents of employee engagement, organizational leaders may design effective strategies to enhance engagement, which eventually enhances employee engagement and organizational productivity. Shuck and Herd (2012) asserted that promoting employee engagement within a rapidly changing workplace is the best strategy for addressing important conditions within the boundaries of the workplace. Brunetto et al. (2013) conducted a study about nurses' engagement and identified organizational support, supervisor–subordinate relationship, well-being, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions as consequences of engagement that affected the engagement of nurses. Rana, Ardichvili, and Tkachenko (2014) indicated that creating an environment that improves employee engagement would involve facilitating meaningful jobs, promoting positive supervisor–cohort relationships, supporting a positive work environment, and applying resourceful personnel management practices. Kahn (1990)

posited that meaningful work is the main driver of employee engagement through increased job satisfaction, job commitment, and life satisfaction.

Employees who perceive that leaders encourage activities and opportunities in the workplace for enriching employees' lives will experience a higher quality of work life and therefore increase activities related to higher performance and productivity (Ahmad, 2013). Employee engagement increases when leaders fulfill employees' basic needs and social supports and minimize threats to health, safety, and well-being (Ahmad, 2013; Nayak & Sahoo, 2015). In contrast, organizational stressors adversely affect well-being, the capacity to work, and job satisfaction (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). Employee engagement is higher when organizational stressors are lower (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). Exploring the strategies that foster a pleasant work environment helps to increase employees' loyalty and quality of work life (Nayak & Sahoo, 2015). Promoting stronger psychological workplace climates, personal accomplishments, and well-being contributes to increased employee engagement, productivity, and effectiveness (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Cahill, McNamara, Pitt-Catsouphes, and Valcour (2015) explained that work-life balance and job satisfaction influence employee engagement and economic well-being, which is essential for promoting organizational effectiveness and improving productivity.

Workplace conditions, job demands, and job resources play a significant role in employee engagement (Albrecht et al., 2015). Likewise, Meyer (2013) asserted that employee empowerment, work designs, and leadership are key drivers of engagement. Employee engagement strategies aligned to management practices explicitly linked to the workplace environment can promote higher employee engagement and organizational

performance (Albrecht et al., 2015; Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013). Shuck and Herd (2012) explained that workplaces could negatively influence employee engagement and create conditions that are detrimental to an organization. Therefore, the strategies for improving employee engagement must have a strategic focus to optimize the workplace environment.

Consistent with Kahn's (1990) employee engagement theory, Whiteoak and Mohamed (2016) explored the nature of health and safety in the workplace and concluded that health and safety contribute to employee engagement or disengagement. Sahni and Kumar (2012) found that environmental conditions lower employees' physical health and thus drive down employee engagement. Poor health combined with an unsafe workplace causes inattention and a lack of focus, which leads to negative implications, such as the inability to retain skilled employees, truancies, and lack of interest and support for organizational goals (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). Other adverse effects include customers exhibiting skepticism, reduction in organizational reputation and image, failure to meet deadlines, and high rates of work-related incidents (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). Leadership assessment and providing employees with supportive conditions for developing a healthy workplace climate ensure high levels of employee engagement across the organization, as well as systems and structures for fostering effective performances (Sahni & Kumar, 2012).

**Communication.** Communication is integral to employee engagement and work performance. Leaders and communication play a crucial role in employee engagement (Men & Hung-Baesecke, 2015). High employee engagement stimulates employees to

contribute to organizational objectives through interactions and upward and horizontal communications. Therefore, leaders' effect on minimizing communication and collaboration challenges can influence employee engagement (Men & Hung-Baesecke, 2015). Mikkelsen, York, and Arritola (2015) noted that employees accomplish work goals through communication, and leaders' communication attributes can have important implications for employee outcomes and organizational productivity. Men and Hung-Baesecke (2015) mentioned that employees often lack information because of poor internal communication. As such, leaders should foster a communication climate in which employees strive to offer feedbacks, participate in decisions, and interact with leaders, which matches closely with Kahn's (1990) employee engagement framework.

Choi (2015) noted that leaders would benefit from the strategies that facilitate the promotion of interprofessional relationships and knowledge sharing, which are essential for enhancing employee engagement behaviors. Leaders' proactive support of interpersonal collaborations and information exchange among employees increases employee engagement (Aragón-Correa, Martín-Tapia, & Hurtado-Torres, 2013). Mikkelsen et al. (2015) concluded that because leadership's communication attributes and leadership styles have significant consequences on work relationships and employee outcomes, the training and development of leaders' communication characteristics are critical. Additionally, Men and Hung-Baesecke (2015) indicated that direct communication and social networking are necessary to create clear and trustworthy interpersonal communication, which is important to employee engagement.

Jiang & Men (2015) noted that communication is essential to employee engagement because employees use communication to make sense of their roles in an organization. The selection of effective communication strategies and platforms is critical to delivering and receiving information (Foote, 2013). Men and Hung-Baesecke (2015) suggested that leaders capitalize on social media as the internal communication channel to increase organizational transparency and authenticity and foster employees' ability to communicate openly and frankly. Ayers (2015) indicated that organizational processes, structure, leadership, management, and communication are vital to employees' performance outcomes and the achievement of organizational objectives. Poorly implemented information mediums facilitate the flow of misleading information or incomplete messaging within an organization (Foote, 2013). In contrast, leaders who incorporate an effective communication medium within an organization contribute to the effectiveness of organizational communication, thereby improving engagement behaviors, and reducing negative engagement performance implications (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014).

Mishra et al. (2014) found that 50% of executives made communication part of the employee engagement priorities in their organizations. Also, Mishra et al. noted that researchers are pushing leaders to integrate innovative internal and external communication resources in organizations to enhance the consistency of the dissemination of organizational messages. By improving employee engagement, employees are in a better position to align with the organizational mission and vision (Mishra et al., 2014). Leaders who focus on the different range of communication

strategies improve trust, company brand, and image and increase employee engagement (Mishra et al., 2014). As leaders improve their communication, employee engagement will improve (Mishra et al., 2014).

Kodish (2014) studied how the link between trust and communication encouraged positive organizational outcomes and concluded that communication was critical for building trust and maintaining trust at the organizational level and the interpersonal level. Investments into effective communication best practices and using innovative communication tools, such as social media might increase employee engagement (Kodish, 2014). By promoting effective communication through employee engagement strategies, leaders strengthened trust, connections, and interactions among coworkers (Kodish, 2014). This means that leaders develop effective organizational communication structures that support improvement in employee engagement, which is necessary for employees to foster values, beliefs, organizational expectations, and interpersonal collaborations.

**Workplace meeting.** Meetings are a noteworthy factor in employee engagement because organizational meetings are work-related activities used to communicate important job functions (Men & Hung-Baesecke, 2015). Different scenarios of formal communications include regular group meetings, job-related meetings, and meetings between employees (Chen, Gable, & Hu, 2013). Mishra et al. (2014) indicated that prioritizing organizational meetings is important for increasing employee engagement and organizational performance outcomes. Allen and Rogelberg (2013) noted that the relevance of a meeting and meeting time directly influenced employee engagement.

Opportunities to improve employee engagement include better use of meeting schedules, adhering to the start and end times of meetings, which is extremely useful for interpersonal collaborations and time for employees to focus on other work activities (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013). Furthermore, Allen and Rogelberg concluded that effective time management of meetings and respecting work time increase psychological availability. Allen and Rogelberg confirmed that what Kahn (1990) concluded is important for employee engagement: workplace gatherings, particularly meetings, allow employees to find meaningfulness in interactions with leaders and coworkers. Meaningful interactions foster the feeling of being worthwhile and respected within an organization (Kahn, 1990). Limited interpersonal interactions in the workplace will diminish the meaningfulness of work, which lowers employee engagement (Kahn, 1990). A practical strategy for promoting the meaningfulness of work might include leveraging important meetings to facilitate connections and interpersonal relationships between colleagues (Mishra et al., 2014).

**Employee voice.** Rees, Alfes, and Gatenby (2013) noted employee engagement occurs through fostering employees' voice and upward communication in the workplace. Employee voice is integral to employees' perception of leaders valuing employees' freedom to speak and therefore contribute to improvements in the organization (Rees et al., 2013). Leaders foster openness and help to promote employees' voice to reduce the feeling of a threatening work environment (Godkin, 2015; Kahn, 1990). Fearon, McLaughlin, and Morris (2013) emphasized that having the freedom to voice concern about events in the workplace is the catalyst for creating a safe and productive work



environment. Additionally, leaders who promote openness during organizational meetings and who allow employees to speak up about work-related issues help to increase engagement in work activities (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013). In contrast, Deter, Burris, Harrison, and Martin (2013) found that some employees resent speaking because the action is potentially career limiting. For instance, employees who speak out about problems within the organization or recommend changes may experience career or social consequences (Deter et al., 2013). The situations described by Deter et al. juxtapose with employee engagement theorists' viewpoint that ambiguous, erratic, and threatening circumstances make any hopes of enhancing employee engagement dangerous. Employee voice is critical to promoting the flow of ideas, which is important for employees to increase their work engagement (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013). Many communication factors can affect employees' perception of their value and contribution to an organization, but encouraging the freedom to speak benefits leaders' ability to enhance engaging attitudes in the workplace (Rees et al., 2013).

**Linking goals with employee engagement.** Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) found a significant link between organizational goal alignment, employee performance outcomes, and employee engagement behaviors. Leaders who successfully align individuals' performance goals with the organizational goals benefit from actively engaged employees and the achievements of broader organizational goals (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Ayers (2013, 2015) defined goal alignment as linking individual purpose and goals with the organizational mission and goals. Likewise, Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) posited that organizational alignment influenced how leaders effectively create the workplace

structures and implement practices that allow for the achievement of larger goals. Ayers (2013) stressed that work and performance goals should both align with the strategic goals of the organizations, and employees are responsible for the achievements of those goals. Altogether, aligning organizational goals with the implementation of effective employee engagement strategies provides an opportunity for influence performance and creating more effective and efficient productive processes.

The performance appraisal serves as the means of communicating the importance of the strategic goals and appraising and measuring employees' goal outcomes (Ayers, 2015). Poor performance appraisals lead employees to lack knowledge of whether they meet or fail to meet expectations (Jin & McDonald, 2016). The performance appraisal process can affect communication between leaders and the extent to which employees engage toward the interest of the organization (Deepa, Palaniswamy, & Kuppusamy, 2014). Son and Kim (2015) studied employees' willingness to accept performance appraisals based on the credibility of the source (leadership), which ultimately shapes the attitude of employees and their engagement in open communication and organizational outcomes. Son and Kim found that leadership influenced higher levels of employee engagement in the organization when employees perceived the source of the feedback was credible.

Leaders and employees participate in face-to-face interactions to discuss important work-related issues, such as job performance, pay raises, recognition for contributions to high-quality products and services, personal strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities to address growth and development (Harrington & Lee, 2015; Kim &

Holzer, 2016). The performance appraisal process creates an opportunity for leaders and employees to build trust (Harrington & Lee, 2015; Kim & Holzer, 2016). The performance appraisal process might adversely affect employees' perceptions, which redirects their performance and commitment to the organization (Harrington & Lee, 2015; Kim & Holzer, 2016). A central premise, considering the viewpoints of the employee is critical to the performance appraisal processes, which in turn, initiate the necessary behaviors for employees to engage in their work activities.

**Organizational support influences engagement behaviors.** Organizational supports must exist in an organization for employee engagement to improve throughout the organization. Managing POS is critical to achieving key employee engagement goals and objectives (Lamm, Tosti-Kharas, & King, 2015). Perceived organizational support denotes employees' belief that leaders value their contributions and effect on organizational outcome; therefore, leaders willingly provide valuable resources that promote positive behavior (Ahmed, Nawaz, Ali, & Islam, 2015). Ahmed et al. (2015) found that POS affects work-related outcomes, including employee engagement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover. Brunetto et al. (2013) studied the effect of workplace relationships, including POS, supervisor–nurse relationships, and teamwork on engagement, well-being, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. The participants in the study were nurses working in Australian and U.S. hospitals (Brunetto et al., 2013). Brunetto et al. concluded that POS affected employees' engagement, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions.

Leaders have a direct role in providing the continuous support system that is core to employee engagement (Naujokaitiene, Tereseviciene, Zydziunaite, 2015). Ahmed, Wan Ismail, and Mohamad Amin (2014) noted that leaders have the most significant effect on employees' POS. Employees who positively perceive organization support are likely to feel valued, safe at work, healthy, and higher levels of organization trust and organizational commitment (Ahmed et al., 2014). In contrast, work-related behaviors, such as disengagement and the intention to quit are results of the lack of POS and engagement (Ahmed et al., 2014). Wai Lam, Liu, and Loi (2016) indicated that POS might serve as the intraorganizational distinctiveness marker for employees. Practices that stimulate employees' POS can shape employees' workplace behaviors and attitudes (Wai Lam et al., 2016). Furthermore, POS influenced extra-role behaviors via another mechanism associated with affective commitment (Wai Lam et al., 2016). Leaders should recognize that fostering a positive perception creates an opportunity to increase employee engagement when employees perceive that work-related rewards are commensurate with the extra tasks performed (Wai Lam et al., 2016).

**Organizational learning.** Other avenues for enhancing employee engagement include facilitating learning needs and providing the tools for professional development and career growth (Custer, 2013). Idris, Dollard, and Tuckey (2015) conducted a study to examine how learning opportunities contribute to employee engagement. The participants in the study were employees who worked in the Malaysian private and public sector. Idris et al. found that leaders who helped employees harness learning opportunities improved employee engagement and job performance. Idris et al. (2015) noted that leaders build

policies and strategies around key issues that hinder the availability of learning opportunities in the workplace. Furthermore, Bernadette van Rijn, Yang, and Sanders (2013) found that organizational learning corresponds with career motivation, which positively influences employee engagement. Employees who believe that learning is an opportunity to further career goals will aggressively partake in all organizational learning activities and thus have a significant effect on employee engagement (Bernadette van Rijn et al., 2013).

**Organizational vision.** Enhancing the meaningfulness aspect of employee engagement often occurs through relevant and convincing organizational vision (Taylor, Cornelius, & Colvin, 2014). The organizational vision, in addition to the mission, helps to determine the organizational strategy (Nurcahyo, Wibowo, & Putra, 2015). Leadership plays a significant role in translating the direction and purpose of an organization through aligning employee engagement strategies (Boyatzis, Rochford, & Taylor, 2015). Employees who understand the organizational vision will contribute to the success of the organization through knowledge, capabilities, and competencies (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Kahn (1990) noted that having a clear delineation of work purpose and a vision of the organization helps to create meaningful experiences at work. Nurcahyo et al. (2015) and Ryu (2015) found that the lack of understanding of the vision is a failure of leadership to translate the organizational vision and mission. Efforts to improve employee engagement include communicating the organizational vision and mission, which helps to guide employees' understanding of the vision and mission, thus empowering

employees to act (Taylor et al., 2014). Likewise, placing priority on the vision during challenging times contributes to goal achievement (Taylor et al., 2014).

**Culture and value can influence engagement outcomes.** Organizational leaders create the capacity for improving employee engagement by developing positive organizational culture and value (Ortega-Parra & Sastre-Castillo, 2013). Organizational culture represents one of many objectives that leaders leverage to influence both positive employee performance and organizational performance (Lukic, Dzamic, Knezevic, Alcakovic, & Boskovic, 2014; Northouse, 2013). Ortega-Parra and Sastre-Castillo (2013) concluded that culture is a suitable strategy for improving organizational commitment, and the alignment between perceived values and stated organizational values helps to influence employees' commitment to organizational values. Lukic et al. (2014) posited that members associated with an organization and linked to the cultural environment embrace similar beliefs and values that emanate from the local environment. Lukic et al. (2014) mentioned that the strength and weakness of organizational culture directly affect employees' behaviors and concluded that despite all organizations having a culture, not all organizational cultures produce the same effect on employees' behaviors.

**Promoting well-being improves employee engagement levels.** Business leaders are promoting well-being as a strategy for enhancing employee engagement levels. Jiang and Men (2015) asserted that well-being and work–life enrichment are important for employee engagement and organizational performance. Disengagement ensues when employees face situations that negatively affect their ability to devote personal physical, cognitive, and emotional resources to achieve critical work roles (Kahn, 1990). For this

reason, leaders have integrated work–life and personal-life practices in their strategies to enhance employee engagement (Jiang & Men, 2015). Leaders play a significant role in improving employees' well-being (Ahmed, Reaburn, Samad, & Davis, 2015). Boxall and Macky (2014) conducted a study of the effect on well-being influenced by involvement in work processes and an increase in the intensity of work. Boxall and Macky found that work involvement through improvements to autonomy, communication, performance reward, and professional development fostered higher job satisfaction and greater well-being. In contrast, employees reported poor outcomes influenced by a lack of job satisfaction, fatigue, job stress, and poor work–life balance (Boxall & Macky, 2014). Employee engagement activities include enhancing the workplace environment by strengthening the supports for the well-being of employees and opting for the strategies that improve well-being (Boxall & Macky, 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Most important, the support for well-being is critical for employee engagement (Shuck & Reio, 2014).

**Work–life balance.** Work–life balance promotes employee engagement (Pradhan, Jena, & Kumari, 2016). Work is valuable and represents the essential activities of daily life (Ahmad, 2013). Moreover, working individuals contribute approximately 30% of their everyday lives to the functions of work (Ahmad, 2013). Leaders who implement the appropriate work–life balance measures could enhance the enrichment of employees' work life, which is essential for improving employee engagement and achieving organizational goals (Jiang & Men, 2015). The concept of work–life balance encompasses broad spectrums and has implications for employees, employers, and society (Munn, 2013). Jiang and Men (2015) defined work–life balance as involvement in

work roles that allows employees to acquire a positive emotional state that is beneficial to life outside of work.

In addition to workplace challenges, related factors outside the workplace exert influence on how employees engage in their work roles (Jiang & Men, 2015).

Furthermore, Rothmann and Baumann (2014) noted integrated interventions that help to reduce distractions at home and simultaneously increase the focus to create a positive work environment might affect employees' level of engagement. Because of the effect of employees' work-life balance occurs when employees are both at work, and away from work, it is vital that leaders gain an in-depth understanding of the work-life balance practices that are valuable to the employees and better position employees to engage in their job roles.

Jin and McDonald (2016) mentioned several programs, practices, and policies that have accounted for employees' work-life balance that are all central to promoting employee engagement. These strategies address several situations that contribute to poor work-life balance. Ahmad (2013) reviewed prior studies and uncovered many organizations whose leaders pursued programs that facilitated improvements in employee work-life and adequately supported higher levels of employee engagement. The strategies implemented fostered improvement in areas that affected work life: (a) health and safety, (b) job security, (c) job satisfaction, (d) work-related stressors, (e) the workplace, (f) work-life balance, and (g) human-related factors (Ahmad, 2013). The quality of work-life influences multiple important factors that help employees to engage, such as the physical, social, psychological, and environmental aspects of the employees



(Nayak & Sahoo, 2015). Designing and implementing practical and relevant work–life strategies exclusive to employee engagement might foster the meaningfulness employees’ need to achieve work–life balance (Munn, 2013).

**Health and safety are essential to engagement.** Health complaints and unsafe workplaces limit employees’ ability to find meaningfulness in work, thus enhancing employee engagement more challenging (Anitha, 2014). Employees need the mental and physical resources to perform and achieve work goals, and a negative effect on an employee’s health leads to disengagement in work-role performance (Garrick et al., 2014). The health and safety of employees relate closely to organizational designs that promote safety and reduce the adverse effects of occupational injuries and illnesses in the workplace (Kim, 2014). Employee engagement increases with the implementation of fundamental workplace health and safety measures (Kumar & Sia, 2012; Whiteoak & Mohamed, 2016). Leaders who are supportive of employees’ health and safety needs will positively enhance employees’ connection with the job and the organization, which will enhance employee engagement (Idris et al., 2015). Given the relevance of health and safety influences on employee engagement and the detrimental effects on employee and organizational performance, leaders must prioritize and refine their practices to mitigate work-related injuries and illnesses and cultivate the efforts needed to enhance employee engagement (Kim, 2014; Ong & Jeyaraj, 2014). Adopting effective workplace safety practices reduces adverse safety outcomes and improves performance in the workplace, which helps to stimulate higher employee engagement (Kim, 2014; Zaeimdar et al., 2013).

Maintaining a healthier workforce and a safer workplace provides significant benefit for employees to achieve higher levels of engagement (Munn, 2013). Hon, Hinze, and Chan (2014) asserted that safety is the responsibility of everyone. Efforts to foster a safe and healthy workplace require the participation and input of the entire workforce (Hon et al., 2014). Hon et al. recommended formulating safety measures that cover all levels of an organization. Contributing to a healthy and safe workplace will help employees to accrue the physical, cognitive, and emotional strength to perform their work roles and create positive influences on work productivity and profitability (Munn, 2013).

**Job security.** Ensuring job security is essential to keeping worker engaged. Employees assess their job security within an organization, and the greater the job security, the higher their psychological availability, which is a vital component of employee engagement (Kahn, 1990). Consistent with Kahn's (1990) argument, distractions within the workplace drain the energy that employees need to invest themselves in their work roles. Job security involves efforts to provide endless and secured job choices to employees, who are the most important organizational resources in light of emerging changes occurring throughout all business sectors (Ahmad, 2013). Furthermore, job security in the workplace is central to employees' innovativeness and work-level engagement (De Spiegelaere, Van Gyes, De Witte, Niesen, & Van Hootegem, 2014). Ahmad highlighted the changes in the employment landscape that significantly affected job security, including workforce downsizing, layoffs, mergers, and acquisitions. Albdour and Altarawneh (2014) opined that employee engagement and employee organizational commitment are vital factors to organizational leaders facing global

challenges. Albdour and Altarawneh (2014) uncovered six initiatives that leaders had used to address job security and foster positive employee engagement: (a) sustainable workload, (b) autonomy, (c) positive recognition and reward, (d) POS, (e) organizational justice, and (f) meaningful work.

**Job satisfaction.** Job satisfaction is a strategic advantage for improving employee engagement. Kumar and Sia (2012) found that job satisfaction is integral to employee engagement and goal achievement. Likewise, Kumar and Sia found that when employees seek a meaningful work environment but experience a lack of cohesiveness among fellow employees and antagonistic and unsupportive leadership, then employee engagement decreases. Engagement is the foundation upon which employees build empowerment and devotion to further their goals (Kumar & Sia, 2012). Karanika-Murray, Duncan, Pontes, and Griffiths (2015) found that by enhancing engagement, employees developed a sense of belonging to the organization, therefore increasing their job satisfaction. Hence, building the resources for empowerment and dedication will facilitate the appropriate attitudes for engagement. Steger et al. (2013) suggested fostering employee engagement should facilitate meaningful work and job satisfaction, thus creating the cornerstone for employees to embody organizational efforts and contribute to positive social change.

**Occupational stress.** As shown in the literature review, there are benefits to reducing occupational stress. Improvements to employee engagement result from acknowledging and responding to stress in the workplace, ensuring job enrichment, encouraging supports from all levels of the workforce, and eliminating stress from the workplace (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015). Occupational stress suppresses employees' ability

to thrive in the public service environment (Liu, Yang, & Yu, 2015). Occupational stress caused by overwork negatively affects employees' work performance (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). Leaders might enhance employee engagement by reducing occupational stress and encourage higher work-role participation. People try to find meaningfulness in their work, and stress in the workplace will diminish how employee's personal engagement in their work activities (Allan, Douglass, Duffy, & McCarty, 2016). Nayak and Sahoo (2015) mentioned that occupational stress is a state of imbalance within dimensions that link people to the environment, which affects the stability of well-being. Thus, leaders aiming to enhance employee engagement should encourage situations that reduce stress at work and promote a positive sense of meaningfulness at work (Pandey & David, 2013). Ahmad (2013) emphasized the need for leaders to focus on stress reduction initiatives to improve employees' quality of work-life. Nayak and Sahoo mentioned that reducing occupational stress improved performance and the quality of work-life.

In summary, the key to enhancing employee engagement includes leaders understanding the workplace environment and the personal resources and opportunities employees need to engage in their work performance and become productive, which is imperative for organizations to achieve maximum performance and effectiveness (Pandey & David, 2013). Furthermore, leaders drive different workplace environments and leadership styles based on how they implement, foster, and sustain employee engagement (Pandey & David, 2013). Therefore, leaders must scan the workplace landscape and learn which leadership styles are drivers or barriers to improving engagement and which decrease engagement enhancement in the organization.

## **Transition**

In Section 1, I introduced the background and problem of the study. Section 1 consisted of the problem statement, which included both the general and the specific problem. Furthermore, Section 1 included the purpose of the study, the nature of the study, and the theory underpinning the conceptual framework. Following the conceptual framework, Section 1 included the definition of key terms; the potential contributions of the study to business practice and positive social change; and the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. The remainder of Section 1 included the synthesis of the literature review. Section 1 concluded with the literature review and a synthesis of professional, peer-reviewed sources relevant to employee engagement.

Section 2 consists of the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher and a comprehensive description of my role as the primary research instrument in this study, the ethical procedures, the steps for selecting the participants and promoting the relationship for gaining trust, and a description of the process selected to collect rich, in-depth information. In Section 2, I will discuss the methodology and design appropriate for the study. The remainder of Section 2 will consist of the data collection techniques, data organization techniques, and data analysis. Furthermore, Section 2 will include detailed explanations of the strategies for ensuring the dependability, credibility, confirmability, transferability, and data saturation. Section 3 will begin with the purpose statement and include the findings from the study, the application to professional practice, the implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for future research, and reflections.

## Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I restate the purpose of the study and address my role as the researcher when participating in a qualitative study. Section 2 includes the criteria for selecting the appropriate participants that align with the research question. Also in Section 2, I provide detailed information about the (a) research method and design, (b) population and sampling, (c) steps to protect right and well-being of human research participant, (d) data collection instruments, (e) data collection techniques, (f) data organization techniques, (g) data analysis, and (h) strategies for ensuring and reliability and validity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore successful strategies that frontline leaders use to improve employee engagement in their organizations. The targeted population was composed of four frontline leaders who worked in a small federal government agency in central Maryland and used successful strategies to improve employee engagement. Federal government agency leaders might use the findings from this study to facilitate positive social change. Adopting and implementing effective employee engagement strategies may lead to enhanced performance and productivity in meeting the needs and expectations of customers. Furthermore, federal government agency leaders may save significant resources and use the savings to invest in the vital services and products of economic and social value to customers.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role in the data collection process includes collecting, organizing, analyzing, interpreting the data, and reporting reliable and valid findings. The role of the researcher in the data collection process is to recognize bias and to prevent bias from occurring during the data collection process, which is central to ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative studies (Koch et al., 2014). Roulston and Shelton (2015) contended that qualitative researchers should acquire a better understanding of the problematic issues that may undermine the trustworthiness of the study and explain the strategy for overcoming the bias and threats to trustworthiness. Therefore, I described relevant strategies considered for mitigating bias and ensuring the trustworthiness of this study.

My relationship with the topic, participants, and research related to my interest in a doctor of business administration with a specialization in health care management and the desire to explore how leaders influence the activities of their organizations to increase workforce and organization productivity and effectiveness. Disclosing the stated goal and relationships with the prospective setting and participants is fundamental to minimizing bias and increasing trustworthiness (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). I have a limited business relationship with the targeted setting. I work in the federal government agency as a government contractor; however, conducting this study is not part of my role. Unluer (2012) noted the disadvantages and advantages of having insider knowledge about the research topic. The disadvantage of having insider knowledge includes potentially jeopardizing the objectivity of the study (Unluer, 2012). The advantage of insider knowledge is the ability to understand the inner workings of an institution and hierarchy

(Unluer, 2012). Careful consideration of personal bias during data collection and analysis and abiding by ethical principles are ways to eliminate bias and ethical concerns (Unluer, 2012). Despite my insider knowledge, I maintained an outsider perspective throughout the study, which is essential to mitigating bias and promoting the viewpoints of the participants.

To generate knowledge through rigorous research, qualitative researchers must uphold and comply with ethical principles and guidelines (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012; Yin, 2014). Complying with ethical guidelines includes demonstrating beneficence by protecting participants from harm and deception, protecting participants' confidentiality, demonstrating respect for individuals by obtaining informed consent from each participant, and demonstrating justice by confirming the equitable selection of participants (Yin, 2014). Therefore, as the researcher in this qualitative case study, I followed the principles and standards outlined in the Belmont Report and ensured the rights, dignity, confidentiality, safety, and health of the participants.

I mitigated bias by supporting the findings with compelling evidence and suppressing potential bias. Roulston and Shelton (2015) contended that qualitative researchers should acquire a better understanding of the problematic issues that may undermine the trustworthiness of the study and explain the strategy for overcoming the bias and threats to trustworthiness. Yin (2014) proposed giving way to conflicting evidence as the means to test a researcher's tolerance to bias. Because a researcher's background might affect a study, qualitative researchers frequently implement a strategy to prevent bias from affecting the research topic, population, and reporting of the data



(Turner & Norwood, 2013). Tarozzi (2013) noted that researchers must be neutral and ethically disconnected from their participants. Neutrality is challenging to qualitative researchers because presuppositions and experiences shape the research topic a researcher chooses to explore (Tarozzi, 2013).

The rationale for using an interview protocol includes guiding the interview process (Koch et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). The interview protocol is essential for improving the credibility of the findings and ensures the data accurately represent the real-world context of a study's participants (Yin, 2014). The proper use of an interview protocol helps to address the concern for bias by ensuring the interview questions include no bias and the findings accurately represent the real-world context and experiences of the study's participants (Yin, 2014). The process for data collection includes compiling data through semistructured interviews using the interview protocol. Therefore, to gain holistic accounts and detailed descriptions of successful employee engagement strategies, I interviewed each participant using the same interview protocol as indicated in Appendix A. Moreover, participants had the opportunity to member-check the interpretation of the data to ensure I capture participants' accounts of the events accurately. Member checking was the strategy to further increase the reliability and validity of the interviews through participants' careful review of the summarized interpretation of the data.

### **Participants**

The participants for this qualitative single case study were four frontline leaders who work in a federal government agency in central Maryland. Selecting unsuitable participants for qualitative data collection leads to unreliable data and weak results and

negatively affects the validity (Dasgupta, 2015; Koch et al., 2014). The criteria for choosing the participants who can best answer the research question include (a) in a frontline leader position, and (b) have used successful strategies to improve employee engagement in their agency.

I began recruiting the participants and collecting the data after the Institutional Review Board (IRB) had reviewed and approved the proposal. Gatekeepers often control access to research participants and influence participants' choices to participate in research (Boggiano, Harris, & Nguyen, 2015; Oye, Sorenson, & Glasdam, 2016). Hall (2014) recommended providing gatekeepers with a comprehensive explanation regarding the purpose of the study, the measures selected to avoid ethical dilemmas, a copy of the interview questions, and the importance of participants to the study and business practice. To access the participants for this study, I telephoned an executive leader within the federal government agency in central Maryland. I explained the purpose and nature of the study, (b) the steps to protect confidentiality, (c) the data collection method, and (d) the length of the interviews. The executive leader agreed to approve and signed the letter of cooperation before the approval of the Walden University IRB. The executive leader agreed to initially determine the names of potential participants based on their positions within the agency and knowledge about the research topic and send out the invitation letter (Appendix B) to the potential participants.

Fostering and maintaining a trustful relationship is vital to gaining the confidence of the participants and collecting the data (Collins & Cooper, 2014). Petrova, Dewing, and Camilleri (2016) explained that fostering and strengthening the trusting relationship

between researchers and participants is central to qualitative studies. Building a trusting relationship contributes to participants' comfort and willingness to reveal valuable information during the interviews (Petrova et al., 2014). A strategy for sustaining a meaningful relationship within this study included offering participants the opportunity to determine the place, date, and time for the interviews (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, honest dialogue about the purpose of the study and adhering to the ethical principles are examples of the strategies that I used to build the trustful relationships.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

After considering other research methods, I chose the qualitative method to meet the objective of my study. I chose the qualitative method rather than the quantitative or mixed-method because my aim is to explore the nuances of a phenomenon. According to Drisko (2016), the qualitative method is holistic and suitable for exploring the open, dynamic system, whereby studying the part opposed to the sum is vital to understanding and making meaning of complex phenomena. Relevant to the qualitative method, researchers often generate new knowledge about an open, dynamic system through ongoing stages of development, such as boundary changes and making changes to achieve the goal of the study (Cairney & St Denny, 2015; Drisko, 2016). I chose the qualitative method rather than the quantitative method after concluding that the qualitative method met suitability for my study for three reasons. First, I did not intend to conduct a laboratory experiment and control the participants to collect data. Second, I did not intend to rely on statistical measures to answer the research question. Third, I needed

to have constant proximity with the participants to obtain rich, thick description and practical knowledge about a real-world event as it occurs in a natural setting not attainable in the quantitative method.

I eliminated the quantitative method as a feasible research method option for my study because I am not doing the deductive analysis. Quantitative researchers focus on deductive analysis, as opposed to qualitative researchers, who rely on inductive analysis for interpreting the data and reporting the findings (Yilmaz, 2013). Quantitative researchers rely on closed-ended questions and deductive analysis, which is not ideal for research that involved allowing participants to share their perspectives or personal experiences with a business problem (Yilmaz, 2013). In contrast, qualitative researchers investigate human social events by capitalizing on open-ended questions and on inductive analysis to understand and describe a social event through participants' words (Schwab & Syed, 2015; Yilmaz, 2013). Interviews with participants and inductive data analysis made the qualitative method ideal for this study. Qualitative and quantitative researchers have different positions that shape the level of researchers' involvement with participants (Santiago-Delefosse, Bruchez, Gavin, Stephen, & Roux, 2015). Rather than engaging with participants, quantitative researchers work independently of participants to achieve objective measurements and empirical observations (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014).

Mixed-method research is appropriate when a single method will not yield sufficient understanding of the underlying research problem, and the researcher lacks sufficient data to develop and generalize the findings (McKim, 2015; Yin, 2014). Mixed-method researchers frequently approach the research problem from multiple

philosophical paradigms (Ponterotto, Mathew, & Raughley, 2013). Morse and Cheek (2014) noted that quantitative elements are often the primary components of mixed-method studies, and the qualitative elements play a secondary role. Because I do not intend to incorporate the quantitative and qualitative components in the same study and combine the findings to answer the research question, the mixed-method approach is not suitable for my study.

### **Research Design**

The research design serves as the plan, and the guide researchers use to collect, analyze, and interpret data (Dasgupta, 2015). Researchers can choose from multiple research designs (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). The case study design is most appropriate for this study. Other designs considered but not chosen include the phenomenological and ethnographic designs. The case, phenomenological, and ethnographic designs are uniquely different and impose a different framing approach to the questions used to obtain data and generate convincing knowledge and understanding about a phenomenon (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014).

A case study design was chosen over other designs because the case study design is most advantageous for exploring successful strategies used to improve employee engagement. The critical nature of a case underpinned by a well-tested theory is the hallmark of case designs (Dasgupta, 2015; Yin, 2014). Carolan, Forbat, and Smith (2016) mentioned two main advantages of case study design. The first advantage is that the flexibility of the design supports acquiring holistic and in-depth characteristics of the social process from multiple perspectives (Carolan et al., 2016). The second advantage of

the case study is the ability to gain access to, and interview, the participants who are foundational to the research topic under study and possess the conceptual knowledge from within the natural context of the occurrence (Carolan et al., 2016). The case study design is appropriate when using open-ended interviews and for engaging in dialogue with participants as the means to achieve a contextual understanding of an event (Rule & John, 2015). Case studies often include in-depth, open-ended questions and probing questions to gain a full description and understanding of events and situations related to the research topic (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). Therefore, I chose the case study design because the design comprises multiple approaches to data collection that is relevant for exploring the successful strategies that frontline leaders in a federal government use to improve employee engagement.

I did not choose the phenomenological design. The phenomenological design was useful for exploring and understanding the essence of individual lived experiences with an unexplored phenomenon (Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994), which was not the purpose of this study. Therefore, I did not use the phenomenological design to collect the qualitative data needed to address the critical issue in the problem statement. For Pearson, Albon, and Hubball (2015), the phenomenology design facilitated exploring similar phenomenological experiences shared among several individuals and creating meaning and understanding of the event. Creating meaning and essence of lived experiences among participants at work was not the primary purpose; therefore, I eliminated the phenomenological design as an appropriate design for my study.

The ethnographic design is ideal for analyzing, uncovering, and describing cultural experiences and practices within cultures (Floersch, Longhofer, & Suskewicz, 2014). Ethnography design involves conducting extended periods of field observations and interviews of a group to gain narrow accounts of the human experiences and then using the data gathered to create the meaning of the cultural experiences (Pearson et al., 2015; Robinson, 2013). The data analysis process in ethnographic research consists of a recursive process to develop themes to show the relationships among cultural behaviors (Pearson et al., 2015; Robinson, 2013). The ethnographic design was not suitable for study because exploring a culture was not the purpose of this study.

For qualitative studies, adequate and appropriate sampling is instrumental to achieving data saturation (Morse, 2015). Data saturation involves the collection and detailed analysis of data sets until no new information emerges from the data evidence (Yu, Abdullah, & Saat, 2014). I ensured data saturation by selecting the appropriate participants and by collecting adequate and relevant documentation required for data analysis. In addition, I searched for similarities that generated emerging themes from repetitive data.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population for this study was composed of four frontline leaders within a small, federal government agency in central Maryland who use successful strategies to improve employee engagement. Goldenkoff (2015) noted that developing, implementing, and enhancing employee engagement is a significant role of federal government agency leaders. The criteria participants were frontline leaders of the federal government who

have worked in a federal agency in central Maryland and have used successful strategies to improve employee engagement. The population from the targeted setting was appropriate for obtaining holistic and accurate information to explore and answer the research question and achieve the purpose of this study.

I used purposive sampling to select the participants for this study. Purposive sampling is crucial to recruiting participants interested in providing a detailed description of a topic (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015; Haegele & Hodge, 2015). Elo et al. (2014) stated that qualitative researchers use purposive sampling to select the participants who align with the research topic and help provide accurate and valid data for gaining insight into the research topic. Mikecz (2012) found that a purposive sampling strategy was the best technique to recruit participants who work in political or corporate industries and are difficult to reach. Because the participants occupy vital positions within the government and fit within the demographics characterized by Mikecz (2012), I used purposeful sampling to choose the population to gain comprehensive data from a subset of federal government agency leaders who work in a federal government agency in central Maryland.

I used a sample consisting of a minimum of four frontline leaders to obtain relevant data for answering the research question. Sample size in case studies is pivotal to gaining in-depth information for the analysis and developing an understanding a complex phenomenon as opposed to obtaining data for replicating and generalizing the findings to other settings (Simons, 2015). Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) noted that three to five participants are an appropriate sample size for a case study. Yin (2014)



mentioned that a case study with a sample of three to eight participants is sufficient enough for collecting in-depth data that is needed to understand the context of the phenomena. Therefore, a sample consisting of four participants, was adequate for obtaining relevant information through in-depth face-to-face interviews until the data became repetitive, which was essential for achieving data saturation.

Achieving data saturation is fundamental to the validity of the study and involves conducting interviews and follow-up interviews until no new information emerges from the data (Galvin, 2014). Obtaining data saturation is integral to replicating the findings and addressing the rigors of qualitative research (Marshall et al., 2013). Data saturation occurs through the repetitiveness of codes, themes, and patterns emerging from data evidence (Alsaawi, 2014). Therefore, to accomplish data saturation, which was critical to ensuring the transferability of this study, I collected data by conducting semistructured interviews and follow-up member check interviews. I confirmed the data collected from semistructured interviews, and member checking by obtaining other sources of data, such as documentations, reports, and website contents until themes became repetitive.

### **Ethical Research**

I adhered to the ethical principles essential for ensuring the well-being of the participants in my case study. Along with identifying the appropriate population and selecting key participants to obtain compelling data evidence, adhering to ethical standards and protecting the rights of participants is paramount to the success of case study research (Yin, 2014). Research ethics is significant to the ethical conduct of all research (Parsell et al., 2014). To understand and comply with federal guidelines for

research that involves human subjects, I completed the National Institutes of Health's Protecting Human Subject Research Participants online course (see Appendix C for a copy of the course certificate). The final study included the Walden University IRB approval number, 03-29-17-0350897.

At each interview and before beginning the interview, I provided each participant with a copy of the consent form to review and sign, which indicated their consent to participate in the study. Participants had sufficient time to review the consent form and clarify concerns before consenting to participate in the study. The informed consent form included a succinct description of the processes for addressing ethical concerns and compliance with federal guidelines for human research participants. Petrova et al. (2014) noted the consent form should include the following information about the study (a) a reasonable description of the research purpose and nature of the study, (b) the measures to protect confidentiality, (c) the data collection method, and (d) the length of the interviews. I reiterated the purpose of my study and encouraged voluntary participation. The steps to eliminate the perception of manipulation or coercion to recruit participants, the consent form included detailed information about the recruitment process and the purpose of the study. Participants had access to my personal contact information and the means to communicate with the participant's advocate at Walden University.

The participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without incurring retribution. The ability to withdraw is solely the decision of participants (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 1979). The participants did not receive any incentive, gift, or compensation for their participation. However, benefit from

the study might include participants sharing contextual knowledge to help find solutions to problems and best practices (Abma & Stakes, 2014). Sharing a copy of the final publication with participants is acceptable when approved by the research ethics body (Petrova et al., 2014). Researchers are responsible for mitigating potential risk or harm to participants and for providing information to participants about any potential risk or harm (DHHS, 1979). For this study, the participants incurred minimal in comparison to the related benefits relevant to understanding the strategies federal agency leaders use to enhance employee engagement. Careful management of the integrity of the data protects the confidentiality and privacy of participants and the agency in which they work (Yin, 2014).

I did not require participants to disclose their personal information, and the final publication did not include participants' identity. Petrova et al. (2014) protected participants' information by assigning pseudonyms to conceal the participants' identities. Allen and Wiles (2016) explained that assigning pseudonyms to protect participants' confidentiality conveys psychological significance to participants and the research process. Reducing the risk of compromising participants' confidentiality necessitates removing all information that might reveal participants' identity after the transcription of digital data to textual data is complete (Bell, 2013). Provisions to prevent unauthorized access to the raw data and to store the data included placing the data on portable computer drives, placing the portable computer drives in an undisclosed location, and using passwords and encryption to ensure the confidentiality and security of the data. I informed the participants about the steps I used to ensure the confidentiality and security

of the data. The data will remain secure for 5 years and then destroyed according to the guidelines implemented by Walden University.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

I was the primary research instrument for collecting data from multiple sources in this case study. Qualitative researchers are the instruments in their studies because qualitative researchers build cooperative relationships and social interactions to gain contextual knowledge about the event or phenomenon under study (Kaczynski, Salmona, & Smith, 2014; Koch et al., 2014). I collected data through in-depth, face-to-face, semistructured audio-recorded interviews. I interacted with participants in their natural setting to explore and advance knowledge and understanding of the participants' real-life situation.

Yin (2014) did not support collecting data with only a single source for a case study design; thus, collecting and using multiple sources to explore and support the findings. Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, and Gray (2016) collected multiple sources of data to complement, corroborate, and expand the multiple data sources. Collecting multiple sources of data for methodological triangulation yielded additional relevant information essential for conclusive findings and ensuring the reliability and validity of the case study (Yin, 2014). Therefore, I collected additional sources of data linked to the successful strategies that frontline leaders used to improve employee engagement, which is crucial for employees to increase their performance and productivity. Additional data sources gathered and reviewed included internal documentations and reports from the agency that was related to the strategies that

frontline leaders used to improve employee engagement; therefore, enabled employees to increase performance and productivity.

Structured and consistent research procedures enhance the reliability of a case study and increase the ability to understand the case study topic (Yin, 2014). For the structured and consistent research procedure, Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013) suggested designing an interview protocol with focused, relevant research questions. Koch et al. (2014) mentioned providing specific details about the design of the interview protocol and origination of the interview questions. The interview protocol is vital to qualitative research, particularly during semistructured interviews (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) further explained that the interview protocol helps to follow a line of inquiry and ensure reliability. Researchers use the interview protocol to guide the interview, which is crucial to the data collection process (Yin, 2014). Therefore, I used an interview protocol for this study, which included information relevant to the date and time of the interview, research ethics requirements, and open-ended questions and applying member checking. The interview protocol included seven open-ended questions.

I increased the effectiveness, relevance, validity, and reliability of the data collection instrument by integrating the recommendations from Walden University peer-review committee. Researchers use feedback from academic peer-review committees to refine the interview protocol and ensure alignment between the interview question and the research purpose (Castillo-Montoya, 2016), which was sufficient for enhancing data collection instrument and process within this study. An additional component of the interview protocol was member checking. I used member checking as an aspect of the

interview procedure for enhancing the reliability and validity of my data collection instrument. Member checking involves following up with participants by printing and sharing the summarized interpretation of the data with participants to verify the summarized data is accurate and consistent (Ivankova, 2014; Morse, 2015). Member checking is vital to enhancing and demonstrating the trustworthiness of research instrument (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014).

### **Data Collection Technique**

I used methodological triangulation to increase the validity of my study. Methodological triangulation is one strategy for addressing the multiple threats to validity (Turner, Cardinal, & Burton, 2015, Yin, 2014). Applying methodological triangulation is imperative for confirming reliability and validity and contributes to a broader understanding of the research topic (Turner, Cardinal, & Burton, 2015; Yin, 2014). Furthermore, advantages of methodological triangulation include the ability to achieve convergence, collaborate, and gain different insights into the phenomenon (Gibson, 2016). To undertake the process of methodological triangulation, a practice of case study researchers is collecting multiple sources of data (Morgan et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). The strategy for applying methodological triangulation in this study included collecting multiple sources of data, such as interviews, official and unofficial documentations and reports from the agency, archival documents, and data published on public websites.

The primary data collection technique in my study was face-to-face, semistructured interviews rather than structured interviews. The semistructured interview was core to qualitative research and was used for collecting information-rich data by

allowing participants to provide an extensive account of their experience with a social phenomenon (Campbell et al., 2013; Vogl, 2013). The face-to-face, semistructured interview comprised a series of open-ended questions and probing questions to elicit a deeper context of participants' accounts. I used the interview protocol to guide the semistructured interviews. Ensuring that the interview focused and on target with minimal interruptions is vital to minimizing the amount of time spent with participants (Alsaawi, 2014). I used the interview protocol to standardize the interviews and ensure the reliability of the study. Crowe et al. (2015) specified that interviews that last 60 minutes generate approximately 30 pages of transcription. For this study, the data collection techniques included initial interviews and follow-up interviews over the duration of about 90 minutes. The length of the initial interview was approximately 60 minutes and the follow-up, member check interview is about 30 minutes. The follow-up, member check interviews included opportunities for participants to contribute additional data and review my synthesized summary of interviews for accuracy and validation of the data and necessary for mitigating bias.

Researchers often use structured, unstructured, or semistructured interviews (Alby & Fatigante, 2014; Koch et al., 2014). The data that derives from semistructured interviews are fundamental to qualitative research (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013). Conducting semistructured interviews has both advantages and challenges (Vogl, 2013). Interviews involved obtaining a contextual understanding and an in-depth background of participants' knowledge about how they have experienced a phenomenon. The benefit of in-depth, semistructured interview includes the ability to

probe delicate issues and participants' ability to share their experiences openly and freely as opposed to providing direct responses to structured interview questions (Mikecz, 2012). Disadvantages of the semistructured interview include (a) susceptible to bias, (b) participants feeling reluctant to disclose relevant information, and (c) participants providing misleading or deceitful information, or exaggerating the extent of their experiences (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The best practices for conducting the semistructured interviews included (a) gaining the trust of participants, (b) ensuring that the interview questions align with the purpose of this study, (c) asking probing questions, and (d) collecting other sources of data, such as policies and memorandums for methodological triangulation.

Member checking was central to my data collection technique and ensuring the credibility of this study. Member checking involves following up with the participants by printing and sharing the summarized interpretation of the data with participants to verify the summarized data is accurate and consistent (Ivankova, 2014; Morse, 2015). Member checking conforms with the process qualitative researchers use to validate participants' descriptions of their experience with the research topic under study (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). Member checking is the technique researchers incorporate in case studies to prevent bias and to emphasize the participants' vantage point and contributions to the field of research (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, member checking is pivotal to the transferability, credibility, and efficacy of data collected from interviews (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Neville, 2014; Morse 2015). Therefore, member checking was an approach that I used to confirm the trustworthiness of data through



follow-up debriefs with participants and sharing summarized interpretations of the data. The participants had the opportunity to member check the synthesized interpretation of the data for accuracy and completeness.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Organizing the data entailed standardized procedures. The data organization techniques included transferring the data to spreadsheets and storing the audio files from the semistructured interviews on a password-protected personal computer. Felice and Janesick (2015) found the use of a spreadsheet program ideal for organizing and analyzing the data. Other researchers, Hart (2016), and Godin, Stapleton, Kirkpatrick, Hanning, and Leatherdale, (2015) have used Excel database software to organize and analyze the case study data. As part of the data organization technique, I exported the data from the semistructured interviews and relevant documents into an Excel spreadsheet, which will enhance the data analysis process. Furthermore, I used the Excel database software to create and maintain a master log to document information about the interview process and data collection process.

Another data organization technique included exporting the data to a password-protected, portable hard drive. With the participants' permission, I recorded the interviews on a Samsung S8 smartphone and an IC audio recording device and transferred the audio files to the password-protected computer for review and protection. Before reusing the audio recorder, I deleted all traces of previous semistructured interviews. I used handwritten notes to journal my concerns regarding reflexivity and maintain an audit trail by storing the field notes on the password-protected computer. I

scanned handwritten notes into the case study file on the password-protected computer. Participants' information and company documents will remain protected. I removed any identifying information and assigned alphanumeric pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of participants. Dipeolu, Storlie, Hargrave, and Cook (2014) replaced participants' identifying information with pseudonyms P1, P2, and so forth to preserve participants' confidentiality.

Another data organizing technique that is important for case studies is using the qualitative data analysis software. Morgan et al. (2016) exported interview data, documents, and audio and video recordings into a qualitative software program to enhance the data analysis process. Carter et al. (2014), and Woods, Paulus, Atkins, and Macklin (2016) mentioned that qualitative researchers commonly use qualitative data analysis software to facilitate the storage, organization, and analysis of data obtained from interviews, field notes, and documents. Importing data from the interviews, documentary information, and field notes into the NVivo 11 qualitative research software (QRS) to store, organize, and code the multiple sources of data is central to my data organization technique. I will retain the raw data and destroy them after 5 years following the strict guidelines instituted at Walden University.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data, I used methodological triangulation to confirm agreement and completeness of the data sources and enhance the reliability and validity of the data. Methodological triangulation is a principal component of the data analysis process and is inherent to corroborating the data and ensuring a study's reliability and validity (Tavakol

& Sandars, 2014). Methodological triangulation involves collecting data from multiple sources of data and analyzing the data to ensure the comprehensive and complete understanding of the social phenomenon (Carter et al., 2014). Qualitative researchers collect data from multiple sources, including semistructured interviews, field notes, documents, and archival data for convergence and analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena (Carter et al., 2014). Methodological triangulation of multiple sources of data enhances the trustworthiness of case findings (Cope, 2014). I used methodological triangulation to enhance the study's rigor, reduce bias, and ensure a comprehensive and complete understanding of the business problem.

I used the thematic data analysis strategy described by Yin (2014). Yin's five-step analysis strategy involves the following steps (a) compiling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, and (e) reporting the findings. For the analysis, I compiled data from participants' face-to-face, semistructured interviews and federal agency documentations linked to the successful strategies that frontline leaders used to improve employee engagement. Next, I incorporated member checking into the data analysis process, which entails following up and providing participants with the summarized interpretation of the data and requesting their verification and clarification.

Crowe et al. (2015) explained the thematic analysis approach involves preparing, organizing, and reporting data. Preparing involves planning, categorizing the unit of analysis, and naming the sampling (Crowe et al., 2015). Organizing consists of coding and naming categories (Crowe et al., 2015). Reporting is the final phase that includes

reporting the findings as they relate to the published results (Crowe et al., 2015).

Thematic analysis involves several steps, including identifying and ensuring consistency between the research question and the data sources (Crowe et al., 2015). Yin's (2014) guidance to researchers conducting case study analysis included developing a disciplined strategy for analyzing multiple sources of data.

I also followed the approach mentioned by Crowe et al. (2015), which was interweaving the analysis, conceptual framework, and research question to ensure congruency. Crowe et al. described the preparatory stage of the analysis process as defining and labeling emerging phrases or context. The thematic analysis process included the revelation of themes. Researchers generate, code, and list themes according to predefined terms (Crowe et al., 2015). Next, I organized and named the themes based on their relevance and retained the themes that reduce the codes related to the research question. After identifying and organizing relevant themes, I named the themes. Crowe et al. suggested synthesizing themes to reveal the meaning of themes about a research topic. Next, I reassembled and began the process of interpreting the data. Crowe et al. explained that interpreting the analysis is an in-depth process and is essential for describing the connection between the themes. For the last step of the analysis process, I synthesized and presented the findings.

I used the NVivo 11 (QRS) to support that data analysis process. Exporting the data to the NVivo 11 (QRS) followed the initial data analysis processes, which include importing, separating, and organizing participants' responses into the Excel database software to identify patterns and themes. Qualitative case study researchers import data

into computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to store, prepare, organize, and synthesize the themes and to maintain an audit trail (Paulus et al., 2013). Yin (2014) indicated that qualitative researchers import research data into computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to store data and access the data for analysis. NVivo is one example of an appropriate qualitative data analysis software. Importing the recorded interviews into NVivo (QRS) and using predefined phrases generates codes and themes (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Yin (2014) purported that the findings included identifiable and observable themes that emerge from the analysis of the data. There were advantages associated with using NVivo 11 (QRS). First, researchers use NVivo (QRS) to facilitate theme and pattern generation (Paulus et al., 2013; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Second, researchers use NVivo (QRS) for handling large data sets and for coding and categorizing qualitative data (Paulus et al., 2013). Third, the NVivo (QRS) tool is a reliable method for streamlining the data analysis process (Paulus et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). Fourth, Parkinson, Eatough, Holmes, Stapley, and Midgley (2016) indicated that using NVivo (QRS) helps to improve the transparency of the data through the facilitation of an audit trail. One disadvantage of NVivo (QRS) is the software cannot function independently of the researcher's constant involvement with the data analysis process (Paulus et al., 2013).

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability is one important criteria used to validate trustworthiness (Koch et al., 2014), and addressing the trustworthiness of a study through measures that are consistent with reliability and validity is symbolic to research (Morse, 2015). Elo et al. (2014)

defined validity as the measures used to analyze the adequacy of the data and findings as supported by the selection of the sample and data saturation. Noble and Smith (2015) and Morse (2015) noted that qualitative researchers apply rigorous methods to enhance the reliability and validity of the research. Tavakol and Sandars (2014) emphasized focusing on dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability as measures for ensuring reliability and validity. Fusch and Ness (2015) mentioned that data saturation is critical to the validity of qualitative research. Methodological triangulation and member checking were essential to the reliability and validity of this study.

### **Reliability**

Dependability represents one of the ways to interpret the reliability of the findings (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). Readers determine dependability by evaluating the consistency and transparency of the data (Elo et al., 2015). I ensured the dependability of the study by applying the following strategies. By repeatedly using the interview protocol and audio recording the interviews, I ensured the replication of the data collection process. Using multiple sources rather than a single source of data also supports dependability (Yin, 2014). Developing a strategy to assume a neutral position and embodying reflexivity assisted in promoting dependability. Focusing on member checking enhanced the reliability of this study. Member checking involves a cooperative effort that includes sharing the printed, summarized interpretations of the interview data with participants to validate participants' accounts, which enhances dependability (Boblin et al., 2013). Accurate coding of the data enhanced the reliability of this study. Syed and Nelson (2015) indicated that accurate coding and the context of coding open-ended data

add to the reliability of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers ensure trustworthiness by reporting the data collection method and sampling approach (Elo et al., 2014). Using methodological triangulation further enhanced the reliability of this study. Gibson (2016) and Yin (2014) indicated that methodological triangulation enhances the reliability of the findings because the data for analysis consists of multiple sources of evidence as opposed to studying the phenomena through a single source of data evidence. To ensure the dependability of this study, I maintained an audit trail of the data collection process. Dipeolu et al. (2015) mentioned that maintaining an audit trail assisted with the transparency of the data collection process and ensured the dependability in the event other researchers decide to analyze the data.

### **Validity**

Validity addresses research excellence and quality. A goal in this case study was to apply the basic principles essential to achieving validity, which are credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation. The following were steps for ensuring the validity of this study.

**Credibility.** Credibility in qualitative research is crucial to the believability of the study (Elo et al., 2015). I ensured credibility by following the approaches that are necessary for conducting a valid case study. The first approach to ensuring credibility involves designing and using an interview protocol. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions to guide the interview process and obtain in-depth data, and standardize delivery of the interview questions to participants, which (Yin, 2014) and Koch et al. (2014) mentioned is core to minimizing researcher's bias and enhancing the

credibility of the research study. Member checking was the other approach to ensuring credibility. Member checking involves conducting a study and encouraging participants to verify the summarized results before reporting the findings (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). I printed and shared with participants, the summarized interpretation of each interview after data analysis to ensure the accurate interpretation and credibility of the data. Accordingly, I ensured the credibility by using data from multiple sources of data, such as interviews, field notes, and government and nongovernment articles and document, and using methodological triangulation to corroborate and confirm the completeness of the data.

**Transferability.** Researchers can determine the applicability and transferability of the findings to other settings (Elo et al., 2014). Researchers use several methods to address the transferability of qualitative data (a) using a meticulous and structure data collection and analysis techniques to capture the complete description of participants' information, (c) reflexivity, and (d) maintaining an audit trail (Trainor & Graue, 2014). Researchers achieve transferability by using an interview protocol and probing for rich, thick descriptions of a phenomenon during semistructured interviews (Morse, 2015; Yin, 2014). Thus, I employed similar approaches, so readers assess and determine the transferability of this study. I used an interview protocol to ensure the consistency of the interviews and thereby ensure the ability for readers to assess congruence between the interview question and the purpose of the study and decide about the transferability of this study. Capturing participants' words accurately and maintaining the authenticity of



participants' accounts through an audio record the interviews was central to ensuring transferability. I used member checking to ensure transferability.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability is pertinent to qualitative research and is pivotal to the objectivity of the study or the degree to which the findings are illustrative of participants' perspective as opposed to the viewpoint of the researcher (Morse, 2015). Techniques applicable to addressing confirmability are methodological triangulation and an audit trail (Morse, 2015). Further strategies for ensuring confirmability include an in-depth focus on the participant's voice during the data collection phase (Morse, 2015) and resisting the urge to influence the participant's voice through motivation and bias (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). The steps I used to address confirmability included building trust with the participants, prolonging engagement with the participants and probing questions to obtain detailed data, and carefully documenting the interviews.

**Data saturation.** Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi (2016) noted that achieving data saturation requires collecting and analyzing the data until redundancy of the themes and patterns occurs. Similarly, Yu, Abdullah, and Saat (2014) explained data saturation as the redundancy of themes following extensive interviews when no new information emerges from the analysis of the data. The semistructured interviews and collection of other data sources concluded upon repetition of the themes and patterns, thus confirming data saturation. Methodological triangulation was also essential for achieving data saturation. Case study researchers use methodological triangulation to analyze interview data, documentary data, and other relevant sources of data to ensure the credibility of participants' perspectives. Therefore, I confirmed data saturation by (a) collecting data

through semistructured interviews, (b) follow-up interviews, (c) collecting documents, (d) data from the internet (d) and methodological triangulation of multiple data sources to establish redundancy of themes and patterns.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I provided a detailed explanation of my role as the research instrument and strategies for ensuring research excellence. I explained the population and sample appropriate for the study. I discussed the criteria for the sampling approach; the method and design; and their implications on gaining detailed, contextual information. Section 2 contained the steps used to safeguard the participants from any physical or psychological harm and to protect the confidentiality of the participants and the organization for which they work. Section 2 included research practices to ensure dependability, transferability, confirmability, credibility, and data saturation. Section 3, includes an introduction, research findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, and my reflections.

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

Section 3 encompasses a brief introduction that includes restating the purpose of the study. Following the introduction, I present the findings that include listing the overarching research question, and I identify themes and minor themes that emerged from data sources that I analyzed to answer the research question. The presentation of the findings includes results from the academic and professional literature sources reviewed for this study. In Section 3, I linked the results of this study to the conceptual framework that connects to the key elements driving implementation of successful employee engagement. Finally, I conclude Section 3 concluded with (a) the application to professional practice, (b) implications for social change, (c) recommendations for action, (d) recommendations for future research, (e) reflections, and (f) the conclusion of the study.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore successful strategies that frontline leaders use to improve employee engagement in their organization. The data collection comprised face-to-face, semistructured interviews with four frontline leaders who work in a federal government agency located in central Maryland. I collected additional data from federal agency documentations directly associated with the successful strategies that frontline leaders use to improve employee engagement. The findings revealed the effective strategies that frontline leaders successfully used to improve their employee engagement to increase performance and productivity.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The research question was: What strategies do frontline leaders in a federal agency use to improve employee engagement? In this study, two prominent themes emerged as the successful strategies that frontline leaders used to improve employee engagement. The first main theme involved effective organizational communication to improve employee engagement. The second major theme consisted of the strategies for enhancing employee development to improve employee engagement. Minor themes that developed as strategies for effective organizational communication included (a) cultivating open, clear lines of communication; (b) leveraging technology and web applications; (c) promoting teamwork and collaboration; and (d) effective leadership communication techniques. Minor themes that emerged as strategies for enhancing employee development included (a) creating learning and skills development opportunities, (b) increasing rewards and incentives, (c) supporting work–life balance, and (d) promoting well-being. The findings in this study showed that frontline leaders who participated in this study confirmed the value of employee engagement and shared that employee engagement may influence employee performance and productivity.

Participant 3 added:

Employee engagement is pivotal to high work performance, productivity, and better customer services. The employees who are much more engaged provide better service to the customers and clients. Likewise, employees who are less engaged will barely respond to the customer needs and create unpleasant work situations. On the other hand, disengaged employees will respond poorly to work

related requests and may complain about being assigned the work-related task, and may display a poor attitude towards supervisors or other employees.

Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that successful strategies used to improve employee engagement benefited not only both employees and the federal agency, but also the community in areas such as health, well-being, and economic prosperity.

### **Effective Organizational Communication**

Effective organizational communication strategies were vital to improving and sustaining the momentum of employee engagement, which was essential for increased performance and productivity. Carefully planned and implemented organizational communication strategy can influence the behaviors of employees, such as becoming more responsible and invested in their work roles (Bharadwaj, 2014). Furthermore, Mishra et al. (2014) suggested that strengthening internal communication helps to build the trust and commitment associated with employee engagement. Hart (2016) identified four types of management communication strategies that increased employee engagement such as (a) honest communication, (b) open communication, (c) transparent communication, and (d) positive communication. Therefore, frontline leaders should note the significant effects of effective organizational communication when selecting successful strategies for improving employee engagement. Table 1 illustrates four minor themes that emerged under embodying effective organizational communication.

Table 1

*Minor Themes Under Effective Organizational Communication*

Minor themes	Source	<i>n</i>	Frequency of occurrence (%)
Open, clear communication	4	21	25.93
Technology and web applications	5	15	18.52
Teamwork and collaborations	5	29	35.80
Leaders communication techniques	4	16	19.75

*Note.* *n* = frequency.

**Cultivating open, clear lines of communications.** Open, clear lines of communication were significant to the successful strategy used to improve employee engagement. Employees and managers had the opportunity to engage in informal, transparent, and interpersonal communication. The findings of this study showed that enhancing and sustaining the momentum of higher employee engagement was achieved through open, clear lines of communications. Frontline leaders using open, clear lines of communication to improve performance and productivity is consistent with similar findings that emerged from the literature review. Mikkelson et al. (2015) have found that transparent communication between employees and leaders increased the opportunity for sharing vital information, building confidence, and positively affecting work performance and productivity.

A recurring theme was that all frontline leaders kept open lines of communication and increased visibility for employees to obtain information and address work or personal matters. One frontline leader noted that open, clear lines of communication remain central to eliminating perceived barriers that could preclude employees from addressing pressing concerns. These frontline leaders used several successful strategies to cultivate

open, clear lines of communications. These strategies included (a) holding regular department meetings to discuss operations and work assignments, (b) obtaining insight about events occurring within and outside the department, and (c) providing feedbacks from senior leaders and customers. The frontline leaders pointed out that visibility affords employees to connect and communicate more often, which encouraged effective communication and fulfillment of work performance and productivity. The successful strategies for maintaining visibility included frequent walks about the department and participating informal, face-to-face conversations with employees. The majority of the frontline leaders acknowledge using these strategies to determine both collective and individual's levels of engagement.

The findings of this study confirm the conceptual framework chosen for this study. Kahn (1990) postulated that employees who can openly express and voice concerns without fearing retribution would experience psychological safety, which represents one of three conditions related to personal employee engagement. As shown studies related to employee engagement and communication (Aragón-Correa et al., 2013; Jiang & Men, 2015); open, transparent communication was a successful strategy used to improve employee engagement. Furthermore, the OPM (2015) final report showed that 76% of federal employees indicated that work supervisors who promote open, transparent communication had a positive effect on their ability to increase personal engagement at work.

**Leveraging communication technology and web applications.** All four frontline leaders pursued different technology and web applications to improve employee

engagement. Reviews of the federal agency documentations and website revealed the federal agency use various technology tools and software such as Google cloud and Facebook to enhance sharing of information and increased communication among employees. Therefore, frontline leaders' successful employee engagement strategies included using mobile devices and Google cloud-based solutions. In addition, the review of federal agency documentation confirmed the responses from frontline leaders that steps to improve performance and productivity had included the implementation of new communication technology and enterprise social network throughout the federal agency. All four frontline leaders implied that using various communication tools such as email, chat groups, and mobile devices influenced employees to manage employee engagement behaviors essential for raising performance and productivity. Pauleen, Campbell, Harmer, and Intezari (2015) stated that diffusion and increased procurement of mobile technologies has increased opportunities for individuals to share information, knowledge, and perform services work virtually anywhere and regardless of time. Furthermore, the findings revealed that leveraging technology and web applications enhanced service quality. The frontline leader perceived that employees who participated in the Google chat groups received higher levels of personal and customer satisfaction, which directly influenced employee engagement.

Furthermore, one frontline leader designed a checklist and converted the checklist from paper-based to a digital checklist that was accessible from a web application on mobile devices (telephone). As compared to a paper-based checklist, installing the checklist on mobile devices helps employees address technical issues at a faster rate and



reduced the rate of technical errors. The frontline leaders noted that creating the digital checklist and leveraging technology enhanced employees' innovativeness and productivity, which emboldened employees to focus on improving employee engagement.

Likewise, leveraging technology emerged as an important strategy for helping employees manage work functions when away from the workplace. The frontline leaders used successful strategies to foster an engaging workforce, which included increasing the use of mobile personal computers and communication devices because employees needed to carry out work functions during the work days even when away from the workplace. These frontline leaders expressed the view that leveraging technology and web applications as successful employee engagement strategy enhance the likelihood of employees improving their performance and productivity.

Participants responses and information found the federal agency's documentations that relates to implementation of technology to improve communication, engagement, and productivity coincides with the findings in previous studies related to influence of technology on improving employee engagement. Naujokaitien et al. (2015) concluded that leveraging technology creates many opportunities to increase organizational learning, knowledge sharing, and skills development. Furthermore, Naujokaitien et al. (2015) noted that by creating these opportunities, leaders can expect improvement in employee engagement, performance, and productivity.

**Promoting teamwork and collaborations.** Teamwork and collaborations emerged as a theme in this study. The frontline leaders used successful strategies to

promote teamwork and collaboration. Kahn (1990) and Anitha (2014) found that supportive, trusting relationships among employees improved employee engagement, which positively influenced performance and productivity. Furthermore, Kahn (1990) found that workplace interactions and supportive work environments are crucial to the extents to which employees engaged and invest themselves or disengaged themselves within work roles.

The findings that emerged from the interviews with all four frontline leaders and review of the federal agency's documentation such as the supervisor handbook showed that teamwork and collaborations were critical to sustaining the momentum of employee engagement. Collaboration was an approach specified in the supervisors handbook that frontline leaders use to facilitate team-based approach to improve performance and achieving productivity. Teamwork was instrumental to networking opportunities to the extent that employees were able to leverage professional expertise and build experiences and knowledge. Frontline leaders permitted employees to work on different projects alongside other teams outside of their standard work center. For example, helpdesk technicians from one center gained permission to working alongside network teams from another center during the installation of new servers.

Similarly, how employee interact as a team was a way that frontline leaders determined the level of employee engagement within the work center. Frontline observed how well employees are interacting and working as one team while accomplishing the job at hand, particularly during periods of high tempo. Yalabik, Rossenburg, Kinnie, and Swart (2015) argued that an expectation of engaged professionals involve demonstrating

a commitment to the organization, team, and customers. These findings illustrated that allowing teamwork and collaboration at all level is crucial because of the value and benefits associated with the decision to improve employee engagement, performance, and productivity.

**Embodying effective leadership communication techniques.** A consistent pattern noted in the findings was that all four frontline leaders expressed the importance of frontline leaders embodying effective communication techniques for improving employee engagement. Furthermore, all four frontline leaders recognized that communication techniques influenced trust relationship, performance, and productivity. Hart (2016) and Kahn (1990) asserted that the communication styles of individuals who supervises and manages frontline employees influence employees' choice to undermine or support efforts to improve employee engagement, which is worthwhile to the strategies used to achieving performance and productivity.

Anitha (2014) found that besides the workplace environment, leadership was the second most important factor associated with influencing employee engagement. Therefore, the findings from this study implied that adopting and embodying effective organizational communication helps promote employees to engage in active and constructive engagement behaviors. Furthermore, Mishra et al. (2014) noted the beneficial aspects of embodying effective organizational communication. These benefits included contributions to (a) sharing of information, (b) decision making, (c) efficient feedback loop, (d) trust, and (e) better performance and productivity.

Effective leadership communication techniques offered some opportunities when used as a successful strategy to improve employee engagement. The following findings illustrated the various effective leadership communication techniques that frontline leaders used to improve employee engagement. Frontline leaders enhance trust relationships with staff by fostering an environment for employees to freely access and have face-to-face dialogue with his or her frontline leader without the fear of rejection or retaliation. Furthermore, the majority of frontline leaders noted the willingness to respond positively when (a) addressing employees' questions about decisions made and their implication on job performance, (b) request for clarifying information, (c) and constructive criticisms from employees. Therefore, effective leadership communication techniques are a successful strategy for improving employee engagement.

### **Enhancing Employee Development**

Enhancing employee development was a successful strategy frontline used to improve employee engagement. These successful strategies increased employees' performance, productivity, and contributions to efforts that benefit the customers and the community. Under the prominent theme related to employee development, these were the interesting and important findings of this study. The successful strategies included (a) creating learning and skills development opportunities, (b) increasing rewards and incentives (d), supporting work–life balance, and (c) promoting well-being. In line with the conceptual framework, these themes aligned with influences of psychological safety that Kahn (1990) stated employees need to increase employee engagement. Similarly,

Kahn (1990) associated employees' psychological safety with possessing the physical, emotional, and or psychological resources to exemplify personal engagement.

Table 2

*Minor Themes Under Enhancing Employee Development*

Minor themes	Sources	<i>n</i>	Frequency of occurrence (%)
Learning & skills development	4	25	38.46
Rewards	5	14	21.54
Incentives	5	15	23.08
Work-life balance	6	10	15.38
Well-being	1	1	1.54

*Note.* *n* = frequency.

**Creating learning and skills development opportunities.** Creating learning and skills development opportunities contributed career advancements, which have been a crucial element to improving employee engagement. After reviewing the interview data, organizational training policy, training announcements for years 2016 and 2017, the finding showed the federal agency supports employees obtaining training and skills development resources and access to training opportunities. These frontline leaders have successfully used training for skills development and professional growth, which significantly contributed to improving employee engagement. These frontline leaders encouraged employees to pursue learning and skills development training offered by the civilian human resources (CHR) office.

Three noteworthy findings emerged from the interviews with participants. First, frontline leaders consistently assessed employees' critical skills alignment with personal performance and productivity. Second, all frontline leaders obtained training for employees who lacked the skills to perform critical and distinct tasks. Third, these

frontline leaders leveraged training opportunities through either cost or no-cost to ensure that employees attended and received outstanding professional skills updates.

These findings juxtapose with previous results of research. Strategies that included leveraging organizational policies, programs and supportive senior and top level management enhanced employees' learning and skills and contributed to increased competence and structured alignment with improving employee engagement (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). By promoting training career progression, the frontline leaders ensured that employees gained the skills and career development opportunities that were essential for continuous improvement of employee engagement. Idris et al. (2015) found that leaders who created opportunities for employees to have access to learning opportunities were significant to cultivating higher levels of employee engagement.

**Increasing rewards and incentives.** Increasing rewards and incentives were successful strategies used to improve engagement. The findings in this study showed that the frontline leaders increased rewards and incentives employees as a strategy for improving employee engagement. One the four frontline leaders used monetary incentives and rewards to recognize employees who demonstrated high levels of engagement and perform at higher levels.

All four frontline leaders suggested identifying the incentives and rewards up front so that all employees know and understand the incentive and rewards systems. The monetary awards offered by the federal agency included (a) quality step increase, (b) performance award, (c) on the spot award, (d) superior accomplishment award, and recognition bonus award. Continuing challenge leaders faced include limits to monetary

incentive and rewards available to federal employees. (Gupta and Sharma (2016) have found that promoting rewarding and incentives positively enhanced employees' perception of value and worth to the organization and significantly enriched employees' persistence to engagement and increase performance. Increasing rewards and incentives may attract employees to espouse the relevant psychological conditions (physical, cognitive, and emotional) that Kahn (1990) found to have stimulated personal engagement.

**Supporting work–life balance.** Increased performance and productivity occurred when work–life balance were successfully used as strategies to improve employee engagement. The conceptual framework chosen for this study substantiates these findings. Work–life balance or “outside life” as defined by Kahn (1990) has a direct influence on employee engagement, and in turn, influence performance and productivity. The frontline leader showed a sense of care for employees during challenging work–life concerns and ensured that employees were not alone throughout the time employees were addressing personal home-life stressors. The frontline leaders offered guidance and encouraged employees to take time off when dealing with a personal issue such as family matters. Flexible schedules and telework are available to employees whose position can accommodate flexible work schedule and telework. Also, the frontline leaders assisted employees with obtaining resources such as the leave sharing program, which allowed employees to be out of the office for an extended time. Employees who have exhausted all available leave and are experiencing medical or family emergency may use the leave the sharing program. Likewise, these frontline leaders assisted employees with obtaining

sick leave and family and medical leave when necessary to balance between work and family concerns. After the interviews with the frontline leaders, the findings showed that these frontline leaders generally (a) monitored for home-life concerns that could negatively affect work performance, and (b) immediately addressed employees professional and family concerns by providing information about available resources available through the organizations' employee relations office. A review of the agency's documentations such as the supervisor handbook confirmed the existence of work-life balance resources, practices, and policies that frontline managers can use to guide work-life balance decisions. Thus, using successful strategies that support work-life balance could improve employee engagement to the point where employees make family and work an equal priority.

**Promoting well-being.** Caring for employee's well-being was an excellent strategy used for improving employee engagement. Interestingly, only one of four frontline leaders discussed well-being in the context of successful strategies used to improve employee engagement. These were the successful strategies. The frontline leader stressed that leaders must show a sense of care for employees during challenging work-life concerns and ensure that employees are not alone throughout the time employees are addressing personal home-life stressors. Also, the frontline leaders encouraged employees to take time off when dealing with a particular issue such as family matters. Furthermore, the frontline leaders assisted employees with obtaining resources such as the leave donor program that allows employees to be out of the office for an extended time. The frontline leader noted that these strategies may help employees perceive



frontline leaders as genuinely having an interest in them individually, and whatever is important to them.

The review of the federal agency's documentations such as the supervisor handbook showed that promoting well-being in the workplace was a high priority. The strategic approach to addressing well-being included (a) educating employees about workplace safety and health resources, programs and policies, (b) promoting workplace safety and health resources, (c) implementing workplace safety and health programs and policies, and (c) mitigating workplace conditions that are barriers to workplace safety and health.

Researchers (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Shuck & Reio, Jr., 2014) noted that promoting the well-being created the capacity to improve employee engagement successfully. Furthermore, Gupta and Sharma, (2016) asserted that successfully employee engagement strategies used in the workplace could increase the ability for individuals to experience well-being and better perform at work. Likewise, Shuck and Reio, Jr. (2014) concluded that the experience of well-being at work could influence employees to subscribe to a higher level of engagement. Interestingly, OPM (2015) final report that showed higher percentages of leaders and supervisors promoted well-being within the federal agencies. Similarly, the OPM (2015) findings showed that 77% of the employees reported that their agency adequately protected employees from workplace safety and health concerns. Likewise, 78% of the employees indicated that their agency prepared employees for potential security threats.

### **Benefits From Improving Employee Engagement**

Frontline leaders who influenced employees to become engaging in their work performance created significant benefits for frontline leaders, employees, the federal agency, and customers. Researchers (Jiang & Men, 2017; Popli & Rizvi, 2016; Shuck, Collins, Rocco, & Diaz, 2016) concluded that improving employee engagement create benefits for both the employees and organizations. The frontline leader responses and federal agency documents suggested the employee engagement created several benefits for employees, agency, customers, and communities. One frontline leaders indicated that during a medical leave of absence that lasted approximately two months, one employee willingly took on the role as frontline leader and carried on with the work functions of the department while fostering active participation and cooperation among colleagues, generated high productivity, and earned positive customer feedbacks.

Equally important, improving employee engagement created a high degree of teamwork and collaborations among employees; thus, increasing the quality of service and positive comments from customers. Also, despite some employees lower pay grade, rather than showing up to work and not give anything extra or willingly jump in to help, employees became more involved in their work. Therefore, contributing to enhancing the work process, and exhibiting more interest in meeting the high expectations of their customers. Furthermore, employees who were empowered to add voice to decision-makings provide feedbacks and corrections whether positive or negative even when the information directly involved the frontline leader. Employees demonstrated a higher degree of loyalty and commitment to protecting the reputation of the organization and the

safety of customers. Finally, employees volunteered as mentors or sponsored community outreach programs that focused on health, wellness, and mentorship for middle and high schools students.

The findings published in previous literature help to substantiate the findings related to beneficial implications. Kahn's (1990) premise is that the effect on both people and work relate to the extent to which people employ different dimensions of themselves. As such, increasing employees' perceptions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability is pivotal to the physical, cognitive, and emotional engagement that employees will invest at the moment of work performance. Thus, Gupta and Sharma (2016) concluded that supporting the needs and expectations of employees as well as their contributions has beneficial, positive implication for both the employees and organization?

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings from this study apply to business practice. Frontline leaders in the federal agency could use the results from this study to generate and implement strategies that are successful for improving employee engagement. Alagaraja and Shuck (2015), and Gupta and Sharma (2016) have shown that efforts devoted to improving the levels of employee engagement led to increased performance and productivity. The explanations offered included successful strategies integrated with effective implementation of policies, resources, systems, and practices that fostered opportunities to develop and sustain high employee engagement (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015), and Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

Effective organizational communication can improve employee engagement.

Bharadwaj (2014) found that effective organizational communication can have compelling effects on employee engagement. Successful strategies that apply to business practice and frontline leader might use to improve employee engagement and create compelling effects such as effective organizational communication include (a) cultivating open, clear lines of communication, (b) leveraging technology and web applications, (c) promoting teamwork and collaboration, and effective leader communication techniques. The findings noted in this study are consistent with the existing body of literature on employee engagement and the conceptual framework.

Enhancing employee development offers opportunities to improve employee engagement. Leaders who fail to enhance employee development for employees to become engaged tend to have lower retention, work performance and fewer opportunities to achieve organizational goals (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Critical for improving employee engagement and increasing performance and productivity is the consistent availability of supports for career enhancement. Frontline leaders in the federal agency can use the successful strategies revealed from this study as opportunities for enhancing career development such as (a) creating learning and skills development opportunities, (b) increasing rewards and incentives, (c) supporting work–life balance, and (d) promoting well-being. Also, successful strategies such as online courses, on the job training, webinars, and conferences that suit the work lives of employees may improve employee engagement.

By utilizing successful employee engagement strategies such as effective organizational communication and enhancing career development, frontline leaders might create the cohorts of engaged professionals committed to promoting the federal agency that is efficient, effective, responsive, and focused on community. Gupta and Sharma (2016) showed the positive influence employee engagement has on both employee and organizational outcomes. Employee outcomes included (a) meeting expectations, (b) health and well-being, and (c) discretionary efforts. Similarly, organizational outcomes included (a) productive employees, (b) higher retention, (c) advocacy of the organization, (d) manager self-efficacy, and (e) profitability. Thus, frontline leaders in the federal agency can integrate the findings from this study into business practices and use as drivers to positively influence employee engagement and key business objectives such as increased performance and productivity.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Positive social change is attainable should frontline leaders use the successful employee engagement strategies that emerged from this study. There are consistencies in findings from this study and results of literature reviewed that have shown the possibility to create positive social change through implementation of successful employee engagement strategies. Mishra et al. 2014, and Naujokaitiene et al. (2015) mentioned that leaders who implemented and used successful employee engagement strategies had a greater prospect of promoting positive social change that benefited employees, organization, and the community. Akingbola and van den Berg (2017), and Gupta and Sharma (2016) also noted that higher levels of employee engagement contribute to

employees, organizations, and communities benefiting from increased performance, productivity, retention, volunteerism, and value to clients. Gupta and Sharma, (2016) stated high levels of employee engagement is vital for employees to invest needed efforts towards helping the organization enhance operational capability, performance, and productivity. Therefore, a crucial way for frontline leaders to create positive social change that benefits their employees, federal agency, and community include using the findings from this study to influence the highest levels of employee engagement.

Mishra et al. (2014) asserted that strengthening internal communication such as face-to-face communication is vital to fostering transparency, increase trust and commitment between employees and managers, which is crucial to employee engagement. Likewise, Naujokaitiene et al. (2015) suggested that integrating technology into the organization to enhance learning and organizational effectiveness benefits both the employees and organization. Employees benefit from increased salaries, improved working conditions, satisfaction for managers genuine concern for employees, a better sense that work has a meaning and purpose and contributes to the effectiveness of the organization. Thus, organizations benefit from employees who are committed, hardworking and contributes to higher performance and productivity.

Furthermore, frontline leaders could use the findings from this study to not only improve employees' career development but also create positive social change for the employees, the federal agency, and community because of strong links between employee engagement strategies used to enhanced career, and in turn benefits employees, organizations, and community. Akingbola and van den Berg (2017) emphasized that

strategies for improving employee engagement and demonstrating positive social change should include providing employees with tangible benefits, attractive wages, and opportunities for training and career promotions. The community benefits from high levels of employee engagement because performance and productivity growths not only permeate the workplace but also transcend out to the community as employees and the organization contribute to improving health and well-being, development and economic prosperity of the community (Akingbola & van den Berg (2017; Shuck & Rose, 2013). Therefore, frontline leaders in the federal agency could use the findings associated with the organizational communication to improve employee engagement and also foster the positive social change that benefits the employee, federal agency, and community. For example, the high levels of employee engagement help to reduce operating cost, which in turn allowed for investments into outreach programs aimed at improving employment, healthy living, well-being, and economic prosperity.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Improving employee engagement creates strategic advantage for frontline leaders in the federal government; however, frontline leaders continuously search for successful strategies to improve employee engagement. The GAO (2015) highlighted personnel management and organizational performance concerns that affected operational performance of various federal agencies. Moreover, leaders in federal agencies are challenged to work toward changing the culture and create 21st-century high-performance federal agencies (GAO, 2015). Thus, improving employee engagement was

one of the many strategies some frontline leaders have used to increase the deliver timely, critical services to customers.

I recommend that frontline leaders in the federal agency adopt the findings from this study to enhance employee engagement, in turn, increase performance and productivity. The findings from this study suggest that successful strategies that frontline leaders were using to improve employee engagement helped reinforced employees to increase performance and productivity. Both effective organizational communication and enhanced skills and employee development improve employee performance productivity. Effective organizational communication was vital to improving employee engagement and the opportunity to change cultures and create the high-performance federal agency. Therefore, I recommend frontline leaders use successful employee engagement strategies that promote (a) clear, open communication, (b) technology integrations into the work process, (c) teamwork and collaborations, and (d) effective leadership communication techniques. The further recommendation includes frontline leaders use successful employee strategies designed to enhance learning and skills development; thus, generate the enthusiasm for employees to shift towards higher performance and productivity. These successful employee engagement strategies might include improving (a) learning and skills development, (b) the opportunity for the employees to earn rewards and incentives, (c) work–life balance, and (d) well-being.

Frontline leaders can use the results of this study as a basis for designing and implementing successful employee engagement strategies to improve employee engagement and further increase performance and productivity. To illustrate how the use



of successful strategies improved employee engagement, I will publish the findings of this study in ProQuest and other academic and professional database. Also, I intend to share the results with frontline leaders who participated in the study as well as request invitation from the federal agency's executive leadership to take part in professional workshops, lectures, training seminars, at the federal agency.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The results of this study resulted in unanswered, new questions that warrant future research. More work is needed to fill the significant gap in research relates to employee engagement in federal agencies. Although the findings showed successful strategies that frontline leaders used to improve employee engagement, there is still the paucity of knowledge about how these strategies were successful. Future studies may include increasing the sample size and using the quantitative method and correlation design to test hypotheses to determine the relationship between engagement and performance or productivity. Also, there is uncertainty that successful engagement strategies that emerged from this bounded case study could apply to other federal agencies. Therefore, to increase applicability, future researchers may use the multiple case design and broaden the study to include small, medium, and large federal agencies or other industry, and extend the study beyond the geographical bounds of central Maryland.

### **Reflections**

During the start of my doctoral journey, I pursued an interest in exploring the effects of health professional shortages with the U.S. healthcare industry. However, lacking critical components of academic, scholarly writing, and balancing full-time

family, academic, and professional responsibilities while serving in the U.S. Armed Force created challenges and obstacles. The challenges and barriers led to redirecting the focus of my doctoral intentions. After re-engaging and pursuing my doctoral journey, I gained the motivation to explore the strategies that leaders use to improve employee engagement in the workplace. In addition to the qualitative, case study design, I considered using the phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of frontline leaders' successful employee engagement strategies. The justification for selecting the qualitative, case study design was the ability to explore the research problem in one setting to gain insight into the successful employee engagement strategies from frontline leaders.

Fostering the trustful relationships with participants was instrumental in obtaining valuable data for exploring successful strategies for improving employee engagement. The opportunity to conduct semistructured, face-to-face in a quiet setting that was free from distractions and compromise of participants' confidentiality was paramount to the integrity of my study. A presumption made before the study was that more participants would volunteer to participate in the study, given the purpose and nature of the study. However, only four of approximately sixteen participants were motivated to engage in this study. An avoidable trade-off that may have affected accessing the participants who could best answer the research question includes going through gatekeepers to access the participants. Through this study, I answered the research question about what successful strategies that frontline leaders in one federal agency in central Maryland are using to

improve employee engagement. Moreover, this study was an opportunity to explore strategies rarely investigated for this population.

### **Conclusion**

In 2015, 51% of frontline leaders in federal agencies did not implement successful strategies to improve the levels of employee engagement (OPM, 2015). Improving the levels of engagement was essential to enhancing the operational performance of federal agencies (GAO, 2015). The findings from this doctoral study revealed successful strategies that frontline leaders need to improve employee engagement better and meet challenges to increase both employee and organizational performance and productivity. Two major themes emerged as successful strategies that applied to professional practice and opportunities for promoting social change that benefits, employees, the federal agency, and the community.

The two major themes were (a) effective organizational communication, and (b) enhancing employee development. Implementations of the successful strategies may result in (a) clear, open communication, (b) technology integrations into the work process, (c) teamwork and collaborations, and (d) effective leadership communication techniques. Other practical values to using successful strategies were (a) learning, and skills development, (b) increased rewards and incentives, (c) work–life balance, and (d) well-being. By accepting the recommendations and integrating the results of this study into business practices, frontline leaders may minimize disengagement and achieve high levels of performance and productivity within a federal agency.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

<b>Preparation</b>																
A	Interview date: _____ Interview start time: _____ Interview end time: _____															
B	Brief Overview of the Study: Yes <input type="checkbox"/>															
C	Alpha Numeric Pseudonym for Participant: Yes <input type="checkbox"/>															
	Informed consent shared with participants: Yes <input type="checkbox"/>															
<b>Ethical Requirements and Interview Questions</b>																
D	Permission to audio record and transcribe the interview: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Perform checks of the quality of the audio recording. Yes <input type="checkbox"/>															
E	<table border="0" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%; border-top: 1px solid black;">Research purpose:</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: right;">Yes <input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="border-top: 1px solid black;">Risk</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Yes <input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">Research ethics discussed</td> <td style="border-top: 1px solid black;">Benefits</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Yes <input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="border-top: 1px solid black;">Right to withdraw</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Yes <input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="border-top: 1px solid black;">Data protection</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Yes <input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		Research purpose:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		Risk	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Research ethics discussed	Benefits	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		Right to withdraw	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		Data protection	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
	Research purpose:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>														
	Risk	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>														
Research ethics discussed	Benefits	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>														
	Right to withdraw	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>														
	Data protection	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>														
F	<b>Interview Questions</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you determine the level of employee engagement?</li> <li>2. What strategies do you use to improve employee engagement?</li> <li>3. What engagement strategies work best to improve employee performance and productivity?</li> <li>4. What engagement strategies are least effective for improving employee engagement?</li> <li>5. What are the benefits of having employees who are highly engaged in their work-related roles in your agency?</li> </ol>															



- 
6. What strategies do you use to sustain the momentum of employee engagement improvements in your agency?
7. What additional information would you like to share about the employee engagement strategies leaders use to improve employee engagement?

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**Strategies to Improve the Quality of the Data**

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G	Look for non-verbal actions and phrases	
H	After conclusion of the interviews, extend a sincere thank you to each participant and a reminder about the follow-up member check interview for the participant to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the summarized data interpretation. Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Participants respond to the follow-up and share their viewpoints. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Introduce probing questions to generate in-depth data. Yes <input type="checkbox"/>

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## Appendix B: Invitation Letter

Dear Recipient Name

My name is Patrick L. Hyde. I am Doctor of Business Administration candidate in the College and Management at Walden University. I am conducting a qualitative case study to fulfill my degree requirement, and I would like to invite you to participate in my doctoral project.

The study involves in-depth interview questions and review of documents to explore successful strategies that you use to improve employee engagement. If you decide to take part in the study, you will meet with me in a face-to-face, open-ended interview to answer questions about the engagement strategies you use to influence employees' higher work performance. I will conduct the interview at a location, date, and time of your choosing. The length of the interview process is approximately one hour. After the completion of the first interview, I will coordinate a preferred location, time, and date to conduct the member check follow-up interview for sharing and validating the accuracy and consistency of the summarized data. With your permission, I will audio record the semistructured interviews to maintain an accurate description of the strategies for improving employee engagement. Please share with me any company document, memorandum, and policy that you deem relevant to the in-depth exploration of strategies used for improving employee engagement.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) authority at Walden University requires researchers and participants follow written guidelines and apply the ethical principles and professional standards to this study. Taking as your participation and is voluntary. If you

begin participation in the study and later decide to terminate the interview, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or fear of retaliation. You will not receive compensation or incentive for additional costs that may result from participation in the study. However, others in the community might benefit from the strategies you share. I will protect your confidentiality and will not share your identity in the final publication.

Your participation in my study is highly desirable, and I extend my thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in my study. Please, provide a response to indicate your desire to participate or not participate by replying by email to discuss your availability for participating in this study. You may contact me at [patrick.hyde@waldenu.edu](mailto:patrick.hyde@waldenu.edu) or the Research Participant Advocate at my university at 612-312-1210, and we will be happy to answer any question you may have about the study.

Sincerely

Patrick L. Hyde

Doctor of Business Administration Student

Walden University

## Appendix C: NIH Course Certificate

