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Organizational Leadership Activities That Positively Influence Virtual Employee Engagement

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Milton Jones Perkins

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Walden University

2018

Abstract

Organizational Leadership Activities That Positively Influence Virtual Employee

Engagement

by

Milton Jones Perkins

MS, Keller Graduate School of Management, 2001

BS, Park University, 1988

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

February 2018

Abstract

Considering the growing virtual workforce, it is important for people-managers to understand whether traditional management techniques produce increased engagement and greater productivity with a virtual population. Guided by James Heskett, W. Earl Sasser Jr., and Leonard Schlesinger's conceptual Service Profit Chain framework, this study focused on addressing the gap in contemporary literature related to management techniques that influence virtual employee engagement. Much of the current research provides a foundation for managing and engaging traditional office-based employees. To better understand which experientially-based management techniques influenced traditional employee engagement for a group of virtual employees, a qualitative descriptive phenomenological methodology was used to collect and analyze data to identify differences between traditional and virtual employee management techniques. Semi structured interviews with a criterion-based sample group of 13 study participants were conducted. Input from participants were analyzed using a thematic inductive approach to understand and categorize the experiential interactions between managers and their virtual employees, discover how those experiences were defined and whether those categorized experiences influenced engagement. The results of this study illustrated how increased communication, autonomy, development, clarity, and succinct goals can be employed as effective people-management strategies for this increasingly more diverse and growing population. The social implication of this research produced insight about how these experiences created a more engaged, better work/life-balanced, happier, and mentally healthier virtual workforce.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated posthumously to my Dad, McKinley Perkins, Jr. Without his advice, counsel and encouragement, this academic journey would have never begun. I am confident my muse, my friend, my Dad, kept watch over me during the many endless nights of research. Thank you, Dad, I miss and love you. Until we meet again, continue to rest in peace my friend!

Acknowledgment

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

According to the benchmarking study conducted by Ways and Working (2011), the number of employees working in an office decreased by almost 13% between 2009 and 2011. It is estimated that over 30% of the workforce will be working virtually by 2020 (Brothertan, 2012). Other research, such as the study conducted by Lister and Harnish (2011), estimated the number of employees who will work at locations geographically dispersed from the traditional office and their colleagues, will exceed 90 million in the U.S. by 2016 (Davis & Cates 2013). Managing virtual employees with traditional management techniques is ineffective (Sheridan, 2012) and employee engagement influences organizational productivity (Soldati, 2007). Considering those factors, it is important for organizational leaders to research what management techniques are effective for managing the ever-increasing virtual employee. To understand which management activities are associated with virtual employee engagement, an understanding of traditional employee engagement strategies must first be understood.

The literature studied for this study illuminated what techniques influence traditional employee engagement. I designed and used a questionnaire as a guide for conducting semi-structured interviews to collect and analyze data to determine if there is a difference between the applied management techniques noted in the assembled literature, its impact on traditional employee engagement, and the experiential descriptions provided by the participants of this study. I focused on discovering and categorizing what experiential interactions virtual employees have with their supervisors

and if those experiences influence their engagement. The importance of engagement on productivity is the primary driver for my study.

The impact of an employee's level of engagement on individual productivity and organizational success is irrefutable (Heskett, Jones, Love, Sasser & Schlesinger, 2008). Engagement, as defined by Kahn (1990), is the physical, emotional, and cognitive commitment an employee has with their work, colleagues, and organization (Ahmed, Rasheed & Jehanzeb, 2012). It is important for organizational leaders to have a better understanding about how to harness an individual's core beliefs, values and behaviors within their work setting to influence them to exceed expectations to meet organizational goals (Kahn, 1990). There is a sufficient body of knowledge related to how engagement influences productivity and success through traditional, office-based employees. When conducting research for this study, a gap in contemporary research addressing this topic as it relates to the virtual workforce exists.

Background of the Study

There is much research emerging with a focus on how employee engagement impacts organizational success. Much of the published research has been limited to certain industries, countries, or populations, as well as to the engagement levels of employees in the traditional office setting. There is vast amounts of research focused on how management techniques impact employee engagement in a traditional, brick-and-mortar setting (Malhotra, Majchrzak & Rosen, 2007). My intent with this study was to discover and list any identified core management activities that influence virtual

employee engagement. One of the most important factors related to employee engagement is how it impacts productivity (Heskett, et al., 2008).

Based on contemporary research there is a definitive connection between employee engagement, productivity, and organizational success. A focus on understanding engagement and its correlation to productivity is becoming a primary area of study for many organizational designers, leaders, and people managers (Dalal, Baysinger, Brummel, & LeBreton, 2012). When an employee's level of engagement increases, they invest extra effort at work resulting in greater organizational success (Myrden & Kelloway, 2013; Soldati, 2007; Kahn, 1990). Not only is it important to understand what management activities influence engagement, it is also important to help employees understand how their engagement influences productivity and organizational success.

There is a positive relationship between the engagement levels of employees and organizational success. In the seminal quantitative research study conducted by Heskett, et al. (2008), an empirical analysis was conducted to define and correlate the relationship between employee engagement, organizational success, profitability, customer loyalty, and productivity. Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as how employees integrated with their work, their organization, and colleagues based on their level of empowerment and the experiences they had with their supervisors (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2014). The outcomes of these and similar studies show a positive correlation between certain traditional management activities, office-based employee engagement, and productivity.

The increase in empirical evidence supporting a focus on how to better manage employees can produce a competitive advantage and has resulted in greater investments in traditional employee-based programs and technology that support customer-facing workers. Although the work of Heskett, et al. (2008) provided a foundation for additional longitudinal research broadly focusing on how supervisory-related tactics influence engagement in an office-based setting, other research has narrowed down and focused on a limited number of tactics. Several workgroups were studied to illustrate how executing 12 management techniques increased employee engagement and generated 22% higher profitability and increased productivity by 21% (Gallup as cited in Mann & Darby, 2014). Considering the increasing virtual workforce, contemporary research also highlights a research gap related to supervisory activities in a virtual setting, the related virtual employee engagement, and its impact on organizational success.

Problem Statement

Based on trends estimating that nearly 25% of Americans currently work remotely, a number that is forecasted to grow (Noonan & Glass, 2012), managing this population should be a focus of contemporary management scholars and practitioners. The study and production of empirical evidence showing how employee engagement influences job performance is becoming a primary area of study for many organizational designers, leaders and people managers (Dalal, Baysinger, Brummel, & LeBreton, 2012). One challenge is that most contemporary literature related to employee engagement focuses on employees working in a traditional, office-based settings (Sorenson, 2013). There is room for additional research on how the experiences of virtual employees might

impact productivity and organizational success (Mone, Eisinger, Guggenheim, Price & Stine, 2011). Utilizing a descriptive phenomenological methodology, this study aims to help leaders understand, synthesize, and clarify how virtual employees' lived experiences are defined and what can be done to better influence and manage virtual employee engagement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study is to collect, contrast and compare data from a literature review and the analyzed answers provided by a group of criterion-based virtual employees about their lived experiences. According to the input provided by participants, I pursued efforts to discover if the management techniques that influence employee engagement differ between the virtual and traditional workplace-based populations. Understanding what practical management techniques influence virtual employee engagement and how that engagement impacts productivity is becoming a primary area of study for many organizational designers, leaders, and people managers (Dalal, et al., 2012). Since the virtual population is growing, it is important to understand if there are different management techniques that influence this population.

Although many of the classical management techniques may be effective with the virtual employee, managing virtual employees with traditional techniques may not apply and could be ineffective (Sheridan, 2012). Having a better understanding of how to manage and influence engagement of the growing virtual workforce may increase organizational success. Driven by a knowledge economy, globalization, rising energy costs, economic pressures and technology, physical workplaces are becoming less

relevant as a requirement to efficiently and effectively complete work (Kamikow, 2011). Within this research, I analyzed data to discover what management techniques may be most effective for leaders to manage and influence virtual employee engagement, to determine whether the tactics are intrinsic or extrinsically aligned, and to learn to what extent the tactics can better predict performance.

Research Questions

Some of the research collected for this study focused on employee engagement in the traditional workplace setting. To better shape a study and focus researchers on their primary problems, well-configured research questions are developed (Petty, Thomson & Stew, 2012; Schulze & Avital, 2011). For this study, I used six research questions (two primary and four supporting) to focus on collecting and interpreting data gathered through the 16 research interview questions and 7 demographic questions. Using a literature review, I established baseline effective management techniques in the traditional setting and the impact they have on employee engagement. I used the research-interview questions to collect data about the lived experiences of virtual employees, how they interacted with managers, how those interactions differed from traditional management techniques, how they categorized those interactions, and how those interactions influenced their engagement levels.

The research questions (RQ) utilized for this study were:

Primary RQ1: What management techniques influence engagement of virtual employees?

Primary RQ2: How do virtual employees define and categorize management techniques they have experienced?

Supporting RQ3: What are the differences between effective management techniques in a traditional versus virtual work setting?

Supporting RQ4: What are the practical activities managers can execute to influence virtual employee engagement?

Supporting RQ5: Are the study participants more engaged by management techniques that are more externally focused, such as money, or are they more engaged by techniques that are more internally focused, such as compliments?

Supporting RQ6: To what extent can behavior be predicted based on the use of defined and effective management techniques utilized in a virtual setting?

The specific interview questions within my study are customized to focus on the virtual work setting. Below are the research interview questions (RIQ) that I used in my semi-structured interviews to gather data to address the overall research questions:

RIQ1. What does your supervisor do to ensure you are productive?

RIQ2. What does your supervisor do to ensure you are happy?

RIQ3. What does your supervisor do to show they care for you personally?

RIQ4. What does your supervisor do to show they care about your work?

RIQ5. How would you prioritize the items in order of importance?

RIQ6. What are your behaviors when you are productive and happy?

RIQ7. In your opinion, what does it mean to be engaged?

- RIQ8. What does your supervisor do to manage your work deliverables as a virtual employee?
- RIQ9. What does your supervisor do to keep you connected to the organization?
- RIQ10. To what extent do socialization, connectivity, development, or communication activities have on your engagement and productivity?
- RIQ11. What do you experience that negatively influences your engagement and productivity?
- RIQ12. What has been the difference in how you are managed as a virtual employee compared to when you worked in a traditional setting?
- RIQ13. What does your supervisor do to ensure you fully understand your role, its importance, and the expected deliverables for which you responsible?
- RIQ14. As a virtual employee manager, how are those tactics different from managing office-based employees?
- RIQ15. What are your overall feelings about working virtually?
- RIQ16. What do you dislike about working virtually?

As denoted by PI (personal interview), the following items address personal demographics.

- PI1. What is your job title?
- PI2. What is your age?
- PI3. What is your profession?
- PI4. How long have you been in your profession?

PI5. How long have you worked virtually?

PI6. What is the highest level of education completed?

Conceptual Framework

All research includes a theoretical or conceptual framework. A theoretical framework informs a conceptual framework without having a tightly bound theoretical basis (Laureate Education, Inc., 2010f). My research focused on identifying management tactics that influence virtual employee engagement based on the experiences of the employees with these tactics. From an epistemological perspective, and like the research outcomes of McKelvey (2003), I am approaching my research in a more socially constructive, intersubjective, emergent, and experiential manner to understand how the subjects of any interactions shape their reality (Thompson, 2011). This approach easily lends itself to the study of engagement.

I used the personal engagement and disengagement theory of Kahn (1990), Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB) and Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory as a conceptual framework. I used these concepts to discover whether engagement and behavioral outcomes are influenced by intrinsically or extrinsically defined experiences, and whether the employee's cognitive, emotional and physical commitment can be predicted. These concepts seem to be naturally aligned, and as such, appropriate for this study. Kahn (1990) posits that engagement is influenced by experiences, Herzberg (1959) opines the triggers for motivation can be categorized as intrinsic or extrinsic, and Ajzen (1991) illustrates how behavior can be somewhat predictive. A more detailed analysis of these concepts is addressed in the literature review. According to

Hyo (2011) when a study does not start with a theoretical foundation it helps the researcher inductively and constructively to discover themes. I pursued this end by focusing on how the virtual participant's interactions and experiences with their managers influenced organizational outcomes. Based on Kahn (1990), I pursued this study with an understanding how an employee interacts with their managers and align with their work has dramatic outcomes.

Kahn (1990) studied how employees integrated with their work and environment based on the level of empowerment and the supervisory techniques they experienced, such as communications, conversations, and their ability to express ideas (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2014). This personal engagement theory illustrates how satisfied and excited employees are when they have good interactions with their surroundings. According to Kahn (1990), the concept of engagement is defined by an individual's personal engagement or disengagement and is related to their ability to align themselves with their work, the environment, and their interactions with colleagues (Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Sinha & Trivedi, 2014). This satisfaction and excitement are manifested at different physical, emotional, and cognitive levels depending on how aligned the employee is with their environment.

The more a person's self is aligned with their role, the more they are engaged. According to Kahn (1990), the levels at which employees are physically engaged in their work, cognitively consider work challenging or emotionally connect with their peers and managers, is influenced by their personal engagement level. Aligned with TPB, the reaction of employees to their interactions with workplace engagement-influencing

stimuli are rather predictive. An employee's engagement, behaviors and outcomes are positive when stimuli is considered favorable, but when they view management's behavior as unethical or negative their reaction results in disengagement from their work, colleagues, and organization (Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008). Utilizing the Herzberg's two-factor filter, the presented conceptual framework will be utilized to investigate whether the stimuli of engagement and planned behavior is categorized by virtual employees as either intrinsic or extrinsic drivers.

Most of current research has a focus on individually-driven efforts and extrinsic organizational or managerial influences impacting engagement (Bhuvanaiah & Raya 2014). Utilizing Herzberg's intrinsic/extrinsic motivational theory as an additional conceptual framework, I utilized a constructivist methodology to investigate whether any identified management techniques could be defined under a Herzberg's intrinsic or extrinsic construct. Understanding whether a management technique influences behavior from an intrinsic or extrinsic perspective can help leaders produce tactics to better incent employees towards greater productivity (Gold, Malhotra & Segar, 2001). I pursued this study to discover which management techniques were intrinsic, extrinsic, motivating and influential on engagement, and could be utilized to better predict behaviors and productivity, as experienced and defined by virtual employees. I also contrasted how these defined techniques differed from management techniques utilized in a more traditional work environment.

I reviewed and analyzed literature to baseline historic management techniques that influenced engagement in the traditional workplace. I also collected and analyzed

data to construct themes about management techniques that influenced virtual employee engagement. I utilized findings of Marshall and Rossman (2012) to support this constructivist approach to identify narrative trends that conceptually defined effective techniques to manage a virtual workforce. Social constructivism pursues capturing and understanding how study participants define their interactions with the world around them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mertens, 2010). By utilizing the personal engagement, TPB, and two-factor theories as a conceptual framework, as well as the collected data, I focused on what tactics are best utilized to positively influence virtual employee engagement and better predict their cognitive, physical and emotional commitment and behaviors related to their jobs, organizations, colleagues, and managers. This constructive and more inductive method aligned with the noted conceptual framework by focusing on experiential definitions that allowed me to narratively answer the research questions.

Nature of the Study

I utilized a descriptive phenomenological eidetic reductionist approach. A phenomenological approach is best utilized to inductively determine, through eidetic reduction, which lived experiences are most effective and have the greatest impact on engagement (Husserl as cited in Sanders, 1982). As noted by Gill (2014), the eidetic reduction approach allowed me to identify and reduce experiential thematic data to its purest form without preconceived notions. As posited by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Robson (2011), this approach provided an opportunity to narratively explain how identified factors influenced items such as engagement (Maxwell, 2013). Utilizing this

more descriptive approach provided me with the opportunity to better understand the reported experiences of the targeted 25 virtual employee study participants, as well as define which management tactics improved engagement and outcomes. Data were collected utilizing a questionnaire to conduct semi-structured telephone interviews with the targeted virtual employee participants. These participants were solicited utilizing various communities of practice within the social media site LinkedIn. Other qualitative methodologies were not utilized because none of them would focus on experiential interactions of study participants. Data were analyzed using contemporary data storage, management, and analysis tools.

I conducted a discourse analysis using analytic induction. The interviews were recorded and transcribed into columns/nodes within an Excel spreadsheet. Utilizing MAXQDA, all collected data were uploaded by columns/nodes with the goal of identifying key words and themes. As highlighted by Bernard and Ryan (2010), I utilized a technique developed by Luhn (1959) called Key Words in Context (KWIC), and is a feature of MAXQDA, to identify key words and phrases to generate themes associated with each of the questions/nodes. MAXQDA was utilized for capturing and analyzing the collected data. Leveraging the embedded features of this tool like MAXQDA affords researchers the ability to generate contextual themes and make comparison across participants, conduct more semantic analysis, and make comparisons across sets of participant data (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The results of the KWIC, word count and semantic analysis afforded by MAXQDA provided me with greater data validity and reliability.

Definitions

The following definitions provided a foundation through which all data could be collected, analyzed, and presented. The definitions also can assist in better understanding the concepts contained within this research.

Autonomy: The ability to execute in our job with little or no input or approval. As noted by Hackman and Oldham (1976), autonomy is best described as freedom, independence, and discretion in all job matters (De Spiegelaere, Van Gyes, Witte, & Van Hootegem, 2015).

Brick-and-mortar workplace: Traditionally, a physical location in which a team of co-workers assembles to conduct business and collaborate. A physical building in which teams gather to accomplish organizational goals (Malhotra, Majchrzak & Rosen, 2007).

Care for Work: A supervisor demonstrating they have concern for an employee's professional well-being and quality of their work.

Collaborate: A process through which employees work together by sharing, following, and leading each other to create an outcome that influences employee engagement (Wallis, Yammarino, & Feyerherm, 2011).

Development: A firm's commitment and efforts to support an employee's acquisition of additional job-related knowledge, skills and abilities.

Employee engagement: Kahn's (1990) is the most widely accepted definition of employee engagement and it is described as an employee's commitment and

positive behaviors towards their work, their colleagues, and their organization (Lieds & Nierle, 2014). Engagement is not measured as a snap shot of a condition; rather it is considered the sustained, holistic positive affect encompassing all interactions with their environment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

Employee disengagement: Disengagement is the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional detachment from your work, colleagues, and organization (Kahn, 1990). Interactions we view as negative can have a counter-productive influence on our levels of engagement (Kahn, 1990). Disengagement is a passionless work existence through which an employee's work becomes meaningless, there is no purpose, and they experience inequity, and believe they do not have any support or growth opportunities (Pathak, 2015).

Extrinsic or intrinsic motivators: According to Herzberg's Two-Factor theory employees are motivated by extrinsic or intrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors are items such as achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, and advancement, whereas extrinsic factors include work conditions, supervision, organizational strength, compensation, and how the organization's culture is manifested through company policy (Buble, Juras & Matic, 2014).

Flexible work: According to Glass and Estes (1997), as well as Kelly and Moen (2007), flexible work is the practice where employees are afforded control over when, where, and how much work they will accomplish (Leslie, Tae-Youn, Si Anh & Flaherty Manchester, 2012).

Job satisfaction: Job satisfaction is the level at which an individual accepts the influences of intrinsic or extrinsic outcomes related to their work (Abrudan as cited in Tomina & Sorana, 2011). It is believed the level of satisfaction an employee experiences contributes to their level of engagement.

Leadership: From an organizational perspective, Hemphill & Coons (1957) described leadership as an individual's efforts to direct activities towards the completion of a shared goal (Buble, Juras & Matic, 2014).

Motivation: The result of an intrinsic or extrinsic influence that causes us to behave (Herzberg, 1959). Employees exploit this behavior to move towards individual goal actualization (Kahn, 1990). The process that employees use to maintain goal-oriented behaviors. Motivation is what causes employees to engage in their work (Kahn, 1990; Zigarmi, et al., 2009).

Personal engagement: Personal engagement is a bit more introspective than the concept of employee engagement. It is defined at a more micro level. Personal engagement is considered as an individual's attitude and mental model resulting in a state of involvement, commitment and interest in a task or an event (Pagani & Mirabello, 2011). Personal engagement explicates how an individual interacts with their work and creates meaning and commitment to it (Sharma, 2015).

Recognition: Recognition and feedback to employees are considered as a significant job resource that helps encourage them to work better and improve upon

themselves and their environment. Giving private (negative) feedback and praise in front of customers and peers (Siddiqi, 2015) can result in greater engagement and productivity.

Telework: The definition of telework is increasingly being defined according to its popularity. Telework is considered an organizational practice through which employees can fully or partially work at home or in locations other than those occupied by most of their team members (Duxbury & Higgins, 2002; Hilbrecht, Shaw, Johnson & Andrey, 2013).

Traditional employee: From an historical perspective, traditional employees are those who go to place of work versus simply conducting work wherever they are located. As defined by Hill, Ferris and Martinson (2003), traditional employees are considered those who share immediate physical access to each other and management and is inclusive of adherence to co-location policies, hierarchy, support, and work roles (Koehler, Philippe & Pereira, 2013).

Virtual employee: Built under the paradigm that work is something you do versus a place you go; virtual employees are dispersed from their brick-and-mortar cohorts. Virtual employees are geographically scattered, use technology to collaborate, communicate, coordinate, develop and execute plans for producing products, goods, and services (Petkovic, Orelj & Lukic, 2014). This population leverages technology for a competitive advantage by lowering the expense for real estate investments.

Work Alignment: The ability of an organizational leader to create cooperation and congruency between an employee's values and goals and those of the company or department (Singh, 2015).

Assumptions

The assumptions for my research included access, data validity, and participation. My primary assumption was the audience had multiple communities of practice operating within various social media sites through which I garnered participation. Although I primarily focused on targeting the community of practice within the social media site LinkedIn, I utilized ww.td.org virtual communities and www.virtualemployee.com blogs as alternatives. An additional assumption was how to validate the data. I validated any suspect data by utilizing semi-formal follow-up interview questions to clarify answers to the primary research interview questions. Although the population for this qualitative study was limited by nature of the defined audience, the last assumption was the potential for limited data. I addressed this by pursuing participants and collecting data until I reached a point of data redundancy and enough data to answer the research questions.

Scope and Delimitations

I focused on studying U.S.-based virtual employees as a criterion-based group. Aside from targeting this population, I did not utilize any other geographic or industry delimiter. The goal of the study was to discover and provide insight to help organizational leaders develop management tactics that will influence greater positive employee and organizational outcomes. The validity of any summations or themes was based on the actual impressions, comments and experiences of the criterion-based group

study participants. Since the approach was to solicit input from a broad, non-industry or geographic limiting group, the participants were able to provide very diverse and broad perspectives.

Limitations

Since my study was limited to a U.S.-based, virtual-employee, criterion-based population, the results of my study intimated opportunities for a broader study. The outcomes of my study are limited to developing and executing a more beneficial body of management tactics focused on virtual employees. A few other limitations are the tenure and cultural nuances of the study participants that may skew the outcomes related to their cohort perspectives. The research findings may have a limitation of not being consistently applied, globally. Variation or disparity of input by tenure and culture may limit research from describing a complete understanding of employee experiences (Nasomboon, 2014). Although the findings of my research are solidly founded on input from participants, the application of the discovered management tactics to a broader and more global group is limited.

Significance of the Study

My research was designed to discover which and to what extent management tactics positively influence engagement of a virtual workforce. The significance of my study was defined by contrasting data collected from the study participants to the information secured in the literature review. The study illustrated the difference between effective management techniques utilized in a traditional and virtual workplace setting. Based on the collected data related to the lived experiences of virtual employees and their

supervisors, I analyzed how effective management techniques in a traditional workplace differed from those in a virtual setting, as well as how those differences influenced virtual employee engagement. In addition to bridging the gap in research, the significance of my research also illustrated how managing virtual employees have a positive social change.

The ability to experience outcomes related to the completion of tasks in the workplace depends on an individual's efforts. Highly engaged employees are assets to their organizations, and disengaged employees can be liabilities. Highly engaged employees have a greater propensity to complete tasks, make substantive contributions to their organizations, and their behavior is more predictive than disengaged employees (Gruman & Saks, 2011). These positive outcomes can also result in happier and healthier employees who positively influence positive social change at an individual, group, or societal level. Positive social change is described as the ability to effect change that benefits individuals, groups, or society (Ahlquist, 2014). I pursued reducing the gap in literature by demonstrating management tactics that positively influence virtual employee engagement and results in greater individual productivity and organizational success. These positive outcomes can be extended to the practice of human resource management, society, and bridges gaps in current management literature.

Significance to Practice

Successful Human Resource Management (HRM) practitioners understand that knowledge is inherent within the organizational human capital infrastructure, and they

understand how important it is to motivate employees to interact, socially and professionally, to share, capture and store useful knowledge that increases an organization's competitive advantage. Research conducted by Kinsey Consulting Group illustrates human nature is the reason behind whether employees participate in information sharing and whether they dole out information on a need-to-know basis (Babcock, 2004). Environments where HRM acknowledges the importance of knowledge workers and create cultures where employees are appreciated, the byproduct is an environment of trust, where engagement is higher and where workers cultivate personal and professional networks for sharing (Cross, Davenport & Cantrell, 2003).

Having an environment where trust has been earned and knowledge is openly shared will result in positive personal and organizational outcomes. According to research conducted by Rana, Ardichvili, and Tkachenko (2014), there is substantial empirical evidence to support a positive correlation between HRM practices and employee engagement (Nasomboon, 2014). In fact, the engagement and productivity of high-performing employees were positively impacted when they could participate in networks where knowledge and experiences were shared. A key for my study was to determine what tactics can be employed to effectuate this concept within a virtual environment. Cross, Davenport & Cantrell (2003) analyzed the performance of organizations within four industries to illustrate how high-performers utilized sources such as intranet databases, print publications, and web sites, to stay current and share knowledge, as well as, to demonstrate how manager activities directly forge productive relationships.

When business leaders and HRM practitioners develop systems to increase trust and the willingness to share information, the result will lead to successful knowledge management (KM) programs. Conversely, organizations with environments of mistrust and fear not only decrease employee engagement, but also create cumbersome processes for contributing and/or accessing information. To assist in creating more productive environments, HRM practitioners must ensure they build incentives that are not purely financial in nature, but also reward employees with non-monetary, more intrinsic incentives. According to Cohen & Levinthal (1990), facilitating an environment based on intrinsic motivators as posited by Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory (motivation or hygiene), will increase the opportunity for learning and quality knowledge management input. As it pertains to KM, Herzberg's two-factor theory notes stimuli in the workplace, if present, generates satisfaction and produces a greater propensity for sharing knowledge and information. Conversely, the absence of certain stimuli does not result in dissatisfaction, rather it results in no satisfaction and inactivity. In addition to Herzberg's theories related to motivation, other scholars have studied how to incent employees to be more engaged and committed to organizational outcomes and to sharing knowledge.

One of the most revered studies on employee engagement and the related outcomes is Gallup's Q12 study. Their study dates to the mid-20th century and involves the collection and analysis of data from thousands of subjects within hundreds of organizations, worldwide. An understanding of what activities positively influence engagement will add to the development of more effective people-management strategies

and efficient processes related to KM and overall employee performance. The 12 questions (Q12) developed by Gallup (2012) to determine actions that positively influence engagement, commitment and positive behaviors, are:

- 1) Do you know what is expected of you at work?
- 2) Do you have the materials and equipment to do your work right?
- 3) At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?
- 4) In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work?
- 5) Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person?
- 6) Is there someone at work who encourages your development?
- 7) At work, do your opinions seem to count?
- 8) Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?
- 9) Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work?
- 10) Do you have a best friend at work?
- 11) In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?
- 12) In the last year, have you had opportunities to learn and grow?

Although all of the questions produced by Gallup are of importance to the study, some of them had a greater impact on employee engagement than others. Of the twelve questions,

two were found to be most critical for increasing engagement and employee willingness to participate in KM activities. According to their study the activities associated with the questions 1) Do you know what is expected of you at work, and 2) Do you have the materials and equipment you need to do your work, had greater weight (Gallup, 2012), were the primary drivers for positive employees outcomes. The Gallup Q12 study illustrates when activities are present related to these two questions, employee engagement and their willingness to participate in KM activities, as well as an increased focus on organizational objectives and performance is the highest (Gallup, 2012). When employees feel engaged, their commitment to their work, fellow employees and the overall organization increases; engaged employees feel a strong emotional bond to their organizations and that bond results in higher customer satisfaction, retention, spend and financial success (Heskett, et al., 2008). The ultimate desire for successful organizations is to increase its margin for the benefit of shareholders, employees, and customers.

It is important to understand the relationship between employee engagement and organizational success, as well as how identifying and managing critical information and knowledge impacts this relationship. In the study by Ram, Bhargavi and Prabhakar (2011), the questions and findings posited by the qualitative study of Burke, Borucki and Hurley (1992) were analyzed to empirically illustrate the link between work environment, employees' perceptions and financial outcomes. They modeled how a concern for employees and a concern for customers causally ordered the construct of increased employee engagement to positive organizational outcomes. The research of Scheider, White and Paul (1998), and Solnet (2006), also demonstrated how a service climate built

on a foundation of caring for employees resulted in increased external customer satisfaction and organizational success. These studies created a foundation which illustrated how well-defined managerial practices could be utilized to produce effective, efficient, and aligned performance outcomes (Ram, et al., 2011). Much of the studied research focused on how employee engagement is developed.

The concept of employee engagement rest upon the alignment of an employee's definition of self and their role. In Kahn's (1990) study, he researched employee engagement while working as a camp counselor and consultant to an architectural firm. He defined employee engagement at three levels of commitment – physical, cognitive, and emotional and demonstrated through descriptive theory, those with high levels of engagement produced results higher than less engaged employees. His seminal and grounded theoretical research resulted in several key findings, specifically, a focus on employees, within the context of their interactions with their environment resulted in increased productivity. According to Kahn (1990), a simultaneous concern with people's emotional reactions to conscious and unconscious phenomena related to organizational goals and the objective properties of jobs, roles, and work contexts impacted the primacy of their experiences within their environmental context. The foundation of Kahn's definition serves to help understand the depths to which employees articulate commitment and behaviorally perform tasks. I will attempt to provide clear options for leaders to analyze, develop and execute strategies to influence people's psychological presence at work, resulting in greater engagement and productivity.

Incenting, encouraging, and engaging talent to meet organizational objectives is the goal of all human resource management (HRM) practitioners and supervisors (Boon & Kalshoven, 2014). Most contemporary research, and much of the research used for my study, illustrates how management techniques impacted employee engagement in a traditional, brick-and-mortar setting (Malhotra, Majchrzak & Rosen, 2007). With a growing population of virtual employees, the amount of research focused on managing virtual employees is lacking. As was illustrated by Boon and Kalshoven (2014), understanding what management techniques positively impact employee engagement is paramount to successfully designing and executing human capital strategies. For this study I evaluated and analyzed seminal and current literature related to workplace activities that positively influence virtual employee engagement. The focus is to discover how managers can better influence increased engagement, and to what extent does increased engagement result in employee's producing greater mutually-beneficial outcomes.

With a focus on understanding how to better encourage employees to participate in productive activities, I pursued an understanding of management tactics that positively impacted virtual employee engagement and outcomes. My research further illustrated 1) virtual employee engagement is a vehicle through which organizational goals are met, 2) an organization's culture must be mutually-beneficial in order to increase virtual employee engagement and, 3) virtual employee engagement efforts must be proactively pursued by business leaders and managers utilizing various approaches. The primary goal of my study was to produce a baseline from which management tactics can be

identified and used to positively influence virtual employee engagement. When clearly identified, these virtual employee management tactics can be distinguished and utilized separately from traditional people-management tactics as identified in seminal HRM and employee engagement studies of organizations such as the Gallup Q12. The outcomes of this analysis will help people-managers better supervise virtual employees. Considering the extensive research on traditional workplace employee engagement and the seeming lack of research on the topic of virtual employee engagement, my research contributes to closing any research gaps.

Significance to Theory

Although much of the qualitative, empirical, and theoretical research has built an adequate foundation to support traditional, office-based employee engagement as a key initiative for organizational success, since there is a growing virtual labor force, additional research is needed. As the labor market evolves and becomes more virtual, global, and culturally dynamic, further studies are needed to determine how this more diverse workforce can be effectively utilized (Ram, Bhargavi & Prabhakar, 2011). One of the outcomes of research is based on Gold, et al, (2001), wherein it was illustrated how technology and conceptual principles have evolved to provide greater insight about incenting virtual and global employees to greater productivity. The noted theories and models were more than adequate for building a business case to support an organization investing in virtual employee engagement activities, service-profit chain modeling, and systems to identify, capture, house and manipulate information for the benefit of shareholders, employees, and customers. The benefit of my research is it provides further

information to support investing in the study of virtual employee engagement and productivity.

The experiential themes discovered using the inductive phenomenological methodology of my research supports the business case for organizations to invest in virtual employee engagement activities. Despite the baseline for tactics impacting employee engagement in a traditional workplace setting as defined by the seminal Gallup's Q12 study (Anand, 2011), my research contributes to the theoretical foundation for virtual workforce management by discerning if the identified virtual-employee management tactics are more intrinsically or extrinsically categorized. Although this qualitative study cannot be broadly generalized, it may provide a framework from which further research can be conducted to quantitatively correlate virtual employee management techniques to Herzberg's two-factor motivational theories. Pursuing more quantitative research may help determine whether virtual employee engagement drivers are more intrinsically or extrinsically anchored (Sinha & Trivedi, 2014). Although there is much research to define what drives traditional workplace employee engagement, there is room for additional research to clarify how these techniques resonate in a virtual settings and how virtual employee engagement might impact productivity and organizational success within the context of independent, dependent, and moderating variables (Mone, et al., 2011). The significance of my research baselines and allows business leaders and future researchers to understand what techniques positively impact virtual employee engagement, as well as provides a direction for further correlated, multi-variant, theoretical research opportunities.

Significance to Social Change

Proactive leadership directed towards efforts for increasing engagement tends to result in greater outcomes. According to Kahn (1990) from a social impact perspective, a greater proactive involvement of leaders to execute tactics that influence virtual employee engagement will result in employees having a greater physical, cognitive, and emotional commitment (Sinha & Trivedi, 2014). A more engaged employee will also result in a happier and mentally healthy employee, workforce, and society. Adopting more contemporary management techniques results in organizations and employees working and living well (Patterson, 2013). Positive social change is a commitment to improving the human and social condition by creating and applying ideas, strategies, and actions to promote the worth, dignity and development of society (Walden University, 2015). Considering nearly 30% of the workforce will be virtual by 2020 (Kamikow, 2011), and the apparent lack of research focused on managing virtual employees, one of the challenges for virtual managers is to identify a proven list of management techniques that could influence the engagement levels of this population.

As capitalist markets continue to evolve to knowledge-based economies, it becomes increasingly important for organizations to develop strategies to identify and leverage information, knowledge, and talent that gives them a competitive advantage. There has been a tremendous amount of research conducted on correlating employee engagement to organizational success. As the labor market continues to evolve and become younger, global restrictions will continue to disappear, and more employees will begin to work virtually, forcing organizations to consider how to better leverage talent

and gain competitive advantages (Johns & Gratton, 2013). Since leaders make consistent decisions about what investments to make in talent, it is imperative they understand how to protect this investment by developing processes to attract, develop, motivate, manage, reward and off-board talent. As it pertains to this research, leaders must understand how to positively influence the engagement of virtual talent.

Considering intellectual capital has become a critical organizational asset, according to van den Hoven (2001), the driver for increased investments in talent is an acknowledgment of the need to share critical knowledge and experiential information. At the crux of the value proposition for accessing this knowledge is understanding what engages and motivates employees to do so, and how to increase this knowledge transfer in daily activities within the communities, groups, or practices under which they are organized and operate (Wegner, 2004). Incenting and encouraging talent to engage fully in meeting organizational objectives is the goal of all human resource management (HRM) practitioners. According to Becker (1993), HRM is about identifying and leveraging the contribution of people to increase the production of goods and services (Uddin, 2014). Understanding environmental tactics that positively impact this engagement is paramount to successfully designing and executing human capital strategies. This paper researched and analyzed seminal and current studies related to management activities that positively influence employee engagement and result in employees investing more time to develop, implement, manage, and sustain robust activities that increase mutually-beneficial outcomes.

With a desire to understand how to encourage employees to participate in efforts that may increase productivity, this paper pursued an understanding of several constructs related to employee engagement and outcomes within the context of productivity and organizational outcomes. I pursued the discovery of management tactics that can be used to influence the engagement and productivity of virtual employees. I triangulated the discoveries against several seminal works on management, virtual employment, and employee engagement with the goal of producing tactics business leaders can use to increase productivity and financial results through employee engagement strategies.

Much of the qualitative, empirical, and theoretical research has been built an adequate foundation to support employee engagement as a key initiative for organizational success. There is a plethora of research illustrating the connectivity between employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and organizational financial performance in an increasingly more global and culturally dynamic workplace (Ram, Bhargavi & Prabhakar, 2011). My study pursued efforts to illustrate what managers have traditionally done to impact engagement in the brick-and-mortar setting and discover what options they may have to sustain engagement and productivity in a virtual setting. As I considered the targeted population for this research and completed the study, I discovered an opportunity for additional longitudinal, quantitative, and theoretical-based research related to this topic.

Summary and Transition

Managing virtual employees with traditional techniques does not apply and will be ineffective (Sheridan, 2012). The goal of my research was to produce a list of

executable management techniques that have the potential to influence virtual employee engagement for greater shareholders, stakeholders, employees, customers and community results. There has been a tremendous amount of research comparing employee engagement to organizational success. As the labor market continues to evolve and become younger, more global, and virtual, organizations are considering how to better leverage talent and gain competitive advantages (Aldea, Popesci & Draghici, 2012). Since talent makes consistent decisions about what to invest in their companies (time, knowledge, skills abilities), it is imperative organizational leaders understand how to attract, develop, motivate, manage, reward, and off-board talent, in the most mutually-beneficial, efficient, and effective manner. As it pertains to this research, efforts were pursued to help business leaders and people managers understand what activities influence the engagement of virtual talent.

Considering intellectual capital has become a critical organization asset, according to van den Hoven (2001), the driver for increased investments in activities to incentivize the sharing of critical knowledge and information lies in understanding how doing so will allow organizations to conduct business faster, better, and more cost-effectively. At the crux of the value proposition for accessing this knowledge is to understand what engages and motivates employees to do share and increase this knowledge transfer in daily activities within the communities, groups, or practices under which they are organized and operate (Wegner, 2004). Just knowing what tactics influence virtual employee behavior is not enough. Creating the environment and

conditions to influence engagement are just as important as what supervisory tactics a manager uses (Sinha & Trivedi, 2014).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The virtual employee population is growing, and there is a limited amount of research focused on the effectiveness of utilizing traditional management techniques. Estimates are that nearly 25% of Americans currently work remotely and this number is forecasted to grow (Noonan & Glass, 2012). Managing virtual employees with traditional management techniques is ineffective (Sheridan, 2012). As a result, there is an increased interest by organizational designers, business leaders and people managers to understand how employee engagement influences job performance (Dalal, et al., 2012). The problem I focused on for this study was to evaluate how managers can more effectively influence the engagement and productivity levels of virtual employees.

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study is to collect, contrast and compare data from a literature review and analyze and describe interview input from 25 criterion-based virtual employees to discover categories of management tactics that may have the greatest influence on employee engagement. My research focused on exploring what differences exist between the lived work experiences of virtual employees in comparison to employees in tradition work settings. I pursued this purpose by doing the following:

- Illustrating which people-management techniques are most effective in a traditional workplace.
- Providing a generally-accepted and operational definition of engagement.

- Analyzing interview input to determine how virtual employees define their interactions with supervisors within the framework of intrinsic/extrinsic motivational theories.
- Summarizing how any discoveries can be utilized to better predict virtual employee behavior.
- Evaluating trends associated with the virtual employee engagement.
- Providing information to illustrate the importance of this and similar studies by articulating the current and forecasted state of virtual employment.

By focusing on these items, I addressed the gap in seminal research related to employee engagement in a traditional workplace to the limited amount of research on the engagement of virtual employees.

Literature Search Strategy

My focus for this study was to discover what differences exist between management techniques deemed successful influencing employee engagement for traditional workplace employees, and experientially, how virtual employees define what techniques impact their engagement levels. My research pursued utilizing a qualitative descriptive phenomenological methodology and approach. My research goal is to help organizational leaders better understand techniques that could positively influence virtual employee engagement. Increasing employee engagement for this growing employment sector may result in higher levels of productivity and organizational success.

To collect and access research for this study, I utilized the Walden University Library Databases and Google Scholar alert function. The search strategy included using keyword searches within the following databases: Business Source Complete, EBSCO, Proquest, ABI/INFORM, Emerald Insight, Sage Stats, and Sage Premier. I proactively searched the Walden University resources and set up search alerts to inform me of any peer-reviewed published research and articles. To conduct the search I utilized the keywords - *employee engagement, theory of predictive behavior, employee engagement and organizational success, intrinsic/extrinsic motivational theory, factors impacting employee engagement, virtual workforce, telework trends, telecommuter, traditional management techniques, managing virtual workers, workforce trends*, as well as *virtual employee engagement*. I consistently utilized each of the keyword searches to see if research may have been archived differently within the journals to which the repositories were aligned. Utilizing the keyword search within Sage Stats did not produce any results. I utilized Sage Stats for statistical data related to unemployment/employment rates. I also set up a Google Scholar alert for any articles using the keywords employee engagement, virtual teams, and employee engagement, and social constructivists and employee engagement. This alert produced daily email alerts containing articles that were worthy and many which were not appropriate for my study. For those which I believed were valuable, I used the titles of those articles and searched for them through the Walden University Library resources. I did this because many of the articles produced using the Google Scholar alert were only available for a fee.

The process utilized for assembling relevant research for my study was to search within the Walden University Library Databases for contemporary peer-reviewed articles utilizing the key words previously noted. After a careful review of the content related to my topic, I reviewed the references cited within those articles to gain additional access to keywords and related peer-reviewed articles. The utilized search strategy produced and allowed me to review a total of 128 source documents, of which 82 were peer-reviewed journal articles, 38 were not peer-reviewed articles, and 8 were books. Aside from the 29 source documents that were more seminal and foundational in nature, 99 were published within the last 5 years.

Gap in Research

Current literature solidly illustrates effective management techniques that influence employee engagement in a brick-and-mortar setting. Of all the source documents secured for my study, less than 5% directly addressed the topic of virtual employment engagement. Most of the available research focused on management techniques that influenced employee engagement in the traditional workplace. Although important to understand these principles, managing virtual employees with traditional management techniques is ineffective (Sheridan, 2012). The limited results of the literature search combined with the forecasted growth of virtual employees support the need for this study. It is forecasted that between 20%-30% of the U.S. workforce will be virtual by 2020, and 1.3 billion will work virtually, worldwide, within the next few years (Kamikow, 2011; Noonan & Glass, 2012; Plumb & Ketchen, 2013). These forecasts and

the shortage of substantial research related to managing and engaging this population further illustrate the gap in literature and support the need for this study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the seminal works of Kahn (1990) which focused role alignment, and illustrates how employees integrate self with their jobs, and how this integration influences their levels of engagement. According to Parahoo (2006), knowing when to use a conceptual or theoretical framework depends on the extent to which a researcher draws concepts versus theories (Green, 2014). My focus will not use theories as the basis but instead will use a conceptual framework and theoretical references. I will highlight concepts related to the phenomenon of experientially defined supervisory tactics that influence increased role alignment and engagement of virtual employees.

As it relates to engagement, Kahn (1990) studied how employees integrated with their work and environment based on the level of empowerment and supervisory techniques they experienced, such as communications, conversations, and their ability to express ideas (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2014). This seminal study focused on traditional employees or those collocated in the same work location. According to Kahn (1990) the concept of engagement is defined by personal engagement or disengagement and is related to an individual's ability to align themselves with their work, the environment, and their interactions with colleagues (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). Much of the contemporary research focuses on individually-driven efforts and extrinsic organizational or managerial techniques that influence engagement (Bhuvanaiah & Raya 2014). Rather

than focus on extrinsic, broader concepts related to the engagement of employees in a traditional workplace, I focused on the thematic and narrative-based outcomes of individual virtual employee intrinsic of self-defined experiences related to management techniques used therein and their engagement.

The approach chosen to study this targeted population was a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach. Utilizing a descriptive approach will allow the researcher to identify and describe themes that emerge from the analysis of collected data (Sanders, 1984). According to Edie (1962), phenomenology focuses on the conscious experience of with a phenomenon. That is, phenomenology focuses on studying a participant's reported self-awareness of their experience with an event. If a researcher's biases are removed from the study, a qualitative phenomenological approach is best used for this study. Bracketing, or setting aside my biases helped me identify and control concepts opined by Husserl (2001), wherein he stated the author's intuition must be employed, yet controlled, to describe the essence of the lived experiences of those being studied (Gill, 2014). I utilized semi-structured interviews as an approach to collect data from virtual employee participants and focused on how they defined and categorized tactics utilized by their managers. The collected data were then analyzed in an inductive and reductionist manner to categorize management activities into distinct tactics that the participants described as influencing their role alignment and engagement levels.

In my search for articles to further evaluate this paradigm, not much substantive research was found related to employee engagement in a virtual setting. A purpose statement must answer the question about why a study is important, indicate the source of

the issue, and reference published literature and identify the gap(s) to be studied (Lewis, 2015). To that end, the purpose of my study was to utilize the employee engagement research of the Gallup Organization to qualitatively study and evaluate what unique organizational leadership techniques can be used to impact virtual employee engagement. Over a 40-year period, the Gallup's Q12 study analyzed survey input from over 33 million employees to understand better what management techniques met the needs of employees and generate higher engagement levels (Robinson, 2014). Since there was not one location to observe this population, in addition to referencing current research related to the topic as a data source, my research focused on a securing input from a population of virtual workers within a professional services organization.

Aligned with this methodological framework, I focused on how virtual employees experienced and define management techniques utilized by their direct supervisors to help determine whether these experiences influence their role alignment and engagement levels. Utilizing a reductionist approach helps clarify descriptive themes inductively discovered from an observation of a phenomenon and the self-reflections study participants have about their experiences with it (Schmitt, 1959). Since my study focused on the lived work experience of virtual employees, the adoption of this approach, using a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological methodology was most appropriate.

The phenomenon under study was the attempts of supervisors to direct and manage activities of their virtual employees. As it pertains to people management, a phenomenon is a perceived occurrence of an event and can also be defined as interactions between superiors and subordinates (Harrison, 1985). Engagement is defined by how the

employee's feel about, interact with and respond to multiple workplace phenomena. Employee engagement is a level self/role alignment resulting from how they practically connect with their work, peers, supervisors, customers, and the organization because of their emotional and rational response to intrinsic and extrinsic workplace stimuli (Dávila & Piña-Ramírez, 2014). In general, these definitions refer to engagement as a voluntary response to stimuli; stimuli, in this case the stimuli are what actions or activities organizational leaders employ to supervise their virtual employees. When these activities are understood, organizational leaders have an opportunity to engage employees at a higher level and elicit and predict more productive responses. Organizations that employ appropriate activities that successfully focus on engagement typically enjoy their employees making significant contributions to the success of the organization (Budihardjo, 2015).

Utilizing the noted approach and methodology, I pursued efforts to construct themes for understanding the experiences of organizational managers and employees interacting in a virtual setting. Specifically, I collected and analyzed data to discover categories and themes about what leaders did to supervise virtual employees, how the employees felt about those interactions, better understand how they wanted to be managed, and evaluated whether participants felt the interactions positively influenced their levels of engagement. Figure 1 displays the concepts associated with this body of research.

The conceptual framework is setup to visualize which management techniques might influence virtual employee engagement and increase the propensity to predict behaviors and outcomes. That is, to what extent does working in a virtual environment change the effectiveness how managers supervise employees? Also, to what extent do these changes influence virtual employee engagement? A conceptual framework can

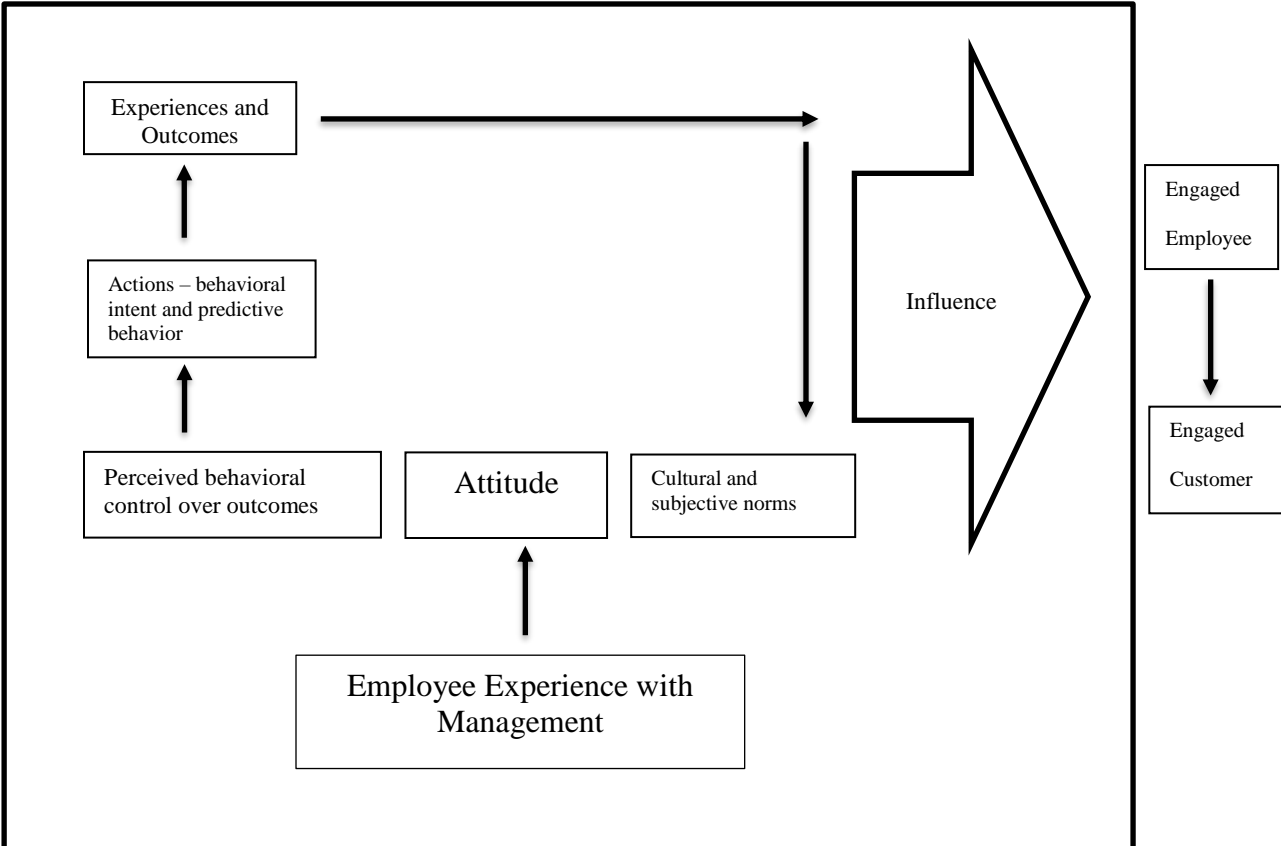


Figure 1. Conceptual framework related to tactics influencing engagement and predicting behavior, illustrating how our cultural experiences and norms, attitudes and perceived control interacts with a phenomenon and based on research how those interactions drive our intent and behavior.

inform the body of research without having a tightly bound theoretical basis (Green, 2014); it provides a foundation on which the research is anchored and can be refined as additional data are collected and analyzed. In the case of this study, and as defined by Husserl (1931), this type of an approach is best utilized to inductively determine which lived experiences are most effective and have the greatest impact on their levels of engagement (Sanders, 1982). An inductive approach was utilized as a filter to determine if any of the identified management tactics were considered more intrinsically or extrinsically engaging by virtual employees.

From an ontological and epistemological perspective, without preconceived definitions, my research focused on a reductionist approach as a means of pursuing the essential phenomenon of how virtual employees define the management techniques they experience when interfacing with their direct supervisors and how experiences influence their engagement. This concept of reductionism based on the experience of participants allowed me to approach the study without any preconceived notions about what was effective for managing virtual employees. Furthermore, utilizing a constructivist approach allowed me to define a body of knowledge based on discovered narrative themes (Schmitt, 1959). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003) and Mason (1996), when viewed and studied without the imposition of subjective rationalism, social constructivism produces multiple social realities based on the perceptions of the actors (Gamage & Wickramasinghe, 2014). Statements and quotes were collected from participants as a validated measure to construct themes about how successful

management techniques were defined, embraced, and used within the context of their virtual work environment.

As posited by Spiegelberg (1971), by identifying and constructing themes, participant subjectivity can help build upon absolutes that will go beyond mere appearances (Sanders, 1982). This constructivist approach involved identifying narrative trends that may help predict behavior and define effective outcomes (Marshall & Rossman, 2012). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), as well as Mertens (2010), social constructivism pursues an understanding of how the participants define their interactions with the world around them. Since the concept of virtual work can transcend an endless list of professions, to better control the study, my focus was a defined sample group from within the professional services setting. Additionally, it is important to consider the epistemic and ontological framework I mentioned earlier that was utilized to support my research.

Literature Review

Setting up virtual organizations and offering flexible workplace options are becoming an increasingly common offering for organizations to be more competitive in attracting talent. The business proposition for offering these options are related to real estate and other costs savings, time savings, the ability to attract a younger workforce, globalization, and advances in information and communications technology (Petkovic, Orelj & Lukic, 2014). It is important to understand how these virtual workplace opportunities create new realities for employees opting to take advantage of them.

From an epistemic perspective, and based on the literature reviewed, my research opines traditional management techniques have been proven to exist as an entity without interface with another involved entity. Although the debate about an entity existing separate from a process is a long-standing debate (Thompson, 2011), my study is based on how virtual employees experience the process of interacting with management techniques, and how those interactions influence their engagement. When a virtual employee interacts with their manager, the self-described definitions of these experiences are unique. Pursuing efforts to define the inductive themes gathered from the interviews of selected virtual employees may result in a body of constructs that may benefit organizations which offer flexible work opportunities. Utilizing the precepts fixated constructs (management techniques) are precepts to change (process or interactions), through which observations of interactions within any study may give birth to new paradigms (Thompson, 2011). Historically, these theories were situated on a continuum. The focus on my study was to align with a mid-range concept that recognized the management techniques, analyzed the interactions between the virtual employee and their supervisors, and focused on potentially new outcomes or themes.

Some traditional research contrasted the absolutes on a continuum of epistemology and ontology. One school of thought researched epistemology from the perspective of fluidity, emic and intersubjectivity through which views were observed objectively, nomothetical and from an etic perspective (Sulkowski, 2014). My research adopted a more mid-range approach. As illustrated by Sulkowski, (2014), I utilized a more functionalist view of the culture wherein classical management techniques existed,

yet blended with a contemporary neo-positivist, intersubjective processes through which experiential outcomes resulted in more effective virtual management techniques. This mid-range approach allowed me to analyze how more traditionally defined management techniques were experienced by virtual employees to discover more efficacious management techniques for this growing labor force. I analyzed seminal and contemporary research associated with the following:

1. The definition of employee engagement.
2. People management techniques.
3. Management techniques that influence engagement in a traditional workplace setting.
4. Intrinsic/extrinsic motivational theories.
5. Theories on predictive behavior, and
6. Contemporary research on predictively managing behavior of virtual employees.

Defining Employee Engagement

The term motivation, engagement, satisfaction, and other behaviorally-anchored motivational terms have been used interchangeably and resulted in confusion about the definition of engagement. According to Christian, Garza, and Slaughter, (2011) there has been confusion about a standard definition for employee engagement, resulting in numerous terms such as work engagement, job engagement, role engagement, organizational engagement, and self-engagement (Bailey, Alfes, Fletcher, Robinson,

Holmes, Buzzeo & Currie, 2015). Based on the seminal and generally-accepted definition of Kahn (1990), the International Survey Research (2003) study defined engagement as the simply increased commitment and productivity of an employee (Kohli, et al., 2015). Before the seminal definition of Kahn (1990), Csikszentmihalyi (1975) tried to define engagement as the intrinsically-focused feeling people get when they are totally involved. This definition laid the foundation for Kahn's (1990) definition because it seemed to provide an alignment between a person and their work. Kahn (1990) defined engagement as the alignment of an organization member's self with their work role resulting in positive emotions and an increased investment of their emotional, behavioral, and cognitive efforts towards their work (Bailey, et al., 2015). Scarlett Surveys further stated employee engagement is measurable and focuses on emotions employees have towards their co-workers, their job, and organization (Macey, & Scheider, 2008; Kapoor & Meachem, 2012). Based on various motivational theories, an employee's engagement has an impact on the investment they will make into their work.

Understanding the contextual framework for determining how a virtual employee's self is integrated or disintegrated with their work is critical to understanding their levels of engagement or disengagement. This person-role integration is an important factor in determining how a virtual employee's experience results in the greater or lesser extent to which they embed their selves in their job (Kahn, 1990). That is, virtual employees define their selves in a way where the self-defined persona integrates with their work. According to Kahn (1990) the greater the alignment between their self and the job, the higher level of engagement, commitment, psychological, physical, and

emotional attachment to their work, organizations, and colleagues. This conceptual framework has its roots in the experiential, face-to-face, encounter-based research of Goffman (1961), Diamond and Allcorn (1985), and Merton (1957). My research outlines how people are inherently involved and engulfed in their work based on the value they place on organizational life encounters (Kahn, 1990). Other more contemporary research has also evaluated and supported these seminal works.

Within the contemporary typology of engagement, a higher self-role alignment resulted in greater levels of performance and satisfaction. According to Kahn and Heaphy (2013) and Schaufeli (2013), the concept of high engagement and burnout exists on a dichotomous continuum that illustrates how high engagement results in positive, fulfilling work rather than exhaustion and lack of accomplishment (Truss, Shantz, Soane, Kerstin & Delbridge, 2013). The greater an employee's organizational experience and self-alignment, the greater they will experience engagement, productivity, and organizational outcomes. HRM practices must focus on understanding how employees identify their self, and what can be done to better align experiences with self-defined constructs.

To better focus on this goal, an understanding of how self is defined is required, as well as what management tactics align with influencing a more positive experience for employees. In an ideal situation, organizational leaders would understand the management principles that positively influence engagement. As noted in the research of Scarlett Surveys, engagement will influence an employee's desire to learn and perform (Kapoor & Meachem, 2012). The key is understanding what factors ultimately influence

engagement and afford leaders the opportunity to predict behavior and outcomes. Since very few studies have focused on this scenario, a solid conceptual or theoretical framework, such as Ajzen's TPB and the two-factor of Herzberg, can be used to help discover the impact of identified engagement drivers (Dunstan, Covic, & Tyson, 2013). Before understanding management tactics that influence engagement, a better understanding of general management theories should be visited.

People-Management Techniques

Leveraging talent in a mutually beneficial way with the goal of an achieving a competitive advantage is one of the most important efforts organizational leaders can undertake. According to Jac Fitz-enz (1995), Millmore, Lewis, Saunders, Thornhill, and Morrow (2008), and Polski and Vokic (2010), human capital is a key asset; it is vitally important for leaders to track the effectiveness of people-management activities (Vokic, 2012). Optimizing the talent inherent within the human capital framework is critical for sustaining a competitive advantage.

How to manage people effectively can be a bit paradoxical. According to Lee, Han, Byron, and Fan (2008), effective leaders must be gentle and soft, yet consistent and strong in the application of defined management practices (Yan, Yu-Lan, Xiao-Bei, 2015). As generational cohorts morph and enter the labor force, each will have unique nuances and tendencies that also perpetuate this paradox. Historically some of the seminal theorists posited succinct management theories and practices to leverage talent. The quantitative processes and behavior-focused approaches of theorists such as Fayol (1949), Koontz (1961), Katz (1966), and Fiedler (1967), continue to have effective

applications within human capital research. Based on those theorists, adopting a more integrative, mid-range approach might be used to leverage a more complex workforce (Luthan & Stewart, 1971). The theory of contingency management is the best approach for managing a complex workforce.

The historical perspective may have been for managers to treat all employees the same. As it pertains to virtual employees, managing them with traditional management techniques is ineffective (Sheridan, 2012). Managers are expected to treat everyone the same while taking into consideration individual needs (Yan, Yu-Lan, Xiao-Bei, 2015). Research has shown for peak performance treating all employees the same is less effective than a more contingent theoretical approach to people management through which a more mid-range, integrative approach versus choosing an A or B option, is more optimal (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The contingent theory of management calls for managing talent based on an evaluation of how the environment, previous efforts, and results are contrasted (Luthan & Stewart, 1971). How we manage talent is based on their historically lived experiences. Instead of utilizing an either/or model of people management, contemporary leadership models might benefit from a more blended approach based on virtual employees communicate they want to be treated.

Many behavior models of people management pose alternatives of extremes. According to Peng and Nisbett (1999), analytically dividing management into parts and segmenting them into either/or alternatives is more of a Western phenomenon (Yan, Yu-Lan, & Xiao-Bei, 2015). Embracing the harmony of co-existing management options into a both/and technique is more effective, fluid, and less paradoxical (Yan, Yu-Lan, &

Xiao-Bei, 2015). As noted by scholars such as Burns and Stalker (1961), Deutsch (1968), Tushman and Romanelli (1985), and Siggelkow and Levinthal (2003), a study of management options should focus on understanding competing options such as exploratory/exploitative, centralized/decentralized, collaboration/control, flexibility/efficiency, and social/profit (Smith & Lewis, 2011). These suggestions led to contingency and contingency-related organizational management options.

According to Denison, Hooijberg, and Quinn (1995), Kaiser, Lindberg, and Craig (2007) and Lawrence, Lenk, and Quinn (2009), with few exceptions, there is limited research contrasting what impact competing management theories have had on the contemporary workforce (Yan, Yu-Lan & Xiao-Bei, 2015). Blending these ends to meet the needs of the organization and employees is referred to as paradoxical leader behavior by Yan, et al., (2015). Combining these paradoxical ends mirrors the contingent management theories posited by the earlier behaviorists. Combined with contingent management theories of Luthan and Stewart (1971), this paradoxical leader concept may be the most appropriate framework for analyzing what practices are most influential for engaging a complex virtual workforce.

Practically speaking, contingent techniques are related to circumstances. Ontologically, my research was pursued from the perspective internal systems of management exists. From an epistemological perspective, when these internal systems interact with virtual employees a new body of knowledge may be produced from which we may enhance the internal management practices and predict behaviors. Based on studies of Luthan and Stewart (1971), the practices utilized to manage human capital is

dependent upon the constitutive factors associated with the populations being managed (Kaiser, Kozica, Swart & Werr, 2015). In the case of this study, the primary constitutive factor that resulted in different management techniques is anchored on the fact that the workforce under evaluation was virtual. Although one of the constitutive factors of a professional workforce, common with virtual workers, is autonomy (Nordenflycht, 2010; Kaiser, et al.,2015), the purpose of my research was not to illustrate a causal relationship between those characteristics and a body of contingent management techniques. Rather, the study was pursued, to support the management concepts posited by Luthan and Stewart, (1971) and Kaiser, et al. (2015) wherein management techniques were described being dependent upon the constitutive factors of the targeted population. We can surmise groups who are defined as autonomous cannot be effectively managed with command and control techniques (Kaiser, et al.,2015). In the context of my study a professional workforce is one which includes knowledge workers that can work away from their teams or counterparts. My research pursued efforts to discover how any shifts in supervisory techniques influenced the engagement of professionals who are virtual. To pursue an understanding of what can be done to positively influence the engagement of virtual employees, a general understanding the engagement framework must be understood.

Techniques that Influence Traditional Employee Engagement

There are various bodies of research listing efforts to increase employee engagement. None of the articles sought for this research focused on tactics that positively influence virtual employee engagement. To discern if the tactics that influence

traditional employee engagement were like those for virtual employees, an outline of those seminal tactics was provided.

Gallup Organization has been involved in collecting and analyzing survey and poll data since 1930. The latest version of the Q12 meta-analytical tool was finalized in 1998 and has since been administered to over seven million employees in over 112 twelve countries (Harter, et al.,2006). As a construct, Gallup Q12 suggest when the following twelve items are present, engagement increases:

1. I know what is expected of me at work.
2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
3. At work, I can do what I do best every day.
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
7. At work, my opinions seem to count.
8. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
9. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
10. I have a best friend at work.
11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

Although there are other significant and related studies, my research utilized the broader outcomes of Gallup's Q12 as the foundational construct for comparing techniques that influence engagement in a virtual setting. However, it is also important to consider what other researchers have published on the topic.

Various researchers have published articles outlining similar items to Gallup's Q12. Additionally, a few have evaluated Q12 and down-selected the influencing factors to a smaller list. For instance, as outlined in the article by Sinha and Trivedi (2014), of the Q12 items Gallup Organization studied as the key drivers of engagement, the most important were the following nine items:

1. Encouragement to develop the skills – focus on career planning and individual growth and development.
2. Work/life balance – Establishment of a culture where leaders are role models of a balanced work life.
3. Belief in the organization's direction and leadership – awareness and understanding of the strategic direction of the organization.
4. Praise/recognition of good work – reward and recognition mechanisms.
5. Being cared about the person – culture of caring.
6. Competitive comparison and benefits programs – formal mechanisms in place e.g. incentive programs.
7. Clear job expectations – awareness and understanding of what is expected from them.

8. Resources for effective job performance – availability of sufficient equipment and resources to all employees.
9. Opportunity to use skills – equal opportunities to utilize current skills and develop new ones.

The accuracy of determining true employee engagement and its impact on organizational success can be a daunting task. As such, not all research agrees on the most frequently cited studies and some researchers believe a few of the findings are simply a fad. Critics of Gallup's Q12 meta-analysis have proven this very popular meta-analysis has never posited a strong relationship between the noted management tactics and employee engagement (Crush, 2009). Dr. Peter Hutton, in the article *Question Time*, went as far as stating the Q12 study did not even illustrate causation, further noting, many of the current surveys related to employee engagement seem to fit within a mental model anecdotally supporting a relationship between employee engagement and organizational success (Crush, 2009). To that end, instead of following the consensus about how to conduct employee engagement surveys, customized surveys may result in a more accurate picture. Carole Mote, the HR Director for Birds Eye, stated they developed surveys to ask the right questions to help discern if their employees were truly engaged or simply happy (Crush, 2009). Whether a researcher uses a customized or generally-available survey, they should contrast their findings against seminal and empirical research to help illustrate how management techniques might influence employee engagement.

Considering the phenomenon of virtual work being recent and upward trending, not much research was available discussing how management techniques influence the engagement of members of this cohort. According to Davila and Pina-Ramirez (2014), the foundation for successful engagement is to understand and utilize intrinsically-based, psychological contracts and experiences between employers and employees. As noted, Gallup's Q12 study of engagement outlines 12 items, which if present, positively influences employee engagement. Since its inception, it has been administered to over 33 million employees and illustrates what management techniques positively influence outcomes for both the employee and organization (Robinson, 2014). Although the meta-analysis of Gallup is widely used and recognized, according to Simpson, (2009), Wefald and Downey (2009), and Schaufeli, (2014), engagement has been criticized as not having construct and discriminant validity (Bailey, Madden, Kerstin, Fletcher, Dilys, Holmes, Buzzeo, & Graeme, 2015). Conversely, others such as Christian, Garza, & Slaughter (2011), as well as the depth and breadth of Gallup's Q12 supports employee engagement being a distinct construct with discriminant validity in comparison to other job-related constructs (Christian, Garza & Slaughter 2011).

Although simply combining elements of discriminately validated constructs is considered a 'Jangle Fallacy,' as named by Kelley, (1927), having similar traits does not make one construct less valid than another. Based on the contrast of several studies, engagement has been deemed a valid construct. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker, 2002), the Disengagement Scale (Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou and Kantas, 2003), the Shirom-Melamed Vigo Measure

(Shirom, 2004), Psychological Engagement (May, Gibson and Harter, 2004), and the Job Engagement (Rich, LePine and Crawford, 2010; Saks, 2006), all show some construct overlap that supports engagement as an independent construct with discriminate validity (Bailey, et al.,2015). Since Gallup's Q12 is an accepted measurement of engagement, an understanding of its elements and how they practically translate is critical.

Understanding other studies will also lend credence to this study and the foundation of the Q12 constructs.

Another study conducted by the Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching (iPEC) analyzed an employee's Energy Leadership Index (ELI) which measures their attitude and perspective of the work resulting in levels of spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical commitment and behaviors (Monesson, 2013). The ELI focused on generating results that would allow managers to build on anabolic tactics versus reactive catabolic reactions to build individual and organizational success. Anabolic efforts are considered activities which result in aspirational, motivational, positive-energy behaviorally-based outcomes; catabolic is the converse. The levels of commitment are like those defined within the engagement paradigm of Kahn, (1990), cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. In Monesson's (2013) analysis of the Gallup Q12 drivers of engagement and iPEC's ELI, she narrowed down the elements of engagement to the following executable tactics:

1. Train everyone on your firm's purpose, mission, and vision.
2. Ensure that everyone understands what is expected of them.
3. Regularly reinforce how important each team member is to the success of the firm.

4. Design “client experiences” so that every team member delivers consistent encounters.
5. Recognize employees for “living your firm’s brand.”
6. Coach leaders to focus on team members’ strengths.
7. Nurture a culture of collaboration.
8. Focus on solutions instead of problems.
9. Empower team members to take ownership of client relationships.
10. Communicate successes throughout the firm.
11. Make leaders and employees accountable for their actions and reactions.
12. Be positive in employee and client interactions.

I contrasted the listed tactics of Monesson (2013) with the interview results to determine if they can be recommended as a source of influence on virtual employee satisfaction. According to Monesson (2013), the Gallup study shows organizations with engaged employees experience a 240% increase in productivity and business outcomes compared to organizations with employees who are not engaged. Understanding how the recommended list of tactics influence engagement is just as important as having a list of tactics. Table 1 outlines each of the factors posited to influence engagement by Gallup and iPEC. All the employed tactics will either intrinsically or extrinsically influence engagement.

Table 1

Employee Engagement Construct Models of Gallup and iPEC

Gallup Q12 Employee Engagement Elements	iPEC ELI Employee Engagement Elements
1. I know what is expected of me at work.	1. Train everyone on your firm's purpose, mission, and vision.
2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.	2. Ensure that everyone understands exactly what is expected.
3. At work, I can do what I do best every day.	3. Regularly reinforce how important each team member is to the success of the firm.
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.	4. Design "client experiences" so that every team member delivers consistent encounters.
5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.	5. Recognize employees for "living your firm's brand."
6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.	6. Coach leaders to focus on team members' strengths.
7. At work, my opinions seem to count.	7. Nurture a culture of collaboration.
8. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.	8. Focus on solutions instead of problems.
9. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.	9. Empower team members to take ownership of client relationships.
10. I have a best friend at work.	10. Communicate successes throughout the firm.
11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.	11. Make leaders and employees accountable for their actions and reactions.
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.	12. Be positive in employee and client interactions.

Note. Adapted from "Gallup (Producer, 2012). *Employee engagement: A leading indicator of financial performance.* Washington DC. Gallup Organization.

Monesson, E. P. (2013). *Employee Engagement Drives Client Engagement.* *CPA Practice Management Forum*, 9(11), 18-21.

To determine items having the greatest influence on virtual employee engagement, I considered the items that are more intrinsically aligned. Contemporary research portends individuals are more motivated and perform better with intrinsic drivers (Davila & Pina-Ramirez, 2014; Park & Rainey, 2012). The theory most related to these statements is the Two-Factor Motivational Theory of Frederick Herzberg.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Motivational Theory (Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivators)

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivational theories, practices and outcomes have a tremendous impact on influencing the investment of discretionary efforts. According to McGregor's (1957) research on factors influencing motivation is variable and depends on the employee; both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators are of value (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2015). According to Hackman and Lawler, (1971) extrinsic motivators are more focused on items such pay, work environment, and punishment; Intrinsic motivators focus more on how employees feel about conducting worthwhile work with meaningful outcomes (Sinha & Trivedi, 2014). In contrast to the Kahn (1990) definition of engagement, employees are more engaged when they see a return on their investment (worthwhile work), and they add value (meaningful outcomes). Which extrinsic or intrinsic driver is most important and produces the greatest outcomes is dependent upon the employee. Some employees seek extrinsic rewards such as money and benefits while others are driven by intrinsic rewards that increase their self/role alignment.

Employees who are influenced by intrinsic rewards seem to have the greatest organizational value. Those who seek opportunities that are more psychologically rewarding by providing them with autonomy and a feeling of accomplishment are more

intrinsically motivated and productive (Ryan & Desi, 2000a). Much of the contemporary research illustrates that efforts targeting intrinsic motivators have a greater influence on engagement and productivity. According to Gmur, Kaiser and Kampe, (2009) extrinsic elements such as pay does not lead to greater commitment, motivation, or engagement (Kaiser, Kozica, Swart & Werr, 2015). I focused on how intrinsic motivators influenced the engagement of virtual employees. Once organizational leaders better understand what factors influence engagement, they will have a better chance predicting behaviors.

Research definitively supports leaders knowing and using motivational theories and practices to engage employees towards greater performance. In the research of Boyne and Hood (2010) and Kohn (1993) they illustrated how business success is significantly and positively impacted when intrinsic rewards are identified and utilized to create mutually-beneficial outcomes, (Smith, Joubert & Karodia, 2015). Many of the theoretical pioneers such as Freud, Skinner, Adler, Jung, and Herzberg had scholarly debates on what motivators were foundational to the human psyche, but they all tended to lean towards intrinsic motivators (Smith, et al., 2015). Although contemporary research has improved upon which intrinsic motivators are more effective and can be applied in the workplace, much of the published research outlines subtle differences on which intrinsic motivators are the most important for influencing employee engagement.

Employees seemed to be more engaged by intrinsic drivers. Although extrinsic drivers have a small impact on engagement and motivation, overwhelmingly, employees are driven, and their engagement is positively influenced by intrinsic items (Smith, et al.,

2015). According to the research conducted by Smith, et al., (2015), the most common drivers that influence engagement are:

- Regular praise/constructive feedback from managers.
- Credit for contribution to the company.
- Working hours.
- Organizational culture fit.
- Independence and freedom.
- Collaboration and teamwork.
- Challenging tasks.
- Significant position in the company.

Additionally, the research conducted by Singh (2015) studied 98 respondents over a period of a year and illustrated intrinsic drivers are much more influential on engagement than any other actions. My research produced the following list of drivers as instrumental in creating an engaged and productive environment:

- A culture of respect
- Recognition
- Trust
- Autonomy

When evaluating the previous list from Gallup, iPEC, Singh (2015) and Smith, et al., (2015), the common factors amongst the research is:

- Autonomy
- A culture of respect
- Role clarity and accountability
- Development opportunities
- Opportunity for collaboration and teamwork

All the combined factors are intrinsic in nature. Decker (2010) noted intrinsic factors are those that are internally motivating to employees (Smith, et al., 2015). In research conducted by Chen, Ford, and Farris (1999), organizations will generate financially rewarding outcomes for both the employee and the company by providing intrinsically rewarding opportunities (Smith, et al., 2015). The focus of my study determined which of the participant self-described intrinsic motivators aligned with the seminal and contemporary research and influenced their levels of engagement. I also evaluated whether the themes discerned from the participant input will give leaders the ability to forecast proactive and planned behaviors resulting in more predictive outcomes.

Predictive Behavior Theories

Having a crystal ball into future behaviors of employees will result in a competitive advantage to organizations. Based on research conducted by Grant (2000); Griffin, Neal and Parker, (2007) the increase in autonomous and self-managed teams resulted in organizational leaders needing to understand proactive and planned behaviors

of their employees (Shin & Kim, 2015). With the increased need for predicting behaviors and the lack of voluminous theoretical research on the topic, Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB) has been chosen as the model for this study. The TPB articulates an individual's behavior is reflective of conscious decisions based a consideration of controllable, available choices (Leroy, Manigat, Meuleman & Collewaert, 2015). These choices, in part, are based on an employee's expectation of rewards that are intrinsically satisfying. As noted by Vroom (1994) an individual's behavior is determined by their evaluation of the overall desire for and the likelihood of consequences for their behavior (Shin & Kim, 2014). In contrast, and according to Ajzen (1991), an employee's behavior is based on their autonomy to act, as well as what subjective norms they have experienced in the past (Dunstan, Covic & Tyson, 2013). The theory of planned behavior is a tool utilized to better predict an employee's behavior by understanding their customary attitude, personal experiences, perceptions about control over their environment, resulting in their intention. Once understood, management tactics could be utilized within this framework to better predict outcomes.

The theory of planned behavior was based on the theory of reasoned action (1980). Ajzen (1991) evolved his theory to predict the intention, and ultimately the behavior, for an employee to engage in certain activities (LaMorte, 2016). The theory was successfully utilized to predict health-related behaviors and later expanded to predict and measure behaviors in the workplace. Like predicting health-related behaviors, for example smoking and substance abuse, workplace related intentions and behavioral predictions were based on an employee's experiences (cultural and affinity group norms),

attitudes and beliefs (attitudes about what they believe will be possible outcomes), and control (power over behavioral outcomes), resulting in an ability to forecast outcomes (LaMorte, 2016). The Theory of Planned Behavior model is outlined in Figure 2.

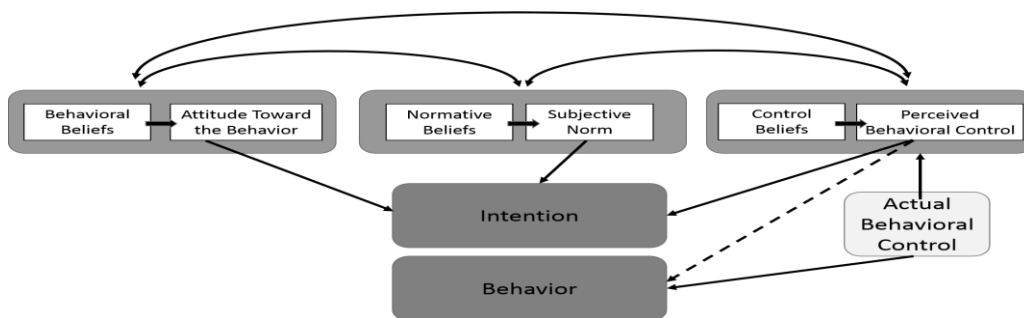


Figure 2. The Theory of Planned Behavior

Note. Adapted from “The Theory of Planned Behavior”, by Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50,179-211.

My research provides an understanding how TPB relates to the intrinsic drivers coded from the Gallup’s Q12 and iPEC’s studies, and the related experiences reported by the virtual employees provided insight on what organizational leaders can do to influence engagement, understand, control and predict behaviors.

Many of the factors discovered while studying TPB can be categorized as intrinsic drivers. As noted in the research of Crant (2000), Ohly and Fritz (2010), Sonnetag and Spychala (2012), and Wu and Parker (2012), the organizational contextual and cultural factors of employee autonomy and control over their job and work, create an environment of trust, teamwork, caring, and support that influence engagement and facilitates the ability to predict behavior (Shin & Kim, 2015). Furthermore, Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson and Sowa, (1986); Hackman and Oldham, (1976) illustrated creating an

environment of caring about an individual's welfare and success, providing them autonomy and freedom to work and make decisions, and showing trust and encouraging teamwork are critical elements for engagement and predicting proactive behavior (Shin & Kim, 2015). Table 2 illustrates the key intrinsic drivers that influence employee engagement and must be present for predicting proactive behavior as reported by Gallup Q12, iPEC and TPB, respectively.

Table 2

Gallup and iPEC Factors Influencing Virtual Employee Engagement

Gallup Q12 Employee Engagement Construct Elements	iPEC ELI Employee Engagement Construct Elements	Theory of Planned Behavior Elements Driving Performance
1. I know what is expected of me at work. CLARITY	1. Train everyone on your firm's purpose, mission, and vision. ALIGNMENT	1. I prefer to work on tasks that force me to learn new things. The opportunity to extend the range of my abilities is important to me. ALIGNMENT
2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right. TOOLS	2. Ensure that everyone understands exactly what is expected. Focus on solutions instead of problems. CLARITY	2. When I fail to complete a difficult task, I plan to try harder the next time I work on it. The opportunity to learn new things is important to me. The organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor. DEVELOPMENT
3. At work, I can do what I do best every day. AUTONOMY	3. Regularly reinforce how important each team member is to the success of the firm. Communicate successes throughout the firm CARE ABOUT WORK	3. The organization values my contribution to its well-being. RECOGNITION
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work. RECOGNITION	4. Design "client experiences" so that every team member delivers consistent encounters. TOOLS	4. The organization cares about my opinion. CARE FOR WORK
5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person. CARE FOR ME	5. Recognize employees for "living your firm's brand." Be positive in employee and client interactions. RECOGNITION	5. The organization really cares about my well-being. The organization strongly considers my goals and values. CARE FOR ME
6. There is someone at work who encourages my development. I've had a chance to learn and grow. DEVELOPMENT	6. Coach leaders to focus on team members'	
7. At work, my opinions seem to count. RESPECT		
8. The mission or purpose of my company makes		

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| me feel my job is important.
ALIGNMENT | strengths.
DEVELOPMENT | 6. The organization allows me autonomy.
AUTONOMY |
| 9. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
TEAMWORK | 7. Nurture a culture of collaboration.
TEAMWORK | |
| 10. I have a best friend at work. MEANINGFUL | 8. Empower team members to take ownership of client relationships. Make leaders and employees accountable for their actions and reactions.
AUTONOMY | |
| 11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress. CARE FOR WORK | | |

Note. Adapted from “Gallup (Producer, 2012). *Employee engagement: A leading indicator of financial performance.* Washington DC. Gallup Organization.

Monesson, E. P. (2013). *Employee Engagement Drives Client Engagement.* CPA Practice Management Forum, 9(11), 18-21.

Dunstan, D. A., Covic, T., & Tyson, G. A. (2013). *What leads to the expectation to return to work? Insights from a theory of planned behavior (TPB) model of future work outcomes.* Work, 46(1), 25-37.

From the content in Table 2, I have coded and narrowed down each of the drivers influencing engagement into five broader categories - 1) Autonomy 2) Recognition 3) Care for Work 4) Development and 5) Alignment. Using the definitions from each column, the larger codes are defined as follows –

- **Autonomy** is having the opportunity to do my best every day by my manager empowering me to take ownership of client relationships. My manager clearly communicates goals and holds me accountable for my actions and reactions. My manager affords me autonomy to do my work.
- **Recognition** is defined as the organization and my manager valuing my contribution to its well-being by proactively and consistently recognizing and praising my work and my actions to live the organization's values. My manager is positive in our interactions.
- **Care for Work** is demonstrated when my manager frequently talks with me about my work and personal accomplishments and challenges. The company is considering as caring for my work when I received frequent reinforcement about my success on the organization, a respect for my opinion and acknowledgment of my accomplishments, goals, and values.
- **Development** is demonstrated when my manager affords me opportunities to increase my skillset to better deliver results to the organization and has discussed content related to my growth. My manager consistently coaches me on my strengths and ways to mitigate any weaknesses. My manager allows any challenges to be viewed as a learning opportunity and I am given the benefit of the doubt when I need unique allowances.
- **Alignment** is comprised of the manager clearly communicating the mission of the organization and how their work impacts it, provides additional training to ensure

their work can impact the mission and they clearly understand which tasks are connected to mission-related outcomes.

These influencing categories were the most consistent across all three studies. These broader categories are in alignment with the interview questionnaire and research questions outlined in Appendix C. They were utilized to discover drivers that influence virtual employee engagement. The broader drivers were evaluated within the context of better understanding, predicting, and controlling behavior.

Having a better understanding of how employees decide to behave is dependent upon their attitudes, experiential norm, and their perception of how much control they have over what they do and outcomes. As defined by Ajzen (1991) the TPB defines attitudes as the importance employees place on the consequences of their behavior, experiential norms as how they feel others will receive and react to their behavior, and control as what they feel about the difficulty (their knowledge, skills, and abilities) of behaving (Dunstan, Covic, & Tyson, 2013). Similarly, Vroom (1994), produced The Expectancy Theory as a framework to better predict behavior. Vroom (1994) illustrated how a person will behave in relation to what value they place on outcomes (valence), their level of efforts to outcomes (instrumentality), and in their level of belief that outcomes will materialize (expectancy), (Estes & Polnick, 2012). As summarized, much of the research utilized for this study points to factors about feelings, experiences and intrinsically-based drivers that influence behavior and engagement. I was not able to secure much research focusing on the growing trend of virtual employees or whether these constructs can be broadly applied to this population.

Defining Virtual Work

Technology has allowed us to connect globally on a 24-hour basis. This connectivity affords organizations the ability to acquire and leverage talent, worldwide, and expand markets, as well. Globalization, technology, communication networks and international trade agreements forced organizations to evolve to team-based structures wherein members share, and work towards the same goal, while being in different building, cities, or countries (Kimble, 2011). According to (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Lipnack & Stamps, 2000), virtual teams use computer technologies to meet goals without organizational, time, space, or geographic boundaries; virtual teams can work around the clock and never (or rarely) meet face-to-face (Berry, 2011).

Extending the concept of team wherein membership is limited and defined, a virtual team also has a few common characteristics. As written by Alderfer (1987), virtual team members spend most of their time working interdependently; they have defined responsibilities for contributing to outcomes, and they manage their relationships across time, space, and geography (Berry, 2011). Although intimated, there are several considerations organizations must pursue before effectuating an alternative work options, such as virtual or telework.

Technology has connected us in such a way we can live and work virtually, around the world, seven days per week, 24 hours per day. Recent studies show how organizations have turned to virtual work as a business strategy substantially increasing their margins, agility, and speed to market (Kraimer & Takeuchi, 2011). Since technology has forced successful organizations to compete for and leverage talent

globally, this phenomenon has allowed people to interact virtually with global colleagues/customers, as well increased the need for expatriate employees (Kraimer & Takeuchi, 2011). More employees are working virtually within the global, as well as domestic context.

Technology, and the resulting virtual work, communications and teamwork have driven growth (Turner, 2016). This growth has not only increased efficiencies in processes and innovations but also has decreased expenses. In a report produced by Aon/Hewitt, organizations that evolve to more virtual work save money on brick-and-mortar, while also increasing productivity 10 to 43 percent, depending on the industry (Turner, 2016). At a minimum, these types of outcomes provide the business case for allowing more workers to operate virtually.

Allowing employees to work virtually increases an organization's access to talent. Virtual work options have resulted in the ability to assemble and focus strong teams on specific tasks, regardless of their geographic location (agility), resulting in a just-in-time-talent strategy option (El-Sofany, Alwadani & Alwadani, 2014). Outcomes such as these further support an organization's pursuit of work alternatives as a viable business strategy. By affording employees virtual work options, they can better manage work/life demands, and this option increases access to global talent while lowering costs (Ferrazzi, 2014). Although these are tremendous qualitative benefits, some researchers have produced undeniable empirical research illustrating the benefits of virtual workers.

In a study conducted by the consulting firm Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and the German Wissenschaftliche Hochschule für Unternehmensführung's (WHU) Otto

Beisheim School of Management (2009), well-managed virtual teams outperform their brick-and-mortar counterparts by 30% (Ferrazzi, 2014). Similarly, Aon/Hewitt reported that the use of virtual teams can improve employee engagement and productivity results (Ferrazzi, 2014). According to an article in Business Week (2005), Sun Microsystems saved over \$300 million in real estate costs alone by allowing employees to work virtually (Plavin-Masterman, 2015). Although there are a few academics studies focused on the topic, research as earlier as Lococo and Yen (1998) and Cascio (2000) showed that firms such as IBM experienced a 15-40% increase in productivity amongst its virtual workers (Plavin-Masterman, 2015). Results such as these illustrate why business communities have accepted the premise that offering virtual work opportunities supports strategies focused on gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage.

Not only is effectuating virtual work strategies good for business, but it also has positive social change implications. As illustrated by Zakaria, Amelinckx and Wilemon, (2004), virtual workers tend to be more innovative, agile, and productive in comparison to their office-based counterparts (Plump & Ketchen 2013). On a more positive social change note, virtual work decreases interpersonal problems resulting in employees who are happier and have increased mental health (Plump & Ketchen, 2013). Additionally, virtual work can have a positive social impact on an affinity group's member who needs to meet certain work/life balance requirements. For instance, groups such as the disabled, single parents with children, senior citizens, or others with special needs, may benefit if they can work virtually (Plump & Ketchen, 2013). Coupled with lowering costs, increasing productivity, and securing global talent, meeting the needs of these and similar

groups can generate positive social change at the individual and communal level.

Considering technology was one of the primary drivers resulting in virtual work it is possible virtual work will become commonplace.

Currently, it is estimated 25% of the American labor force works remotely and it is forecasted to grow to more than 30% by 2020, (Kamikow, 2011; Noonan & Glass, 2012). Within a study conducted by Johns and Gratton, (2013) the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates 1.3 billion professionals, worldwide, will be virtual within the next few years (Plumb & Ketchen, 2013).

Considering these trends, it is important to note the advantages and disadvantages of virtual teams. Contemporary research has illustrated overwhelming evidence that supports the idea of offering virtual work and managing virtual employee's engagement as a critical factor to organizational success. The advantages and disadvantages in Table 3 as described by Ebrahim, Ahmed & Taha, (2011), further support this fact.

Table 3

Advantages and Disadvantages of Virtual Work

Advantages	Disadvantages
------------	---------------

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reducing relocation time and costs, reduced travel costs. 2. Cultivating and managing creativity. 3. Greater degree of freedom to individuals involved with the development project 4. Cultural and functional diversity in virtual teams leads to differences in the members' thought processes. 5. Better team outcomes (quality, productivity, and satisfaction) more effective in making decisions Self-assessed and higher performance | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of physical interaction. 2. Challenges of project management are more related to the distance between team members. 3. Challenges of determining the appropriate task-technology fit respond quickly to changing business environments and increased competition. 4. Developing trust among the members is challenging Sharing knowledge, experiences team members need special training and encouragement. |
|--|--|

Note. Adapted from Ebrahim, N., Ahmed, S., & Taha, Z. (2011). *Virtual Teams and Management Challenges*. *Academic Leadership* 9(3), 1-12.

Summary and Conclusions

Seminal and contemporary research shows engagement is an important management issue on which successful organizational leaders should focus. Although most research does not explicitly contrast how factors influence engagement in a traditional setting versus a virtual one, most research has been limited to phenomenon within four walls as noted by Ouchi and Wilkins, (1985); Deal and Kennedy, (1982); Alvesson, (1990); Denison and Mishra, (1993); and Fletcher, (2002), (Bateman, 2015). The research has referenced factors which can be utilized to influence behavior, but none secured for this paper focused on engagement for virtual employees. As published by Townsend, DeMarie, and Hendrickson (1998), Cascio (2000), and Duarte and Snyder (2001), when evaluating how management factors influence engagement and impacts productivity it must be extended to include virtual work environments (Bateman, 2015).

Based on the research content of iPEC, Gallup, Herzberg, and the theory of planned behavior, many of the factors that influence engagement, and help predict behavior have been independently documented. The summaries of Chapter 2 illustrated how to combine these factors in a way that employee engagement can be understood, and behaviors can be predicted. My research was primarily focused on office-based employees. Based on the listed trends related to virtual workers and the organizational benefits of increased engagement, this study is of utmost importance. During this research I determined what management tactics influence virtual employee engagement. Utilizing the conceptual frameworks outlined, I focused on analyzing interview data to determine which of the methods outlined in Chapter 3 advanced the limited contemporary research on the topic of virtual employee engagement. Chapter 3 also outlines the method and approach that was utilized for collecting and analyzing data to address the research problem and questions.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study is to collect, contrast and compare data from a literature review and the interview results from 25 purposeful, criterion-based virtual employees. The goal was to discover categories of management techniques that have the greatest influence on virtual employee engagement. My research involved exploring what differences exist between the lived experiences of virtual employees interacting with their managers in comparison to those in traditional work settings. Lastly, my study pursued the discovery of which management techniques most influenced virtual employee engagement based on intrinsic or extrinsic factors of Herzberg (1959), and a better understanding of how these factors can help predict and control behavior as posited by the Icek Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior.

According to Ajzen (1991), and as described by (Mafani & Poee, 2013), an individual's behavior can be predicted based on the extent they positively or negatively interact with their job based on their attitudes, subjective experiences, cultural norms, and expectations of outcomes (Ghouri, Kahn & Abdul Kareem, 2016). An organization's competitive advantage is dependent upon the collective behaviors of its workforce. In research conducted by various researchers (e.g. Delmas & Pekovic, 2016; Hayton, 2003; Pajo, Coetzer, & Guenole, 2010; Stavros, Nikolaos, George, & Apostolos, 2016), an organization's outcomes are a result of an employee's behavior which can be influenced by their intentions; these behaviors can be predicted and controlled if how and understanding of how managerial tactics interact with attitudes,

subjective experiences, cultural norms, and intentions (Ghouri, Kahn, & Abdul Kareem, 2016).

Research Design and Rationale

The phenomena under study is the interactive experiences virtual employees had with their supervisors, how they classified those experiences, and to what extent the experiences influenced their engagement. This investigation contrasted with seminal and contemporary research on the topic that typically focused on office-based employees. The purposeful, criterion-based population targeted for this research were U.S.-based, virtual employees. Virtual employees are defined as individuals working geographically dispersed from their core; they share and work towards the same goal, yet are in different buildings, cities, or countries (Kimble, 2011). Targeting a purposeful, criterion-based group is best used to gather rich data related to the initial inquiry by focusing on pre-determined criteria (Suri, 2011). In the case of this study, my purpose of inquiry was to discover management techniques that influence employee engagement for study participants who met the criterion of working virtually.

The approach, as posited by Sanders (1984) allowed me to collect and analyze data with the goal of discovering and identifying themes that emerged from the analysis (Sanders, 1984). According to Husserl, (1931) a phenomenological approach helps correlate actions to behavior, and Edie, (1962) focuses on the conscious experience of a subject with a phenomenon (Sanders, 1984). To ensure a purer study, the conceptual framework honored the concept of bracketing to eliminate any preconceived notions. According to Husserl (2001), the author's intuition must be employed to describe the

essence of the lived experiences outlined in the study (Gill, 2014), yet the preconceived perspectives about outcomes must be set aside.

A qualitative phenomenological methodology was best used for this study since it focused on the experiences and feelings of the selected participants. According to Moran (2000), phenomenology is the study of a phenomenon that appears to the consciousness of an actor (Gill, 2014). I utilized a conceptually-framed transcendental eidetic reductionist approach for this study. As defined by Husserl (1931), a phenomenological approach is best used to determine, through reduction (without judgment), which lived experiences are most effective and have the greatest impact on an individual's engagement (Sanders, 1982). As posited by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Robson (2011), this approach provided an opportunity to narratively explain how identified factors influenced items such as engagement (Maxwell, 2013). Utilizing this more descriptive approach provided me with the opportunity to answer the research questions:

RQ1: What management techniques influence engagement of virtual employees?

RQ2: How do virtual employees experience, define and categorize management techniques and efforts utilized to supervise their work?

By utilizing this method and approach I leveraged the reported experiences of study participants to develop a list of tactics that can help managers adjust their supervision of virtual employees, positively influence engagement, and increase outcomes. Data were collected utilizing semi-structured telephone interviews with the study participants. I clarified and validated collected data by utilizing follow-up

questions during the telephone interviews. Other qualitative methodologies were not utilized because none of them were purported to focus on experiential interactions of study participants. Data were managed utilizing contemporary data storage, management, and analysis tools.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to act as the focal point for research design, data collection, data analysis and summations. The primary method of collecting data was done by using semi-structured telephone interviews. For areas where participant input is not clear, my role as researcher also involved conducting brief follow-up telephone interviews or using follow-up questions for clarification. By utilizing an epoch approach to inquiry, I was able to maintain a perspective of objectivity.

Since participants were secured from a global and virtual community of practice, they volunteered and were randomly selected to participate in this study; as a researcher I maintained objectivity. None of the secured participants were co-workers. The only similarity was that the participants and I were all U.S.-based and shared the experience of being virtual employees. I had no ability to direct or influence the input of any of the study's participants. This allowed me to maintain the participant's ability to provide honest, open, and unbiased input. An informed consent was used to communicate the goals of the research and clearly communicated no form of remuneration was available to coerce input.

The participants were informed of the goal of the study; however, no specific results were promised. As noted in the Informed Consent, the goal of the study was

communicated as the pursuit to investigate how participant's classified their experiences and discover whether those experiences influenced their engagement. Participants were asked for candid and honest feedback. To maintain the objectivity of the collected data, no leading questions were designed or utilized.

The process for securing data was explained, as well as how confidentiality and privacy would be maintained. I gave directions to participants to ensure an acceptable level of openness, ethics, and honesty. Additionally, to further ensure privacy if clarification interviews were required, they were conducted at the participant's convenience with a focus of conducting them at a time and place most private for the participant. This allowed them to manage the environment in which any follow-up telephone interviews were conducted. Keep in mind, the participants are all virtual employees, therefore, the odds of me having an interview in an environment where their supervisors might be able to observe or view their interactions with me, was unlikely.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Since there is not one location to observe this population, in addition to referencing current research related to the topic as a data source, I secured input from a U.S.-based population of virtual workers within professional services organizations. To gather data, I utilized a direct method of data collection. Within both the qualitative and quantitative research domains, the three broad categories of data collection are indirect observation, direct observation, and elicitation (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). I used an elicitation method of in-depth, direct, semi-structured interviews. With permission, the

telephone interviews were recorded and transcribed so that actual comments could be inductively reduced to themes utilizing the qualitative data analysis tool, MAXQDA.

Regarding the number of participants for a phenomenological study, the sample groups are relatively small in comparison to quantitative studies. According to Giorgi (1985, 2006b), Sanders (1982), and van Manen (1990), descriptive phenomenological studies can be successfully conducted utilizing a small purposive group of three, whereas Benner (1985, 1994) posits the pursuit of an interpretive study should continue until data collection reveals no new information (Gill, 2014). I targeted collecting data from a criterion-based purposeful sample of virtual employees until I reached a point of redundancy. The criterion-based purposeful sample is a targeted population with defined characteristics (Patton, 2002). In this case participants were U.S.-based employees who have worked in or supervised employees in a virtual setting. Homogeneous and purposeful samples are best used to solicit input from groups who have a shared experience with the phenomenon of interest (Gill, 2014). I organized the larger populations from which to choose or recruit the criterion-based sample by developing a virtual employee community of practice utilizing a social media outlet.

Instrumentation

The primary method utilized to capture data for this research was a semi-structure interview (Appendix A). Not only was it used to capture data related to the specific research questions, it also captured appropriate demographic data to help classify participants during the analysis phase. The interviews were conducted with random participants who volunteered to participate in the study. Interviews are best used in

qualitative research wherein the goal is to collect facts and insight about experiences, attitudes, and behaviors (Rowley, 2012). The interviews began with questions regarding demographic data, followed by a series of inquiries designed to answer the research questions. For any questions which provided unclear answers, the research protocol allowed me to conduct short, follow-up questions for clarity. The research questions served as a foundation for the semi-structured interview questions. Utilizing this method ensured validity for this research, since the data set included actual comments from study participants.

Although there are various definitions and approaches to validity, I utilized descriptive validity, summarized from the input of study participants. The means of ensuring descriptive validity is increased by comparing quotes of participants to discovered themes (Gilmore & Feldon, 2010; Md Ali & Yousef, 2011). My focus during this study was on the lived experiences of virtual employees. The interviews allowed me to capture exact comments and afforded me opportunities to ask follow-up, clarifying questions to better understand the lived experiences of the virtual employee. Since the collected data came from direct sources, validity was attained in its purest form. This was based on the participants communicating and categorizing what they experienced and articulating how these experiences influenced their engagement.

In the case of how management techniques influence virtual employee engagement the source of validity were the participants. Based on firsthand input, I analyzed, summarized, and communicated themes based on an unbiased evaluation of this input. Although not perfect, this approach for eliciting pure and direct input of

participants presented the opportunity for descriptive validity (Pinto-Prades & Abellan-Perpinan, 2015). Within the seminal research related to qualitative methodologies and validity that was read for this study, the most influential was that Joseph A. Maxwell. One of the five categories to judge validity was descriptive validity, through which credibility is assured by accurately reporting participant input (Maxwell, 1992; Thomson, 2011). The process of securing participants, encouraging participation, collecting, and analyzing data, as well as utilizing epoché supported valid and credible outcomes.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

To gather data, a direct method of data collection was utilized. Within both the qualitative and quantitative research domains, there are three broad categories of data collection – indirect observation, direct observation, and elicitation (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). I utilized an elicitation method of semi-structured interviews, followed by clarifying interviews, as needed. With regard to sample size for a phenomenological study, it generally accepted to interview 20-60 participants to discover core themes and lived experiences (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). I targeted, collected, and analyzed survey data from a purposeful, criterion-based group of virtual employees. The recruitment of participants was through personal and professional contacts. The participants were sourced from a virtual worker community of practice within the social media site LinkedIn. Broad communications were sent every two days asking for volunteers to participate in the study. The blast communique was continued until the targeted group of participants of 25 was reached, with the belief this group was sufficient to experience data redundancy. Once the targeted group of participants was secured, an informed

consent was sent providing participants with greater detail about the study requesting they return of the informed consent. After the initial group was identified and had returned the informed consent, I scheduled and conducted the semi-structured interviews. All interviews concluded with verbal thanks followed by an email of thanks. The letter of thanks invited them to utilize my provided email address to obtain a copy of the study, once approved and published.

Data Analysis Plan

The data that I collected was meaningful for a phenomenological study. My pursuit was to conduct a discourse analysis of analytic induction. Utilizing MAXQDA, data from the columns and nodes were uploaded to identify keywords, word counts and themes from the transcribed interview content. The keyword in context and word count method can generate themes associated with each of the questions/nodes, (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). MAXQDA will be the primary tool for capturing and analyzing the collected data. As outlined by Bernard and Ryan (2010), I used the embedded features of MAXQDA to generate contextual themes and make comparisons across groups and provide a basis from which a more semantic analysis and comparison was conducted. I then pursued identifying themes and comparisons across participants. Lastly, and although MAXQDA was a very beneficial tool, my 15 years of virtual work experience allowed me to understand and interpret answers related to the reported behaviors and experiences of the virtual employee participants. To ensure more accuracy and pureness of the collected data, I also answered the interview questions to help me articulate biases

and bracket my results. The results of the key work, word count and semantic analysis afforded to me by MAXQDA provided further data validity and reliability.

Utilizing the analysis methodology of Moustakas (1994), the collected data were processed in the following manner:

1. Utilizing functionality of MAXQDA, data were grouped by experiential themes.
2. Data were read and analyzed for clarity.
3. The themes were labeled.
4. The labeled data were clustered and grouped.
5. The themes and clusters were examined for relevance in contrast to the research questions.
6. The relevance and validity of the analyzed data were supported by contrasting identified themes against participant quotes.
7. Narratives and inductive explanations of each validated theme were provided.
8. Summations were provided to illustrate my understanding of what was discovered.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The concept of credibility was approached by ensuring the study and utilized methods and approaches clearly focused on the experiential and lived experiences of virtual employees and their engagement. The research questions, interview questions,

research methods and approaches to inquiry and analysis were used to focus on this topic. Utilizing bracketing and clearly articulating how the analysis was unbiased furthered increased the credibility of my research. Credibility increases when explicit consideration is given to and contextual research illustrates how data are filtered in an extensive, systematic, and ethical manner (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Robson, 2004; O'Connor, 2011). In the case of this research the context was the virtual environment. In qualitative research, the role of auto-ethnography, reflexivity, and self-critique helps establish credibility within the context of the study (O'Connor, 2011). My study allowed for reflexivity and self-critique by participants to ensure connectivity between data and the conceptual frameworks presented.

As published by Lincoln and Guba (1985; 1994) credibility is obtained in various ways – post-positivism, constructivism, and the critical paradigm (Lub, 2015). According to Lub (2015), the post-positivist approach pursues credibility in a very participant-focused manner through which the knowledge of the researcher and input of the participants are utilized to infer outcomes; the constructivist assumes a more interpretive approach through which new realities are reconstructed based solely on input from individuals or groups, and the critical approach assumes a more systematic, rigorous approach. For this study, I assured credibility by synthesizing the input of participants and utilizing various behavioral theories and concepts to produce tactics to assist organizations to predict and control behavior (a constructivist approach).

Transferability

The concept of transferability deals with the ability to utilize research outcomes in a broader context than was studied. According to Lincoln and Guba, (1985) and Schofield, (2000) transferability between different context is dependent upon similarities between the two (Finfgeld-Connett, 2010). With this study, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks have transferability (Finfgeld-Connett, 2010) and may apply to other settings, but the outcomes of my research are limited to the context of virtual employees. Without additional latitudinal and longitudinal studies, the extent of generalizability and transferability is limited.

Dependability

Ensuring the dependability of research is a vital part of qualitative research. To ensure research dependability, the quality of the research process must be maintained. Quality research processes can be assured by documenting clear steps for selecting participants, conducting interviews, and capturing data. Within my study, these processes have been clearly articulated. Furthermore, dependability can be ensured through the independent audit of the findings and documenting and articulating the various methods of inquiry, timelines, and data collection procedures (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Dependability for this research was assured through the process of documenting, maintaining, and articulating a concise and pure process for conducting interviews, collecting pure data, managing, and analyzing data in an unbiased fashion. Lastly, since the analyzed participant data were contrasted against historical and contemporary research noted in the literature review, dependability was further increased.

Confirmability

Explicit integrity and management of data, analysis, and outcomes illustrate confirmability of research. The integrity of my research was supported by me presenting an analysis that is unbiased by bracketing my personal interview findings. As was stated, utilizing epoché allowed the inquiry to secure pure data of study participants. Four methods can be utilized to ensure confirmability – confirmability audit, audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity (Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2013). I utilized the audit trail method of confirmability. My audit trail method entailed rigorous details outlining how interpretations, summaries, and recommendations were made (Houghton, et al., 2013). To ensure I followed a rigorous process, the interview questions were aligned with the research questions as noted in the matrix (Appendix B). The rigorous details of my research were detailed throughout, as well as be captured within MAXQDA as the primary tool for data coding and analysis.

Ethical Procedures

In any research involving human subjects, there is a risk of physical, emotional, spiritual, and economic or many other areas of harm. Within the area of social science research, human subjects are frequently targeted as a source of data. Whenever there are interactions between humans, errors can occur, as well as the opportunity to do harm. Guidelines and statutes related to ethical research is a result of negative outcomes and harmful actions. Obviously, researchers are seeking the most meaningful and concise data to deliver useful research. However, because of unethical studies such as The Syphilis Study at Tuskegee Institute and an analysis of information related to Nazi

Medical War Crimes, the National Research Act of 1974 was signed into law creating a regulatory commission to develop guidelines for human subject research (NIH, 2011). The summary of this law and work of the regulatory commission was outlined in The Belmont Report. The Belmont Report outlined three essential areas for ethical conduct 1) respect for the research participant, which means participants will be given adequate information to make decisions about participating; 2) beneficence for the subjects, which involves the protection of human rights, and 3) justice, meaning the researcher provide an equal opportunity for subjects to participate (NIH, 2011).

Organizations such as The Academy of Management and Institutional Review Boards (IRB), which operate under the regulations of several governmental agencies, have produced guidelines for conducting ethical studies and protecting the identity, anonymity, privacy, consent and confidentiality of participants (AOM, 2006; HHS, 2012); all accredited universities have an IRB to evaluate proposed studies and approve human-involved research.

The topic of this proposed research involved gathering data from a criterion-based purposeful group of virtual workers. To secure meaningful data, as well as mitigate risks associated with anonymity, privacy, consent, and confidentiality, I operated under the guidelines set forth by AOM (2006). Informed consent was required for all participants. This permission was requested utilizing a consent form that was issued to the targeted virtual employee participant pool. These forms included confidentiality and anonymity statements. Each participant affirmed these statements by returning the informed consent form before participating in interviews.

I addressed any concern regarding confidentiality and anonymity by allowing participants to choose unique identifiers to identify themselves. Although data trails can exist and IP addresses can be investigated, according to Whelan (2007), most researchers do not have enough knowledge about privacy technology and computer vulnerabilities to negatively impact the anonymity of research participants. To further ensure confidentiality and anonymity I ensured IP address tracking was disengaged in the collector settings when sending/receiving informed consents. Regarding confidentiality, the data collected are housed and were analyzed on my personal laptop utilizing a computer-based version of MAXQDA, not a central database that can be accessed by others. By utilizing the outlined process, I operated under the guidelines set forth by AOM. Specifically, according to AOM (2006), researchers should protect the confidentiality of individually identifiable information, such as information that can be used to discover a participant's identity and could lead to negative outcomes.

Understanding how to leverage an organization's most important asset or people requires studying human behavior through research, interviews, surveys, or an analysis of published information. When the process involves interactions with human participants, extraordinary efforts must be expended to protect those participants. Not only did operating under the guidelines of AOM, IRB, The Belmont Report, and others, produce quality data, doing so also produced competitively-advantageous results that are aligned with federal statutes and regulations.

Summary

The proposed research methodology and approach for this study were overviewed in Chapter 3, as well as my role and efforts to ensure data and research trustworthiness. In this chapter, I outlined the efforts that were undertaken to ensure that the proposed theoretical concept is utilized to frame whether the factors influencing engagement have an intrinsic or extrinsic value. Within this chapter I also addressed my targeted research population, how they were selected, and the criteria used to select them. Within Chapter 4 more details are provided regarding participant demographics, the phenomena, collected data, the method of analysis, as well as the findings.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of my research was to discover what managerial tactics participants experienced, how they categorized them and how those tactics influenced their level of engagement, behavior, and productivity. The research was pursued to determine the extent to which management tactics influence virtual employee engagement via an internal versus external perceived construct according to the two-factor motivational theory described by Herzberg (1959). The research also pursued a better understanding of predicting planned behavior in accordance with Acek Ajzen's theory of planned behavior. Considering the upward trending virtual employment population, my study sought to add to the growing body of research related to this population.

According to Herzberg (1959), an individual can be motivated by intrinsic factors such as achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, and advancement, or extrinsically by factors such as work conditions, supervision, organizational strength, compensation, or how an organization's policies play out. According to Ajzen's TPB, when these motivators are understood, behavior can better be predicted (Ajzen, 1980) and (Buble, Juras & Matic, 2014). TPB posits an individual's intentions depends upon their motivation and ability (Ajzen, 1980), and has its foundation on the extent they believe they have control their destiny through their attitude, cultural norms, subjective experiences, and perceived power over outcomes (Ghouri, Kahn and Abdul Kareem, 2016).

Purpose

In Chapter 4, I describe the lived experiences of participants based on their input and provided details about how the data were collected, organized, analyzed, evaluated, summarized, and validated. The framework for this study was provided by the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What management techniques influence engagement of virtual employees?

RQ2: How do virtual employees experience, define and categorize management techniques and efforts utilized to supervise their work?

RQ3: What are the differences between effective management techniques in a traditional versus virtual work setting?

RQ4: What are the practical activities managers can execute to influence virtual employee engagement?

RQ5: Are the study participants more engaged by management techniques that are more externally focused, such as money, or are they more engaged by techniques that are more internally focused, such as compliments?

RQ6: To what extent can behavior be predicted based on the use of defined and effective management techniques utilized in a virtual setting?

Within this chapter I outlined the location of where and how data were collected, the research participant demographics, and their dimensions, how data were coded, the method of data analysis, research limitations, data validation methods, and

the results and summary. This chapter concludes with the emergent coded themes of management tactics that influence the engagement of virtual employees.

Setting

Each semi structured interview was conducted telephonically. There were no distractions noted during any of the phone calls. The telephone interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to just over one hour. All interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed using the paid subscription service NoNotes.com. All participants were sent the research participation consent form which was completed prior to scheduling and completing the telephone interview. I was in my home office while conducting each interview. There were no significant organizational or personal conditions influencing or impacting participation of the individuals who volunteered.

Demographics

The participant group was predominately college-educated professionals operating in professional service environments. Other than being a virtual employee, the only other requirement to participate in the study was they work for and live in the United States. As outlined in Table 4, of the 13 participants, five held undergraduate degrees, six were graduate degree holders and two were high school graduates. The gender profile of the group was just over 62% female (8) and 38% male (5). All worked in professional occupations (education, sales, consulting, software development and human resources) in senior capacities.

Table 4

Demographics of Study Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Title	Education Completed	Profession	Years in Profession	Years as Virtual Worker
P1	46	M	Sr Director Impact Services	GD	Education	12	5.5
P2	54	F	HR Partner	GD	Human Resources	25	6
P3	46	M	Software Architect	UG	IT	14	14
P4	35	F	Customer Care Supervisor	GD	Customer Care	15	4
P5	30	F	Manager After School Initiative	GD	Education	9	2
P6	35	F	Director of Executive Search	GD	Human Resources	5	5
P7	54	M	President & Sr HR Consultant	UG	HR Consulting	20	12
P8	56	M	Chief Marketing Officer	UG	Consulting	18	14
P9	47	F	Talent Advisor	HS	Human Resources	17	4
P10	36	F	Senior Buyer	UG	Advertising	13	3
P11	1	F	Sr Director Business Develop	HS	Sales	21	13
P12	44	F	Sr Director Business Develop	UG	Sales	23	20
P13	28	M	VP Growth & Strategy	GD	Strategy Consulting	3	4

Note. F = Female, M = Male; HS = High School, UG = 4 Year Degree, GD = Master's

Other than the virtual employment demographic, no other dimension seemed to impact the quality of the study, participant answers, the findings, or study recommendations.

I targeted a study group of 25 participants with the caveat that I would continue collecting research until redundancy of data was experienced. Sixteen participants returned the consent form to participate in the study, explicitly volunteering to participate and acknowledging no conflicts of interest with Walden or with me as the researcher. One volunteer resided and worked in Canada and was eliminated. Each participant was provided instructions on how to communicate any concerns about participating in the study by providing them with instructions for addressing those concerns and contact information for the research chair. When scheduling the appointments, only 13 provided availability and participated in the interview. The average age of the participant population was 42, with the youngest being 28 and the oldest being 56 years old.

Data Collection

Consistent and numerous attempts were made to recruit participants via communities of practice (virtual employment, virtual employees, and virtual workers) within social media sites. The framework for inclusion in the study was that participants must be U.S.-based and work virtually or primarily away from their core team. These attempts were conducted until I could identify enough participants to create redundancy and sufficiently answer the research questions.

Fifteen participants volunteered to participate in the research and thirteen participants completed the interviews. Although all interviews were recorded and transcribed, only the first name of the participants was used in the interviews and none of their names were included in the written study. Their first names were only used to identify them at the commencement of the interviews. Thereafter, no names were utilized during the interviews. I utilized the outlined methods to identify and recruit research participants in pursuit of enough data to sufficiently address the noted research questions (RQ).

My efforts to recruit and qualify participants consisted of sourcing efforts within social medial virtual worker communities of practice. I joined and communities of practice within the social media site LinkedIn. Electronic messages were sent to all members within each community of practice. As I received responses of interest to participate, I sent personal emails from my Walden University email address, attaching the Consent form, thanking them, and asking for a time to conduct the interview and phone numbers to reach them. This process continued until I experienced redundancy in answers which was at the point of 13 participants. I reached redundancy in answers over a period of two academic quarters.

During this process over two academic quarters, none of the participants communicated any concerns about privacy, conflicts of interest or confidentiality during or after the interviews. All collected data and communication between me and the participants have been stored electronically on my personal computer and no printed files exists. In addition to my personal computer, the interview recordings and

transcripts have been housed on a SOC1 and SOC2 compliant server of the recorder and transcription service NoNotes.com.

SOC1 and SOC2 compliance is a cybersecurity data protection standard. SOC1 cybersecurity data protection is designed to ensure the related system controls are sufficiently designed to meet the security objectives; SOC2 includes security reporting, sustainability, data confidentiality, processing, and privacy of the service provider systems (Choe, Taylor & Brizhik, 2012). NoNotes.com did highlight that its systems are both SOC1 and SOC2 compliant. Although no Personally Identifiable Information (PII) data were collected or communicated, this precaution was checked to further ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Analysis

The interviews started with rapport building dialogue, overviews of the purpose for the research, as well as communicating gratitude for their participation. I reviewed the consent form with each participant and confirmed their desire to continue. This was followed by asking interview questions outlined in Appendix A. The interview was conducted in an open-ended question, non-directive manner. When the participants provided answers that evoked follow-up questions for clarification, further questions were asked and answers were provided.

I pursued collecting and organizing data in order to conduct a content or thematic analysis of the gathered data. The analysis is based on patterned coding. According to Saldana (2010), patterned coding involves using smaller, thematic segments of text from a larger body of text by identifying similar passages. MAXQDA assisted me after I

uploaded the data by providing features to theme and code raw interview data, comments, and interview questions. I utilized the pre-coded thematic categories as noted in Table 2, coupled with the MAXQDA conceptually-aligned interview answers and key word themes. I utilized my reading of the answers and outputs of MAXQDA to summarize answers into these pre-coded categories. This process of structuring raw interview data into pre-coded thematic categories helped identify meaning.

As posited by Lalor, Casey, Elliott, Coyne, Comiskey, and Higgins, (2013) and Yin, (2014) discovering themes across multiple data sources results in support for phenomenological summations and further helps validate the studies (Yin, 2014). I used an inductive process for analyzing and coding comments in accordance with the following definitions:

- **Autonomy:** having the opportunity to do my best every day by my manager empowering me to take ownership of client relationships. My manager clearly and frequently communicates goals, review progress and challenges, and me holds me accountable for my actions and reactions. My manager affords me flexibility to do my work.
- **Recognition:** is defined as the organization and my manager valuing my contribution to its well-being by proactively and consistently recognizing and praising my work and my actions to live the organization's values. My manager is positive in our interactions.

- **Care for Work:** is demonstrated when my manager frequently talks with me about my work and personal accomplishments and challenges. The company is considered caring for my work when I receive frequent reinforcement about my success on the organization, a respect for my opinion, and acknowledgment of my accomplishments, goals, and values are demonstrated.
- **Development:** is demonstrated when my manager affords me opportunities to increase my skillset to better deliver results to the organization and has discussed content related to my growth. My manager consistently coaches me on my strengths and ways to mitigate any weaknesses. My manager allows any challenges to be viewed as a learning opportunity and I am given the benefit of the doubt when I need unique allowances.
- **Alignment:** is comprised of the manager clearly communicating the mission of the organization and how their work impacts it, provides additional training to ensure their work can impact the mission and they clearly understand which tasks are connected to mission-related outcomes. Being able to stay connected and communicate with other team members.

Input

Each participant (P) answered all questions. Data were collected, and when necessary, quotes were utilized to validate the collected data and better support the recorded answers. The research interview questions (RIQ) asked and input provided is as follows:

RIQ1: What things do your supervisor do to ensure you are productive?

P1: Clear goals and project plans. Communicates regularly.

P2: I would say my supervisor had weekly meetings with me. My supervisor made sure she was available by various means, emails, telephone, instant messaging. During the weekly meetings we discussed the various things that I was working on giving her updates of any HR things I was working on, employee relations issues and also during those meetings she would keep me up to date of what was going on, on site in the offices, there is some meetings on site that they did not have virtual capabilities so I wasn't able to attend, so she would keep me up to date on those things and then it was just the time for us, if I had a specific questions or just time to continue to build that relationships and I could not just go into her office or walk past and say hello and things of that nature.

P3: We have lots of interactions depending on the client or depending on the job. We use formal tools such as project plans, resource spreadsheets and things like that and then on an informal basis we just communicate via phone calls, emails, text, and any other communication avenue that we can take advantage of, online meetings and things like that.

P4: Provides and discusses workplans and metrics.

P5: Communications via weekly meetings; clarity about work is provided.

P6: Monthly my manager sets and communicates clear goals and ask us for productivity reports. We have weekly team meetings about productivity. Have

national net meetings for the broader team each month to discuss the same. We also receive training to ensure we can do our jobs.

P7: Provide clarity via weekly one-on-one meetings to discuss goals and progress.

P8: Documents, discusses, and communicates clear goals.

P9: Communicate and discuss goals and service level agreements and meeting weekly to discuss activities and progress; consistent communications.

P10: Communication with weekly meetings, goals, and deadlines.

P11: She sets goals, budgets, and makes herself available to us; does not micromanage and trust.

P12: We have goals that we have to make yearly, we have monthly sale calls to kind of discuss what you are working on and where you are with those opportunities. But I would say the biggest thing that she does – well, just her availability, it's not so much of her checking in with me as me just checking in with her, but I would think those three things are really all that she must do to keep us productive.

P13: I would say, emails and impromptu phone calls to do temperature checks on various projects. He'll set the vision and say, "Okay. This is our end goal. This is what I want to see happened by end of 2017. Let's make it happen." And then that will extensionally be okay. Over the next couple of weeks, "Write me an email or come out with a document that's going to say, 'These are the ways that I plan to make this happen by end of 2017.'" And then we do talk, he doesn't necessarily ask and

give out those things outlined in the email, however, that is: however how I report it to him.

Utilizing the larger coding framework illustrated in Table 2, and analyzing participant responses, 100% of the responses were related to autonomy as the tactic that had the greatest influence on their engagement. This question was seeking to discover what managers did to positively increase productivity within the conceptual framework outlined in Figure 1; tactics influence engagement, resulting in predictive behaviors and increased productivity.

Autonomy is defined as having the opportunity to do my best every day, being empowered to take ownership of client relationships, my manager clearly and frequently communicating goals, reviewing progress and challenges, and me being held accountable for my actions and reactions; My manager affords me flexibility to do my work. The theme discovered for RIQ1 was that managers frequently communicating and clearly defining goals as a tactic, influences greater productivity and engagement. Support for autonomy being the primary driver as the theme for RIQ1 is illustrated by comments such as “We have goals that we have to make yearly, we have monthly sale calls to kind of discuss what you are working on and where you are with those opportunities”, and my manager “Communicates and discusses goals and service level agreements and meeting weekly to discuss activities and progress; we have consistent communications”. Only one participant noted any other tactic influencing their engagement and productivity. This participant mentioned clear

goals and frequent communication, but also noted their manager provided them with development opportunities.

RIQ2: What things does your supervisor do to ensure you are happy?

P1: Communicates about my well-being. She makes room for that conversation and occasionally checks in.

P2: Even outside of the weekly meetings, she would just be in contact with phone calls or messages throughout the week to just say hello or to see how were going. My supervisor ensured weekly and even monthly calls in which she would simply ensure her assistance was offered to help me.

P3: Direct communication. We have a very informal hierarchy process. So, we have weekly calls and we also have an E-Happy Hour.

P4: Nothing.

P5: Performance reviews monthly to discuss how I am progressing against plans.

P6: My manager consistently showed and verbalized she cares about me and my work.

P7: I was assured and provided tools I needed and was provided autonomy.

P8: It was done through trust and latitude.

P9: My manager helped with me being happy through consistent communication.

P10: I was made happy through flexibility and the ability to work virtually.

P11: My manager's availability and demonstration of care about me and the things that are important to me; She extends herself to me beyond the job. She values my opinion.

P12: "But what keeps me happy in my job is that I know I'm supported by my manager or boss basically." I think the biggest piece to ensure I am happy is she always supports me, always supports me in whatever it is I've sold, whatever it is I'm trying to sell, whatever crazy idea I have with an account. It's just that absolute non-questioning, just complete support that I get from her. But what keeps me happy in my job is that I know I'm supported by my manager or boss basically.

P13: I would say that he provides a good bit of flexibility around my personal life. And by that, I mean, when I have board meetings for the nonprofits, I serve on: it's never an issue to divert my travel. To do that and similar support encourages me and makes me happy. Those type of things, which I think it's still good, it's not like he absolutely ignores it or doesn't care about me being happy. And then he also asks sometimes, like, "Hey, where can we pull back some travel, so you can have some time at home."

The primary experiential theme discovered for RIQ2 related to the supervisor ensuring the participant was happy is autonomy. Although according to Kruse (2012) an employee can be happy and not engaged, this research is based on the definition of Kahn (1990) wherein an engaged employee is happy and cognitively, physically/behaviorally, and emotionally committed to their job, colleagues, supervisor, and company.

Additionally, according to Heskett, et al., (2008) an engaged employee will generate increased productivity.

Utilizing the larger coding framework illustrated in Table 2, and based on participant input, 100% of the responses were related to autonomy as the tactic that influenced engagement. Communication, flexibility, and support were communicated as most influential tactics. Participants made comments such as “my boss communicates about my well-being. She makes room for that conversation and occasionally checks in”, “I was made happy through flexibility and the ability to work virtually”, as well as “I was assured and provided tools I needed and was provided autonomy”, to support this summation. The combined comments of the participants support Autonomy as the tactic with the greatest influence on their engagement. Autonomy has frequent and clear communication, feedback, accountability, and flexibility as definitive attributes. Secondly comments were made to support care for work as an overall tactic influencing engagement.

Care for work is defined as a manager demonstrating they care by talking about the work, personal accomplishments, challenges, and its impact on the business. In contrast to autonomy wherein it's about setting clear goals and having frequent opportunities to talk, care for work is more about task identity and task significance as posited by the job motivation theory of Hackman and Oldham (1976). When care for work is inductively identified as the tactic, participants would communicate more about how their managers would have broader conversations about their work and its impact on the organization. Care for work includes conversations about an employee's success on the organization,

managers showing respect for their opinion, and acknowledgment of overall accomplishments, goals, and how employees manifest organizational values. Care for work is a bit more personal. Conversely, autonomy conversations are more about the frequent milestone conversations about work and challenges. Although a few comments were made outside of autonomy being the primary tactic, none were thematic or redundant enough to impact the summation for this question.

RIQ3: What does your supervisor do to show they care for you personally?

P1 –Sends care packages periodically. Focuses on relationship building with me and with the team. "She makes it clear she values our relationship."

P2: She would reach out with calls, sometimes she would just send like even for birthdays, she would something in the mail be it fruit basket or candy basket.

P3: By frequently checking in with me.

P4: They do monitor our calls and they do provide feedback. So, I mean we do get quite a bit of feedbacks from you know them listening from our phone calls and some of it are positive and a lot of it is you know, this is what you may have could have done better you know just more of you know, coaching opportunity.

P5: We have monthly development calls where we discuss personal issues, challenges, development desires and work/life balance.

P6: My manager would check in on me frequently to discuss personal things; texts and instant message randomly.

P7: Consistently asked about my family, getting to know me and my family.

P8: My manager provided flexibility to deal with family issues.

P9: She would periodically ask about my family and affords me flexibility to care for important things.

P10: She does everything that she can to help alleviate some of that stress, but again it's up to me on if I want to openly communicate about my personal business.

P11: She shows how she cares about my life and demonstrates she is invested in my life. She's a great person to be able to talk to if I'm having challenges or going through issues. She's always, I feel, had my back. I feel that she's loyal to me like I'm loyal to her.

P12: I feel very supported by her personally by what she does. Just yesterday I had a call with her and we always start every conversation with personal stuff. I was asking her about her child, which college has he chosen, we were talking about my children's spring break last week. So just checking in. I can share another story with that, when I was on maternity leave we happened to work for a company that doesn't pay maternity leave. I didn't take her up on this, but she offered to pay me out of her own pocket, my salary. Very invested. But my very first gift for my baby, my first one shows up on my front porch. I thought it was from my mother. It was the most sensitive thing I have registered for, which was a stroller and it was from Stacy. This is just showing little and big things that show that she cares.

P13: I would say that he provides a good bit of flexibility around, like, my personal life. And by that, I mean, when I have board meetings for the nonprofits, I serve on: it's never an issue to divert my travel, to do that and similarly encourages me, okay, I know you work in weekends, we all must but try not to work this day or any more than that. Those type of things, which I think it's still good, it's not like he absolutely ignores it or doesn't care about me being happy. And then he also asks "Hey, where can we pull back some travel, so that you can have some time at home?" He will say scale back some things to take care of your family.

Utilizing the larger coding framework illustrated in Table 2, based on the percentage of participants who identified an item influencing their engagement, in the broader coding context, 100% of the participants stated their manager clearly and frequently inquired about their personal experiences and discussed how those experiences impacted their work. These activities are more in line with the tactic care for work. Care for work is demonstrated when my manager frequently talks with me about my work, personal accomplishments experiences and challenges. This attribute has more of a micro-focus on personal issues and the impact thereto. Whereas, autonomy is more about the work, development about the investment in an employee's skills, recognition is about publicly and privately acknowledging critical incidents and alignment is about articulating the compelling story between the work, the mission, vision, and organizational goals.

The company is considered as caring for my work when managers reinforcement an employee's personal balance, provide respect for their opinions, helps them understand how balancing their work/life produces success on the organization, as well as privately

acknowledging accomplishments, goals, and when the employee behaviorally manifest organizational values. Considering these definitions and participant input, RIQ3 has care for work as its primary tactic a manager can use to show they care for the employees personally. This is supported by comments such as ‘my manager would sometimes say I should scale back some things to take care of your family’, ‘we have monthly development calls where we discuss personal issues, challenges, development desires and work/life balance’, or ‘She shows how she cares about my life and demonstrates she is invested in my life’.

RIQ4: What does your supervisor do to show they care about your work?

P1: I was required to share feedback and reports. My manager communicates the importance of the work.

P2: He had frequent communications, questions, and suggestions.

P3: We reviewed project plans and deliverables weekly.

P4: They do monitor our calls and they do provide feedback. So, I mean we do get quite a bit of feedbacks from you know them listening from our phone calls and some of it are positive and a lot of it is you know, this is what you may have could have done better you know just more of you know, coaching opportunity.

P5: My manager provides lots of communication, coaching, counseling, and correcting as it pertains to my goals and outcomes.

P6: We talked about it at very detailed level.

P7: She asked about it and discussed specifics; provided support for my work and ideas and demonstrated I was trusted.

P8: I had frequent discussions and deadlines.

P9: I was required to provide activity reports and asked if I needed help.

P10: She would ask questions, but it is up to me to openly communicate.

P11: My manager communicates about where I am and provided help whenever needed. She is available.

P12: Communicates and is available.

P13: He holds me accountable and communicates about work and challenges.

Utilizing the larger coding framework illustrated in Table 2, and based on the percentage of participants who identified an item influencing their productivity, the theme identified for this research question is autonomy. All the participants identified autonomy as the primary management technique influencing their engagement. The coded theme of autonomy was defined as the opportunity to do their best every day, their manager consistently empowering them to own their work and proactively communicating expectations, accountabilities, and outcomes.

Comments provided by participants such as ‘my manager provides lots of communication, coaching, counseling, and correcting as it pertains to my goals and outcomes’, ‘he had frequent communications, questions, and suggestions’, and ‘we reviewed project plans and deliverables weekly, support autonomy as the primary tactic showing managers care about their work and influencing their engagement’. As

communicated, the conversations were more about work deliverables, challenges and how the manager would support them to accomplish their tasks. As noted, autonomy is more about articulating clear goals and having frequent communication about milestones and deliverables. In contrast, other more closely related tactics like care for work is more about the individual and alignment is about the compelling story between the work and organizational success.

RIQ5: How would you prioritize the items in order of importance?

P1: Holding me accountable and communicating with me about my work and challenges.

P2: Number one, she cared about me personally. Number two, she cared about the work regarding me being happy and the customer being happy, and the number three productivity, and I say number three because being exempt employee she knew the work was going to get done.

P3: Caring about me; I would say just the ability to the reaching out and checking in and just the personal thing is probably the highest priority, that's probably what I like.

P4: Caring about me and productivity.

P5: The communication around my productivity is first, discussions about the quality of work is second and about me is third.

P6: Care about me personally, praise, autonomy.

P7: We had frequent communication and clarity of goals, building on our personal relationship.

P8: I was provided clarity of communication, latitude, trust, and flexibility to deal with family or work/life conflicts.

P9: Communication about work goals and activities, flexibility, and personal issues last.

P10: Communication, flexibility, personal attention is last.

P11: Valuing my opinion by communicating, asking, and engaging in discussions. Caring about me first and about my goals second. I think it'd be in the same place professionally if I didn't know her personally.

P12: I would say probably the support is number one, caring about me personally is two and the communicating the goals because I'm the type I will set my own goals if you didn't set them for me, so that would be third.

P13: Communication, number one. Cares about me personally, number two, and make sure that I'm happy, number three.

The comments provided by participants for this question resulted in 53% of them noting communication and conversations related to the work or autonomy as their most important tactic influencing their engagement. The remaining 47% noted care for work as the primary tactic influencing their engagement. Although many of the participants prioritized three tactics 1) caring about me, 2) articulating goals, and 3) communication, the latter two are related to autonomy. Comments such as 'I would say that support is number one, caring about me personally is two and the communicating the goals is

number three' or 'caring about me first and about my goals second', illustrate how the tactic were prioritized.

RIQ6: What are your behaviors when you are productive and happy?

P1: I love my work, so my commitment is high regardless of my supervisor. I get the work done because I like it.

P2: I would say my level of commitment is probably 120%. When I work remotely, good, or bad, I probably work more than in the office because you don't have the distractions.

P3: I think if I'm productive and happy, I am excited about the potential of a project. Yes, you're going to go above-and-beyond providing solutions. If you're not productive and happy you kind of work to the letter.

P4: Well I have extremely high-level commitment to the company because you know I personally like to do a good job. It's not always about their goals, it's about my personal goals for myself. I am much more committed with I understand how my personal goals can be accomplished by completing my work.

P5: I go the extra mile working overtime. If not happy and productive I tend to do exactly what is asked of me. I am much better when allowed to get my work done with trust and flexibility.

P6: I go beyond, so I'm making sure that I'm... I understand that she has... She's in a high position she doesn't have time so I'm making sure that I'm taking time to put the right people in front of her. I'm making sure that I'm finding the right people and

people that are good and not just you know, people that you know, have some potential or you know, like they meet our requirements, but they also go beyond. So, I take the time to make sure number one, that that's happening. I think for me like, I also make sure that I'm accepting phone calls like I'm always open. I set boundaries so that I know you know like when family time happens, like this is family time but for the most part like I'm 20... We can talk 24/7.

P7: being very much in the now, in the moment. I am very helpful with others around me I'm just sensitive to their needs and, so I will offer my help. I will offer to problem solve. I will offer to work on such a project. I will do all those things that I consider to be kind of beyond a day-to-day function because I'm going to do my day-to-day job. I'm not going to, I'm not going to not do that even when I'm less engaged. I was talking to somebody and this is years ago, and we were talking about something and just to give a visual, it's that person that's sitting at the deck on a Friday afternoon and it's about two or three minutes before he or she is signing off for the weekend and the phone rings. the phone rings and your engaged employee is going to pick up that phone realizing especially, I'm going to say need go on to areas you don't know what's behind that phone call. You don't know what's behind that ringing right. Having this type of attitude develops when my manager allows me to own my work like a business.

P8: I always productive and engaged; primarily by the work

P9: work longer and harder without regard to time of day or day of week

P10: I push harder when happy and procrastinate when I am not. When allowed to work on outcomes instead of by the clock, I am much more productive.

P11: I have pride in my ability to build relationships internally to get at the end of the day to get the job done.

P12: I work with every day. None of us plan to go anywhere because we are also loyal to the company. We understand the importance of our work.

P13: I continue to work harder and I'm excited about coming to work every day, I'm excited about the work that I do, but when I don't feel productive or happy, I'm going to be quite honest with you, those thoughts cross your mind of, "Okay. Well, maybe I should start dipping my toe in the water or cast in the net." Not even to say jump shift but to: sometimes, see what's out there, quote and quote, right? So, and I think that's some of the common traits, but like, when I'm happy, it's like, "Man." You're excited about what you do which seems very cliché and high level but it really is true, right? Like, that's where you see those 10-hour days, not even a feeling like other days, or work around the weekends doesn't feel like you're sacrificing something, as much as you are investing into something much bigger.

Utilizing autonomy as the primary tactic influencing engagement, participants reported high levels of commitment and productivity as their response to increased engagement. This comports with the conceptual framework in Figure 1, as well as the service profit chain theory posited by Heskett, et al., (2008), wherein it is illustrated and stated, respectively, increased engagement generates higher productivity. As defined in

the larger coding framework illustrated in Table 2, and based on the percentage of participants whose comments illustrated a connection to one of the defined themes, several of the participants noted going the extra mile when their engagement is positively influenced. Participants made comments such as ‘I push harder when happy and procrastinate when I am not’, ‘I work longer and harder without regard to time of day or day of week’, and ‘I go the extra mile working overtime’. It is important to note, many of the participants stated they were engaged by their work and not their manager. However, under the tactic of autonomy the manager clearly defines the work. Utilizing the noted tactics, primarily autonomy and care for work, will have a greater influence on engagement and produce resources that will work harder with a greater level of organizational commitment.

RIQ7: In your opinion, what does it mean to be engaged?

P1: Care about the work, care about the process and care about the impact.

P2: I would say to be engaged is to enjoy your job, enjoy the management team you work with, and are actively developing opportunities to use your knowledge to benefit others, and so a lot of it is enjoying what you do and the people you work with.

P3: To be engaged would be to be aware of I guess the scope of a project to make yourself whether you’re onsite to make yourself and your client visible, I guess to make yourself visible to the client. So, whether that be the phone conversations,

holding meeting, just general check in, things like that. And to keep your client informed of progress and without the need to be face-to-face.

P4: Engaged is kind of just knowing what's going on and there's process update or procedural update.

P5: I am engaged with I feel connected to the mission and feel important. When my personal goals are aligned with the teams and company.

P6: I would think that being engaged is wanting to be at your current... with your current company or you know kind of being engaged with your job and your position in whatever work it is that you are doing. So, not only doing it but doing it passionately, liking it, enjoying it, and not looking to leave. And not even considering leaving. So even if I was presented an offer to leave, I wouldn't. I wouldn't even consider it right now because I am engaged.

P7: Going the extra mile no matter the time; not working to the letter of the job description but exceeding it.

P8: That just means that I'm active with my bosses, with my clients and my clients' bosses that there's a lot of interaction going on between us all. If you consider them the three legs of the stool, to me, being engaged means that I have active and ongoing interaction with all three parties and that to me is engaged.

P9: Engagement for me is the key to being successful in my role and it is the key for me to remain happy and in the proper mindset with management and with my

position; it means consistent and frequent contact with my boss, clients, and candidates.

P10: Engagement occurs when someone is willing to participate and offer opinions within the company.

P11: Being productive and committed is a sign of engagement to me.

P12: Loyalty and commitment. I am not going anywhere.

P13: I would say that, the organization has a best interest in your distinct purpose for being at the organization and conversely, you are understanding that purpose, fulfilling it and being excited about fulfilling it. I begin to separate things into buckets, when I think about it. When you have people that are doing more strategic high-level work, the engagement means that they really feel a sense of purpose in that work, to the point where they take ownership. I'm excited about this project because I see the opportunity to really feel the bottom-line for this organization that I really believe in, et cetera, et cetera.

Utilizing the larger coding framework illustrated in Table 2, and based on the percentage of participants who identified an item influencing their engagement, 55% made comments related to managers discussing and communicating how their work is interdependent (alignment). The remaining 45% commented on either recognition, development, or care for my work as the driver off their engagement; a small group could not be aligned with any of the themes. The themed answers illustrated how participants reacted to management tactics that influenced their levels of engagement. They

described their experience and manifestation of greater engagement as going the extra mile, caring for their work, being excited about their work and being available.

Participants made comments such as ‘I care about the work, care about the process and care about the impact’, ‘engagement means that they really feel a sense of purpose in that work, to the point where they take ownership’, and ‘I would say to be engaged is to enjoy your job, enjoy the management team you work with, and you are actively developing opportunities to use your knowledge to benefit others’. These comments align with a more productive workforce as illustrated in the Figure 1 conceptual framework.

RIQ8: Describe what activities your supervisor does to manage your work deliverables as a virtual employee.

P1: Project plans, weekly calls (frequent communication).

P2: Frequent communications.

P3: Clear goals, project plans, and weekly calls.

P4: Productivity reports

P5: Weekly communication meetings and clarity.

P6: Weekly meetings, impromptu meetings, as needed, clear goals and reports against those goals.

P7: Weekly meetings, impromptu meetings, as needed, clear goals and reports against those goals.

P8: Weekly meetings and reports.

P9: Weekly meetings and communicates.

P10: Weekly meetings and goals.

P11: Goals, communication, and accessibility; We do have monthly sales calls where we must talk about our activity. And so, during those monthly calls, it's where I'm held accountable to my activity. I'm the first sales person on the team that did the contingent – certified contingent work for professional certification training.

P12: Communication and goals.

P13: One of the biggest things that I really appreciate about my supervisor is that, he's very transparent, and I think the more transparent that you have, to the extent that you can be transparent about some things. Really gets one engage. He frequently solicits my opinion on where the organization is going next year and explains how he sees my work and talent playing inaugural part in that. As for my work on a related project, we may not get to that project for another nine months. My manager just wants to ensure I understand the organization's direction and discuss how we can deliver dependent deliverables over the next 12 months. If we hit those deliverables, this where we should land us and how that relates to my position. That doesn't always have to be in the vein of a promotion or more money or anything like that, as much as it is saying, "Okay. What you're doing right now is cool, and as you continue to work on this, this is how it snowballs and builds and this is what's it's

going to provide to the greater strategic plan and operational road map to the company.

Utilizing the larger coding framework definitions as illustrated in Table 2 and based on the percentage of participants who identified an item influencing their engagement, 100% of the respondents stated a manager frequently communicating was the main tactic used to manage their deliverables. This level of communication is associated with the management tactic of autonomy. Care for work also has communication as an attribute, however for this tactic communication is related to communicating about personal challenges in contrast to work deliverables. Whether the respondent commented 'Weekly meetings, impromptu meetings, as needed, clear goals and reports against those goals' or 'having clear goals, project plans, and weekly calls', the tactic of autonomy was the primary item having an influence on engagement.

RIQ9: What activities does your supervisor do to keep you connected to the organization?

P1: Communicate and team building events.

P2: Team building exercises and keeps me up to date with frequent communications.

P3: Socialization events and communications.

P4: Not a lot.

P5: We have web meetings where we see everyone, when we get together non-work things are planned.

P6: We have monthly meetings to socialize. She also introduces me to other internal resources that could help me help the organization.

P7: Calls and introductions. We also have time in the office.

P8: We had periodic office visits; but very little otherwise. That's where I coin the term corporate mercenary. You're a resource. You got billable hours. You've got to make the effort to make sure that you get framed. You got to make sure that you're involved. You get FaceTime and Windscreen time. If you're just a road warrior and you're doing damn well on your job and you're getting customer satisfaction reports, the only thing I got from IBM was an award for the job I did in American Express. That's probably the only time I really felt I was part of the IBM family.

P9: Bi-weekly meetings and allowing us to discuss non-business before each meeting.

P10: My boss doesn't do a whole lot. I mean they'll call me in for conference on my work phone or conference calls, so I can be a part of it and a lot of times we're on the call before the actual meeting will start. We'll have a little friendly chatter something like that, but most of the time I don't get included in stuff like that unless I physically go into the office which is not often.

P11: Availability, meetings, communication, and social events.

P12: Social events and frequent calls. I think the biggest thing that my supervisor does is monthly sale calls which used to be every other week, we just recently switched it to monthly. So, she does coordinate the monthly sale calls, the rest just

kind of happens. I'll say two things; the monthly sale calls encourage us to collaborate on all accounts.

P13: And I think that helps too because then when we do have conversations from a socialization standpoint, I'm able to have conversations about things going on the field. Meetings with people at corporate, et cetera, et cetera. But yes, if it was just me sitting at my home, all day, every day, it could be a challenge because like I said, my supervisor and I don't have schedule one on ones and things like that so I could very easily begin to feel left out or not know the heck is going on.

RIQ10: To what extent do socialization, connectivity, development, or communication activities have on your engagement and productivity?

P1: None.

P2: It is a primary source of my engagement.

P3: It is the basis for my engagement. They are very important, but not present in my current role.

P4: They are very important, but not present in my current role.

P5: They have a huge impact, when I feel connected and communication channels are open, I produce lots of work and am happy about it.

P6: It does not help or hurt.

P7: They are very important to my feeling connected, resulting in higher engagement and productivity.

P8: Communication is of utmost importance. Without goals and consistent communication things can go off course. However, it would be higher if it existed more. I'd feel more loyalty in my employer. You know, when you're treated as chattel and you're just somebody that being hired up kind of like being pimped out then you realize that you're a resource to anybody. You know, you can do this job for Dean Whitter or KPMG; you can do it for anybody. It didn't matter if you don't have a sense that your company cares and is loyal.

P9: Lots. Frequent communication is paramount to relationships and meaningful and valued work.

P10: It has an impact. Sometimes I need information but am not close enough to someone to know what they know.

P11: It is important, for instance my best friend works with me. Although I have a lot of peers on whom I can rely on, I communicate with my best friend by 10am each day. We exchange personal stories and catch up on interdependent work.

P12: I think it's very easy to feel disconnected and isolated when we do work remotely, you need – that's really to me the only benefit of being in the office is just the kind of – to look across the room and make a joke with somebody or just kind of having somebody you have gotten that shared experience with. So, I think that having some sort of plans, communication, and we have ourselves maybe monthly – as you know we have other events that a few or all of us attend from time to time then that kind of just gives you one more opportunity to spend time with another counterpart. I

think it's invaluable, I think without that you'd constantly be losing people because they've got to be connected. I think somebody new coming into the organization, they are not going to be connected to the owners at first, or Agile1 as a brand at first, or certainly not even to their manager if it's somebody that is interviewed with one. It's building those relationships with your counterparts that – again, I'm assuming you are talking to people that you probably don't know as well as you know our team.

P13: Tremendous. If no one is noticing my work and no one cares, then why continue to put my best foot forward, why continue to show up with the level of excitement and zeal daily.

Utilizing the larger coding framework definitions, and based on the percentage of participants who identified an item influencing their engagement and productivity, as the answers relate to questions RIQ9 and RIQ10, 15% stated socialization, connectivity, development, or communication had no impact on their engagement, 85% stated connectivity (alignment) had a tremendous impact, and communication and socialization were imperative management tactics for increased engagement and productivity.

When I contrasted RIQ9 (how does your manager keep you connected) and RQI10 (what is the impact of the tactic), utilizing the larger coding definitions nearly, 69% of participants stated managers arranging for employees to communicate with each other, understand interconnectivity and socialization (alignment) was the tactic used to keep them connected to the organization, resulting in greater engagement and productivity. One participant succinctly communicated the importance of this type of alignment by stating 'I think it's invaluable; without socialization, interconnectivity and cross-

functional communication, you'd constantly be losing people because they are not connected.' The tactic of alignment is defined as managers clearly communicating the mission of the organization and how the employee's work impacts it, providing additional training to ensure assigned work has a greater propensity to positively impact the mission, and arranging for opportunities for employees to stay connected and communicate with other team members.

Based on comments such as 'my manager arranges for team building exercises and frequent communications', 'we have social events and frequent calls', and 'we have web meetings where we see everyone' alignment is the primary tactic for influencing engagement. Three of the respondents (P4/P8/P10; 23%) commented nothing or very little was done to socialize them and in contrast to their answers to RIQ10, and their engagement is negatively influenced by the lack of this tactic. Comments such as 'communication is of utmost importance or 'without goals and consistent communication things can go off course' supported this fact. I also heard comments like 'it would be higher if more communication and socialization existed; they are very important, but are not present in my current role'. These comments illustrate the impact of alignment and autonomy as tactics with influence on engagement for virtual employees.

RIQ11: What do you experience that negatively influences your engagement and productivity?

P1: I am naturally paranoid when I am not in the office, I always wonder if I am meeting expectations or if meetings may be occurring about me.

P2: Not being able to see people and their non-verbal clues.

P3: Just the fact that you have distractions, I think distractions are a huge negative component of a virtual employee. Meaning some distractions would be family – that goes back to the happy, productive person too.

P4: Lack of communication and information.

P5: Not having enough info; sometimes I am asked to do something without the reasoning behind it.

P6: Not having the full picture when decisions are made affecting me.

P7: Nothing really.

P8: This whole idea that they'll just send you on an engagement and let you lose and you're done and then all they can do is criticize. You're the guy on the ground but they want to second guess on what you're doing and why are you doing. That's the kind of thing that alienates you.

P9: Lack of communication. Aside from that, much of what I do is self-initiated, i.e., time management and deliverables. Delivering good work and meeting expectations also impacts my engagement.

P10: I feel like sometimes I may miss something if not communicated with frequently or when I am not in the office. So, it may be--like we just switched over to a new buying program and there are little things here and there and they'd been tweaking but I don't find out about it until months later because while they spoke about it in the office nobody thought to put this in an email or something and send it out to

everybody because they just taken for granted that everybody was there to get that information.

P11: Communication, accessibility, trust, valuing my opinion.

P12: Isolation can creep up, but we stay connected. I love the flexibility of working virtually. I mean, there was a time in my life that being in the office would have been important. How I have two kids, they are in elementary school and their lives are busy. It's just the sight that I can be here; At the end of the day they get off the bus, they come in, they can get their homework done and I can still get them out of the door by 5.30 for baseball. I don't know, all these years that I have sat in the office and I watched people with kids, I don't know how they did it. I think when you're a virtual worker, at least in sales we also travel and then when we travel we have no flexibility in what needs to be done from a personal standpoint but the tradeoff with that is that when I am in town I do have that flexibility. When I work from an office, at 9.00 o'clock every morning me and the girls shared an office. By 11.30 we were out the door to lunch. I was probably much less productive because I had somebody to talk to too much, it was very social. Somehow, I miss the social aspect of it, but I think from a work perspective I am much more productive.

P13: I think not being in the office, work can tend to end up on your desk without much thought. Because no one can see the amount of work I am doing, sometimes you can end up taking on so many different roles wearing so many different hats. And I think that where it gets frustrating because you're like, okay, well, I'm going to do this because it's my job and because I'm here and am part of the leadership team,

but at the same time, you sometimes feel like, although I wear ten different hats, I only get viewed or assessed in one or two of those types of roles.

Utilizing the larger coding framework definitions in Table 2 and based on the percentage of participants who identified negative items influencing their engagement, some of the responses were also analyzed from a perspective of impact if the tactic is absent. That is, how did respondents communicate the impact a tactic had on their engagement when the tactic was not present. For example, when evaluating the answers provided by P4, P8 and P10, when contrasted with answers by the remaining participants, communication (autonomy) and socialization (alignment), had a great impact because they were absent. The same tactics were reported by others as a positive influence when present. Of those providing comments, 46% stated no communication would negatively impact their engagement, 15% reported not caring for their work as a negative influencer and 38% communicated no alignment of their work to a greater good creates a negative impact. Although the comments of this sample population communicated virtual work as a very positive experience, working remotely does pose a few challenges.

Not being in the office increases the chance you missed or did not accurately understand a communicate. Participants illustrated this with comments such as 'I feel like sometimes I may miss something if not communicated with frequently or when I am not in the office' or 'Not being able to see people and their non-verbal clues'. However, despite the chance of possibly missing or misunderstanding directions, in contrast to answers provided for RQ11-4, the tactic executed by virtual employee

managers that has the greatest influence on engagement is clear and frequent communication (autonomy).

RIQ12: What has been the difference in how you are managed as a virtual employee compared to when you worked in a traditional setting?

P1: In the office it was intense. "everyone was considered an idiot" so we were micromanaged. Now trust is inherent and measured by what you deliver, not how long you work or take coffee breaks. So as a virtual employee, trust and communication lines are much open.

P2: To be honest I had a very good manager who really went beyond to ensure I was managed properly and she met my needs virtually. However, sometimes you are very busy and may not hear something you would otherwise hear in the office and this could be impactful.

P3: I think my manager is very hands-off in the virtual setting. Autonomy. So, there's that in what others call the non-virtual character, the ability to maybe keep and do work and not to delegate as much. In my opinion, this is about maintaining power.

P4: When you work remotely you can think you are falling by the wayside; out of sight, out of mind. When you're in the office and you have one-on-one communication all the time. I feel being in the office is where you learn more. When you work remotely, it's kind of like you're out of sight and out of mind. So, unless you're doing something terrible, you know completely horrible wrong, you don't really have much communication with anybody.

P5: More communication and connections.

P6: More communication and reports when virtual; more impromptu when in the office.

P7: Whether working in-person or virtually, I believe the management tactics are fairly the same. The difference is what I used to refer to as those walk-byes. With my virtual manager, I could pick up the phone and call up that individual but nine times out of ten I probably would not connect. I would probably have to schedule a call. Increased communication is needed with virtual employees but is not always available.

P8: There's a great deal more written reporting than it was while you're in the office. So, there's a great deal more documentation as to your deliverables, timing, issues, and risks. Also, you're doing a great deal on a written documentation level to communicate back and forth between people in the office and yourself as to where you are status wise, what issues are in need resolution and where you need them to step in. So, there's a great deal more of what is documented rather than that informal stand at the doorway of your office and asks questions. When you're not virtual, you have one window into the organization, so there is much more teamwork. You have management people, you have people above, your own manager who see what you do. So, your visibility enhances your brand and enhances how people perceive you which you don't get any of when you're a virtual employee.

P9: More flexibility and management by numbers in virtual setting. Also, more communication.

P10: More scheduled communication exchanges; quite a few freedoms that I have now working at home. It's pretty much daily if you do what you supposed to do they leave you alone and you're good. Obviously, the difference is going to be I just put in my pajamas all day now and it's not going to be different.

P11: I was micromanaged more. I was given task that were just not really helping my success. I wasn't really given – I wasn't very well developed as a – promoted from an account executive to a branch manager. And so, I wasn't very trained, or I don't feel like I was given the right preparation to do that move. Very different. It's very different and I would not go back to that setting anymore in my career.

P12 – No real comparison; I have only worked virtually.

P13: I think there's a level of productivity that would be increased if we were all in an office together. In fact, that's something that I tell my manager all the time, I'm like, "Man, I'd love if we were all in the same place." Because I personally think that it helped. I know that's contrary to the study and the way the market is going but that's just my personal thought. If I were in an office, it would be more advantageous to that style of work, because my commentary is more anecdotal.

For those participants who were managers, they contrasted how they tactically managed both virtual and employees in an office-based setting. For those we were not managers, they answered based on their lived experience being in an office and virtual.

Utilizing the larger coding framework definitions and based on the percentage of participants who identified a management tactic which influenced their engagement 84% mentioned increased communication (autonomy) was inherent to their virtual experience. One participant (seven percent) mentioned their development needs received less attention as a virtual employee, and one stated there was no difference. Employees made comments like ‘as a virtual employee, trust and communication lines are much open’, ‘sometimes you are very busy may not hear something you would otherwise hear in the office’, ‘I have much more autonomy, more communication and more connections, virtually’, and ‘I have more flexibility and management by numbers in virtual setting’, to illustrate how communication and autonomy are primary tactics influencing engagement.

RIQ13: What does your manager do to ensure you fully understand your role, its importance, and the expected deliverables for which you are responsible?

P1: Frequently communicate and works with me on project plans.

P2: Communicates and follows up. I went beyond to reach out to the associates that reported to me so that they still felt a part of the team. I could not walk past them and say good morning but I would say good morning in an instant message. I would let them know that I was available for them, and one thing that I would do is keep my calendar and everything up to date, so they didn't necessarily know where I was, but I was available in a meeting or some things like that because some things you can't just know that okay, I'm in a termination or something like that.

P3: Weekly meetings project plan.

P4: Productivity reports nothing else.

P5: Often, she explains why the work is being done.

P6: Communication and goals.

P7: Provide and discuss goals. I understood the cascading goals were connected to a bigger objective.

P8: Clear goals and weekly meetings to discuss milestones.

P9: Goals and service level agreements.

P10: Goals, deadlines, and discussions for clarity.

P11: Goals, reports, flexibility, and trust.

P12: Communication.

P13: Goals, communications, transparency.

As illustrated by comments such ‘my manager provides me with goals, deadlines and we have frequent discussions for clarity’ and ‘I receive goals, reports, flexibility, and my manager trust me’, supports communication and receiving clear goals as having a great influence on the employee’s engagement. According to the respondents, managers utilizing tactics in alignment with the definition of autonomy are successful at helping them understand their role, the importance of their role and clearly understand what is expected of them. These tactics are in alignment with the definition of autonomy where employees are allowed the opportunity to do their best when their manager clearly and

frequently communicates goals, reviews progress, provides challenges, and holds employees accountable for their actions. Only one of the respondents provided a partial answer in support of a difference tactic, alignment. The respondent noted how the manager discussed goals, but also helped them understand how accomplishing the goal had a greater impact. According to Hackman and Oldham (1971) this job motivator illustrates the phenomenon of task significance wherein an employee understands how their work impacts the work or product of others. Despite this one answer, the management tactic of autonomy has the greatest influence on engagement as it relates this question.

RIQ14: As a virtual employee manager, how are those tactics different from managing office-based employees?

P1: Trust is higher virtually; everyone was treated as an idiot when I worked in an office setting.

P2: More communications as a virtual employee.

P3: I am not a manager.

P4: When you are office-based they cuddle you a little more, and that's the best part. You have a little more hands-on, and you know, oh it's okay. Don't worry about it. You know, a little more reassurance that you're doing a good job whereas when you work virtually, for me my entire training was on the computer. I never sat in the classroom. I never had anybody explain anything to me. It was all virtual. So, it was

based on me really paying attention and really learning what was going on and in addition to and I did start the job, you know remembering and writing things down.

P5: There are more impromptu meetings in the office, so I must schedule more time with virtual employees.

P6: Not a manager.

P7: Not a manager.

P8: I spent more time in the field. I spent more time ensuring that they knew that I knew what they're doing. I spent more time being visible to them and giving them the opportunity to take me to their engagements and let their customers talk to me about their happiness with their resource. I spent, a great deal of time travelling around making sure that they knew what they were there and talking about you know, you're not going to do this the rest of your life so tell me where do you want to go, what do you need, what do you want to do and try to work on the personal angle.

P9: I had to make sure that I went beyond when it came to kind of conveying kindness and support and just a friendly tone so that they knew that I was there even though I wasn't necessarily sitting right next to them. I also had to make sure and this is just me and my personal style, I also held weekly calls with my folks and I made sure that their activity for the week was very clear. I believe they call that managing-to-task and that's what I did. I made sure everybody knew exactly what needed to be done each week and then we follow it up on it the following week.

P10: Not a manager

P11: Less micromanaging and trust. I think you do better when you're not working in a branch and that's very true. I think there's a lot of time wasted when you work in an office environment.

P12: Not a manager

P13: Communication with the virtual team is more and it's more regimental.

Regimented versus with the - an office team which seems more impromptu. Just getting to know each other, talking about stuff that when we are on a phone call working virtually, it's kind of like, we really don't have time to waste so let's just hop right into the business, let's talk about this, talk about that, or it's anecdotal but it's like, "Okay. I'll call to get this answer, you just gave me my answer, and I'll talk to you later. All right?" So, it's very much different, even in - even in my current role, like I say, when mi out there, it's different - and then from previous roles that I've had where I was working in an office, it was - it was fun because we'd be a team of five or ten people all working next to each other and like I said, it was very team focused, we worked together, we were able to say, "Hey, like, I just came up with this idea. This is something we can improve. Let's go into the room where there's a whiteboard and let's like, hash it out really quick." That type, to the point it's much harder to do that, even with Skype and all the great technology, it's still not the same, it's just more of a work around, I would call it.

Of the 13 participants, five noted they were not managers. For the remaining respondents the theme was to employ tactics in a more frequent robust manger. The concept of impromptu meetings and communication was not present with virtual

employees, therefore more planned and deliberate meetings had to occur. This concept is best illustrated by the comments of P13 who stated, communication with the virtual team is more, and it's more regimental; Regimented versus an office team which seems more impromptu. This concept of communicating with one another more is also supported by P9 who stated the need to go above-and-beyond when it came to conveying kindness and support for the work of virtual employees and having weekly meetings to ensure managers clearly understood expectations. Since the employees are not sitting next to each other, trust was communicated as a required attribute of successful virtual team management. More communicating, trust, empowering the virtual employee to take ownership of their work and outcomes are the cornerstone of the management tactic of autonomy.

RIQ15: What are your overall feelings about working virtually?

P1: Control of my schedule.

P2: Working virtually is a positive thing in some respects but I prefer more of... I would say blended environment where you can have the best of both worlds, where you can have a few days working from home, that you are working on projects, have your notes to the grind or whatever but then in the office where you have the interactions, able to attend those meetings that are impactful and make a difference and have face to face with you manager and peers.

P3: I love it. I do love it. It gives me the flexibility to be home.

P4: Lots of flexibility. I love working virtually. It allows me the opportunity to take care of myself physically and mentally. In addition, it allows me to pair to my children without necessarily having to always be gone from the house. So, there are a lot of rewards you know to working from home and those for me are the top ones.

P5: I love it; flexibility. Maybe later in my career and family life, I will opt for another in office experience

P6: I love it I enjoy it. I work more. I work more virtually, and I provide to meet a better quality of service working virtually. Because of the freedom and because of the flexibility.

P7: I love it. It's not for everybody though.

P8: I think it's a phenomenal opportunity for people to work remotely. The problem is, for me is it does limit because the way we organize, it does limit somebody due and potential for promotion because you see them at the outdoor resource. You wouldn't see him as a supervisor. You wouldn't see him as a guy to bring back in the office because he's just never been in the office. So, I think it tends to limit opportunities that people in the office would get just by virtual socializing. So, I think that's a negative to the idea of virtual resources.

P9: I think it add the level of flexibility and freedom in your personal life that is fantastic. The one thing I have noticed that is difficult aside from being able to manage your own personal schedule is everything that you would normally need from your office while you are working in an office, IT, HR, all the people that would

normally help you with the things that you needed to find to do your job. All those tools and resources must be found remotely and that can be a struggle. So, I love the freedom and I love the flexibility and if the company I'm working for provides all the resources I need to be able to find what I need to be productive, I'm very appreciative of that, as well.

P10: I think I miss that day to day interaction with people, but I don't want it every single day. Ideally, I would like to maybe go into an office twice a week, even once a week just to check in with people like, "Hey, okay, did I miss something? What's going on? I just want to make sure I got everything that I need going on. Okay, cool" and then work from home every other day.

P11: We live in a 24/7 environment that so reachable. And so, I think until the world changes, that's not going to go away. So, I'm always accessible. I still like the first thing I do and the last thing I do is: of the day is check email, when I'm on vacation, I'm working. So, I don't know that that would – that would be different if – I don't think it would change if I worked in an office environment or being virtual.

P12: I can't imagine working in another environment. It provides me with lots of flexibility to get my work done. Since I work from home, I never really leave work.

P13: I think that the virtual workforce is growing inevitable. However, as a manager and direct report, I would say that, a large part of its successes a virtual employee, it's based on the work that you're doing. For example, I'm about to hire a data analyst. A data analyst can work remotely because I just need them to crunch numbers and toll

reports and develop PowerPoints and things like that or even some of the recruiters on some of our teams, like, okay, as long as you can show me that you got X amount of submittals every day this week then you're fine with me, whereas when we are very strategic in operations, focused, practice that I manage, gosh, I would love to have all of my folks at that level together where we can spitball ideas and really create an environment that's an incubator for growing the company and things at that sort. So, I would say it's very much based on the success of this based on role and the job function.

As illustrated by a couple of the respondents, we work in a 24/7 and since working from home does not allow me the ability to really turn work off, I am more productive, but I would not have it any other way. Although many of the respondents acknowledged working virtually is a bit lonely and not being in the office could have a negative impact on advancing in the organization, all of them communicated they loved working in this environment because it provided a level of flexibility they enjoyed and would have if they worked in the traditional setting. This flexibility is one of the key attributes of the management tactic of autonomy. For this study autonomy is defined as having the opportunity to do your best every day, being empowered to take ownership of your work, having frequent and clear communications with your supervisor, receiving progress feedback, being afforded flexibility to get work done and being held accountable for results and corrections.

RIQ16: What do you dislike about working virtually?

P1: Loneliness.

P2: Being out of site and not being able to see non-verbal signals.

P3: I dislike is just the lack of social interaction with humans.

P4: I say the lack of human interactions. When you're working with people, you get to talk and try to get to know people in a personal level. I really don't have that anymore.

P5: Lack of contact with people, missing happy hours, and missing last minute get togethers.

P6: Interacting with employees, other employees.

P7: Nothing really.

P8: Limit somebody due and potential for promotion because you see them at the outdoor resource. You wouldn't see him as a supervisor.

P9: Time management and sometimes isolation

P10: Missing interactions with people.

P11: You never get to unwind. You're always working and I think, for me, I've sacrificed a lot of my personal life for my success at my job.

P12: Periodic loneliness, but I have frequent communication with the team and have one person who lives about a mile from me.

P13: I'm just an outgoing person and I really enjoy collaborating with my colleague, so I miss being around with people. And it has those pros and cons, right? Like you have great flexibility and I can be throwing some clothes in the washing machine and

packing my bag to fly out while on a conference call but at the same time, like, I do miss that people aspect of being in and around: I mean, in an office and being around people where it can easily, “Hey, how was your weekend, you have a good Easter? Cool, cool. So, oh, by the way I forgot to mention on Friday that.” Like I said, I think it fueled a faster pace productivity.

The most common theme discovered from respondent answers for RIQ16 is the inability to frequently interact with colleagues and being lonely as a downside to working virtual. However, in contrast to other questions, frequent communications and socialization events can offset loneliness. According to the comments throughout the study, managers are aware of the need for socialization events and realize doing so can offset the loneliness of working virtually, however doing so remains a challenge. The collected data shows how infrequently definitive socialization events occur. In RIQ15 a few of the respondents noted that being a virtual employee makes them more productive because they never unplug, however for this question the same was noted as a challenge because virtual employees never unwind from the job. The antithesis for the answers to RIQ16 is having the ability to frequently communicate and socialize with colleagues or alignment. The components of alignment include managers clearly communicating task significance, providing tools, and training to bridge gaps, and affording employees the opportunity to stay connected and communicate with other team members.

Results

Each of the Research Interview Questions (RIQ) yielded information supporting the conceptual framework outlined in Figure 1, helped determine whether the

mentioned management tactics were intrinsic or extrinsic in nature, as well as helped determine if behavior could be predicted according to the theory of planned behavior. The interview questions were aligned with each of the Research Questions (RQ).

The interviews were conducted utilizing semi-structured, non-controlled telephone interviews. Data were collected through notes, recordings, and transcriptions. The collected data were organized in an Excel spreadsheet by rows (participants) and columns (questions). Once fully collected, the spreadsheet was uploaded to MAXQDA for assistance identifying Key Words in Context (KWIC) and themes. Following the suggestions noted in Bernard and Ryan (2010), I utilized a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis System (CAQDAS) tool, specifically MAXQDA, to help me generate themes within the context of multiple sources of data collected for each question. Using the embedded features of this CAQDAS allowed me to not only generate contextual themes and make comparison across participants, it also provided me with the basis from which more semantic analysis or comparisons were performed. The results of the key word analysis, word count and semantic evaluation provided further validity and reliability of my conclusions. Since I directly conducted each interview, the MAXQDA findings were also contrasted against my notes and understanding of what was communicated.

To provide further validity, the concept of *epoche*' was employed. According to Moustakas (1994), the setting aside of biases when analyzing data, or *epoche*', helps further the purity of findings (Shehan, 2014). It is also important to outline what was being studied. I utilized the *noema/noematic*. Within Moustakas (1994) it was

illustrated how the noetic framework is based on one's orientation towards an experience because of their noematic or experiential foundation (Sheehan, 2014). In contrast to this noema/noematic perspective, I also considered Acek Ajzen (1991), theory of planned behavior, through which an individual's intentions depends upon their motivation and ability and has its foundation on the extent they believe they can control their destiny through their attitude, cultural norms, subjective experiences, and perceived power over outcomes (Ghouri, Kahn and Abdul Kareem, 2016). What a person experiences (noema) is based on their experiential filter and framework (noesis). As I evaluated data provided by participants, I considered their noema from a noetic/noesis perspective.

The collected data were also analyzed to determine if redundancy in answers or saturation was occurring. The Research Interview Questions were aligned with overall Research Questions as outlined in Table 5. This was done to ensure all Research Questions were answered versus simply coding data.

Table 5

Research and Aligned Interview Questions

Research Question	Aligned Interview Questions that Generated Input
RQ1: What management techniques influence engagement of virtual employees?	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13
RQ2: How do virtual employees experience, define and categorize management techniques and efforts utilized to supervise their work?	5, 7, 8
RQ3: What are the differences between effective management techniques in a traditional versus virtual work setting?	7, 12
RQ4: What are the practical activities managers can execute to influence virtual employee engagement?	1, 7, 8, 9, 11
RQ5: Are the study participants more engaged by management techniques that are more externally focused, such as money, or are they more engaged by techniques that are more internally focused, such as compliments?	2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11
RQ6: To what extent can behavior be predicted based on the use of defined and effective management techniques utilized in a virtual setting?	6, 7

Utilizing the larger coding framework illustrated in Table 2, and based on participant input, RQ1: What management techniques influence engagement of virtual

employees, and themed responses to a larger number of questions than originally aligned (RIQs 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 or 81%) showed the vast majority of the participants believed autonomy was the tactic that positively influenced engagement. Autonomy being defined as frequent communication, clarity, trust, and the ability to work independently, and included the participant being afforded the opportunity to do their best every day by and their managers empowering them to take ownership of their work and client relationships.

To illustrate and support this conclusion, participants provided answers such as “Clear goals and project plans were provided, and we communicated regularly”, “My supervisor made sure she was available by various means, emails, telephone, instant messaging”, and “my manager does not micromanage and trusts me”. All the provided answers were intrinsically categorized. Secondarily, 95% of the respondents stated a manager demonstrating Care for Work through frequent communication helps manage deliverables and influences their engagement. Although ‘Care’ was mentioned throughout the discussions related to this question, the concept of frequent communication and accountability was the better theme and translates to Autonomy. The remaining 45% made comments about managers discussing and communicating how their work is interdependent (alignment), as well as the remaining 55% commenting on either Recognition or Development as an influencer of engagement. The tactics mentioned were all considered intrinsic in nature.

Herzberg’s two-factor theory posits employees are motivated intrinsically by the opportunity to perform meaningful work, work that is identifiably valued, and work that

is consistently acknowledged (Sinha and Trivedi, 2014). Employees who are influenced by intrinsic rewards seem to have the greatest organizational value. However, individuals who experience extrinsically-aligned motivators also find their experiences are psychologically rewarding when they have a manager who provides autonomy and a feeling of accomplishment (Ryan & Desi, 2000a). Much of the contemporary research illustrates that efforts targeting intrinsic motivators have a greater influence on engagement and productivity. Extrinsic elements such as pay does not lead to greater commitment, motivation, or engagement (Gmur, Kaiser & Kampe, 2009; Kaiser, Kozica, Swart & Werr, 2015). Even though the tactics identified in this study are related to supervision, an extrinsic motivator, coupling supervision with more intrinsic motivators could possibly have greater results.

The RQ2 utilized answers to RIQ 5, 7 and 8 to define virtual employee's experiences and how their answers themed to identify management tactics which had a positive influence on their engagement. The question - How do virtual employees experience, define and categorize management techniques and efforts utilized to supervise their work? The provided answers were analyzed using the larger coding framework illustrated in Table 2 to theme tactics that influenced their engagement. Approximately 100% of the responses were related to autonomy as the tactic that influenced engagement. Autonomy includes experiences affording them the opportunity to do their best, their managers empowering them to make decisions and take ownership of client relationships, as well as their managers clearly and frequently communicating

goals, reviewing progress and challenges, and me holding them accountable. In support of this conclusions, specific comments from RIQ5, 7, and 8 were captured.

Some of the comments provided by the participants to support Autonomy as one of the most engagement-influencing tactics utilized by managers were – “Communications is the most effective thing my manager does, followed by her caring about me and my happiness last”, “Number one for me is the ability to participate and offer opinions within the company”, and “Weekly meetings and reports, weekly communication meetings and clarity”. Quotes such as these directly support Autonomy as a defined tactic that influences engagement. The tactics mentioned were all considered intrinsic in nature. According to Herzberg extrinsic motivators relate to factors like working conditions, supervision, organizational strength, compensation, and how the organization’s culture is manifested through company policy (Buble, Juras & Matic, 2014). Herzberg’s two-factor theory also posits employees are motivated and influenced intrinsically by the opportunity to perform meaningful and work that is identifiably valuable and consistently acknowledged (Sinha and Trivedi, 2014).

For RQ3, I utilized the comments provided in RIQ7 and 12 to distinguish if there are tactical differences managing office-based versus virtual employees. The participants illustrated Autonomy because of flexibility and increased communication as the tactic with the most influence on their engagement. For those participants who were managers, they contrasted how they tactically managed both virtual and office-based employees. For those we were not managers, they answered based on their lived experience being in an office and virtual. Approximately 85% of participants identified increased

communication (Autonomy), 7% identified Development as a difference between working in an office versus virtual as a tactic influencing their engagement for RIQ12. That is, the presence of Development was engaging, but was lacking as a virtual employee. Research participants made comments such as “as a virtual employee, trust and communication lines are much more open”, “I receive more communication and connections”, “More communication and reports when I work virtually and more impromptu when I am in the office”, and “There are more scheduled communication exchanges working virtually, and I have quite a few freedoms and flexibilities now that I am working from home.”

Specific to RIQ7, 45% of the responses supported Alignment as a tactic with positive influences on engagement. Those who provided input stated managers would ensure the understood how their work was valuable and interdependent with targeted outcomes. The remaining 55% commented on either Recognition (15%), Development (15%), Care for My Work (7.5%) or made comments that could not be aligned (7.5%) with any of the themes. The themed answers to distinguish a difference in management tactics are Autonomy and Alignment. As I analyzed the answers to both questions, approximately 33% provided answers associated with Alignment as a force influencing their engagement.

Based on the input provided for RQ4 – “What are the practical activities managers can execute to influence virtual employee engagement?”, Autonomy through communication, trust and flexibility was the primary management tactic influencing engagement. RQ4 utilized RIQs 1, 7, 8, 9, and 11 to support the identified theme.

RIQ01 produced comments such as “It was done through trust and latitude”, “My manager helped with me being happy through consistent communication”, “Socialization events and communications”, and “Bi-weekly meetings and allowing us to discuss non-business before each meeting”, to illustrate how the defined factors of Autonomy had a positive influence on their engagement. The answers also contrasted the participant’s definition of engagement to that of Kahn (1990) where engagement was defined as the alignment of a person’s self with their work and environment, resulting in positive emotions and an increased investment of their emotional, behavioral, and cognitive efforts towards their work (Bailey, et al., 2015). The participants of this study made such comments as “Being productive and committed is a sign of engagement to me”, “Loyalty and commitment, “I am not going anywhere”, and “Going the extra mile, no matter the time; not working to the letter of the job, description but exceeding it, is a sign of engagement”. A second management tactic influence engagement was Alignment.

Utilizing the larger coding framework illustrated in Table 2 and based on the percentage of participants who identified an item influencing their engagement, 45% made comments related to managers discussing and communicating how their work is interdependent as was as is in Alignment with the mission of the organization. The remaining 55% commented on either Recognition (15%), Development (15%), Care for My Work (7.5%) or made comments that could not be aligned (7.5%) with any of the themes. The themed answers related to how they define engagement related to commitment, going the extra mile, caring for their work, being excited about their work and being available. For RIQ08 and RIQ09, the answers illuminated Care for Work

(95%, RIQ08), and Autonomy (69% for RIQ09). Lastly, for RIQ11, of those providing comments, 46% stated no communication would negatively impact their engagement, 15% reported not Caring for their Work as a negative influencer and 38% communicated no alignment of their work to a greater good creates a negative impact. Although other tactics were mentioned briefly, utilizing averages RQ4 showed that Autonomy (41.2%), Care for Work (23%), and Alignment (7.6%) were the primary tactics influencing engagement. The remaining tactics were less than 3% of the respondents and 22% did not identify an influencing tactic through these questions.

RIQs 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, and 11 were utilized to evaluate RQ5. The analyzed data showed participants experienced Autonomy was the primary tactic influencing their engagement. In fact, 100% of responses to RIQ02 and 85% of RIQ10 supported this theme as illustrated by comments such as “my manager communicates about my well-being and makes room for that conversation and occasionally checks in”, “We have direct communication. We have a very informal hierarchy process. So, we have weekly calls and even E-Happy Hours”, “I was assured and provided tools I needed and was provided autonomy”, and “I would say that he provides a good bit of flexibility around my personal life”. Nearly 100% of RIQ3, 04, and supported this theme, followed by Alignment (45%) of respondents for RIQ07. For RIQ11, based on the input, the larger coding framework highlighted negative items influencing their engagement. The captured data were analyzed as anti-thematic to the established coding framework. That is, the items were viewed to determine what impact was experienced if a theme was not present. Of those providing comments, 46% stated no communication (Autonomy)

would negatively impact their engagement, 15% reported not Caring for their Work as a negative influencer and 38% communicated no alignment of their work to a greater good creates a negative impact.

To address RQ6, “To what extent can behavior be predicted based on the use of defined and effective management techniques utilized in a virtual setting?”, I utilized RIQs 6 and 7. Understanding what work they were accomplishing (Alignment) and being provided consistent guidance and freedom (Autonomy) were the tactics that had the greatest influence on engagement and ability to better predict outcomes. The participant’s provided comments such as, “We had monthly development calls where we discussed personal issues, challenges, development desires, work/life balance, deliverables and timelines, “I had frequent discussions about deliverables and deadlines”, “my manager showed she cared about me personally and provided me with lots of autonomy to get the defined work accomplished on an agreed upon deadline”, and “communication is of utmost importance, not having enough info; sometimes I was asked to do something without the reasoning behind it and that caused a problem”, to further support this summation. Having, 46% of participants note Autonomy as a driver for higher levels of commitment and productivity, and 46% showing Alignment as the most influential tactic, utilizing these tactics not only influences engagement, but better affords managers the ability to predict behaviors and outcomes.

The resulting influence on engagement of employees also results in a greater opportunity to predict behavior and outcomes according to Ajzen (1991), theory of planned behavior. According to Acek Ajzen (1991), an individual’s behavior can be

predicted based on their attitudes, experiences, cultural norms, and expectations of outcomes (Mafani & Pooe, 2013; Ghouri, Kahn & Abdul Kareem, 2016). Based on the information provided, cultural or group norms was increased communication, they experienced increased communication, welcomed it, and expected it, as well as this tactic having a positive influence on their engagement. Utilizing increased communication as a management tactic with virtual employees allows a manager to predict more engaged behaviors and increased productivity.

The final three RIQs were not aligned with any RQ but was posed to participants for general comments about their virtual employment experience. The answers did provide further support for the identified themes associated with RIQ01-13. Related to RIQ14, based on the percentage of participants who identified a difference in managing a virtual team, 46% stated increased communication (Autonomy), 38% were not managers and 15% stated Care for Work was the tactic they used to influence engagement and productivity. As we discussed RIQ15, the tactics of frequent and clear communications or Autonomy (68%) was reported as having the greatest influence on engagement, Development (7.5%), Alignment (7.5%) and two of the respondents (15%) noted having the flexibility (also associated with Autonomy) to work part-time virtually influenced their engagement. The final interview question, RIQ16, was also analyzed using the larger coding framework and based on the percentage of participants who provided input on this topic, nearly 77% stated the lack of communication with colleagues (the antithesis of Autonomy), would have a negative impact on their engagement. Two participants had

no real commitment or did not answer (15%), and the last respondent felt the lack of Development was a negative to their virtual work experience and engagement.

Several demographic questions were posed to participants. Specifically, research participants answered the following demographic questions -

PI1. What is your job title?

PI2. What is your age?

PI3. What is your profession?

PI4. How long have you been in your profession?

PI5. How long have you worked virtually?

PI6. What is the highest level of education completed?

None of the discussions, collected data or analysis seemed to uncover or provide themes illustrating how any of these demographic characteristics influenced levels of virtual employee engagement.

The greater of the identified management tactics were related to supervision. When a supervisor communicates frequently and clearly, allows flexibility to get the work done within a defined timeline, this Autonomy has a positive influence on engagement. According to Herzberg intrinsic considers items such as achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement, whereas extrinsic factors include work conditions, supervision, organizational strength, compensation, and how the organization's culture is manifested through company policy (Buble, Juras & Matic,

2014). Herzberg's two-factor theory also posits employees are motivated intrinsically by their supervisors when they are presented with an opportunity to perform meaningful work, and work that is identifiably valuable, as well as work that is consistently acknowledged (Sinha and Trivedi, 2014). Although the word 'supervision' is categorized as an extrinsic factor, the experience of supervision aligns with the tactic being intrinsic.

In addition to intrinsic motivators providing the experience of achievement, accountability and recognition through advancement, intrinsically aligned motivators also provide for task identity, task variety, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. These factors include managers providing the employees with opportunities and freedom to conduct various tasks (variety), to accomplish a clearly articulated and important piece of work (identify and significance), without being micromanaged (autonomy) and with constant communication (feedback), (Giancola, 2014). Based on the input of the research participants, these factors produce a more engaging, intrinsically-aligned, and psychological state based on clearly defined, aligned, and frequently communicated status of work.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1989) proposed trustworthiness of the research is supported by its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as the foundation for qualitative research trustworthiness (Trochim, 2006). As opined by LeCompte and Preille, (1993), utilizing what a participant communicates as their experiences, values and attitudes corroborates the emergent codes and trustworthiness (Saldana, 2010). Utilizing the seminal research of Guba and Lincoln (1981, 1989), producing audit

trails through which other researchers can reach the same thematic conclusions illustrates credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Cutliffe & McKenna, 1999; Trochim, 2006). I utilized the actual comments of participants and thematic data analysis and coding to produce audit trails. Transferability or generalizability is the extent to which the findings can be utilized or transferred to another setting. The extent to which these findings can be generalized or transferred is limited to practical applications to a virtual employment context. Although management themes were identified, transferring the study to a larger group might be challenging since the social context under which each of the study participants interacted was unique and the context under which their experience took place impacted how they individually perceived, processed, and reacted to their phenomenon and were engaged (Wright & McMahan, 2011).

Summary

Within this chapter the data collection and analysis methods were described. The demographic information was provided, and the data collected from the research participants were analyzed and summarized. All research participants were U.S.-based, virtual employees who provided information related to 13 interview questions. The answers provided insight about their lived experiences related to being managed as virtual employees, managing virtual employees, and how what they experienced could be coded into management tactics utilizing the coding schemes defined in Chapter 2. Once gathered, the influence of how those coded management tactics influenced their engagement was discussed.

The provided answers and coded themes allowed me to determine if the management tactics they experienced were intrinsically or extrinsically defined and considering their responses to those tactics, whether utilizing them could help predict future behavior. The chapter concluded by describing how the evidence of trustworthiness was approached. A more in-depth description of outcomes will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Within Chapter 5 summaries and conclusions are provided about this study. Chapter 5 addresses what management tactics are proven to be most influential on the virtual employee engagement for this group of research participants, what research gaps exist for future research opportunities, and what practical, social change, and conceptual framework changes were discovered.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to discover which managerial tactics the research participants experienced positively influenced their engagement. The research pursued an understanding of these tactics via an internal versus external perceived construct according to the motivational categories described by Herzberg (1959), two-factor motivational theory. The research also pursued a better understanding of predicting planned behavior in accordance with Acek Ajzen (1991), TPB. I analyzed data to determine, (a) if participants had an experiential expectation related to virtual employment, (b) if there were cultural similarities amongst the participants, and (c) if, combined, did these experiences create behavioral intentions and the ability to better predict behaviors. Considering the upward trending virtual employment population, I also discovered practical and social change outcomes, as well as advanced the growing body of research related to this population.

Based on trends estimating nearly 25% of Americans currently work remotely, and that number is forecasted to grow (Noonan & Glass, 2012), managing this population should be a focus of contemporary management scholars and practitioners. According to the benchmarking study conducted by Ways and Working (2011), the number of employees working in an office decreased by almost 13% between 2009 and 2011. It is estimated over 30% of the workforce will be working virtually by 2020 (Brothertan, 2012). Managing virtual employees with traditional management techniques is ineffective (Sheridan, 2012) and employee engagement influences organizational

productivity (Soldati, 2007). The impact of an employee's level of engagement on individual productivity and organizational success is irrefutable (Heskett, et al., 2008). Engagement as defined by Kahn (1990) as the physical, emotional, and cognitive commitment an employee makes to their work, colleagues, and organization (Ahmed, Rasheed & Jehanzeb, 2012). It is important for organizational leaders to have a better understanding about how to harnesses an individual's core beliefs, values and behaviors within their work setting to influence them going the extra mile to meet organizational goals (Kahn, 1990).

This Chapter summarizes how the lived experiences of the participating virtual employees illustrate which management tactics positively influenced the engagement of participants. I also revealed how the noted management techniques were intrinsically received by participants and combined with their historical experiences and expectations, and how, by practically employing certain tactics, the propensity to predict performance behavior was higher. The study concluded with practical techniques that could be employed to manage virtual employees, how these tactics also supported the conceptual framework posited in Chapter 2 and had a positive social impact.

Research Overview

My efforts for this research was to examine input from U.S.-based virtual employees to determine which tactics were used to manage them or used by them to manage other virtual employees. The goal was to discover how the tactics differed from those utilized and experienced by employees in a traditional work setting and whether the

study participants experienced a positive influence on their engagement. To better define any new tactical discoveries, the research further utilized the two-factor motivational framework of Herzberg (1959), the framework of the Gallup and iPEC engagement studies, and from practical perspective, and the TPB of Ajzen (1991). I collected data from participants who worked in various organizations and location throughout the U.S. Since there was not one location to observe this population, in addition to referencing current research related to the topic as a data source, data were secured from virtual workers who worked in professional services organization. Since all the employees worked virtually and in locations outside of my geographic area, data were collected via telephone interviews.

Within both the qualitative and quantitative research domains, the three broad categories of data collection are indirect observation, direct observation, and elicitation (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). I utilize an elicitation method of in-depth, direct, semi-structured interviews. With permission, the telephone interviews were recorded and transcribed, allowing me to utilize actual comments to inductively reduce the collected data to conceptual themes utilizing help from the qualitative data analysis tool, MAXQDA.

The number of participants for a phenomenological study are relatively small in comparison to quantitative studies. According to Giorgi (1985, 2006b), Sanders (1982), and van Manen (1990), descriptive phenomenological studies can be successfully conducted utilizing a small purposive group of three, whereas Benner (1985, 1994) posits the pursuit of an interpretive study should continue until data collection reveals no new

information (Gill, 2014). My participants consisted of a set of criterion-based purposeful sample of virtual employees and the study continued until a point of redundancy was reached. The criterion-based purposeful sample is a targeted population with defined characteristics (Patton, 2002). In this case participants will have worked or supervised employees in a virtual setting. Homogeneous and purposeful samples are best used to solicit input from groups who have a shared experience with the phenomenon of interest (Gill, 2014). I identified and organized the sample group from a larger population of virtual employees who were members of social media affinity groups.

Interpretation of Findings

Considering the current state and estimated growth of the virtual employee population, I chose this unique opportunity to study and discover if the management techniques employed in traditional work settings differed from those utilized in a virtual employment setting and how those differences influenced the engagement levels of participants based on their lived experiences. The outcomes helped refine effective people management tactics, as well as advanced the body of knowledge associated with virtual workers. The research used the baseline research of Gallup and iPEC associated with people management and employee engagement to discover effective tactics according to virtual employee research participants. Those larger bodies of research were combined into well-defined, yet narrower coded themes based on the information outlined in Table 2. Further defining the seminal work of Herzberg (1959), and according to some researchers (e.g., Ford, 1992; Gagné & Deci, 2005), intrinsic motivation conceptually differs from external drivers in that external

experiences are like policies being made whereas intrinsic rewards are based on the rewards someone would get by influencing a policy decision (Zhu & Zhang, 2014). Understanding how to utilize management tactics that result in virtual employees experiencing their more innate values being contributed and social change being effectuated is more engaging than extrinsic rewards.

The outcomes of my research produced general findings that will help virtual people managers understand and adjust their management style for virtual employees, help them understand whether their adjustments are more aligned with intrinsic or extrinsic tactics, and provide a framework for better predicting behaviors of those they manage. The research also reinforced the conceptual model outlined in Figure 1. The research produced practical and social change implications related to managing virtual employees utilizing the noted tactics and in a consciously different manner than those who are managed in a traditional brick-and-mortar setting. Lastly, the outcomes of my study highlighted research limitations and offered recommendations for future research.

General Findings

All study participants were U.S.-based, virtual employees who worked in diverse professions. The professions were not considered in this study since the only criteria for participating was being U.S.-based and having experience as a virtual employee. The goal of my research was described as the discovery of management tactics they experienced in contrast to their experience in a traditional setting as an employee or manager, where identified. The studies of Gallup and iPEC which outline items that

influence employee engagement (Table 2) were utilized as the baseline, resulting in more narrowly defined tactics. The input related to items influencing engagement were analyzed to determine similarity. A coding framework was developed and utilized to better define the categories of tactics that could influence engagement. This coding framework also included the similarities between the noted studies as outlined in Table 2. This resulted in five categories of management tactics as follow:

- **Autonomy:** having the opportunity to do my best every day by my manager empowering me to take ownership of client relationships. My manager clearly and frequently communicates goals, review progress and challenges, and me holds me accountable for my actions and reactions. My manager affords me flexibility to do my work.
- **Recognition:** is defined as the organization and my manager valuing my contribution to its well-being by proactively and consistently recognizing and praising my work and my actions to live the organization's values. My manager is positive in our interactions.
- **Care for Work:** is demonstrated when my manager frequently talks with me about my work and personal accomplishments and challenges. The company is considered caring for my work when I receive frequent reinforcement about my success on the organization, a respect for my opinion, and acknowledgment of my accomplishments, goals, and values are demonstrated.

- **Development:** is demonstrated when my manager affords me opportunities to increase my skillset to better deliver results to the organization and has discussed content related to my growth. My manager consistently coaches me on my strengths and ways to mitigate any weaknesses. My manager allows any challenges to be viewed as a learning opportunity and I am given the benefit of the doubt when I need unique allowances.
- **Alignment:** consists of the manager clearly communicating the mission of the organization and how their work impacts it, provides additional training to ensure their work can impact the mission and they clearly understand which tasks are connected to mission-related outcomes. Being able to stay connected and communicate with other team members.

The RIQs were aligned with the RQs and were used to better answer each RQ. The input provided resulted in the participants experiencing the Autonomy as the more influential tactic positively influencing their engagement. Through the eidetic reduction approach, I could identify experiential thematic data and reduce the findings to the purest form without preconceived notions, as posited by Gill (2014). Miles and Huberman (1994) and Robson (2011) reported this approach provided the opportunity to narratively explain how identified factors influenced items such as engagement (Maxwell, 2013). Based on the calculated averages for each RIQ, the overall averages were calculated for the aligned RIQs to demonstrate the cumulative averages for each RQ as illustrated in Figure 3.

Determining the overall averages by combining the results of the independently calculated averages for each RQ, the general findings associated with the RQs demonstrated the virtual employee research participants placed 66% of their experiential value on Autonomy, 12% on Alignment, 5% on Development, 5% on Care for Work, and 3% verbally noting nothing was done to influence their engagement. The remaining 9%

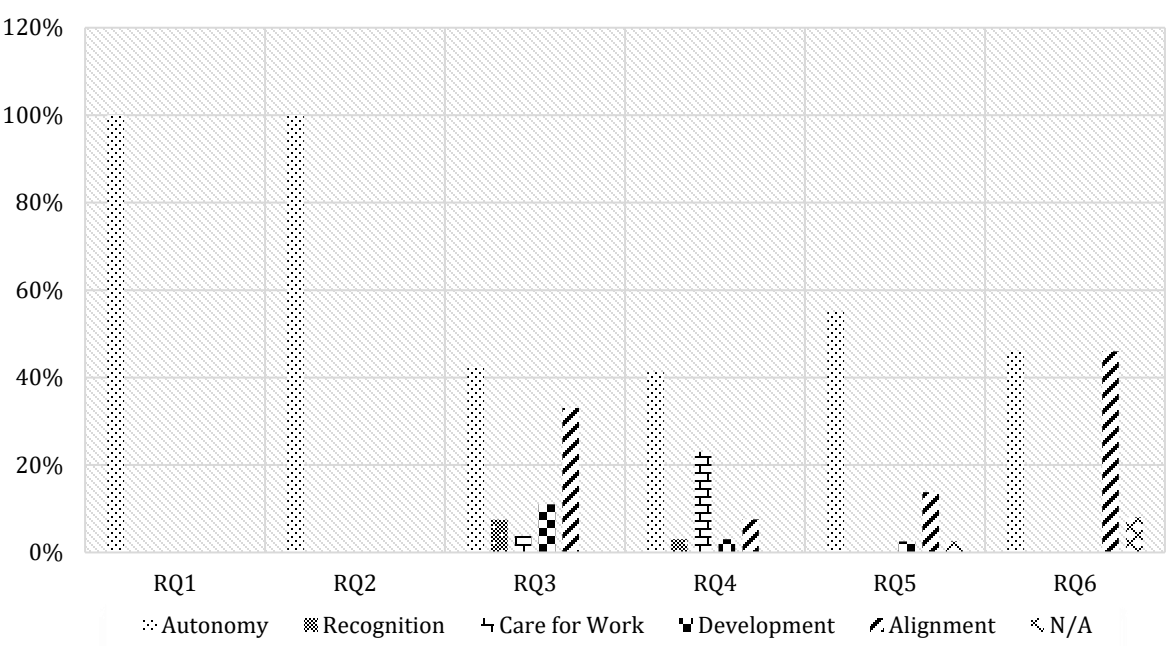


FIGURE 3.
Themed Management Tactics Influencing Virtual Employee Engagement

of the answers did not align with any of the tactics in a meaningful way or did provide for an additional thematic conclusion. The tactics communicated with the greatest frequency (Autonomy and Alignment) demonstrates managers who provide clear, transparent, well-defined objectives, who empower their virtual employees with the latitude to own and get the work done, who participates in progress checks and holds them accountable, who

provides the tools to get the work done, who illustrates how work cascades and is interdependent, and help them stay connected to the organization has the greatest influence on engagement. Although the remaining categories of management tactics produced lower results (Development and Care for Work), all of tactics were classified as intrinsically motivating tactics.

Intrinsic Versus Extrinsic Paradigm

One of the discoveries of my research was related to whether the identified tactics were intrinsically or extrinsically classified. As defined by Herzberg (1959), the items that are intrinsically related have a greater impact on the motivational levels of participants. Extrinsic motivators are more focused on items such pay, work environment, and punishment and intrinsic motivators focus more on how employees feel about conducting worthwhile work with meaningful outcomes (Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Sinha & Trivedi, 2014). It is also important to note the concepts of motivation and engagement are closely related. Motivation has been defined as the level of interest initiated to accomplish a task and engagement is ore about accomplishing a task for greater returns like organizational success (Giancola, 2014).

The intrinsically defined items according to Herzberg are achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement, whereas extrinsic factors include work conditions, supervision, organizational strength, compensation, and how the organization's culture is manifested through company policy (Buble, Juras & Matic, 2014). In addition to the one specifically defined intrinsic item of responsibility that aligned with the participants stating their engagement was

influenced by managers empowering them to own and get their work done, the experience of all participants was aligned with intrinsic factors. Extrinsically-aligned factors are related to achieving more tangible responses such as pay and promotion, whereas intrinsically-aligned experiences are based a person's self-interest, curiosity, and edification (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1992; Malhotra, Galletta, & Kirsch, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Zhu & Zhang, 2014).

Knowing how these tactic, the experience of being supervised was processed and experienced intrinsically, as well. This is important to note for two reasons 1) most managers and HR professionals do not focus on intrinsically designed performance management programs (Giancola, 2014) and 2) having a better understanding of what tactics are more likely to influence can also help better predict planned behavior.

Theory of Planned Behavior

According to Acek Ajzen (1991), having the ability to know someone's intent, values and beliefs can result in the ability to better anticipate their behavior. Based on how the participant's answered questions provided a framework on how they valued management, specifically, what they valued, better affording managers who employed the noted tactics to better predict behavior outcomes, despite the fact the employees were working in remote locations.

The TPB was successfully used to study and predict health behaviors and intentions including smoking, drinking, and substance use, among others. As noted, TPB

was built on constructs related to a person's attitude or evaluation of their behavior, their intentions, or their motivation to behave a certain way, their subjective norms based on their perceived power to influence factors facilitating or impeding their behavior. As analyzed in this study many factors were identified related to this construct.

The participants communicated their behavioral intentions resulting from how they were managed, what they experienced, how they historically behaved when managed through the identified tactics, and what was expected of them and the behavioral ideals for virtual employees. Within the context of this study, TPB was adopted to anticipate results dependent upon an employees' motivation (attitude) resulting from applied management tactics and the behavioral control afforded to them (behavioral control). Coupled with the affinity group behavioral expectation and experiential norms, TPB could be applied as a method of effectively managing virtual employees and forecasting more accurate outcomes. TPB illustrates how to base workplace related behavioral predictions on the constructs of an employee's experiences (norms), beliefs (attitudes about possible outcomes), and control (power over behavioral outcomes), resulting in an intention to behave in a certain manner (LaMorte, 2016).

Implications

Practical Implications

Understanding what practical management techniques influence virtual employee engagement and how that engagement impacts productivity is becoming a primary area of study for many organizational designers, leaders, and people managers (Dalal, et al.,

2012). Since the virtual population is growing, it is important to understand if there are different management techniques that influence this population.

Although many of the classical management techniques may be effective with the virtual employee, based on research there is a difference. Managing virtual employees with traditional techniques may not apply and could be ineffective (Sheridan, 2012). Having a better understanding of how to manage and influence engagement of the growing virtual workforce may increase organizational success. Driven by a knowledge economy, globalization, rising energy costs, economic pressures and technology, physical workplaces are becoming less relevant as a requirement to efficiently and effectively complete work (Kamikow, 2011). The goal of my research was to evaluate collected data to discover what management techniques was most effective for leaders when managing virtual employees, influencing their engagement and productivity.

Based on the outcomes of my study, the management tactic with the greatest influence on engagement is Autonomy. Considering the items that make up Autonomy – clear and frequent communication, allowing the virtual employee to own their work and outcomes, holding them accountable, and providing flexibility, at a very practical level, this tactic means the manager should define outcomes and get out of the way, allowing the employee to do what you hired them to do. That is not to say, the manager should assign work and forget about the employee. Based on input from participants, frequent communications and accountability also is a factor that influences their engagement. Considering the alarmingly low levels of engagement being reported by organization such as Towers Watson, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), and

McKinsey, it is important for managers to understand what tactics impact engagement and motivation (Giancola, 2014), as well as how to use them to forecast better outcomes. Manager should ensure virtual employees understand the importance of their work and deliverables, resulting in better Alignment of their work. This supports the concepts of task identity and significance as intrinsic factors influencing engagement.

According to my findings, from a task identify and significance perspective, managers should utilize Alignment and Autonomy as intrinsically aligned tactics to influence engagement and related productivity. The application of consciously planned and well-understood tactics could also afford managers the ability to better predict outcomes and to address the gap between employee and organizational expectations.

Many recent studies have highlighted how management practices are out of alignment with the experiences and desires of both virtual and office-based employees. Research conducted by well-respected organizations such as Towers Watson, McKinsey & Company, Harvard Business School, WorldatWork and SHRM have shown how the effective use of intrinsically-aligned tactics have been successfully utilized to better motivate and engage workers, and how these tactics are not broadly used by managers (Giancola, 2014). Specifically, SHRM's surveys, demonstrated how organizations, human resources and people-managers efforts were outdated as they pertain to the application and use of intrinsic rewards as a method to increase engagement (Giancola, 2014). I have defined what those intrinsic tactics are and how they can be applied to positively influence engagement, as well as to better predict behaviors and outcomes.

Positive Social Change Implications

Virtual workers tend to be more innovative, agile, and productive in comparison to their office-based counterparts (Plump & Ketchen 2013). On a more positive social change note, virtual work decreases interpersonal problems resulting in employees who are happier and have increased mental health (Plump & Ketchen, 2013). Additionally, virtual work can have a positive social impact on an affinity group's member who needs to meet certain work/life balance requirements. For instance, groups such as the disabled, single parents with children, senior citizens, or others with special needs, may benefit if they can work virtually (Plump & Ketchen, 2013). Coupled with lowering costs, increasing productivity, and securing global talent, meeting the needs of these and similar groups can generate positive social change at the individual and communal level. Considering technology was one of the primary drivers resulting in virtual work it is possible virtual work will become commonplace. A greater positive social impact of virtual work can be related to health.

According to Gallup (2012), in addition to the well-research productivity and business outcomes related to increased employee engagement, it was noted engagement is positively related to health, i.e., lower diabetes, better weight management, increased healthy habits, and lower blood pressure, to name a few (Wendel, 2014). According to Wendell (2014), although these positive outcomes have not been quantitatively correlated, Gallup's research does show a general causal relationship. These outcome result in employees who are engaged in their work to be more committed to their work and companies (Jackson, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2006). Engaged employees not

only have more meaningful experiences, they produce greater outcomes and are more adjusted psychologically (Steger et al., 2012). Employees who experience meaningful work will experience greater well-being. The extension of increased engagement using intrinsic management tactics can result in a happy, healthier, and more productive employee, who collectively can positively impact the costs of healthcare and families within the larger communities.

Conceptual or Theoretical Implications

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the seminal works of Kahn (1990) which focused role alignment and illustrates how employees integrate self with their jobs, and how this integration influences their levels of engagement. According to Parahoo (2006), knowing when to use a conceptual or theoretical framework depends on the extent to which a researcher draws concepts versus theories (Green, 2014). My focus within this study will not use theories as its basis but instead will use theoretical references. Concepts will be highlighted related to the phenomenon of experientially defined supervisory tactics that influence increased role alignment and engagement of virtual employees. The theorists who will be referenced are Kahn's (1990), Ajzen (1991) and Herzberg (1959). As noted by Fain (2004), a conceptually framed study will not result in a theory, rather it will utilize various concepts posited by the mentioned theorists (Green, 2014).

Limitations of the Study

Since the targeted population was a criterion-based, purposeful sample of U.S.-based virtual employees, the results of my research are limited in transferability and

generalization to this study group. As was outlined in Chapter 1, the study was proposed with this limitation being acknowledged. When pursuing the research, a few other potential limitations mentioned were tenure and cultural nuances of the study participants that may skew the outcomes related to their perspectives. The variation or disparity of input by tenure and culture may limit the research from describing a complete understanding of employee experiences (Nasomboon, 2014). Although no input was produced related to culture or tenure, outcomes related to the intrinsic or extrinsic nature of management tactics was received.

Regarding a broad application and transfer of knowledge on extrinsic versus intrinsic tactics that influence engagement, and the narrow sample of my study, there is a limit on the application of these findings. For instance, comparing the outcomes of my research (Autonomy and Alignment being the primary tactics influencing engagement) to a recent study by SHRM, wherein they found three intrinsic factors to be lacking in management practices 1) opportunities to use skills and abilities, 2) autonomy and independence and 3) the work itself (Giancola, 2014), my findings are not only limited to the sample population utilized, but there are other opportunities for further research. Overall, there was not an outcome of the findings based on tenure. The research input did not produce themes that could be conceptually associated with the number of years an employee worked virtually. There are also a few limits to consider related to the TPB.

The TPB does not account for the more complex factors that may impact an employee's engagement. Although not insurmountable, managers must consider these

items when behaviors and outcomes were not accurately predicted. When employing consciously designed and thoughtful tactics, my study illustrates the ability to better predict behavior. Items such as the ability to secure appropriate resources, fear, threats, moods, or experiences outside of the workplace, economic or environmental factors, an employee's cognitive ability, or the size of a goal (ability to attain success), are limits to TPB (Lamorte, 2016). The broader factors impacting planned behavior have not been studied and can limit the ability to predict behavior.

Recommendations

There were numerous items discovered during my research related to specific management tactics that could be employed to increase virtual employee engagement. The study resulted in the participants identifying Autonomy and Alignment as the primary items influencing their levels of engagement. These broader categories were made up of communication, the manager caring for the employee and their work, providing flexibility, ensuring the employees were offered development opportunities and clear goals and outcomes. From a practical perspective employing these tactics to virtual employees will result in the manifestation of the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1, that is greater engagement and increased engagement of customers and organizational success. Managers should understand and give thoughtful attention to whether the applied tactics are intrinsically or extrinsically aligned since intrinsic tactics yield greater results. By applying the constructs of the TPB, managers can also better predict outcomes, if they thoroughly understand the limits of this theory. Despite the advancements of TPB in broader settings, it has been studied in very

siloed, less integrated settings, creating an opportunity for additional research (Lamorte, 2016).

There is also an opportunity to extend this body of research to a broader sample, i.e., outside of the professional services virtual employment arena. According to Giancola (2014) there is also an opportunity for further research into the premium placed on intrinsic factors. This recommendation is further supported by the gaps in research discovered through the SHRM 2008 – 2012 surveys. According to these survey, there is considerable opportunities to better understand the level of importance employees place on engagement influencing factors or whether these factors can be substituted by other factors that have yet to be studied (Giancola, 2014). For instance, although according to Giancola (2014) the importance of intrinsic factors for employees outweigh extrinsic by 37%, there is an opportunity to research to what extent extrinsic items such as better healthcare coverage, more robust skill-shortage development, the political climate, and media (social or general) have on workplace engagement.

Conclusion

My research clearly illustrated how the experiential phenomena of being supervised virtually is different from working in a traditional brick-and-mortar setting, and how the associated management tactics influenced engagement, behavioral and productivity outcomes. The outcomes of my study reinforced the conceptual model outlined in Figure 1, by noting how specific management tactics influence engagement, better allow for predicting behavior, and illustrate how the defined tactics are aligned

with an intrinsic or extrinsic paradigm. Managers can positively influence the state of engagement, behavior, productivity, and related outcomes of virtual employees by utilizing the management tactics of autonomy, alignment, care for work, and development. Further, utilizing these tactics will positively impact the cognitive framework and effect of virtual employees, creating a healthier and happier environment in which to work. Employing positive management tactics create positive emotions and effects resulting in increased or replenished inventories of physical, mental, social, and psychological resources, as well as, an increased state of self-development, confidence, success on new tasks and positive attribution, intent, and behavior (Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman & Harms, 2012).

My outcomes produced information that defined and illustrated tactics that allows managers the opportunity to positively influence engagement and productivity, as well as better predict performance. When an employee's psychology, health and behaviors are positively engaged, they stay longer, work more efficiently and effectively, and produce better customer experiences (Heneman & Milanowski, 2011; Luthans, 2012; Tims et al., 2013; Wright & McMahan, 2011; Luthans, et al, 2014). By helping managers understand the nuances of management tactics for virtual versus office-based employees and the intrinsic nature thereof, better results are produced for individuals, organizations, and society. By utilizing the tactics defined in my study, managers will also have a better chance of predicting behavior and anticipating outcomes.

As outlined in Ajzen's theory of planned behavior, an individual's behavior is reflective of conscious decisions based a consideration of controllable, available choices

(Leroy, Manigat, Meuleman & Collewaert, 2015). These choices, in part, are based on an employee's experiential expectation of rewards that are intrinsically satisfying. As noted by Vroom (1994) an individual's behavior is determined by their evaluation of the overall desire for and the likelihood of consequences for their behavior (Shin & Kim, 2014). As framed in Figure 1, when managers utilized intrinsically-based tactics and creative positive experiences, the virtual employee is more likely to behave in a predictive manner. The outcomes of my research illustrate how well-defined and directed management tactics helps close the gap in research related to what employees expect and what managers are doing with respect to intrinsic rewards. Although research on intrinsic motivation and related management tactics receives sporadic and low-key coverage, the importance of utilizing intrinsic tactics creates a more satisfying work environment and a competitive advantage in recruiting, retaining, and rewarding employees (Giancolo, 2014).

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Appendix A: Virtual Employee Research Participant Interview Guide

Demographic Data

PQ1. What is your job title?

PQ2. What is your age?

PQ3. What is your profession?

PQ4. How long have you been in your profession?

PQ5. How long have you worked virtually?

PQ6. What is the highest level of education completed?

Experiential and Opinion Data

1. What does your supervisor do to ensure you are productive?
2. What does your supervisor do to ensure you are happy?
3. What does your supervisor do to show they care for you personally?
4. What does your supervisor do to show they care about your work?
5. How would you prioritize the items in order of importance?
6. What are your behaviors when you are productive and happy?
7. In your opinion, what does it mean to be engaged?
8. What does your supervisor do to manage your work deliverables as a virtual employee?
9. What does your supervisor do to keep you connected to the organization?

10. To what extent do socialization, connectivity, development, or communication activities have on your engagement and productivity?
11. What do you experience that negatively influences your engagement and productivity?
12. What has been the difference in how you are managed as a virtual employee compared to when you worked in a traditional setting?
13. What does your supervisor do to ensure you fully understand your role, its importance, and the expected deliverables for which you are responsible?
14. As a virtual employee manager, how are those tactics different from managing office-based employees?
15. What are your overall feelings about working virtually?
16. What do you dislike about working virtually?

I sincerely thank you for participating in this study. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the published results once approved for publication and sufficient for matriculation, feel free to send me an email requesting such – milton.perkins@waldenu.edu. Once approved, published and matriculation is complete, I will gladly send you a copy.

Appendix B: Research, Interview Question, and Theme Code Matrix

Research Question	Interview Question	Do Interview Questions Align with Code Theme
RQ-1: What management techniques influence engagement of virtual employees?	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 13	Autonomy, Recognition, Care for Work, Development, and Alignment
RQ-2: How do virtual employees experience, define and categorize management techniques and efforts utilized to supervise their work?	5, 8	Autonomy, Recognition, Care for Work, Development, and Alignment
RQ-3: What are the differences between effective management	12	Autonomy, Recognition, Care for Work, Development, and Alignment

techniques in a traditional versus virtual work setting?		
RQ-4: What are the practical activities managers can execute to influence virtual employee engagement?	1, 8, 9, 11	Autonomy, Recognition, Care for Work, Development, and Alignment
RQ-5: Are activities influencing virtual employee engagement more intrinsic or extrinsically categorized?	2, 3, 4, 10, 11	Autonomy, Recognition, Care for Work, Development, and Alignment
RQ-6: To what extent can behavior be predicted based on the use of defined and effective management techniques utilized in a virtual setting?	6	Autonomy, Recognition, Care for Work, Development, and Alignment