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Strategies for Virtual Sales Leaders to Increase Productivity of Remote Employees

Tamera Monai Gaines
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Tamera Gaines

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Faculty

Dr. Jaime Klein, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Judith Blando, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2018

Abstract

Strategies for Virtual Sales Leaders to Increase Productivity of Remote Employees

by

Tamera Monai Gaines

MBA, University of Phoenix, 2007

BS, Michigan State University, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

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Abstract

An employee's contributions toward the success of organizational results and objectives are essential to how virtual sales leaders implement strategies to improve productivity. In 2014, 21% of virtual leaders received formal training to manage remote employees, and 17% of remote employees received formal training on how to work productively. The purpose of this single qualitative case study was to explore strategies virtual sales leaders used to improve remote sales employees' productivity. The population included 6 virtual sales leaders in 1 staffing organization located in Michigan. The conceptual framework for this study included the job demands-resources model. Data were collected through semistructured interviews, direct observation, organizational document review, and reflective journaling using thematic analysis. Three themes emerged from the data analyzed in this research study: high level of communication, including virtual meetings for improved relationship development; adapting to change and work environment, including introduction of change before implementing; and measurement of employee performance, which could include monitoring activity reports and metric tracking tools. Findings included developing consistent team and individual meetings to communicate metrics and goals, implementing varied communication tools to encourage self-management, involving employees in decision making before changes were executed, and developing attainable employee goals to promote a productive work environment. Contributions to social change include the opportunity to develop an employable and specialized workforce who contribute to the local economy as well as expand community development and higher income for families.

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Dedication

I dedicate my study to my mother who always allowed me to explore my talents and find my way through my own educational journey. My mother has always been my number one fan. There is nothing I would not do to make her proud because there were no stops for her when it came to encouraging me to succeed in all areas of my life. I would also like to include a special dedication to my son. The admiration in his eyes and voice when we talk about mommy receiving a doctorate is nothing short of amazing and I will always do everything I can to make him proud, knowing that the sky is the limit.

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I thank almighty God for holding my hand every step of the way through this journey. He gave me the strength I did not know I had and provided me with a sound mind even when I wanted to quit, although that was never an option. I would like to thank my family and friends that supported my decision to take this step. They supported me and continued to appreciate me at a distance, so I could complete what I started. I was able to connect with some amazing people who encouraged and supported me along the way. Thank you to those who allowed me to focus and helped me eliminate any distractions, knowing that this outcome was worth my short absence, thank you and I am forever grateful!

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Sales leaders are responsible for ensuring adequate resources to limit employee stressors and increase productivity for the business to remain successful and employees to remain efficient. Adequate resources to perform a job and the level of job demands posed on a sales team can make the difference in the high or low productivity rates. Sales leaders continue to encourage employees to manage their careers and take responsibility for performing their job (Segers & Inceoglu, 2012). The focus of this study was to explore strategies virtual sales leaders used to improve remote sales employees' productivity.

Background of the Problem

Virtual employees are responsible for managing their resources and competencies for productive outcomes just as much as management (Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Huibers, & Blonk, 2013). One entity of how to remain productive in a virtual workforce is work engagement. In studying the transition of virtual work and the ability to keep employees engaged and productive, research dated back to the 1980s with the evolution and knowledge work within the virtual workforce (Johns & Gratton, 2013). The business problem of this study was that some virtual sales leaders lacked strategies to improve remote sales employee productivity. Virtual sales leaders depend on remote employees to provide feedback from sales based on customer needs to increase revenue (Morgan, Paucar-Caceres, & Wright, 2014). Sales leaders who work in virtual work settings must

take on managing time, employees, and productivity at the same capacity of sales leaders who manage in-office staff but do so in a way that employees are producing without the daily one-on-one interaction (White, 2014). The importance for employees to utilize virtual communication include providing resources to ensure communication, management support, and any support staff the organization has for employees (Akkermans et al., 2013). Strategies sales leaders implement for teams affect production and income generation as well as trust and ability to perform from employees and the sales leaders at high levels.

Problem Statement

Virtual sales leaders depend on a highly-engaged staff to provide strategic sales responses to stakeholder and consumer needs for increased profits (Morgan et al., 2014). Only 21% of virtual leaders received formal training to manage remote employees, and 17% of remote employees received formal training on how to work productively (Greer & Payne, 2014). The general business problem is that some virtual sales leaders experience revenue loss from less productive remote employees. The specific business problem is that some virtual sales leaders lack strategies to improve remote sales employees' productivity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this single qualitative case study was to explore strategies virtual sales leaders used to improve remote sales employees' productivity. The sample population consisted of 6 virtual sales leaders in a staffing organization with proven success in improving remote sales employees' productivity. The geographical area for

data collection was Michigan, the Midwest region of the United States. Sales leaders may consider the findings useful to adapt and implement the identified strategies that improved productivity in virtual office locations. The implications for social change could be an employable and a specialized workforce who contribute to the local economy as well as expand community development and higher income for families. An additional benefit may be findings that leaders could use to improve local and regional economies for members in the communities and foster opportunities for future professionals.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative method for this study to explore detailed and physical behaviors and emotions of individuals (Barnham, 2015). Researchers pursuing the understanding of individual or group behaviors because of social or human problems employ the qualitative methodology (Barnham, 2015). A researcher selects a quantitative method to examine behaviors, attitudes, and truths subject to statistical data methods (Barnham, 2015). The quantitative method was not appropriate to explore successful strategies virtual sales leaders used to improve remote employees' productivity. Included in the mixed methods of research are qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative research limits in-depth material needed to identify and explore strategies to improve remote sales employees' productivity. A qualitative method was best to permit participants to identify successful productivity strategies in a virtual workforce.

I used a single case study design for this study to explore strategies virtual sales leaders use to improve remote employees' productivity. I selected the case study design because of the ability to gain evidence about a process or procedure. Researchers using a

case study have an opportunity to record individual responses (Barnham, 2015).

Phenomenological research was not appropriate because there was not a phenomenon to explore the meanings of participants' lived experiences (Blank, Harries, & Reynolds, 2013). The narrative research design did not support my research because I did not want to collect and analyze the personal construction of experiences or research individual's life experiences (Lewis, 2015). Ethnographic research was not appropriate because the goal was to gain evidence about a process or procedure and not to understand the shared patterns of beliefs and behaviors within a cultural phenomenon (Kemperaj & Chavan, 2013). The case study design was sufficient to use because I explored leaders' operational practices that affected the workplace and strategies used to achieve outcomes.

Research Question

What strategies do virtual sales leaders use to increase productivity of remote employees?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use for virtual sales employees to increase productivity?
2. How did you involve the virtual employees in the development of the strategies?
3. How do you measure the effectiveness of the productivity?
4. What were the challenges experienced during the implementation of the strategies?
5. What procedures do you have to improve virtual work productivity?

6. What other information would you like to share that we have not discussed?

Conceptual Framework

The job demands-resources model (JD-R), developed by researchers Bakkar and Demerouti (2007), is appropriate to explore the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of work-related responsibilities. Sales leaders rely on employees to contribute to the organizational goals, achievements, and production and drive revenue (Rodriguez & Walters, 2017). The key tenets of the JD-R model include a two-stage approach, which are job demands and job resources (Bakkar & Demerouti, 2007). Examples could include high work stress, negative physical environment, and high-pressure emotional interactions with clients (Bakkar & Demerouti, 2007). For this study, I focused on job demands as they related to sales leaders and productivity expectations, and job resources related to strategies to increase productivity in a virtual sales workforce. Exploring these tenets of the JD-R model provided findings to improve understanding concerning strategies virtual sales leaders used to improve remote employees' productivity. As the remote workforce develops and more organizations take on flexible work options, virtual sales leaders may have to develop systematic and creative approaches to job demands that only remote employees face. In addition to new job demands, there are some terminology that may develop as a result of the specialized workforce.

Operational Definitions

Numerous terms used in this study were included to develop a uniform understanding. The following are terms and definitions referenced throughout the study.

Intrinsic motivation: Intrinsic motivation is the desire to perform an activity to experience satisfaction because of the inherent pleasure of the work activity itself (Peters, Poutsma, Van der Heijden, Bakker, & Bruijn, 2014).

Job crafting: Job crafting is changes employees initiate to modify their levels of job demands and resources (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2013).

Productivity: The capacity of production created by combining particular resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Self-efficacy: Self-efficacy is expectations people have about their abilities to execute desired behaviors and to affect their environment successfully (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2014).

Virtual teams: Virtual teams are groups of geographically and organizationally dispersed coworkers who are assembled using a combination of telecommunications and information technologies to accomplish organizational tasks (Lilian, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Kirkwood and Price (2013) defined assumptions as believed and described hypotheses that are not verifiable. Researchers suggested underexamined assumptions lead to uncertain findings and indefinite data collection (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). The first assumption was that all participants would answer honestly. To help increase confidentiality of all participants and enhance the probability of participants responding to each question honestly, I ensured answers from recordings and notes would be secured and locked. A second assumption was interview questions would contribute to findings of

the study. To help increase the trustworthiness of participant responses, I shared that executive leadership could use the study results to understand the influence remote employees have on productivity outcomes.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses of a study that is out of the control of the researcher. (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). A limitation could be the short time limit of the study. The study participants for the current research were limited to virtual sales leaders who worked in a staffing organization. To minimize this limitation, future researchers should duplicate the study in other industries. Another limitation was participants would not want to answer all the questions accurately. To minimize participants withholding information, I ensured the protection of the participants' identities, including responses via recordings and note-taking shared by the participants.

Delimitations

The boundaries of this study included delimitations. Delen, Kuzey, and Uyar, (2013) described delimitations as set parameters a researcher designs and controls. Participants from this study were from a staffing organization in Michigan. Also, interviews were restricted to virtual sales leaders who lead remote employees. The study was restricted to one organization with virtual leaders who had been successful in encouraging productivity of remote employees. I narrowed the interview questions for responses to encourage sales leaders to reveal strategies for improved productivity from remote employees.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Business leaders seek evidence that will influence employees' performance in a virtual work environment to increase revenues and profits (Pawar, 2013). Implications of findings may lead to improved productivity for virtual sales employees. Leaders from other business sectors may find the business practices innovative and useful to increase production outcomes. Additional implications for business practice could include strategies for managing virtual teams across the United States for increased productivity, instituting communication plans, cross-mentoring, training career and professional development opportunities for upward mobility, implementing policies and work procedures for virtual work environments.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change could be an employable and a specialized workforce who contribute to the local economy as well as expand community development and higher income for families. An additional benefit may be findings that leaders could use to improve local and regional economies for members in the communities and foster opportunities for future professionals. The findings of this study may allow for sustainable growth in the labor force and economic development in communities. Organizational leaders may create professional employment opportunities because of the decrease in overhead, which also contributes to sustainable communities. Employment opportunities may also expand local economic and community development based on increase and consistent production services. Members of communities may

consider the findings significant to social change for cultivating a new generation of professionals.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The literature review consists of peer-reviewed research based on strategies for virtual sales leaders to increase productivity of remote employees. Also, the review includes peer-reviewed studies that address limitations, weaknesses, and the potential for future research in areas of telecommuting, workplace flexibility, employee engagement, leading a virtual team, innovative leadership and work environment, performance management, virtual team performance, manager behavior and employee performance and work stress and performance. The literature review includes 85% peer-reviewed articles, as well as 85% articles published within 5 years of the expected date of receiving Walden University's approval and published between 2013 and 2017. Publishing of remaining sources occurred before 2013 to include background and supportive citations. Organization for the literature review included formation by topic and concluded a review of gaps in the literature.

Examination of various research studies aided my understanding of how to evaluate issues related to productivity strategies. The objective of this single qualitative case study was to explore strategies virtual sales leaders used to improve remote sales employees' productivity. The following research question was also addressed: What strategies do virtual sales leaders use to increase productivity of remote employees? Findings presented how personal characteristics, leadership, professional characteristics, job demands, and job resources affected productivity.

Sources for identifying scholarly journals and peer-reviewed sources include EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Business Source Complete, Emerald Management Journals, SAGE Premier and Google Scholar. The following keywords enhanced the association of articles to improve content and depth of research: *productivity, performance management, remote employees, employee performance, virtual sales, virtual sales leaders, remote workforce, innovative leadership, leadership JD-R model, telecommuting and, employee engagement, leading a virtual team, work environment, performance management, virtual team performance, manager behavior, work stress and performance and workplace flexibility.*

Job Demands-Resources Model

Historically, changes in job characteristics required examination from a top-down approach. Analysis on how employees influence job characteristics surfaced for review in many organizations (Tims et al., 2013). Job demands are those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require continued physical and psychological effort (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). The JD-R model suggested job demands could be stressors, whereas job resources can be motivators, striking a balance between the two and can foster work enjoyment (Peters et al., 2014). Job demands are primary predictors of adverse job strain (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). As researchers develop further investigations of job resources regarding the effect of various job demands, practitioners want to promote functional and effective organizational practices (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Job demands for various sales positions can heighten job

strain, but when monitored and provided the appropriate resources, employees can create a stable work environment for themselves.

Research helped provide proven job demands that hinder productivity based on extensive work capabilities enforced on employees. Some examples of job demands include high-volume workloads, role conflict, and other unfavorable working conditions (Charoensukmongkol, 2014). The goal of present studies is to focus on employee initiatives to develop job demands and improve resources (Tims et al., 2013). Bakker and Demerouti (2017) explained the JD-R model was traditionally referenced to explain burnout but new findings account for employee well-being. When employees engage in prolonged physical or mental effort, the employee may become overburdened with high levels of strain and cause reduced performance and productivity (Rattrie & Kittler, 2014). There is little research focusing on individual differences that could explain workers' perceptions of their job. Engagement is affected indirectly through decreasing job demands and increasing job resources from burnout and leadership (Schaufeli, 2015). Job demands contribute to employee absenteeism and can cost organizations billions of dollars in lost employee productivity each year (Van Woerkom, Bakker, & Nishii, 2016). Employee absenteeism and productivity can have a direct relation to organizational profitability.

Job Resources

Employees can function in work environments differently based on the role and resources provided to ensure production as a result. Job characteristics that contribute toward achieving work-related goals, reducing the effect of job demands and associated

costs, and stimulating personal development are called job resources (Tims et al., 2013).

Job resources are those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Achieving work goals, learning advanced skills, and achieving personal growth at work are all characteristics of successful use of job resources (Tims et al., 2014). Task resources refer to how individuals perform independently and social resources apply to interactions between colleagues and tasks conducted at the group work level (Hu, Schaufeli, & Taris, 2016). Two positive work outcomes come from task resources and social resources.

Resources organizational leaders provide to employees are to strengthen employee outcomes with performance. Job resources encourage employees to meet their goals (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). The motivational practices about job resources are assumed to increase work engagement which is associated with positive outcomes and higher productivity (Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008). Leaders who can manage job demands and job resources to promote work engagement and prevent burnout are a reflection of the JD-R model (Schaufeli, 2015). High levels of job resources affect employees and allow them to have a reduction in the relationship between job demands and work-home interference (Rattrie & Kittler, 2014). Organizational researchers need to understand person-specific characteristics influencing self-reported evaluations of work tasks and work environment because of concerns employees have with how aspects relate to productivity outcomes.

Job Demands and Resources

An employee's contribution toward the success of organizational results and objectives is an essential part of how virtual sales leaders implement strategies for revenue increase. The conceptual framework and starting point of this study focus on the JD-R model. The influence leadership has on productivity and the ability to keep their employees motivated is important to consider. To remain healthy, motivated, and productive, leaders have to maintain a balance between job demands and job resources for staff (Schaufeli, 2015). The JD-R model is the notion that regardless of the type of job, work characteristics include two group categories: job resources and job demands (Hakanen et al., 2008). The JD-R model is an open, exploratory model rather than a specific model that includes distinct sets of particular demands, resources, mental states, and outcomes (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Job demands pertain to those psychological, physical, societal, or organizational characteristics of the job that require continuous physical and mental exertion or skills associated with certain physiological and psychological costs (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). The emotional strength of individuals results from the ability to adapt to demands and resources within an organization.

Enabling virtual sales leaders to implement productivity strategies by remote employees requires management of job demands, job resources, burnout, and engagement. The limited discussion on the needs to ensure employees of virtual work environment have adequate support based on job demands and resources could lead to burnout and lack of engagement, if not managed appropriately (Schaufeli, 2015). The JD-R model has gained much popularity as the basis to improve employee outcomes,

employee well-being, and performance in different occupations and organizations (Brauchli, Schaufeli, Jenny, Füllemann, & Bauer, 2013). Employees who work from home can also develop a pattern of working 24 hours a day and not setting boundaries for work hours.

Management along with individual self-management requires employees not to allow burnout to become the reason they are not able to work in a productive and efficient manner. According to Rattrie and Kittler (2014), as an assumption, job resources overshadow the negative impact of job demands on burnout. High-performance expectations lead to the development of an obsessive passion for high performance outcomes (Lavigne, Forest, Fernet, & Crevier-Braud, 2014). Workaholics may make their work more complicated than necessary; in other words, high job demands may appear as self-inflicted because of high levels of personal expectations (Guglielmi et al., 2012). Acquiring resources and competencies to mobilize and successfully manage the productivity and performance of their career is imperative for employees. High job demands may cause strain on employees and job resources are likely to demonstrate positive outcomes.

The ability to manage one's career includes the ability to perform in a capacity where resources are regulated and readily available to provide outcomes based on organizational leaders' expectations. Current developments in managing one's career include concerns of change, demands and flexibility, and the need for employees to take responsibility for performing their job (Segers & Inceoglu, 2012). Precursors of employee burnout and engagement stem from job demands and resources (Hu et al.,

2016). Investigation of independent effects of several job demands has become a norm of JD-R research, including health-related outcomes, and the interaction between a particular job demand and some job resource (Van Woerkom et al., 2016). People invest more than what is expected in many cases to provide high-level outcomes, including time, energy, and skills (Hu et al., 2016). The typical examination includes the relation between job characteristics and work outcomes using the JD-R model (Hu et al., 2016). Application of the JD-R model is useful in all occupational settings to identify possible damaging job characteristics and protective factors, which could promote employee well-being (Balducci, Schaufeli, & Fraccaroli, 2011). Occupational satisfaction is exhibited through performance and productivity with adequate resources, ensuring employee success and lowers levels of job demands.

Active virtual leaders encourage their employees to take control of their careers and allow autonomy for employees to make decisions and execute as remote employees (White, 2014). Indicators of organizational development in areas of more flexible work options are important for the attainment of career capabilities. Akkermans et al., (2013) defined career competencies as knowledge, skills, and abilities central to career development influenced by the individual. Because the current labor markets demand more self-management of careers, proficiency in the work skills employees attain require career-focused abilities beyond daily responsibilities (Akkermans, Schaufeli, Brenninkmeijer, & Blonk, 2013). Regarding the effects of job demands on work engagement and self-management, previous studies have shown that work engagement has a direct correlation with resources provided by organizational leaders, in contrast to

burnout, (Guglielmi et al., 2012). Working as a remote worker means that many influences regarding task-related decisions include independent decision-making.

The JD-R model is a platform for researchers to investigate demands and resources based on current role functions within a role. Self-efficacy is a significant personal resource (Jacobsen, & Bøgh Andersen, 2017). Confidence to perform and execute projects to organize the course of action required to perform at a high-level defined self-efficacy (Guglielmi et al., 2012). When working from home, a remote worker could experience many positive assertions of self-efficacy that virtual employees can implement into self-managed positions to ensure productivity and production. Self-efficacious employees spend the necessary effort to meet their work goals and to be persistent in the face of difficulties (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Fischbach, 2013). People that identify themselves as possessing higher competency levels may have higher levels of self-motivation and set goals to overcome obstacles (Guglielmi et al., 2012). Employees can determine what demands and resources will help make their jobs more attainable as virtual workers because they are self-managed.

Based on the assumptions of job demand and job demands-resources, leaders have a role in managing the effect of job demands and job resources on their followers. Prevention of burnout and promotion of work engagement is promoted by leadership that can manage the two (Schaufeli, 2015). Lack of inspiration from leadership, strengthening, or connecting is likely to result in burnout when employees experience high job demands and lack resources necessary to execute daily work activities (Schaufeli, 2015). Work engagement provides an indicator of motivation and emotional

exhaustion as an indicator of strain (Akkermans et al., 2013). Based on the JD-R model, Tims et al. (2013) theorized that employee employment constructing would have an influence on work engagement, job satisfaction, and burnout through changes in job demands and job resources. Employee job crafting can have a positive influence on employee well-being given the opportunity to construct their jobs.

Attaining work goals and achieving personal growth and development is the desire for managers to lead employees to produce consistently. Based on the JD-R theory, researchers argued that job crafting is a strategy through which highly self-efficacious employees may create a pleasurable work environment that positively contributes to their work performance (Tims et al., 2013). Some empirical studies have shown that when employees are satisfied with their jobs, they are more likely to become attached to their work (Charoensukmongkol, 2014). Employees, who expect they can successfully shape their environment, may be likely to take on additional tasks or to use proactive strategies (Tims et al., 2014). Studies using the JD-R model typically examine the indirect links between job characteristics and work outcomes, via well-being (Hu et al., 2016). Genuine sales leaders create a job environment to uphold employment standards that avoid burnout and encourage work engagement

Engagement has been a core concept of the JD-R model, relating to a cohesive work environment (Brauchli et al., 2013). Researchers indicated that the JD-R model has findings to show increase performance and productivity from employees as well as improve employee well-being in varied occupations and organizations (Brauchli et al., 2013). Some researchers posited individual characteristics as moderators of the relation

between workers' perceptions of job demands and resources and their well-being (Lavigne et al., 2014). Also, motivation about the JD-R model plays a significant role in preventing a future loss of resources and enhances the process of future resource gain (Rattrie & Kittler, 2014). Job resources, often recognized by researchers, regulate the way in which emotionally demanding conditions determine work engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2013). Employees with emotionally demanding work conditions may also accept the outcomes of high job demands as a driver to determine the level of engagement and their willingness to participate.

Examining positive and negative effects on job demands and high job resources as they relate to the JD-R model is important. Van Woerkom et al. (2016) examined the theory that employees who focus too much on the higher job demands may deplete the resources needed and make them less efficient with other job demands. Classifications of all job characteristics fit into either job demands or job resources (Rattrie & Kittler, 2014). A combination of high job demands and low job control leads to psychological strain and illness (Lavigne et al., 2014). Employees who experience illness from pressures of job demands can incur higher levels of absenteeism, which leads to lower levels of productivity to contribute to the organization.

Telecommuting and Workplace Flexibility

Removing traditional office settings in many industries is unrealistic, and the industries that have the opportunity are seeing continued growth and lower expenses within their organizations. Report prepared by the Telework Research Network (Goodman, 2013) indicated that 34 approximately 3.1 million American workers work

from home exclusively, with an even larger percent working out of the home part-time. The rise of virtual teams has encouraged virtual work, whereby individuals “work from home,” “on the road,” outside of traditional centralized offices (Mukherjee, Lahiri, Mukherjee, & Billing, 2012). Technology efforts have afforded employers the ability to implement teleworking, teleconferencing, and video conferencing for effective communication (Lilian, 2014). Technological and new infrastructures have made it possible to transcend distance, time zones, and traditional work environment (Koehler, Philippe, & Pereira, 2013). Telework often entails working from home, and includes working from other remote locations such as a client office, airport, telework center, or hotel (Golden, 2009). Some firms have challenges with office operational leaders and building relationships among employees, but executives have enjoyed financial, staffing and operational benefits (Drew, 2013). Organizational leaders must determine if allowing their employees to work virtually is realistic and maintainable business practice.

A benefit for organizations that allow employees to work from home is the savings for the organization. Virtual teams allow organizations to create more flexible to react to market demands (Mukherjee et al., 2012). Organizational leaders place significant trust in employees by allowing them to work independently (Koehler et al., 2013). According to Telework Research Network, around 3.1 million American workers work from home exclusively, with an even larger number working remotely part-time (Goodman, 2013). Researchers argued that some employees are not always productive in offices and working in an isolated area may suggest higher productivity (Hankel, 2013). The option to work virtually may allow employees to enjoy work-life balance and

increase productivity because of the lack of distractions that a traditional office setting may have.

The majority of employee's value flexibility, but far fewer have it. Technology and new organizational structures allow companies the option for some of their workers to work from home (Koehler et al., 2013). Tensions of workplace flexibility include variable versus fixed arrangements, supportive versus unsupportive work climates and equitable versus inequitable implementation of policies (Putnam, Myers, & Gailliard, 2014). Organizations that allow employees more flexibility in their work schedule often increase the employee's commitment to the organization (Putnam et al., 2014). In the present worldwide business setting, teams need different methods for overcoming the current demands and future challenges for which a productive workplace is a requirement (Sia & Appu, 2015). Within the international work context, additional pressures arise from factors such as geographic dispersion and frequent mobility (Rattrie & Kittler, 2014). Telework options are here to stay, and managers need to continue to take the necessary steps to ensure employee satisfaction and production as technology allows these opportunities to continue to grow (Golden, 2009). Employees may respond in a thriving manner to employers who are subtle to the difficult challenges that personal and professional obligations bring.

The use of telecommuting has been something that makes employees happy the ever-growing changes in many organizations. As teleworking has become an increasing option for many organizations, researchers have continued to study communication and job satisfaction variables that contribute to how employees perform on the job (Smith,

Patmos, & Pitts, 2015). Organizational leaders can measure job satisfaction to determine how to effectively hire and retain employees who best fit the job based on personality type and communication efforts. Employers have also benefited regarding higher productivity (Rosenberg & Skiba, 2013). Telecommuting increased flexibility has potential to allow employees to manage their lives better and reduce stress (Goodman, 2013). Many tasks of virtual employees can become emotionally demanding. Achievement of work goals stimulates personal growth, learning, and development, which can help to counteract the strain associated with job demands (Van Woerkom et al., 2016). A critical piece in leading a virtual team is the ability to determine the areas of improvement without the daily discussions from employees.

Employee Engagement

Trust from the employer and employee of virtual teams is important as uncertainty may arise and can determine the level of engagement. Work engagement relates to an individual's psychological state of mind during at work (Purcell, 2014). Attentive, feeling, connected, integrated, and focused on their role performances are characteristics of committed people. Carlson, Carlson, Hunter, Vaughn, and George, (2017) propose both cohesion and openness will be related to team effectiveness for virtual teams. Committed individuals can work independently as well as group settings connected to work, and focused on their role performance (Purcell, 2014). Employee engagement tends to relate to the managerial practices that link to staff becoming engaged (Purcell, 2014). Low attrition, high productivity, and organizational reputations are directly related, resulting in management's ability to cultivate an engaged workforce

(Karanges, Beatson, Johnston, & Lings, 2014). Hankel (2013) explained that there is little doubt that working physically side-by-side is advantageous for collaboration and communication. Employees who work from home have limited socialization with peers and lower management communication (Koehler et al., 2013). Employees in traditional office settings have daily interaction with peers, where relationships are developed and management is readily available for support (Koehler et al., 2013). Online platforms and social networking is becoming a heightened communication tool for organizational to market, expand globally, and employee engagement. Internal and external social networking can help organizational leaders improve the social well-being of their employees by introducing another form of communication (Korzynski, 2015). Repeated efforts of the deliverance of expectations set the foundation of confidence from employees and continuous communication.

Many virtual leaders go weeks without talking to their teams, depending on the field of workers. The virtual environment allows mentor/mentee relationships to develop across broad geographic boundaries, making the pairing of participants' easier (Richardson, 2015). Chaudhary, Rangnekar, and Barua, (2013) identified six personal factors associated with engagement: attachment to the job, agreeableness, emotional stability, openness to experience, achievement orientation, and self-efficacy. Medlin and Green (2014) determined both the management principles and process directly affect employee engagement in a positive manner. The implications of virtual work environments reveal teams who rely solely on virtual communication need to understand the parameters, level of use and amount of time to communicate with peers to have a

positive effect on productivity (Malhotra & Majchrzak, 2014). Hiring managers need to evaluate the employee's abilities and skills and whether they are a good fit for the organization to improve employee engagement outcomes (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015). Malhotra and Majchrzak (2014), findings suggested communication type does not negatively affect productivity but the level of use.

Overlooking leadership challenges is a common practice and even more regarding virtual leaders. An employee and behavioral engagement is more relevant to HRM and employment relations but suffers, and a fails to specify the components associated with higher levels of employee engagement (Purcell, 2014). Despite the significance of employees about corporate social responsibility (CSR), few studies have examined CSR and the relevance of engagement (Slack, Corlett, & Morris, 2015). A deficiency in the alignment of CSR is an explanation of this diversity of employee engagement, in addition to poor communication related to business and personal objectives (Slack et al., 2015). When leaders match employees appropriately to the best job and the ability to have a cohesive relationship with peers, the more success the employee will experience in the new company (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015). Allowing employees this autonomy requires trust, and that alone may be a challenge for some virtual leaders.

Employees with high levels of socializing in an office setting can end up wasting time and hindering productivity, which is eliminated when working from home (Goodman, 2013). Work-related stress can decrease efficiency, increase disagreement with others, and be a cause of physical and psychological problems (Jawahar & Soundria, 2015). Those who enjoy the social aspects of going into an office and an office

environment may find it difficult to transition to remote solidarity work. Home-workers sometimes lack access to support staff and equipment. Delegating clerical tasks like scanning, making copies or stapling brochures, all that can enable a more productive workday is not an option (Goodman, 2013). Co-location appears as a significant characteristic of traditional work environments (Koehler et al., 2013).

Korzynski (2015) stated employee engagement could be related to motivation. Experts claim employee engagement predicts employee outcomes and performance. Online social platforms also allow leaders to communicate with the employees as well. Effective communication and relations-oriented leadership indicated the best predictors of organizational commitment (Mikkelsen, York, & Arritola, 2015). If virtual employees can use internal online networking platforms, lines of communication will increase, and essential productivity may improve as well. Alsharo, Gregg, and Ramirez (2017) suggested knowledge sharing positively influences trust and collaboration among virtual team members. How managers interact with employees can determine the level of performance from employees and productivity that is expected. Social cues from leadership affect behaviors in employees, but in the case where social cues are not present because of a virtually anonymous context, employee interaction is limited (Shollen & Brunner, 2016).

Social media platforms for employees who work in virtual teams can allow them to interact with peers on a social level. Employees who have high levels of engagement at work with other employees are likely to have an increased social media use with co-workers because healthy relationships create a bond inside and outside the office, which makes

them feel connected to one another (Charoensukmongkol, 2014). When employees are allowed to work from home achieving work goals and personal goals are essential, and creating an environment that separates the two will increase productive outcomes (Tims et al., 2013). The main reason why perceived high levels of support from coworkers can enhance social media use at work is that healthy relationships among colleagues make employees feel connected to one another (Charoensukmongkol, 2014). Job satisfaction for employees can come from the ability to learn more about their peers through social media outlets to balance their work life activities and cause employees to develop favorable attitudes toward their job (Charoensukmongkol, 2014). Research has shown that people who experience joy are also more likely to report other positive emotions, such as feeling happy and excited (Tims et al., 2014). Work enjoyment may indicate high levels of work-related resources and demands.

Employee experiences with high-resource jobs have necessary tools that are available and accessible to them to do the work. High-resources jobs provide an engaging atmosphere and relatively less stress (Hu et al., 2016). Engaged workers have high levels of energy, are enthusiastic and strongly involved in their job, and fully immersed in their work (Xanthopoulou et al., 2013). The definitions of employee engagement tend to focus on the engaged employee's attitudes and beliefs (Purcell, 2014). Optimism keeps employees energetic and able to preserve perseverance in the face of demands and facilitates engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2013).

Leading Virtual Teams

Organizational leaders are often interested in global expansion to support the demands of global marketing with the flexibility of working in many different time zones (Putnam et al., 2014). Technological advancements have created new limits for communication and interaction beyond time, physical distance, and organizational boundaries are unique to corporate management (Mukherjee et al., 2012). Virtual team management requires an intricate look into the understandings of people, process, and technology, recognizing trust is a more limiting factor compared with face-to-face interactions (Serrat, 2017). Some managers are required to manage a mix of office based and remote workers, which challenges managers to maintain high levels of engagement, motivation, and creative leadership capabilities from a distance (Scrivener, 2014). Many successful organizational leaders have to ensure that they provide basic support for their employees within the organization, the especially effective leaders also ensure they build trustworthy individual and team relationships (Ford, Piccolo, & Ford, 2017). Zero face-to-face contact obliges virtual leaders the task of driving results and the ability to trust remote team members to bring in the results required (Scrivener, 2014). Scholars agree leading virtual teams is harder than leading teams that meet face-to-face (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). There is no one answer that can explain how to understand what makes a successful leader, but theories can help leaders develop into efficient sources for the organization to continue to grow (Latham, 2014).

Some leaders of organizations view flexible work options as a benefit and not a standard work arrangement. Employers see this as an accommodation and reward for

admirable employees and are likely to offer them to high-performance employees or employees with the ability to maintain influence in the labor market (Correll, Kelly, O'Connor, & Williams, 2014). Dulebohn and Hoch (2017) explained some advantages of virtual teams include maximizing functional expertise from a global group of professionals and lowering costs such as travel and overhead. Disadvantages included limited collaboration efforts and difficulties establishing trust and shared responsibilities. (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017).

Employees who leverage the option of unwarranted flexible work practices or take excessive leaves have slower wage growth, earn fewer promotions, have lower performance reviews, and perception of them is less motivated and dedicated than workers who work full time, on-site, without interruption (Coltrane, Miller, DeHaan, & Stewart, 2013). One initiative, the Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE), allows all employees to work whenever and wherever they want as long as work is complete, valuing results rather than face time (Correll et al., 2014). Multinational companies often employ virtual teams to take advantage multi-level experience, globally dispersed knowledge and innovative resources with the desire to successfully facilitate strategic activities (Mukherjee et al., 2012).

Many leaders still prefer traditional work settings to monitor performance, and changes like Rowe have been rare (Correll et al., 2014). Leaders who manage remote employees may have a difficult time incorporating motivation and team dynamic efforts because of communication and disbursement of workers (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Darics (2017) noted, research shows that leading people via digital channels requires

even greater effort to combine leadership and management functions. Focusing on individual-level positive work outcomes is important in management (Peters et al., 2014). Managers who give employees autonomy to make decisions and decision-making authority are also necessary to keep the employee engaged because this helps to make the employee feel valued and involved (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015). Organizational leaders who understand person-specific characteristics can contribute to lead employees by implementing programs, which could increase worker productivity (Lavigne et al., 2014).

With more organizations turning to the option to work from home there has been a question of how managers will measure deliverables and train employees via telework. Training for leaders on how to use internal social media to drive business results will help leadership more than remote employees (Korzynski, 2015). Virtual sales leaders who want their teams to function at the same capacity of those who meet face-to-face will likely need to invest more time incorrectly implementing media outlets for means of communication, motivation, employee development, and offer strategies to improve productivity (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). The expectation for virtual leaders is to invest time and effort developing employees and managing team tasks to facilitate team processes (Liao, 2017). Support for online networking platforms is necessary to organizational leaders who seek ways to simplify internal online networking to organize training and development (Korzynski, 2015). In an effort to improve cost reduction, time-saving, attracting young workforce, globalization, and reinventing workforce demographics managers may begin to experience less interaction with their employees (Petkovic, Orelj, & Lukic, 2014). Managers may also experience less interaction with

their employees, less business to business communication and limited interaction with human resource and try to improve cost reduction (Petkovic et al., 2014).

Job crafting is a concept that focuses on employee job restructure (Tims et al., 2013). Many managers face the same daily tasks as their staff and can relate to their job because they have or still do the same amount of work. Cunyat and Melguizo (2013) suggested a leader who has the same amount of responsibility as their followers and shows the same productivity exemplifies higher output than those leaders who are not as productive. Leadership style plays a role in the effectiveness of relationships within organizations as well as employee satisfaction (Mikkelsen et al., 2015). A perception of leaders who are authentic in developing employees and acting morally and ethically is they lead responsible and sustainable organizations (Freeman & Auster, 2011). Leaders of organizations with optimistic employees strive for positive outcomes. Confident employees are likely to believe in their potential regardless previous failures (Xanthopoulou et al., 2013).

Innovative Leadership and Work Environment

When a leader understands the importance of innovative strategies and performance, the opportunities will start to increase for that organization. The traditional methods organizations use will no longer get preferred results (Geer-Frazier, 2014). Creating value for some stakeholders and the resources that for innovation has become difficult to come across (Latham, 2014). Creating a work environment that has purpose and aspirations where leaders lead based on self-understanding create responsible leadership (Freeman & Auster, 2011). Organizational leaders that are only good at

innovative strategies will experience “boom-bust” cycles, with many early sales only to experience a steep decline when they cannot deliver on their promises; great leaders have to be able to both execute and innovate to be successful (Latham, 2014).

Leaders of some corporations are reluctant to consider new models of working, virtual work may be a growing theme of interest in the innovative trends of large organizations. Leaders within organizations develop virtual teams to gather experts who collaborate in a dispersed environment and communicate online to accomplish organizational tasks (Alsharo et al., 2017). A transformational leadership style promotes innovation through the development of such attributes as enthusiasm, trust, and openness; transactional leadership, on the other hand, leads to acceptance of change only through formal organizational practices around reinforcement and reward (Shanker, Bhanugopan, & Fish, 2012). Managers with the right leadership capabilities lead innovative organizations (Shanker et al., 2012). Flexible work arrangements may factor into improving some of the pressures placed on employees, and business leaders may gain a higher interest to understand how nontraditional workplace policies affect their organizations to improve productivity. Truss (2014) explained employee engagement is an approach taken by organizations to manage their workforce, rather than a psychological state experienced by employees in the performance of their work. Employees take ownership of the work process; in turn will work harder to achieve the desired performance outcomes (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015).

Staffing remote employees from a business aspect may include greater productivity, reduced overhead and happier workers (Goodman, 2013). Characteristics of

a person who may work well from home include self-motivator, goal setter/goal getter independent spirit and self-starter (Goodman, 2013). Eliminating the commute for work means that the worker can be productive during the time they would usually spend traveling. Telecommuting allows employees to attend meetings without the travel to different offices or locations, thereby allowing more time to produce and less time in travel (Goodman, 2013). We are experiencing not only technological but also great social change with the implementation of telecommuting employees of organizations (Korzynski, 2015).

Innovative work structures entail a high level of trust, autonomy, and adaptability from employees. Employees and organizational leaders need high levels of trust for performance outcomes and productivity to remain above average. With low levels of employee trust, performance results may have adverse effects on the organization (Koehler et al., 2013). Trust is a result of credibility, to build a culture of trust in the organization, employees must be empowered, supported and the organization must be their commitments to their employees (Koehler et al., 2013). American companies use telecommuting as a means to reward workers and to make employment possible for segments of the workforce that otherwise might not be able to be employed (Rosenberg & Skiba, 2013). Telecommuting within contemporary management has made the workplace more flexible and has given workers more freedom (Rosenberg & Skiba, 2013).

Managers who offer employees pioneering ideas to succeed in a virtual environment extend guidance on the physical needs to increase productivity as well as

mental capabilities. Goodman (2013) identified some ways to succeed as a telecommuter; get dressed for work, organize a dedicated workspace, get comfortable, reduce clutter, minimize distractions, structure your time, check in, manage childcare, define your objectives and make sure you take breaks. Working from home creates a less social work environment and it should not become grounds for working around the clock either. Employers who encourage setting appropriate work times and integrating technology such as face-timing, chat, and teleconference can ease the lack of social communication (Goodman, 2013). Social communication is also an easier transition for employees when leaders can integrate national and cultural differences to aid in productivity and not as a hindrance (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014).

Innovative organization structures such as a virtual workforce require a level of trust that allows employees the independence of decision making on behalf of the organization. Low levels of trust may hurt employee outcomes, productivity, and revenue generation (Koehler et al., 2013). Leaders who implement engaging leadership strategies to encourage productivity and engagement include collaboration and interpersonal bonding, so virtual employees still get that sense of belonging to a team and inspire, strengthen and connect employees to their peers and the sales leaders (Schaufeli, 2015).

Yahoo Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Marissa Mayer saw innovative and collaboration, which drives revenue, was not the culture of the organization made up of a virtual workforce and eliminated the work from home option (Rosenberg & Skiba, 2013). The decision made by a leader of such a large organization to drop the work from home policy could raise questions from other organizations and industries that have

implemented or are considering implementing a virtual workforce. Work engagement is seen as positive, fulfilling, dedication, reciprocity, and willingness to participate in continuous outcomes (Purcell, 2014). Employees are often required to work with cross-functional teams and communicate with sales leaders often, and none of that can take place without engagement. Research on the behavior of future generation's shows that growing up with virtual reality might lead to an increase in the number of virtual teams, normalizing virtual work practices (Großer & Baumöl, 2017).

Manager Behavior and Employee Performance

Organizational leaders must develop strategies to ensure employees connect with one another as well as with the organization's mission, goals, and values (Drew, 2013). Regarding communication, researchers propose the presence of work engagement is an alert to management that the organization is performing well (Timms et al., 2015). Influential managers and effective team dynamics can facilitate and limit the adverse effect of flexible arrangements (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Briscoe & Kellogg, 2011). Serrat (2017) explained leading a virtual team requires a deeper understanding of people, process and technology, each of which requires a high level of trust factors for efficient and productive work environments. Leadership style, physical distance, and communication between virtual leaders and remote employees are factors seen as affected by perceived leader performance.

A critical challenge organizational leaders may face in a remote workforce is developing other leaders who are prepared handle trials and are experienced with the skills to succeed in the global market (Dennis, Meola, & Hall, 2013). Managers' are

responsible for improving the environment among their staff job demands-resources in addition to personal resources (Nylen, Lindfors, Le Blanc, Aronsson, & Sverke, 2017). In the increasingly multifaceted and fast-paced work environment that depends on the employee's familiarity to be at an all-time, managers are finding success comes from a well-trained and highly motivated workforce (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015). Employees who know their managers have a vested interest in them will likely be invested in the manager and drive performance because of the manager and employee work relationship (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015). Parker and Morgeson (2017) suggested incentivizing employees with rewards and security might counter job demands and could inspire growth and foster success. Breevaart et al. (2014) explained how more researchers include how transformational leaders contribute to their followers' work engagement.

Based on a poll conducted by the Association for Talent Development (ASTD) forum to enhance executive global leadership skills, some of the most critical leadership skills for all leaders are identified as the ability to establish and meet metrics for work projects and goals and be extremely clear about goals and directions with a constant focus on the big picture (Dennis et al., 2013). Breevaart et al. (2014) noted although transactional leaders can be effective (e.g., promote follower job performance), transformational leaders are even more efficient (e.g., boost follower job performance beyond transactional leaders). Engaged employees perform their work because they enjoy it and are intrinsically motivated (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Managers who enlist time management, delegation, coping with stress, negotiation, caring, listening, empathy and trust are equipping their team to perform in a

way where delivering outcomes of high rankings are favorable for the organization. Some organizational leaders have mixed feelings about work from home options for employees. Recently telework options have come under scrutiny from some Fortune 500 companies that ban this option because of productivity matters (Smith et al., 2015). In March 2013, Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer banned telecommuting for the company's employees, noting that personal interaction is the best way to convey the company's vision (Rosenberg & Skiba, 2013). The shift in strategy at Yahoo can have several damaging effects, including lower morale and lower productivity (Rosenberg & Skiba, 2013). Modern establishments have created innovative work settings that allow employees to work independently (Koehler et al., 2013). Instead of offering 100% work from home option some organizations offer flexibility in schedules, which could also increase employee morale and productivity. More organizations are into telecommuting work environments, and ensuring employees who have this option have high integrity is essential. Leadership within organizations set the tone of performance and productivity. A leader's behavior accounts for 25% of why people feel productive, motivated, energized, capable, and committed to their work (Mikkelsen et al., 2015). When employees experience feelings of happiness and satisfaction, intrinsic motivation occurs. Intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to perform an activity to experience satisfaction from the inherent pleasure of the work activity itself (Peters et al., 2014). Intrinsic motivation can also be a factor in enhancing employee performance (Peters et al., 2014). Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees, and Gatenby (2013) examined perceived line managers, human resource practices with

employee engagement and individual performance. The study includes self-report measures of individual performance for task performance and works behavior.

Engaging leaders inspire their followers, strengthen their followers and connect their followers (Schaufeli, 2015). Without inspiration, strength and a connection with leadership, encouraging a traditional workforce that works in an office is hard and even more difficult for a virtual workforce. From inspiration comes promotion and fulfillment from the employee of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. From strength comes a higher level of expertise after task completion and managers who have a connection with their employees are better able to help employee engagement with peers and will feel a strong sense of belongingness (Schaufeli, 2015). Job resources factor consisting of autonomy, promotion prospects, and social support relates to work engagement (Balducci et al., 2011). Leaders that focus on inspiring and strengthening employee engagement levels are likely to see levels of engagement increase (Schaufeli, 2015).

Performance Management

Virtual company managers can hire top talent wherever candidates reside and not restrict to one geographic area (Drew, 2013). There is a common fear that being "out of sight, out of mind" damages chances of advancement within a company (Goodman, 2013). To retain gratified and motivated workforce leaders must continually find ways to meet individual employee needs and stimulate their creativity (Karanges et al., 2014). Managers want to ensure employees remain productive and employees want to make sure they have the autonomy to perform without monitoring from management (Sewell & Taskin, 2015). Timms et al. (2015) suggested that both formal and informal

organizational systems are import tools that leaders can use to focus on the team and organizational goals. A well-managed remote workforce can reap the benefits of flexibility and productivity whereas isolation, disengaged and underperforming team members are the results of a remote workforce that do not have the same level of management (Scrivener, 2014). Managerial control conditions for teleworkers will vary depending on the occupation and factors of the job duties (Sewell & Taskin, 2015). Managers of corporations can implement work-life benefit programs that may affect employee job satisfaction and successively affect employee performance.

Establishing an articulate organizational culture, engaging employees, using performance evaluations and incentives, and employee training is critical to achieving meaningful performance results (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015). Virtual collaboration contributes to team performance (Liao, 2017). There is a risk of revealing inconsistencies with management when employees work in a remote work environment and work independently (White, 2014). Discouragement and lack of performance will lead to a loss of productivity; employees may also decide to leave the organization for a better opportunity (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015). Performance evaluations aid in determining performance improvement strategies for increased revenue. The employee should come out of the performance appraisal knowing management expectations to perform at their best level (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015). Individual employees working for any manager experience support and are likely to be influenced by the relationship between the manager and employee (Van Woerkom et al., 2016)

Effective leaders position themselves to learn and develop in the same capacity that they expect from their employees. White (2014) communicated the history of virtual work environments, how leaders position themselves based on trust, achievement, engagement, and membership along with the relationship between being conscious of historical data to prosper clear in the future. Rusch and Brunner (2013) suggested leaders become learners themselves, so they know how to lead, and they are well versed in the practices they are asking who they lead to provide. Acceptance of not knowing is something individuals in a leadership position become quite uncomfortable with but understanding that every situation is a learning tool that can help to lead is the transparency leaders need to possess (Rusch & Brunner, 2013). When organizational leaders actively help employees realize they bring exceptional attributes and strengths to work, and that the organization and its employees benefit when they can successfully capitalize on employee's assets, employees will be more likely to apply their strengths and effort (Van Woerkom et al., 2016).

Virtual Team Performance

Drew (2013) noted examples of employees who have caregiving responsibilities such as raising small children and even some that care for senior members of the family but can work any hours because performance is the basis of evaluation. Stanford University researched whether working from home made people more productive. From the controlled study of two groups of 255 people divided, virtual workers increased productivity by 13%, staff attrition was half that of office-based employees and working from home saved the company \$2000 per employee (Goodman, 2013). Satisfaction with

virtual work practices and mentorship has been similar to those in face-to-face mentoring programs (Richardson, 2015). Traditionally in many cases, high levels of work performance are conducted between the hours of 8am and 5pm, but remote workers think of work as taking place between the time work is assigned and when work is due (Dennis et al., 2013).

Virtual team success is dependent on management ability to drive performance and productivity. Though diversity of knowledge created by an integrated global workforce and experiences creates potentially valuable resources for a team, if team member diversity is not properly managed, many of the benefits may become liabilities (Batarseh, Usher, & Daspit, 2017). Barriers of cross-cultural practices could hinder communication. To create team cohesion in a virtual setting, team leaders must establish routines that facilitate each condition in which they want the team to perform (Dixon, 2017). Virtual teams depend on implementing appropriate communication technology to connect and support the members in ways that develop trust (Ford et al., 2017). Some virtual team members report a sense of isolation from a lack of face-to-face contact with team members and are not able to collaborate with one another on ideas, which may affect performance (Dennis et al., 2013). In a nine-month study, researchers at Stanford University ran a controlled study at China's largest travel agency, CTrip. CTrip staffs 13,000 employees. The 255 divided sample population included home-based workers and office-based workers. Results indicated home-based workers had a 13% increase in productivity (Goodman, 2013).

Work Stress and Performance

Employees' hesitation to speak up about work-related matters may come from factors linked to individual and organizational outcomes (Brinsfield, 2013). Tepper, Duffy, & Breaux-Soignet (2012) regarded abusive supervision as leaders' display of engagement of hostile, verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact. Organizational leaders depend on employees for new product development, and leadership abuse can hinder employees ability to want to contribute at their full capacity (Mathieu, Neumann, Hare, & Babiak, 2014). Job satisfaction may affect employee performance (Delen et al., 2013). Healthy working conditions have the potential to influence job satisfaction, which includes flexibility in work and life balance of a virtual workforce (Mohammadi & Shahrabi, 2013).

Autonomy allows employees to make decisions and work at a pace they feel appropriate but does not mean that employees always make the best decisions for increased productivity (Wilson, Perry, Witt, & Griffeth, 2015). Given the need for the remote communications and the common goals to achieve, the role of trust and allowing autonomy becomes necessary in virtual work settings (Zhu & Lee, 2017). Norms of evaluating work have evolved over the years, and the markers that assess the status of workers are not just about the image anymore but completed what work certain roles (Rosengren, 2015). Production deviance may be the least detectable but most performed type of deviance because of its passive nature (Wilson et al., 2015). Results from multiple regression analyses revealed employees with self-directed work opportunities, higher

levels of stress and are in a position to have numerous employment opportunities are more likely to have production deviance (Wilson et al., 2015).

The term job-related stress is defined as the turmoil associated with a job or employment and can lead to burnout (Chou, Li, & Hu, 2014). Studies of stress-cognate illnesses show stress is imposing a high cost on both productivity and health (Jawahar & Soundria, 2015). Reshaping a workplace where virtual sales leaders can improve revenue by remote employees could add stress because of the pressures on revenue increase. Correll et al. (2014) put forth a call to action: to redesign work to meet the needs of today's workforce and to redefine successful work. Despite technological advances, workplaces demand increasing amounts of time (Correll et al., 2014). Professional and managerial jobs often require long hours, strong emotional engagement, and constant availability (Blair-Loy, 2003; Perlow, 2012). Managers have to take the challenge of work-life balance seriously, as it affects their professional success, employee performance and personal stability (Jawahar & Soundria, 2015).

The goal of lower stress is to separate work and non-work functions, so the two are not in conflict with one another and productivity levels increase in both. Work-related stress is a negative and unpleasant condition, which one may experience when a person perceives he/she is unable to meet the demands and pressures placed upon him/her (Jawahar & Soundria, 2015). Ledesma (2014) defined resilience as the capacity to face stressors without significant negative disruption in functioning. No one definition can explain what makes employees consider work pleasing but *work enjoyment* refers to employees' evaluation regarding the quality of their working life (Peters et al., 2014).

Koch and Binnewies (2015) proposed work-life-friendly role modeling positively relates to employee individual work/home segmentation behavior and well-being (moderate amounts of exhaustion and disengagement). Leaders of organizations are responsible for maintaining a sustainable work environment; they must also encourage resiliency from employees (Ledesma, 2014).

Summary and Transition

Section 1 of this doctoral study identified problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, research and interview questions, conceptual framework, the definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and significance of the study. Section 1 concludes with the literature review, which incorporates (a) telecommuting and workplace flexibility, (b) employee engagement, (c) leading a virtual team, (d) innovative leadership and work environment, (e) performance management, (f) virtual team performance, (g) manager behavior and employee performance and (h) work stress and performance. A shared goal of case study research is rigorous study, which also includes an exploratory framework (Cronin, 2014). Included is how virtual sales leaders implement strategies to increase productivity.

A single qualitative case study was appropriate exploring productivity strategies of virtual sales leaders. In Section 2, I restate the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher. Section 2 will also include participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, data analysis techniques, and the validity and reliability of the study findings. Section 2 transitions to Section 3 for a summary of findings.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this single qualitative case study was to explore strategies virtual sales leaders used to improve remote sales employees' productivity. The sample population consisted of 6 virtual sales leaders in a staffing organization with proven success in improving remote sales employees' productivity. The geographical area for data collection was Michigan. Sales leaders may consider the findings useful to adapt and implement the identified strategies that improved productivity in virtual office locations. The implications for social change included an employable and a specialized workforce who contribute to the local economy as well as expand community development and higher income for families. An additional benefit includes findings leaders could use to improve local and regional economies for members in the communities and foster opportunities for future professionals.

Role of the Researcher

The role of a researcher in a qualitative case study is to explore views and implications of participants based on how the participants articulate explanations appropriate to the study (Pettigrew, 2013). The role of a researcher is to make sure participants understand the questions and is informed of their participation. I was the primary data collection instrument for this study and I collected and interpreted data using semistructured interviews. In a qualitative case study, a researcher collects data from multiple resources such as (a) interviews, (b) records, and (c) documents (Yin,

2012). As a researcher, semistructured interviews allowed me to acquire data on strategies virtual sales leaders used for improved productivity.

Although I had experience working in a virtual work environment, there was not any previous engagement or relationship with the participants. There was no knowledge of the organization, and there was no interaction or relationships with the leadership team before selecting participants. Contacting the appropriate executive leadership to contact participants who met requirements of participating in the research was the method of selecting participants. Before conducting the study, I ensured completion the National Institutes of Health (NIH) certification (Certification Number: 1796361). In addition to completing the NIH certification to ensure ethical limitations, I adhered to the Belmont Report's Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research protocol. Ethical protection for all participants is essential. I used the Belmont report concerning participant decisions in what they decided to share from the initial interview through member checking to protect participants' verbal and written responses and identity. To mitigate bias, I used reflective journaling as a resource to ensure specific feelings were not implemented during the interview and included member checking to safeguard and eliminate bias responses. I explained the process to the participants, monitored the process, and extracted data from the interviews to provide valid and informative information for future researchers. Preconceived expectations and nonverbal expressions shown during face-to-face interviews can be indicators that researchers may introduce bias (Hansen, 2013). I reduced the use of nonverbal expressions during the interview process.

My role in the qualitative case study was to conduct interviews, ask applicable questions, listen actively, ask probing questions, and take notes. The interview protocol was the foundation for the qualitative interviews. I used the protocol to interview sales leaders and ensured the accuracy of interview interpretations. Data sampling for this research required gaining approval from participants who had proven success in managing remote employees. A critical part of ensuring the review of data without bias is accuracy, reliability, and valid conclusions, in which data coding is used to diminish researcher bias (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). The process of data collection included examining existing literature surrounding the topic, creating relevant and useful interview questions, interviewing participants with success, collecting, and analyzing data and presenting research findings.

Participants

The sample population included 6 virtual sales leaders in a staffing organization, with proven success improving remote sales employees' productivity. Each participant selected had minimum 1-year experience working in a remote workforce as a virtual leader and had managed an individual or sales team to increase productivity. Participants were selected using the purposeful sampling technique. Selecting individuals with the most knowledge and provide accurate information based on experience with a phenomenon depicts the purposeful sampling technique (Palinkas et al., 2015). Successful productivity strategies of virtual sales leaders align with the study overarching research question.

To gain access to participants for the study, I contacted executive leadership to ensure there were no conflicts of interest. For the interviews to take place, I gained permission from the executive leadership team to discuss strategic business information with virtual sales leaders. Maintaining ethical and confidentiality guidelines in addition to maintaining ethical principles throughout research when interacting with participants for research is required throughout the process (El-Khani, Ulph, Redmond, & Calam, 2013). Sales leaders from varied departments received an email with a detailed write up of the study and decided if they were interested in participation in the study. Before the study, set criteria were set to ensure participants were fit to include or exclude from the study (Killawi et al., 2014). I established criteria to select participants for the study to ensure eligibility: (a) individuals employed within the virtual workforce as a remote leader for at least 1 year, (b) sales leaders employed by the single staffing organization, and (c) leaders willing to share strategies to increase the productivity of remote employees.

All participant information, as well as company information, will remain undisclosed for the privacy of the individual and organization. I used email for initial communication to establish and build relationships to gain contacts. Allowing executive leadership to make the outreach confirmed access to the most appropriate virtual sales leaders to ensure the pool of participants demonstrated success in their respective role. Access to contacts within the organization went through the executive leadership team to ensure sales leaders who had experienced success with strategies to increase productivity were included in the study. A researcher must protect and be transparent with participants before and during the interview process (Solomon, 2013). The goal of the study was to

have the participant provide transparent, honest, and significant responses to create an additional resource for future researchers.

Research Method and Design

There are three methodologies offered for current research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Yilmaz, 2013). After evaluating each of the three research methods, I selected a qualitative method and single case study design. Selecting the right method and research design provided the most appropriate strategies for research development.

Research Method

Researchers select from three research methods, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Yin, 2014). Based on the problem, purpose, and research question of this study, the qualitative method was the practical option. All methods can produce insights regarding various phenomena and have strengths and weaknesses (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). The selection to complete research for this study was the qualitative method and single case study design. The decision to use the qualitative method was made after exploring all three methods, based on the research question.

I used the qualitative method to explore physical and emotional behaviors of individuals for this study. Qualitative researchers explore and gather information in an area that is unknown with respect and ethical standards of participants in mind (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). Qualitative researchers can improve and modify data for a thorough inquiry (Tucker, Powell, & Meyer, 1995). Researchers who are focused on communication are concerned with gathering relevant, complete,

valid, and reproducible data and are encouraged to explore qualitative research methods for improved business findings (Tucker et al., 1995).

A researcher selects a quantitative method when depicting results for social research and social phenomena subject to statistical data (Manfredi et al., 2014). The quantitative method is not appropriate for exploring life experiences and perception (Yin, 2014). The quantitative method has been driven by questions including what, how much, and why, whereas qualitative research emphasizes on answering the questions why and how (Jacques, 2014). Qualitative research also allows for exploring of real-life behavior, enabling research participants to speak for themselves (Jacques, 2014). The quantitative method was not appropriate to explore strategies of successful virtual sales leaders to improve remote employees' productivity because there were no social research and social phenomena to explore. Mixed methods include qualitative and quantitative methods, which excluded the mixed methods option because I did not test hypothesis or variables. Contrary to the differences in both qualitative and quantitative research methods, some scholars execute them successfully based on the respective strengths.

Research Design

Selecting the design for the study was necessary to understand how virtual sales leaders implemented strategies to improve productivity from remote employees. Answering questions like *how* or *why* is typical when using the case study design. I used the single case study design, which centered on my research question. Recording individual responses from participants and gaining an in-depth understanding of real-life experiences was significant to the research data, case study design gives researchers the

opportunity to record individual responses. Considerations for other qualitative study designs included phenomenology, narrative, and ethnography (Roberts, 2013). The case study design was best for this study because data collected from interviews and conclusions were drawn to answer the research question from interviewing successful sales leaders.

Through the phenomenological design, researchers form conclusions and recommendations based on a phenomenon explored through lived experiences (Blank et al., 2013). The phenomenological research design was not appropriate for my research because individuals are encouraged to describe individual lived experiences and interpret data to form conclusions of the lived experiences. The narrative research design was not appropriate to use for my research because I did not want to study personal life construction to form a narrative or investigate the lives of participants. Understanding social patterns and beliefs of cultural groups was not the goal of my study; therefore, ethnography was not a viable option for the research design. The case study design was an adequate option because I explored virtual sales leaders' strategies and practices used to reach productivity outcomes. Failure to reach data saturation can result with a negative effect on the validity of the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To ensure data saturation, I interviewed six virtual sales leaders in a field where there was limited documentation to ensure there was enough information to replicate the study. The interview and responses served to obtain new data. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested the number of interviews needed for a qualitative study to reach data saturation is a number that could not be quantified and researchers should use the sample they have unless data saturation is

accomplished. In the event that data was not replicated from the six mentioned interviews, I would have met with additional participants to gain information until data saturation was reached.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study included virtual sales leaders from a staffing organization located in Michigan who have used strategies to improve productivity from remote employees and included purposive sampling. The sample size must be large enough to address the research question but small enough to contain data pertinent to the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Sampling is essential to the practice of qualitative methods but discussed less compared with data collection and analysis (Robinson, 2014). The aim is to produce new knowledge that was not available before (Suri, 2011). The population for this single qualitative case study was virtual sales leaders within a staffing organization with proven success improving remote sales employees' productivity. Purposeful sampling is the most appropriate to access participants who will be able to provide information-rich data and add to the current data for future research (Suri, 2011). Purposeful sampling provides a researcher the ability to select well-informed individuals who are reflective and willing to share experiences (Benoot, Hannes, & Bilsen, 2016). Participant emails were provided for the study by executive leadership. I used purposeful sampling to identify prospective participants and emailed a consent form asking participants to participate in the study. During the interviews, participants provided detailed answers in response to the research questions. Purposeful sampling may also allow a researcher to identify patterns and themes (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017).

Selection of participants was made based on knowledge, experiences, and proven results. Collecting data using purposeful sampling helps filter data to a larger population (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). The data collected from this study aided in research areas of productivity, sales leaders' strategies, and the virtual work environment. Member checking was identified as a source to gain more in-depth responses and ensure data saturation. Using purposeful sampling and member checking aided in concluding responses from selected individuals within the virtual workforce of the staffing industry.

Each participant was a virtual employee who has the option to work virtually and report to an office. Additionally, as a dispersed workforce, most participants reported in at different times, which could have made it difficult to perform face-to-face interviews. Each participant had the autonomy to schedule the interview at the time that worked best with their schedule. The dispersed work option did not pose a problem with scheduling or time spent the day of the interview. Each participant provided multiple time slots that worked best, in which we agreed on a set date and time to execute the interview with no distractions. I did not know any of the participants prior to interviews. According to Hamalainen and Rautio (2015), appropriate measures should be taken to make the interview setting more relaxing if there is a complex or sensitive topic addressed to allow the interviewed to obtain transparent nonbias responses. The in-person interviews in the office of the staffing organization allowed each participant the ability to answer questions from the participant location of choice, ensuring a comfortable, quiet, yet professional environment.

After receiving the email addresses of participants from executive leaders, each participant received an email before the interview to clarify the agreement to participate in a 15-30-minute audio-recorded interview, was educated on the process as well as the importance of selecting a time that allowed minimal distractions. The order of questions remained the same for each participant, allowing same order and given the same amount of time to complete the interview (Doody & Noonan, 2013). All devices that could have posed a distraction in the area, including cell phones, were removed, or asked to be placed on vibrate or silent. The main interview process was in-person interviews. Each participant answered the same questions in the same order and was given the same amount of time to complete the interview. Participants answering the same questions in the same sequence allowed accurate data for comparison and fair treatment of participants.

Ethical Research

Integrity and ethics are vital entities of research, and requirements for conducting research should adhere to ethical boundaries to ensure confidentiality of the participants. Ethical standards defined by the Belmont Report are for research and the protection of participants. Researchers must ensure appropriate measures of consent, privacy, and confidentiality are controlled (Kelly et al., 2013). Selection of participants must be a standard process to ensure ethical protection using a consent form noting privacy and confidentiality (Yin, 2014). The consent form included (a) researcher's contact information, (b) Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval data, (c) research and interview procedures, (d) participant withdrawal procedures, (e) potential study risks, (f)

records retention information, and (g) participants' confidentiality procedures.

Participants received details of the study including the purpose, research question, any potential risks and the benefits of the industry and future research (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013). Executive leadership personnel within the staffing organization was contacted after approval from Walden University's IRB for authorization to conduct research. The IRB approval number for this study is 10-06-17-0564866.

Engagement with the participant throughout the process and ensuring confidentiality gained the trust of the participant, as well as ensured their information would be used for the appropriate and agreed on purposes. All participants were made aware of the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Providing participants with the opportunity to consent in advance allowed the opportunity for a participant to decide not to participate before beginning the research. Participant withdrawal was offered to take place by email or a verbal phone call. No participants elected to withdraw from this study. If participants had elected to withdraw, the opportunity to witness the destruction of any documents and records would have been offered, including audio, consent forms and notes. Participation in the study was voluntary with zero incentives, and the participants reserved the right to withdraw in any format that was most comfortable for that individual (phone, email, or in person). None of the participants withdrew from the study and each participant answered each question presented during the interview process.

Participants received the participant consent form via email as well as an overview of anonymity of the process before accepting the offer to participate in the

research. Once participants received the consent forms, they were asked to return the consent form through email within one week replying, “I Consent” as an electronic signature. Information will remain protected and sealed without accident to reveal or disclose any of the information provided during the interview process as recommended by Pletcher, Lo, and Grady (2015). As mentioned in the agreement documents signed by the participants, participant awareness of the anonymity took place before beginning the process in the participant consent form to ensure privacy and ethical protection. I am responsible for safeguarding all documentation and research data for five years to protect the confidentiality of all participants. To protect participants, names of individuals and company were eliminated and are only referred to by a coded name (P1, P2, etc.) for reference purposes. Hard copies and flash drives of participant information will be kept in a locked file cabinet and electronic files secured on the locked computer. All data will be destroyed by shredding hard copies and destruction of electronic copies after the 5-year mark including electronic data (recordings and USB drives) and hard copies (notes and interview transcripts). I am the only key holder of the locked and secured location of the research materials.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary instrument in the data collection process for this case study. Documenting qualitative case studies can come from various sources (Yin, 2014). The concept of human activity in the sense of research provides rich insight during the qualitative data collection (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Humans as an instrument in the data collection process can bring responsiveness and transparency to open dialogue and

responses from participants. I followed the interview protocol in the exact order to ensure consistency, reliability, and validity of the interview questions. The interview protocol guided the interview and ensured each participant was asked the same questions, in the same order. The importance of the interview protocol was to ensure data saturation as well as the reliability of data. The interview protocol and company documents also served as instruments. I used the interview protocol to keep the interview questions consistent; the interview protocol also allowed me to ask questions to enhance notes on observation to include in the study. I used company documents to review communication tools such as internal customer relationship managers (CRM) and conference call logs, productivity worksheets, electronic and paper, employee management tracking, (daily, weekly and monthly sales tracker) and goal spreadsheets. Company documents and the interviews assisted with identify themes.

Gaining insight into productivity strategies of virtual sales leaders provided the ability to process data from semistructured interviews and collect in-depth information for this case study. The format of semistructured interviews includes a presentation of inquiries explored by the researcher (Jamshed, 2014). This interview cycle included planning, acting on, analysis and reflection. Interviews are one of the most important data collection methods in a qualitative study (Qu & Dumay, 2011). I coordinated interviews with participants via email. Verbal and nonverbal cues were assessed during the interviews.

Interviews were recorded through a Lyker audio recorder for the interviews. Conducting qualitative research interviews requires a high level of listening skills to

interpret and translate an accurate account of the participants' depiction of the questions being asked (Qu & Dumay, 2011). As a researcher, I asked preselected question to each participant in a manner that did not cause bias or influence to answer a certain way.

Although the participant and the interviewer may have the same thought process, based on experiences and views their answers may have different meanings (Qu & Dumay, 2011). As the interviewer, I controlled the interview with the questions and direction and ensured reliability and validity of data. Member checking the transcripts served as a tool to enhance the reliability and validity of data. Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) described member checking as a technique for establishing credibility in a study. Member checking allows researchers to include participants in the process of confirming the credibility of information (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Participants were the focus and data were confirmed and thoroughly checked data. Study participants had the opportunity to confirm responses they shared during the interview process through member checking to ensure information standards were met. Each participant was emailed an interpretation of the transcript and given one week to respond to any changes. Participant responses via email deemed there were no changes needed to interpretations

Data Collection Technique

Semistructured interviews were one of the data collection techniques used for this study. Techniques used for various self-report measures data collection in qualitative research include interviews, observations. Interviews are a standard practice and involve pre-determined questions asked in the same order to create a dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee (Harmon, Morgan, & Harmon, 2001). I also reviewed

company documents, such as conference call logs, electronic paper performance worksheets, and employee goal spreadsheets to review and document productivity of remote employees. The company documents supported responses to the interview questions and aided in the finding of communication, adapting to change and employee performance. Observation included selecting participants or non-participants to watch and record behaviors (Chaleunvong, 2009). After receiving IRB approval, I emailed consent forms to potential participants. I contacted executive leadership of the organization to ask permission to interview employees. Leadership provided email addresses to contact potential participants. After gaining permission to interview, 12 potential participants were contacted, in which six responded to the email. After each participant responded to the email consenting to participate in the study, interview dates and times were scheduled to accommodate the participant. Each participant responded to the email as a consent and signed the consent form before interview questions commenced.

Semistructured interviews were the chosen data collection technique in this case study. With semistructured interviews, participants are encouraged to clarify answers and stay within the guidelines of the preset questions and collecting similar data from each participant (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Using the interview protocol, I ensured the order of questions were the same and asked each participant the same questions. Each interview took place at the staffing organization, in which all of the participants worked, in a private room and participants were given the overview again of the study before questions were presented. Each interview began with an introduction, followed by

approval from the participants. I asked each participant to review and sign the consent form before beginning the interview. Interviews took place in an individual setting with the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee only (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The recorder was set to on during the open-ended face-to-face interviews, participants' body language and nonverbal cues were recorded through note taking to help gather an in-depth understanding of participant responses. Semistructured interviews consist of gathering information about emotions, experiences, relationships and allow the participant to respond with a clear conscience (Rossetto, 2014). The use of the Lyker digital voice recorder allowed for me to interpret verbal data collection, including the option to replay question and answers for data accuracy.

Data collection through semistructured interviews has advantages and disadvantages. Doody and Noonan (2013) explained an advantage of semistructured interviews is that interviewers can create a conversational interview style that allows a researcher and participant to have an open dialogue related to the research question. The advantage of face-to-face interviews was understanding lived experiences of virtual sales leaders' strategies implemented to improve the productivity of remote employees. Lamont and Swidler (2014) posited data collection has no bad technique, but there are good and bad questions. To exhaust the possibilities of advantages, I ensured consistency of the interview protocol to maximize trustworthiness of interview questions to answer the overarching research question. Another advantage was direct access to the organization policies and procedures of strategies to improve the productivity of remote employees. A disadvantage of semistructured interviews is some interviewers are

immersed in the dialogue of the conversation and are left not knowing where and when to prompt or probe the participant (Doody & Noonan, 2013). To reduce disadvantages, each participant was given as much time needed to respond to the questions.

An advantage of observation was the nonverbal expressions made from participants when they were eager to answer questions and the anxiousness in body language and gestures to provide more information than the questions required. Participants also decided what they wanted to share and had the option not to answer questions or participate in the interview. Not participating once the interview had begun could pose problems for a researcher in developing enough data to fulfill the case study (Yin, 2014). The disadvantage was some participants used limited nonverbal gestures and determining if the lack of movement was a guard to withhold information. Participants of this study answered all questions posed during the interview process without hesitation. The interview protocol (see Appendix D) served as the guide for the case study. I scheduled interviews, and they were commenced at a date and time agreed on by the participant, considering the participants' schedule. A copy of the consent form was provided for the participant's review. Participants replied with their consent to participate through email and signatures of consent were collected prior to the start of the interview. A Lyker audio recording device was the selected method of recording the interview, and the participants had a full view of the recording device. The Lyker audio recording device was selected for ease of use, the ability to play back audio for interpretation accuracy and the ability to transfer data from the recorder to a protected USB to ensure participant privacy.

Ethical standards, integrity, and competency to execute a qualitative study were all qualities needed when interviewing. I practiced the interview questions before going live with the participants. Interviews generate perplex answers from participants, for this reason, repetition and preparation are essential (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Collecting high-quality data with trustworthy outcomes resulted from practicing to improve my interview skills.

Member checking referred to sharing with participants the data recorded and interpreted during the interview process to ensure that my interpretations were accurate based on the participant's experiences. Before member checking took place, the interview was interpreted to condense the report for fluidity, including the use of paraphrasing not to lose track of the participants' intended message (Carlson, 2010). After the interview was summarized, participants were able to contribute through member checking. For the member checking process, the participant received an email of the interpretation of the interview to verify for accuracy by email. The participant received an email requesting to return the document with corrections to my Walden University email address within one week. None of the participants had any corrections or additions to make to the document. Carlson (2010) noted member checking is a way for participants to approve the interpretation of what they stated during the interview. Participants had one week to review and return the document. Four of the six participants responded to the email within two days without a reminder email. Two participants needed reminders but all six confirmed and approved document to move forward after member checking. In person, interaction did not take place during member checking. The main difference of face-to-

face from email or phone interaction is the absence of the nonverbal cues (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013). Through member checking participants can contribute data to an analysis of the lived experiences and guarantee accurate data (Hallett, 2013). The member checking process allowed me and the participants to agree on precise information to present in the case study and for data analysis.

Data Organization Technique

Conducting interviews allowed me to expand knowledge used to collect data on productivity strategies virtual sales leaders use to increase productivity from remote employees. Recording interviews with an audio recorder were essential in keeping track of data for validity, interpreting the interview, as well as a tool to reference in the event participants. Each participant and organizational leader will remain confidential and labeled in all documents as Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2), etc. for ethical consideration and the right to privacy (Chaleunvong, 2009). Ensuring confidentiality of all information is critical to data analysis. Interpretations and member checking followed the interviews to ensure information was approved with no further review necessary, although to remain scholarly few researchers allow the interviewee to have the final say on what to report in the study (Anyan, 2013). Interpreting the interviews included NVivo 11 software as well as listening to any audio and reviewing notes from reflective journaling to summarize participant answers to each question. During member checking, I emailed participants the interpreted documentation to ensure accuracy.

I categorized and labeled all data by type of information (interview), participant unique identifier and date obtained. An electronic filing system held all information from

the audio recording and supporting documents. I separated all research data and labeled documents and files with unique identifiers P1-P6. All electronic data including consent forms, an invitation to participate, emails, and notes were stored on a password-required computer in addition to a flash drive. All personal data are sensitive and should remain private (Chaleunvong, 2009). I will keep all documents, files including, flash drives, notes from journaling, and recordings in a locked file cabinet, and they will remain stored in my home for a minimum of five years to remain in compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines (Walden, 2013). Shredding and destruction of all hard copies and electronic data will commence after the five years.

Data Analysis

I used results from NVivo 11 to concentrate on key themes of this study. Researchers use NVivo 11 software to identify word frequency across data sources. I used NVivo 11 to code data and identify themes. This case study included the data analysis process where examined are four types of triangulation. Castleberry (2014) included researchers use NVivo 11 to identify themes and keywords that occur in different forms of data. I related the key themes identified during the data analysis process to JD-R model. Related themes from the data analysis expected included workplace flexibility, employee engagement, virtual teams, leadership, employee performance, performance management, work stress, and performance.

After the interview was complete, I reviewed all notes and recordings, assigning codes to protect participants identities before pursuing interpretation. I

organized and coded the interview and listened carefully for pauses to include notes from direct observation, this included reflective journaling and note-taking. I grouped themes for data collection using NVivo 11 software, which has been compared to Microsoft Office Suite as it relates to ease of use. Interpretation of interviews also ensued to present to participants for feedback. Participants' were allowed to review interpretations used from data interpreted and summarized from audio recordings sent via email. I proceeded with the interpretation of data once participants were given the option to make changes based on feedback. Data from interviews, observations and company documents emerged the three themes. I established methodological triangulation by evaluating and comparing data from the interviews with company documents.

This study involved coding via NVivo 11 software. Data analysis is the process of coding. I used software that was user-friendly, similar to programs used in the past and least complex. NVivo 11 software was the software of choice for coding and identifying themes. According to Richardson (2015), this software is appropriate for data analysis because it focuses on the themes in the analysis of both the interview text and the audio recording. NVivo 11 allowed the process of identifying patterns, sort, store and identify patterns to analyze data (Saldaña, 2013). Qualitative codes were grouped based on similarities and formulated categories for data analysis. Using the NVivo 11 software allowed me to organize data. The process of identifying themes included data input to Microsoft Excel and NVivo 11 to identify similarities that related to the research question. Data analysis of a case study involves organizing collected data to develop

themes and patterns. Each response to the interview questions was separated into subcategories to identify reoccurring themes. The data analysis method and data coding help sort data and compare experiences in a uniform manner (Basurto & Speer, 2012). Each aspect of the data analysis method was included, which were the phases and steps to break down the interview questions and group relevant data to create an overview of responses from the groups. Recognizing themes include identifying patterns and concepts repeated observed throughout data collection (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Based on emerging themes, there was an assessment to focus on the main topics that offered ideas on productivity strategies virtual sales leaders' use for productivity increase by remote employees. The themes were reflective of data collected to answer the research question. To validate the data gathered, key themes were aligned with the research question, literature review and conceptual framework.

Definitions of triangulation include (a) data triangulation: time, space, and persons; (b) investigator triangulation: multiple researchers in an investigation; (c) theoretical triangulation: using more than one theoretical theme to interpret the phenomenon; and (d) methodological triangulation: more than one selection to gather data such as interviews, observations, and documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Methodological triangulation was the most appropriate data analysis process for this study. For reliable data analysis are the inclusion of semistructured interviews, member checking and direct observation in the data collection technique (Wilson, 2016).

Methodological triangulation included the review of interview recordings, taken during interviews, nonverbal cues, and company documents, including internal CRM and

conference call logs, productivity worksheets, goal spreadsheets and employee sales tracking. I reviewed interview transcripts, recordings, and the company documents, reviewed notes, and reviewed the codes in NVivo 11. Reviewing the data helped me identify repetition, which led me to the themes that emerged, and established the reliability and validity of data. The process of methodological triangulation included following the interview protocol, collecting information from interviews with participants, record answers from interview questions and observations as well as evaluate data and documents from each source for the assessment, interpretation, and conclusion of collected data (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Turner, Cardinal, and Burton (2017) described methodological triangulation as a combination of different data sources that adds depth. To improve my understanding of the strategies of the virtual sales leaders, I used methodological triangulation by reviewing interview data with the organizational documents about remote employees and productivity in addition to literature to support the research findings. The findings from data analysis should align with the research questions and conceptual framework. Data analysis was conducted with the JD-R model as the conceptual framework. The JD-R model explored the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of work-related responsibilities (Bakkar & Demerouti, 2007). Communication, adaptability and employee performance encourages productivity from remote employees. Data from participant interview responses, observations, and company documents led to the themes that emerged, communication, adaptability and employee performance.

Reliability and Validity

Assessing the quality of the results depends on an effective reliability and validity process (Iwata, DeLeon, & Roscoe, 2013). Making sound judgments and decisions about research helps to assess the reliability of the study and findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Patterns of behavior from interview content supported the capability to draw practical results in this qualitative research. To make accurate conclusions, data analysis must reflect the overarching research question (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). To increase the reliability and validity of research outcomes, I conducted semistructured interviews, in which direct observations for reflective journaling ensued, implemented member checking to ensure participant validity and triangulation to increase validity and reliability of results.

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability refers to the consistency of collected data, comparison of data, replicability, dependability, and data extraction (Leung, 2015). In qualitative content, trustworthiness is often the representation of the term dependability. Achieving dependability includes, providing detailed descriptions of the business problem, purpose, participants, data collection techniques, data analysis, and research results as well as sequential documented events to increase duplication for future researchers (Anney, 2014). Measurement of data is assumed reliable when the output of results is continuously the same (Venkatesh et al., 2013). Dependability is not a measurable action item and will need to be established through the triangulation process and member checking (Wilson, 2016). During member checking to ensure dependability,

I allowed participants the opportunity to review interpreted data by sending an email. After the participant received the interpretation through email, they had one-week time to make adjustments as necessary and return to me to certify written responses corresponded with observations and was approved by participants. As a form of triangulation, researchers compare data after the interviews for verification and accuracy with peers, member checking (Leung, 2015). Member checking is a process for participants to review interviewers summarized interpretation of recorded data occurred during the interview (Hallett, 2013). The process for member checking included the following steps; (a) participants received emails of interpretations, (b) participants validated data and emailed back for final review, (c) each participant had the opportunity of one week to make corrections, verify data and respond via email.

Validity

Trustworthiness of qualitative studies is often referenced and supported by terms such as credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Elo, et al., 2014). I determined credibility with methodological triangulation including semistructured interviews, member checking, and reflective journaling from direct observation. Methodological triangulation is the practice of using multiple methods concurrently to increase reliability, granted the results are the same each time with each method (Heesen, Bright, & Zucker, 2014). Validation of research demonstrated the desire to offer quality research that can be both replicated and serves as a resource for other researchers. To establish credibility and validity reviewing of all interpretations took place for similarities from each study (Leung, 2015).

Transferring research findings to other settings or groups is the belief behind transferability (Elo et al., 2014). Detailed descriptions of research processes offer future researchers an analysis of current data and the potential for future use. The research findings from this study may extend as relevant to other virtual sales leaders who are trying to improve productivity strategies by remote employees. To ensure transferability, I included a rich description to help readers determine if findings are transferable for future research.

Confirmability is findings reflective of participants' experiences (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Findings that are traceable back to the data exist with confirmability. To eliminate bias, I implemented member checking for participants to ensure their point of view and ability to confirm accuracy. Member checking included sending emails to participants of interpretations and reflective journals to ensure the accuracy of information. Once completed, participants emailed any updated information back to me to include in final write up. Participants also received follow-up questions during the interview process to ensure confirmability. .

Sample size should not determine data saturation, rather the depth of data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Interviewing six sales leaders with the proven success of strategies to increase productivity to ensure data saturation based on their comprehension of the research question helped maintain validity. Interviews commenced after the six interviews, saturation was achieved, and participants were no longer able to provide new information.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included an in-depth view of the study and restated details of the research processes. Included were (a) the purpose statement, (b) role of the researcher, (c) participants, (d) research method and design, (e) population and sampling, (f) ethical research, (g) data collection instruments, (h) data collection technique, (i) data organization technique, (j) data analysis and (k) reliability and validity. In Section 3 I included (a) reintroduction of the study, (b) presentation of the findings, (c) application to professional practice, (d) implications for social change, (e) recommendations for action, (f) recommendations for further research, and (g) reflections and (h) study conclusions. In Section 3, I presented the findings of the study, application of professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further study and reflections.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this single qualitative case study was to explore strategies virtual sales leaders used to improve remote sales employees' productivity. After collecting data, and evaluating all interview responses, reflective of the research question, I identified three themes (a) high level of communication, (b) adapting to change and work environment, and (c) measurement of employee performance. I conducted a qualitative single case study to answer the research question. Data collection included face-to-face semistructured interviews with a sample size of six sales leaders in a staffing organization. Semistructured interview questions, direct observations, and document review triangulated and confirmed data for this study. Section 3 includes the presentation of the findings, application to the professional practice, and significance to improve business practice based on findings. Also included in Section 3 are implications for social change, recommendations of action, how results might be distributed in literature and training, recommendations for future research, reflections, and conclusion.

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to answer the central research question: What strategies do virtual sales leaders use to increase the productivity of remote employees? I explored strategies that virtual sales leaders use to improve remote sales employees' productivity. Semistructured interview questions, direct observations, and document review triangulated and confirmed data for this study.

In this study, I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews with six virtual sales leaders from one staffing organization in Michigan, a state located in the Midwestern United States, to answer the overarching research question. The interviews gave the participants an opportunity to share detailed information about the strategies employers use to improve remote sales employees' productivity in the staffing organization. I also reviewed company documents, including communication tools such as customer relationship management (CRM) tracking, conference call logs, electronic and paper productivity and performance worksheets, employee management tracking (daily, weekly, and monthly) and employee sales tracker. I asked each participant the same set of questions in the same order, and – after taking as much or little time as needed - each participant responded. During the interviews I advised participants of their right to answer questions or to refuse to answer questions as well as the confidentiality of their responses and my notes regarding company documents. I also informed the participants of my note taking process, which utilized both written, and voice-recorded notes; for voice recording, I used the Lyker recording device. In addition, I utilized direct observation as a form of gathering information for my study. I met with each participant in the staffing organizations office to conduct interviews.

To confirm participant interpretations, I used member checking. After participants emailed confirmation and approval of interpretations of the data collected , I interpreted and transcribed the audio recordings, by way of word processing using Microsoft Word. I then uploaded the transcribed interviews from my Lyker digital voice recorder into NVivo 11. Based on the research question and, after compiling and analyzing the

interview responses, I identified three themes as follows: (a) high level of communication; (b) adaptation to change and work environment; and (c) measurement of employee performance. Section 3 includes the presentation of the findings and an application to the professional. Also included in this section is an explanation of the study's relevance to the conceptual framework as well as a discussion on the triangulation of data sources, implications for social change, and recommendations of action.

Through my analysis, I recognized patterns among participant responses. I used the patterns to cluster themes and to eliminate irrelevant data from participant interviews and company documents. Three themes that emerged from the data are as follows: (a) high level of communication; (b) adaptation to change and work environment; and (c) measurement of employee performance. The JD-R model includes factors of various job resources and the effect of various job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Like the JD-R model are the themes that emerged from this study. Findings revealed strategies virtual sales leaders could use to improve the productivity of remote employees.

Theme 1: High Level of Communication

The first theme that I identified from the study is a high level of communication. Study participants explained that resources such as conference calls, one-on-one cell phone conversations, mobile applications, and video calls are the primary means of communicating with one another during the workday and during nontraditional work hours. P5 shared how utilizing various forms of communication allows employees to maintain clarity on daily goals and objectives and, in turn, effective individual

performance. P5 stated characteristics of committed people include being attentive, feeling connected and integrated, and focusing on his or her role performance. Findings that high levels of communication from sales leaders create a productive workforce for remote employees are similar to the findings of Purcell (2014). Committed individuals who are connected to their work environment can work independently as well as in group settings and can focus on their role performance (Purcell, 2014). Karanges et al. (2014) explained that a direct relationship exists between employee engagement and high productivity; this results in improved focus and resourcing by managers to cultivate an engaged workforce.

Company documents reflected the length of conference calls, and employee trackers noted calls with sales leaders as forms of communication. P1 indicated video conferencing as the best virtual communications tool for this organization. Company documents also revealed that employees had higher sales outcomes following team meetings via conference calls or web chat. These findings aligned with Lilian (2014), who shared that technology efforts have afforded employers the ability to implement teleworking, teleconferencing, and video conferencing for effective communication.

Social media and online platforms allow leaders to communicate with employees. All six study participants indicated communication as a strategy to increase the productivity of remote employees. The findings in this study confirmed the findings of Korzynski (2015), who shared that online social networking is becoming essential for marketing, global expansion, and employee engagement within organizations. Internal and external social networking can help organizations improve the social well-being of

employees. P1 mentioned that working in a virtual workforce requires maturity, communication, and the need for video conferencing.

Each of the six participants identified communication in some form as a vital tool for increasing productivity and for improved engagement of remote employees. This finding is aligned with research conducted by Mikkelsen et al. (2015). Based on the results of this study, creating and promoting channels of communication for remote employees is important to ensure employees are engaged, are committed to working together, and maintain working relationships. Hoch and Kozlowski (2014) also supported the idea of finding that sales leaders should create multiple channels of communication. Mikkelsen et al. said effective communication and relational leadership are a good predictor of organizational commitment. P1 stated communication practices included relationship management tracking applications, virtual meetings, and cellular devices as well as weekly and monthly meetings.

Virtual video and audio meetings in the remote workforce were identified as the most efficient way to communicate to enable discussion and the sense of face-to-face interaction with others. P4 explained, “We communicate often to make sure the metrics we have implemented are realistic, so if someone is not meeting quota or not meeting production we figure out why.” Developing communication strategies that worked within the remote workforce directly reflected how metrics were forecasted. Sales leaders were able to identify levels of success and opportunity for production outcomes from the communication.

Participants shared their views and experiences on how leaders encourage and promote effective communication for remote employees. Leaders within the organization identified communication from a leadership outlook as well as from a peer-to-peer outlook. Findings from this study were consistent with Lilian (2014), who stated that technology efforts have afforded employers the ability to implement teleworking, teleconferencing, and video conferencing for effective communication. Three participants suggested that increased communication creates effective employee engagement.

P1 expressed

Everything in the virtual world goes back to people. Everyone wants to work from home. Are you mature enough to work from home because you can do it? You look at my office here and my recruiters and sales team out there. A lot of communication is still done virtually.

Hoch and Kozlowski (2014) suggested virtual sales leaders need to invest more time implementing media outlets for means of communication, motivation, and employee development and need to offer strategies to improve productivity.

Theme 2: Adapting to Change and Work Environment

Adapting to change and work environment is important in a remote workforce. It is possible that when a leader understands how to implement change and the importance of innovative strategies, performance will start to increase for that organization. Four participants stressed the importance of adapting to change, how employees respond to change within a remote workforce and the effect that change has on productivity. P4 indicated employees with the autonomy to perform the job and individual self-

management allowed for adaptation to the change and higher performance because of ownership and accountability. For example, when implementing a new CRM tool, employees informed of the change prior to its execution were able to adapt quicker because of heightened ownership and self-efficacy. The same employees would utilize the CRM for enhanced performance outcomes. These findings aligned with Parker and Morgeson (2017). Parker and Morgeson explained that job autonomy promotes proactive work behavior and outcomes and could possibly predict job performance. P2 shared that an initial challenge as a remote employee was learning new systems to work efficiently in a remote environment. P2 explained, “Dealing with younger non-business people, they don’t understand the urgency, so my patience level. How do you get it across to an employee is one of the biggest challenges? It’s nothing personal, our goal here is the customer.” P2 also shared adapting to patience levels and urgency of processes and not being able to address one another face-to-face. These findings were consistent with findings by Schaufeli (2015), who noted leaders who implemented engaging strategies to encourage productivity and engagement; this enabled virtual employees to get the sense of belonging to a team and inspire employees.

P2 explained that there were new processes implemented that everyone had to adhere to, but there were some instances when sales leaders could use old practices in which teams would operate differently. Company documents revealed that remote employees who utilized the formal sales tracker had higher sales outcomes than those who had not adopted the new practice. These findings were consistent with Guglielmi et al. (2012), who noted that people who perceive themselves with high competency levels

set goals and are persistent and motivated. P4 explained how change within organizations is inevitable; to remain efficient, employees must remain consistent with change. Leaders may realize that forcing change can have a negative effect on results.

Findings from the research indicated sales leaders who understand employees are managed differently might also understand how to encourage adaptability to an evolving workforce. P5 said, "To overcome resistance to change, there is a need for building confidence for the team, so everyone is on board because many employees do not trust the process until results are seen." These findings align with Purcell (2014). Purcell stressed the importance of employee trust within virtual teams, as doubt may arise and can determine employee outcomes; in this case, an individual's psychological state of mind during work can be affected. P5 also explained

Once one person trusts the process and they start seeing wins the next person is like okay, I've been trying to do things my way, but I see that my partner here is consistently winning all the time. Why? Because I only do steps 1, 2 and 3 and they're doing all 6. Some sales leaders were able to identify with remote employees and it had been revealed that trying out new processes required some trial and error before trusting the process.

P5 indicated the importance of breaking through diversity barriers to implement change and build a cohesive work environment. P6 said, "You have different diverse groups. Some people are social media savvy, and some aren't. That is a big issue. Management support encourages employees to adjust to new processes." Sales leaders have the responsibility to ensure employees adapt to change and work environment in a

way that remains efficient for the work environment and productive for the organization. P5 expressed that breaking barriers is harder once there is a sense of resistance and allowing employees to adjust to the change process is easier once the employee has bought into the process. Findings from this study aligned with the literature suggesting an organization's success and work environment depends upon its ability to embrace change and realize the benefits (Saxena, 2014). All participants indicated that building a trusting work relationship made it easier to adapt to change and that the ease of adapting to change results in higher employee outcomes. Based on the findings of this study, virtual sales leaders who promote inclusion of changes within the organization see an increase of productivity from those employees.

Theme 3: Measurement of Employee Performance

Measurement of employee performance was the final theme that emerged from participant responses. During the interviews, each participant shared measurements of employee productivity, inclusive of productivity worksheets, activity reports, goal spreadsheets, accountability trackers, and sales meetings and metric tracking tools. All six participants explained how achieving the sales goals and maintaining the bottom line number is the most effective tool for measuring productivity. P5 mentioned that virtual sales leaders would know if their employees are productive, if the remote employees met the goals implemented, and that there is no need to micromanage because the numbers will indicate productive or nonproductive work. Bakkar and Demerouti (2007) explained how sales leaders rely on employees to contribute to the organizational goals, achievements, production, and revenue.

P5 explained,

To increase productivity working from a remote access, I think, number one, they understand what we're looking for, what jobs, what clients that we're looking for them to target. It's very important that we have their day scheduled out for them or what's even nicer is someone who can plan out their day for us to review.

P4 stressed the importance of starting with the end goal of the initial project in mind. P4 said, "It goes back to the bottom line of growth each week." Findings from this study aligned with the literature. Dennis et al. (2013) shared information from a poll conducted by the Association for Talent Development, which indicated some of the most critical leadership skills for all leaders are the ability to establish and meet metrics for work projects and goals and the ability to be extremely clear about goals and directions with a constant focus on the big picture. Findings from this study have contributed to understanding the strategies virtual sales leaders use to increase the productivity of remote employees. P5 explained that productivity worksheets for tracking metrics to hold employees accountable were one of the best tools for measuring employee performance. This aligned with Pawar (2013), who explained that sales leaders seek confirmation of practices, which can influence employees' productivity in a virtual work environment, and those practices can affect profits.

P4 shared that annual performance meetings were not enough to drive employees to the fullest potential. In addition, P4 explained how implementing impromptu meetings and informal discussions about metrics take the ease off the full employee review. Findings on employee discussions about performance were similar to research conducted

by Radda, Majidadi, and Akanno (2015), who found that an increase in productivity and performance is reflective when employees efficiently participate in the workplace and are aware of performance goals. All participants stated that there is an open-door policy when it comes to sales leaders within the organization.

P4 explained that employees often need redirection outside of regularly scheduled meetings. Employee performance from daily sales tracking revealed those individuals who have an impromptu meeting with sales leaders have greater outcomes and, as a result, higher productivity. These results are similar to Latham (2014), who expressed that great leaders have to be able to both execute and innovate to be successful. Leaders who implement engaging leadership strategies to encourage productivity and engagement often include collaboration and interpersonal bonding, so virtual employees still get that sense of belonging to a team and encourage strengthen and connect employees to their peers and to the sales leaders (Schaufeli, 2015). P1 expressed no employees would ever be asked to do anything sales leaders would not do.

As mentioned with theme two, for remote sales leaders, daily, weekly, and monthly meetings are scheduled for enhanced communication via conference calls, mobile devices, and web meetings. P4 explained that sales leaders within the organization have the same outreach for performance calls as they do with sales calls; some are structured, but many times a phone call will serve as an alternative. P5 shared that many times a web meeting is the most appropriate form to communicate when discussing metrics, so sales leaders and remote employees get the sense of an in-person meeting. These findings are similar to Irvine et al. (2013) as they distinguished the main difference

between face-to-face interaction and email or phone interaction: the absence of the nonverbal cues. The findings indicated that sales leaders should include structured and non-structured discussions of performance to encourage increased productivity of remote employees.

Relevancy to Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is JD-R model. I used the JD-R model to identify strategies virtual sales leaders use to improve the productivity of the remote employee. According to the JD-R model, job demands, such as physical and psychological effort, are primary predictors of adverse job strain (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Additionally, the JD-R model suggests job demands can be stressors, whereas job resources can be motivators; this strikes a balance between the two (Peters et al., 2014). This study focused on strategies and influences identified in the JD-R model and how leaders attribute the influence of these practices on remote employee productivity.

Job demands and resources are those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require continued physical and psychological effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The findings in theme one -- high level of communication -- are directly aligned with JD-R. Under theme one, study results revealed that various tools of communication which initiated from the sales leaders actually contributed to more engagement and higher levels of productivity. Participants also revealed feedback from employees, and inclusive team strategies contributed to higher levels of communication and outcomes.

Findings under theme two -- adaptation to change and work environment -- indicated virtual sales leaders build confidence in their teams and allow individual self-

management of remote employees. The JD-R model accounts for various types of employee well-being. Researchers suggested that engaged individuals are motivated to stay engaged and to create their own resources (e.g., autonomy, feedback, support) over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Participants also revealed that managing employees at different levels and approaching change within a diverse organization results in a receptive response from employees. Higher levels of productivity result when delivery of change in the work environment is effectively communicated.

Findings under theme three, measurement of employee performance, indicated alignment with the JD-R model. Researchers suggested transformational leaders have a positive influence on their employees because they create job resources, including daily social support and autonomy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Review of organizational documents and participant responses reflected transparent goals, projections, and potential outcomes with employees who allowed them to communicate what resources were needed to perform the job and to maintain successful productivity levels. Therefore, communication, adapting to change and employee performance are factors that improve productivity.

Triangulation of Data Sources

Turner et al. (2017) described methodological triangulation as a combination of different data sources that adds depth. To achieve a robust understanding of strategies virtual sales leaders used to increase the productivity of remote employees, I used methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation was used by following the interview protocol, collecting information from the semi-structured interviews with

participants, and recording answers as well as direct observations; I reviewed company documents for this study to further assess, interpret, and conclude my study. Company documents included internal CRM and conference call logs, productivity worksheets, both electronic and paper performance and productivity worksheets, employee management tracking (daily, weekly and monthly), goal spreadsheets, and employee sales tracking. Executive leadership agreed to share internal documents as well as to allow employees to participate in interviews to represent outcomes for the staffing organization.

Three primary themes evolved from using methodological triangulation. The three themes developed from coding the interpreted data. Results from company documents indicated employee performance after communication with sales leaders from conference calls and video chats improved productivity. Employee performance levels increased after some form of communication with a sales leader. The outcomes from sales numbers remained constant or slightly declined during times when there was less communication. The organization had formal and informal daily trackers in which employees had the autonomy to utilize, as long as some form of daily sales was tracked. Parker and Morgeson (2017) expressed the connection between job autonomy, proactive work behavior and outcomes, and influence on job performance. Company documents revealed employees who utilized the formal daily tracker had higher sales results than those who tracked daily activity with older, informal organizational daily trackers. Based on the results of responses from the semi-structured interviews, direct observation, member

checking, and company documents, sales leaders from this staffing organization have implemented functional strategies to increase the productivity of remote employees.

Applications to Professional Practice

Findings from this study support the idea that Bakkar and Demerouti (2007) JD-R model include physical, psychological, social and organizational characteristics of work-related responsibilities. Each strategy could improve productivity within organizations and increase resources for sales leaders to improve communication, adapt to change and work environment, and measurement of employee performance. Findings from this study added to previous and existing data about the importance of implementing strategies to improve remote employee productivity.

Theme 1 provided evidence based on organizational sales leaders responses within the staffing company addressing communication. High levels of communication within the organization could improve the productivity of remote employees. Sales leaders seek information about how their current policies may or may not affect employee productivity as remote workforce, and virtual work policies may affect overall productivity and company earnings (Pawar, 2013). Organizational sales leaders could use the findings from this study to create effective communication strategies to improve remote employee productivity.

Theme 2 revealed adapting to change and work environment is significant. Previous research included leaders that create a work environment that has a purpose with leaders who lead their employees to strive toward higher aspirations create responsible leadership (Freeman & Auster, 2011). Organizational sales leaders could

benefit from implementing a procedure to assist employees with adapting to change within their organization and an evolving work environment to improve the productivity of remote employees.

Theme 3 provided evidence based on responses of the organizational sales leaders within the staffing company addressing measurement of employee performance.

According to Mikkelsen et al. (2015) productivity, motivation and commitment are characteristics of why employees feel committed to their work and 25% of leader behavior attribute to these feelings. Direction from leaders, physical distance, and communication effectiveness between leaders and followers are all factors seen that affect performance. Organizational leaders could use the findings from this study to align manager behavior and employee performance to improve remote employee productivity.

Effective communication and being able to adapt to change within any work environment are reflective outcomes of increased productivity. Outcomes and results from this study offer evidence of past and present research literature to include the benefits of high levels of communication, adapting to change and work environment and measurement of employee performance as strategies to improve the productivity of remote employees. Organizational leaders could use these strategies for onboarding new employees of a remote workforce and implement for a workforce transitioning into a remote workforce to maintain and improve productivity. The findings from the study might provide further insights that could be instrumental in assessing productivity strategies among virtual sales leaders and remote employees. Implementing these strategies may contribute to social change.

Implications for Social Change

Findings from this research add to the existing body of knowledge and professional academic literature by providing information on the strategies virtual sales leaders use to improve the productivity of remote employees. The benefits of social change from this study include the opportunity to develop an employable and a specialized workforce who contribute to the local economy as well as expand community development and higher income for families. Business leaders look for employees who understand the importance of leadership to communities and society (Claydon, 2011). . . Socially responsible leaders help improve local and regional economies for members in the communities and foster opportunities for future professionals to aid in future staffing opportunities.

Organizational leaders must understand what influences productivity and recognize the possibility of some barriers. Well-balanced leadership offers a sense of security and confidence that encourages higher rates of production and more employment opportunities from temporary and permanent staffing organizations. Participants understood the importance of remote work activity and the social change it could bring to the community. The more resources remote employees have access to, the more job opportunities they can discover for a flourishing economy. This study's findings and recommendations may serve as a basis for positive social change.

Recommendations for Action

As the researcher, I am personally committed to informing relevant business leaders of these study findings as they relate to organizational practices. As the findings

discovered, high levels of communication, adapting to change and work environment and measuring employee performance can lead to high productivity outcomes for remote employees. Virtual sales leaders from different industries should consider the strategies implemented from the data revealed from this study. Steps for useful action are included with recommendations for the most effective implementation of the data analysis.

The first recommendation is to use technology and tools for high-level communication by including check-ins, monthly virtual team meetings with the sales department and cross-functional teams for brainstorming, sharing innovative ideas and ease of communication. Second, I would recommend procedures for introducing change before implementing with new processes with any change within the work environment. Building trust and confidence within a team can ease the anxiousness and anxiety of change before it happens. Employer trust within virtual teams is important as doubt may arise and can determine the level of engagement, which could determine an individual's psychological state of mind at work (Purcell, 2014). Engaging employees to see what promotes fear of change and the anticipation of something new can help sales leaders approach each change in a way where employees feel inclusion. The third recommendation is measuring employee performances, which includes reviewing the financial analysis, implementing realistic projections and metrics, and obtain feedback from employees about team strategies and best processes.

Upon completion of the study publication, I desire to further the results through educating, training, and writings. With the potential of many organizations transitioning to remote workforces, my goal is to publish the results of this study for the broader

audience through lectures and seminars. I would also like to submit the findings of this study to professional journals. In addition to professional platforms, students may find results from this study valuable for academic purposes.

Recommendations for Further Research

The focus of this study was on sales leaders and remote employee productivity. The study was specific to employees within one staffing organization located in Michigan. Recommendations for future studies address some limitations included in the study. Uncontrollable potential weaknesses define limitations (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). One limitation was the availability of the participants. Including more participants from varied departments can help the researchers assess findings to see if there are similarities based on the type of job function, resources provided and job demands. Future researchers can explore a larger demographic and industries outside of staffing to see if industries have the same strategies to improve the productivity of remote employees. Another limitation was that participants would not be able to answer all the questions accurately. Delivery of the questions and making sure each question has an identifiable outcome for the best response will allow future researchers for clear and concise answers and open dialogue.

I would recommend future researchers explore a multiple case study to understand differences and similarities within the case of strategies remote sales leaders use to improve the productivity of virtual employees. I conducted a qualitative single case study. The more industries begin to adopt the idea of a remote workforce; the more data

revealed to understand best practices and perceptions of improved processes for an increase in productivity.

Reflections

The idea of obtaining a doctoral degree was never in my plans, especially after graduating with my MBA. When I started the program I had no preconceptions of strategies virtual sales leaders use with their remote employees. Given there is so much talk about how millennials will shape the future of the workforce and the increase in remote work options, this research came at an essential time. Leaders are seeking alternative, nontraditional work options to ensure they have qualified teams and are moving in a direction that will ensure innovation and productivity. I had no prior experience with the staffing industry, and as the research, I tried to approach the sales leaders as individual contributors and not cluster them. Completing this study gave me the opportunity to gain experience with interviewing with the purpose of collecting data for an industry that future researchers can use.

My role in this qualitative single case study was to gather data without bias. I went into this anticipating the well-rounded answers that would surface from personal experiences and how people view the same scenarios in different ways. I met with participants diverse walks of life but were able to contribute to a common goal. I felt educated and privileged to have individuals voluntarily contribute their experiences and knowledge. I gathered data to provide the result of the study and learned new knowledge from the findings. The findings of this study presented strategies for sales leaders in

numerous industries to have access to as a body of knowledge to increase remote employee productivity.

Conclusion

Some sales leaders require a greater understanding of strategies other sales leaders use for improving productivity in a virtual work environment. The purpose of this single qualitative case study was to explore strategies some virtual sales leaders use to increase the productivity of remote employees. The data collection process included semistructured interviews followed by triangulated data, including member checking, direct observation, and reflective journaling. I used methodological triangulation to validate themes across the data sources. The conceptual framework for this study was the job-demands resources model, which explore the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of work-related responsibilities (Bakkar & Demerouti, 2007).

This study's findings and conclusions resulted in recommendations for action and further research. The study findings may also contribute to social change as they have the potential to inspire sales leaders to implement new strategies to improve the productivity of remote employees. Research findings highlight several strategies sales leaders use to implement processes for improvement of productivity, but the study revealed three main themes, including high levels of communication, adapting to change and work environment and measurement of employee performance. Readers and practitioners are encouraged to use these findings, conclusions, and recommendations for improving their organization.

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Appendix A: Authorizing Representative Agreement

Walden University

Strategies for Virtual Sales Leaders to Increase Productivity of Remote Employees

{Organization Name}

{Organization Contact}

{Date}

Dear Authorizing Representative,

My name is Tamera Gaines, a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am working on completing my Doctor of Business Administration degree with a concentration in leadership. I am conducting a doctoral research study on strategies virtual sales leaders' use to increase productivity of remote employees. Research will include interviewing ***6-10 virtual sales leaders with a minimum of two remote employees in the Midwest United States.***

As Human Resources leaders, I am requesting that you forward the attached invitation letter to the selected managers on my behalf. Each manager will contact me directly to express consent to participate in the study. All interviews will be conducted at a time that is convenient for the managers.

Sincerely,

Tamera Gaines

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

Community Research Partner Name
Contact Information

Date

Dear Tamera Gaines,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Strategies for Virtual Sales Leaders' to Increase Productivity of Remote Employees within the **Insert Name of Community Partner**. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct an interview, followed by a member checking session, with virtual sales leaders regarding strategies to increase productivity outcomes at **Insert Name of Community Partner**. I understand you will invite virtual sales leaders to participate in interviews to share productivity strategies used to enhance productivity of remote employees. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include access to management personnel. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not include the name of our organization in the published doctoral study report.

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

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

Sincerely,

Authorization Official
Contact Information

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What you will do	What you will say—script
Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee	<p>Hello, my name is Tamera Gaines. I am a doctoral student attending Walden University with a focus in leadership. I am conducting a doctoral research study on strategies virtual sales leaders’ use to increase productivity of remote employees. Strategies you use in your department will assist in the research development process of the study. Can you please state your first and last name before we begin? Mr./Ms. _____, to assist in ensuring the accuracy of my notes, we would like to audio tape our interview today. Is that ok with you?</p> <p>In addition to recording the interview, I also have a consent form for you to sign. You have been emailed the consent form and your reply to the email “I Consent” will serve as your electronic signature. The consent form addresses the following: (a) all information shared is voluntary, (b) you can decide to end the interview at any time, and (c) all information shared is seen only by the researcher. The recorded interview will be destroyed after the interview is interpreted; you have verified the accuracy of the information and 5 years after CAO approval. Your identification nor the company for which you work will be disclosed to anyone or included in the published study.</p> <p>The interview will last 15-30 minutes. Pre-selected questions have been created for the interview today. If we begin to run out of time, I will let you know, and you can decide if you want to continue or stop at the suggested time. Do you have any questions before we start? If not, I am going to turn on the voice recorder now.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch for non-verbal queues 	1. What strategies do you use for virtual sales employees to increase productivity?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paraphrase as needed 	2. How did you involve the virtual employees in the development of the strategies?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask follow-up 	3. How do you measure the effectiveness of the productivity?
	4. What were the challenges experienced during the implementation of the strategies?

probing questions to get more in-depth	5. What procedures do you have to improve virtual work productivity?
	6. What other information would you like to share that we have not discussed?
Wrap up interview thanking participant	Thank you for participating in the study and taking time out of your day. The information shared with me today will assist in identifying successful strategies virtual sales leaders' use to increase productivity of remote employees
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	As a reminder, you will have the opportunity to review a copy of your interpreted interview for accuracy by way of email after the interview within the next week. What day and time would be convenient for you?

Appendix D: Certificate of Ethical Compliance

