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# Leadership Strategies to Improve Employee Performance in the Insurance Industry

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Momodou Sonko

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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2018

Abstract

Leadership Strategies to Improve Employee Performance in the Insurance Industry

by

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MBA, American Intercontinental University, 2002

BIT, American Intercontinental University, 2000

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

May 2018

## Abstract

Lack of performance improvement strategies contributes to poor employee performance and increases the potential for business failure. Some insurance business leaders lack strategies to improve employee performance. The purpose of this case study was to explore strategies that successful insurance business leaders use to improve employee performance. The classical management and transformational leadership theories served as the conceptual frameworks for this study. Using a semistructured interview technique, 9 purposefully-selected insurance senior managers in Atlanta, Georgia were interviewed on how they successfully improved employee performance. Through open coding and thematic analysis, 4 themes emerged: goal setting and performance review; effective communication; training, coaching, and counseling; and good working environment and teamwork. Sixty-seven percent of participants cited effective communication, and 56% of respondents cited training, coaching, and counseling as well as a pleasant working environment and teamwork as strategies to improve the performance of employees. Findings for the 4 themes revealed that goal setting and performance review had positive effects on employee performance. Study findings show that a good working environment and teamwork have a positive effect on employee engagement. The findings of this study may contribute to positive social change by providing local insurance business leaders with additional strategies for improving employee performance. With improved employee performance, business leaders could generate extra revenue that they could use to advance community welfare.

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## Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, my mother and father. Mom and Dad, it is impossible to thank you enough for everything both of you have done for me, from loving me unconditionally to raising me in a stable household where you instilled traditional values and taught me how to work hard to achieve my goals, celebrate, and embrace life.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Business leaders who emphasize strategies for improving employee performance are more likely to succeed than their colleagues without leadership strategies (Bahn & Weatherill, 2013). Maximizing performance improvement strategies can help businesses achieve high employee performance and productivity (Parris & Peachey, 2013; Wile, 2014). The focus of this qualitative, exploratory, single-case study was to explore the strategies that corporate leaders use to improve employee performance in the insurance industry in Atlanta, Georgia.

### **Background of the Problem**

Employees are the most important resources for a business (Grigoroudis, Tsitsirisi, & Zopounidis, 2013). Although many segments of the economy have a surplus of qualified people, the insurance industry has a shortage of employees because of competition for talent with the banking industry (Anitha, 2014). Without any sound employee performance improvement strategies, insurance industry leaders may find it difficult to attract and retain high-performing employees (Carter, 2013). Business leaders in the insurance industry should develop strategies for improving employee performance.

Business leaders, especially in the insurance industry, need to consider employee management as a strategic approach to achieve organizational goals (Bajwa, Yousaf, & Rizwan, 2014). Employee recruitment and retention depend on a positive work environment where employers recognize and reward employees for good performance (Bakotic, 2014). Organizational leaders in the insurance industry should develop strategies to attract and retain talented employees.

### **Problem Statement**

Lack of performance-improvement strategies in any organization contributes to poor employee performance, reduced efficiency, and potential failure of the business (Balcioglu & Nihinlola, 2014). According to Ratiu and Suciu (2013), 50% of businesses fail because of an unengaged and unmotivated workforce. The general business problem was that business leaders lack strategies to improve employee performance. The specific business problem was that some insurance business leaders lack strategies to improve employee performance.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory single case study was to explore the strategies that insurance business leaders use to improve employee performance. The target population consisted of nine senior managers in the insurance industry in Atlanta, Georgia, who had been in management positions for at least 5 years. Implications for positive social change arising from the study could include providing area insurance industry leaders with an in-depth understanding of leadership strategies for employee engagement and performance improvement. By using these strategies, insurance business leaders could reduce the employee turnover rate, achieve higher productivity, increase revenue, and create employment opportunities for people in the local community.

### **Nature of the Study**

Researchers use the qualitative method to study participants in their current environment and to gain an in-depth understanding of a research problem (Dahl, Hays,

Kirk-Jenkins, & Wood, 2016; Houston & McGill, 2013; Yin, 2014). The qualitative method was ideal for this study because I sought to understand the problem of employee performance improvement. Researchers use the quantitative method to collect statistical data and test hypotheses (Alexander, 2014; Chong, Kwong, Thadani, Wong, & Wong, 2015). The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because I did not intend to test hypothesis. The mixed method involves analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, which was not ideal for this study.

The case study design is suitable when the researcher seeks to understand real-life events by asking open-ended questions (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Yin, 2015; Zohrabi, 2013). Researchers use qualitative exploratory single case study design to observe participants, interview participants, and collect data from participants (Morsea, Lowerya, & Steurya, 2014; Yin, 2014). The qualitative exploratory single case study design was appropriate for this study. Ethnographic studies involve studying a cultural group and require researchers to immerse themselves in the phenomenon (Alarape, 2013; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013; Uprichard, 2013). The objective of this research was not to study a cultural group but to explore leadership strategies. Therefore, ethnographic study was not appropriate for this study. Phenomenological design is ideal when researchers intend to explore the human experiences and perceptions of participants (Berbary, 2014; Bernard, 2013; Zilber, 2014). Because the goal of this study was not to explore participants' experiences and perceptions, but to explore leadership strategies, the phenomenological design was not appropriate.

### **Research Question**

The overarching research question for this study was the following: What leadership strategies do insurance business leaders use to improve employee performance?

### **Interview Questions**

Participants responded to the following questions:

1. What strategies do you use to improve performance of your employees?
2. How do you assess the effectiveness of the improvement strategies?
3. What obstacles have you encountered in the process of implementing employee performance improvement and motivation strategies for your company?
4. How did you overcome these obstacles?
5. What recommendations would you give regarding methods to improve performance of employees?
6. What other related information could you share?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The classical management theory (CMT) and the transformational leadership theory served as the conceptual frameworks for this study. Taylor (1911) developed CMT, and the main tenet of the theory is that workers need tools for maximizing their efficiency and output (Asaduzzama, Hossain, & Rahman, 2014; Ashar, Ghafour, Munir, & Hafeez, 2013; Bajwa, Yousaf, & Rizwan, 2014). Burns (1978) proposed transformational leadership theory, the main tenets of which are enhancing the

motivation, morale, and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms. Enhancement of motivation, morale, and performance involves (a) connecting followers' sense of identity and self to the mission and the collective identity of the organization, (b) being an inspirational role model for followers, (c) challenging followers to take greater ownership of their work, and (d) understanding followers' strengths and weaknesses (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leaders attempt to inspire trust, admiration, and respect in followers (Bass, 1990). Bass identified three ways in which leaders transform followers: (a) increasing their awareness of task importance and value, (b) getting followers to focus first on team or organizational goals rather than their own interests, and (c) activating followers' higher order needs. Classical management and transformational leadership theories are useful frameworks for understanding the importance of leaders involving employees in decision making (Bakotic, 2014; Wooderson, Cuskelly, & Meyer, 2016). Taylor's (1911) CMT and Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory were appropriate and relevant in this study for exploring employee performance improvement strategies.

### **Operational Definitions**

Operational definitions of some of the terms used in this study were as follows:

*Employee engagement*: The extent to which people employ physical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions of themselves during work-role performances (Taylor, 1911).

*Employee retention*: Activity an organization undertakes to reduce employee turnover (Johnston & Spinks, 2013).

*Job satisfaction:* A state of mind characterized by positive emotions and how an individual feels about his or her job; those things that the job provides that are important to the individual (Gurazada & Rao, 2013).

*Onboarding:* A comprehensive approach to joining an organization that ensures that each employee is immersed into the culture, quality, and operational systems of the organization (Carter, 2013).

*Transformational leadership:* A type of leadership style that can inspire positive changes in those who follow (Carter, 2013).

*Transactional leadership:* A style of leadership in which the leader promotes compliance in followers through rewards and punishments (Burns, 1978).

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

Concerns with truthful responding, access to participants, and survey instruments are restrictions that researchers face. Deficiencies include the availability of resources and the researcher's reasoning processes. Empowerment comes from recognizing shortcomings of choices taken and then adjusting in the best way possible (Yin, 2014). When conducting research, some researchers confuse limitations, delimitations, and assumptions (Carroll & Huxtable, 2014).

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are facts in a study that may not be verified (Carroll & Huxtable, 2014; Yin, 2014). The first assumption I made was that the participants would answer questions truthfully during their interviews. Qualitative researchers using interview methods explore the underlying reasons for issues by asking open-ended questions during



interviews (Yin, 2014). Another assumption I made was that respondents would share information ethically and without restraint.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are potential weaknesses in a study that a researcher must accept (Yin, 2014). In qualitative research, a researcher may not be able to generalize the research findings to a larger population (Andriopoulous & Slater, 2013). The first limitation was that I used a small sample size of nine participants. Another limitation was the short time frame of the study. I made the decision to limit the study to perspectives of senior management, which eliminated the insights of other categories of workers.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are those features in a study that a researcher can control to determine the study's parameters or size (Gill et al., 2016; Yin, 2013). Researcher-controlled delimitations may limit the possibility of drawing a general conclusion from the study's results (Alarape, 2013). The first delimitation was that individuals with less than 5 years of leadership experience in the insurance industry did not participate in this study. The insurance industry in Atlanta, Georgia was the focus of this study. I analyzed data from one organization in Atlanta, Georgia using a sample size of nine participants. My aim was to narrow the scope of this study to one major city vice multiple cities. I also conducted interviews using identical questions submitted to the participants. The region and participants of this study did not pose any credibility or dependability threats to the results.

## **Significance of the Study**

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The findings of this qualitative exploratory single case study may contribute to business practice by providing information on strategies to improve employee performance. Business leaders could gain from the results of this study to increase their body of knowledge on strategies for engaging and motivating employees for improved performance. The findings can help business managers to improve strategies and practices. Business leaders could use the findings of the study to identify factors that support employee engagement, improve performance, and increase revenue. The findings of the study may contribute to positive social change through improved leadership performance, which, in turn, should increase employee performance and boost profits and thus benefit the local economy. Corporate leaders who apply the study findings could increase employees' satisfaction and improve productivity, which could lead to social stability.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Company leaders may use extra revenue achieved by applying the findings of this study to contribute to positive social change by embracing corporate social responsibility. Business leaders could use such extra revenue, for instance, to grant scholarships, offer health insurance to employees and their families, contribute to entities such as the Red Cross, or contribute to research on and treatment of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and cancer-related diseases. More successful companies could also

help to drive business success and contribute to employment opportunities for the local population (Alarape, 2013).

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

The objective of this qualitative exploratory single case study was to explore the strategies that business leaders need to improve employee performance. A lack of strategies to improve employee performance remains a threat to businesses in many industries, but the majority of executives are still not developing ways to address this problem (Balcioglu & Nihinlola, 2014; Banihashemi, Hossini, Golizadeh, & Sankaran, 2017). Any business leader who does not have strategies to improve staff performance may experience low employee productivity (Berssaneti & Carvalho, 2015; Keeys & Huemann, 2017; Xu, Zhong, & Wang, 2013). For some companies, payment structure is the primary strategy for fostering improved employee performance.

In the economy, insurance companies face fierce competition regardless of size, scope, and market focus. In addition, company leaders experience challenges relating to employee performance, motivation, and retention while striving to remain profitable (Chinthala, 2014; De Silveira, de Lima, da Costa, & Deschamps, 2017; International Factors Group, 2014). Evidence from the literature review indicates that company leaders consider their employees as their most important assets and have recognized the need to engage them toward the accomplishment of company goals. Business leaders who do not have strategies geared toward employee satisfaction and performance will find it difficult to improve their organizations and achieve their goals (Berbary, 2014).

To confront competition, business leaders need to establish and maintain strategies geared toward employee performance improvement.

For this study, I reviewed scholarly articles, textbooks, and peer-reviewed articles relating to the impact of leadership strategies on employee performance. The literature review included documents relating to leadership skills, employee performance improvement strategies, and the causes and consequences of improved employee performance. The reference section contains 222 references, of which 89% came from peer-reviewed journals that were less than 5 years old. The sources also included five textbooks. In this study, the search for articles involved the use of the following data sources: dissertation electronic database, ProQuest EBSCOhost, and Business Premier. Key phrases and words for this research study included *leadership strategies*, *performance improvements*, *employee engagement*, *leadership types*, *characteristics of effective leaders*, *human resource management*, *effective leadership strategies*, and *work performance improvement*.

### **Leadership Theories**

Leadership theories have been the source of numerous studies (Holland & Weather, 2013; Thomas, 2016). In reality and practice, many researchers have attempted to define the qualities of authentic leaders that distinguish them from other leaders (Carter, 2013). Many philosophers, researchers, and professors have developed many leadership theories (Agrusa & Lema, 2012; Chinthala, 2014; Engelbrecht, Johnston, & Hooper, 2017; Weather, 2013). Taurigana and Afrifa (2013) categorized theories using

aspects that best define the leader. The primary leadership theories are transactional theories and transformational theories.

**Transformational leadership.** Transformational leadership is a type of leadership style that can inspire positive changes in those who follow (Carter, 2013). Transformational leaders are energetic, enthusiastic, and passionate. Involvement in the followers' achievement process and helping every member of the group to succeed are important to transformational leaders (Holland & Weather, 2013; Martens & Carvalho, 2017). Transformational leaders stimulate and inspire followers to achieve outcomes, help followers grow and develop into leaders, and recognize followers' accomplishments, rendering rewards where necessary (Engelbrecht, Johnston, & Hooper, 2017; Grigoroudis, Tsitsirisi, & Zopounidis, 2013). Transformational leaders create valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders (Thomas, 2016). Thomas (2016) contended that when leaders enact transformational leadership in its authentic form, they enhance the motivation, morale, and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms. These include (a) connecting the followers' sense of identity and self to the mission and the collective identity of the organization, (b) being a role model for followers who inspires them, (c) challenging followers to take ownership of their work, (d) and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of followers in order to align followers with tasks that optimize their performance.

Good visioning, impression management, and rhetorical skills are central to transformational leadership (Oppong, Chan, & Dansoh, 2017). Transformational leaders

employ rhetorical skills to evoke strong emotions in followers and motivate them to performance beyond expectations (Carter, 2013). Transformational leadership is a process in which an individual engages with others and creates a connection that results in increased motivation and morality in both followers and leaders (Garrison & Vaughan, 2013). Transformational leadership theory is a theory of charismatic leadership that assumes that leaders with certain qualities, such as confidence, extroversion, and clearly stated values, are best able to motivate followers (Agrusa & Lema, 2012; De Silveira, de Lima, da Costa, & Deschamps, 2017; Holland & Weather, 2013). Under transformational leadership, rules and regulations are flexible and guide group norms, which provide a sense of belonging for followers as they easily identify with the leadership and its purpose (Carter, 2013). The essence of transformational leadership theory is that leaders transform followers through their inspirational nature and charismatic personalities.

Authentic transformational leadership focuses on moral foundations based on four components: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. Carter (2013) highlighted three moral aspects of transformational leadership: (a) the moral character of the leader; (b) the ethical values embedded in the leader's vision, articulation, and program, which followers may embrace or reject; and (c) the morality of the processes of social ethical choice and action that leaders and followers engage in and collectively pursue.

**Transactional leadership.** The transactional leadership style, as opposed to transformational leadership style, starts with the idea that team members agree to obey

their leader when they accept a job (Khedhaouria, Montani, & Thurik, 2017; Yukl, 2012). The transaction usually involves the organization paying team members in return for their effort and compliance on a short-term task (Kasekende, Byarugaba, & Nakate, 2013; Storch, Makaroff, Pauly, & Newton, 2013). A transactional leader punishes team members if their work does not meet an appropriate standard (Chan & Dar, 2014). In transactional leadership, also known as *managerial leadership*, leaders focus on the role of supervision, organization, and group performance (Tauringana & Afrifa, 2013). Transactional leaders promote compliance in followers through both rewards and punishments (Odunayo, 2015).

For transactional approaches to be effective and have motivational value, the leader must adequately align rewards or punishments for followers for performing assigned tasks (Hassanzadeh, Silong, Asmuni, & Wahat, 2015). To enhance efficiency, transactional leaders develop a mutually reinforcing environment in which individual and organizational goals are in sync (Khan, 2013; Martens & Carvalho, 2017). The downside of the transactional leadership style is its chilling and amoral aspects, which can lead to high staff turnover (Thomas, 2016). Transactional leaders promote limited knowledge-based or creative work, which may lead to team members doing little to improve their job satisfaction (Fasola, Adeyemi, & Olowe, 2013). Transformational leadership is often the best leadership style to use (Kasekende et al., 2013). Most business leaders prefer the transformational leadership style to the transactional leadership style.

## **Management Theories**

Management theories include classical, behavioral, and situational management theories (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014). Knowledge of management theories is a basic requirement for managers to meet the challenges of any organization. No organization can achieve its objectives without proper management (Dekas, Bauer, Welle, Kurkoski, & Sullivan, 2013; Odunayo, 2015). Management is the foundation of any organization (Garrison & Vaughan, 2013). Knowledge of management theories is essential for successful management and leadership (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013). Business leaders have to face many challenges in the modern era (Dekas et al., 2013; Khedhaouria et al., 2017). Business leaders should have basic knowledge of management and theories of management to meet organizational challenges relating to competition, efficient and economical uses of sources, and maximum output (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013). Classical management theories are very important because they are the basis for all other theories of management (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014; Keeys & Huemann, 2017). Corporate leaders' competency in management and leadership theories is critical to business sustainability.

**Classical management theories.** Researchers developed classical management theories to predict and control behavior in organizations (Khan, 2013; Sani, 2013; Thomas, 2016). Frederick Winslow Taylor developed the scientific management theory in 1911. According to Taylor, scientific management is the solution to the labor problem, in that it favors training of workers to perform better and division of work between management and workers, with management performing science and instruction and



workers performing labor. Taylor introduced four principles of scientific management theory to increase efficiency, which are applicable to all types of human activities. The four principles are as follows: (a) study the ways in which jobs are performed now and determine new ways to do them, (b) codify the new methods into rules, (c) select workers whose skills match the rules, and (d) establish fair levels of performance and pay incentives for higher performance.

Management theorist Henry Mintzberg (1990) was highly critical of Taylor's methods. An obsession with efficiency allows measurable benefits to overshadow less quantifiable social benefits, which negatively affects social values (Mintzberg, 1990). James W. Rinehart (2006) argued that Taylor's methods of transferring control over production from workers to management and the division of labor into simple tasks intensified the alienation of workers that had begun with the factory system of production around 1870-1890.

### **Improving Organizational Performance**

In 1978, Thomas F. Gilbert developed the behavior engineering model. Gilbert is known as the father of performance technology; as an engineer, he applied his understanding of the process of technological improvement to human beings. Gilbert opined that absence of performance support, not a person's lack of knowledge or skill, was the greatest barrier to exemplary or worthy performance, and he advised business leaders to focus on variables in the work environment before addressing an individual's variables.

Gilbert (1978) developed the behavior and environment registers of the behavior engineering model within the basic framework of the Skinnerian operant behavioral model. Gilbert described the paradigm as the ABC theory: Antecedents lead to behaviors, which, in turn, lead to consequences. According to Gilbert, behaviors can generate stimuli, which, in turn, can lead to reinforcing or aversive consequences. The reward or punishment value of the consequences increases or decreases the probability of future repetition of the behavior. Gilbert identified six variables necessary to improve human performance: information, resources, incentives, knowledge, capacity, and motives. Gilbert posited that absence of performance support at work, rather than an individual's lack of knowledge or skill, was the greatest barrier to exemplary performance. Business leaders should focus on variables in the work environment before addressing an individual's variables (Gilbert, 1978; Martens & Carvalho, 2017). The conditions in the work environment are critical to an individual's level of performance.

### **Importance of Leadership and Management Strategies**

The success of any business depends on effective leadership and management. As the insurance market evolves, business leaders need to be looking for highly qualified and high-performing employees (Ahmed, 2016; Khan, 2013; Winiecki, 2015). Scholars and professionals have realized that performance improvement strategies form a very important component of corporate strategy to set expectations for employee performance (Engelbrecht, Johnston, & Hooper, 2017; Khan, 2013; Kim, 2014; Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014). With the advancement of technology, business leaders require good leadership strategies to navigate changes within their industry (Hechanova & Cementina-

Olpoc, 2013; Kim, 2014). Notwithstanding the size of a business, an effective leader can guide the company towards success, profitability, and higher employee performance (Khan, 2013). Business leaders should understand strategies for improving employee performance.

Management may control and direct people; leadership requires engaging and coaching employees (Idowu, Capaldi, Matthias, Zu, & Schmidpeter, 2015; Thomas, 2016). Leadership requires that managers have a clear understanding of the goals of the company and know how the firm can achieve them (Carvalho & Rabechini, 2017; Tauringana & Afrifa, 2013). Good leaders need to seek the skills, knowledge, effort, and resources needed to accomplish corporate goals but need also to constantly be on the look for effective strategies geared toward employee engagement and performance improvements (Keeys & Huemann, 2017; Kim, 2014). Corporate leaders are responsible for improving employee performance.

Being in a leadership role does not necessarily make someone a leader; leaders should have unique qualities (Martens & Carvalho, 2017; Sani, 2013). In most situations, management controls and directs people, whereas leadership requires engaging and coaching employees (Jannesari, Ghorbani, & Haery, 2014; Odunayo, 2015). Leaders should have a clear understanding of the organization's future goals and knowledge of how the company can achieve them (Khan, 2013; Nicholas, 2016). Leaders need to develop plans that follow a relatable process and create a roadmap for their company for guidance (Rinehart, 2006). The leadership role is not autonomous because good leaders need to seek the skills, knowledge, effort, and resources needed to accomplish company

goals (Kovanic, Schuh, & Jonas, 2013; Sani, 2013). Business leaders should understand strategies for improving employee performance to ensure the sustainability of their companies.

Leadership cannot be an assumed role; it involves going through proper selection of primary positions in the company before one earns the position (Wang et al., 2013). Business leaders need to know how to choose the best employees for their company and orchestrate the mission and the process (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014). If a level of mutual respect exists between employees and leadership, followers will trust the leader's decisions and be willing and high-performing individuals (Chan & Dar, 2014). In contrast, followers' lack of trust in leadership could have far-reaching drawbacks, including low performance from employees (Khan, 2013). The job performance of employees who trust their leaders is better than the job performance of employees who do not trust their leaders.

Understanding how employees' unique traits contribute to the work environment and job descriptions is important for leaders seeking to coach and engage their employees (Chinthala, 2014). There is a need for employees to fit within the framework of cooperation between leadership and team members (Sani, 2013). As a maestro, the leader needs to learn and understand individual employees' unique skills and work habits to encourage performance and productivity, and to foster growth and improvement among employees (Chinthala, 2014). Business leaders should consider the differences among employees' personalities in developing strategies for improving employee performance.

Leaders should create benchmarks for employee performance, instilling in employees satisfaction and company loyalty so that employees perform at their best (Wang et al., 2013). Setting objectives helps employees constantly provide feedback, which creates accountability for all employees and develops a strong and collaborative environment (Chinthala, 2014). Leaders should focus on total company value and strive to create an environment where all employees attempt to delight the customer or prospect (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014). When a positive employee experience has been established, customers experience unique and memorable contact with the organization (Gupta & Charu, 2013). Firms benefit from subsequent loyalty, long-term relationships with employees, and increased income and equity for the company (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013). Business leaders could improve employee performance through setting objectives.

Leaders should understand the importance of demonstrating honesty and integrity in communicating with any member of the team, especially to promote leadership role-model traits among employees, friends, neighbors, and community members (Aaltonen, 2013; Chan & Dar, 2014). Leaders must always be open and honest with their team members on all occasions (Khedhaouria, Montani, & Thurik, 2017; Sani, 2013). Employees continually watch the leader, making it important for leaders to develop strong standards that touch every facet of their lives (Chinthala, 2014). The direction, culture, reputation, work ethic, and professionalism of the company begin with the leader's behavior, while the leader's personal actions at work or at home instigate accomplishments of the business goals (Devadass, 2011; Engelbrecht, Johnston, &

Hooper, 2017;). Leaders should understand the importance of their actions in safeguarding the firms' reputation (Martens & Carvalho, 2017; Tauringana & Afrifa, 2013). Business leaders should be role models for employees to emulate.

Leaders should not perceive the role of leadership as a burden but a privilege (Chan & Dar, 2014). Although being a leader comes with an incredible amount of responsibilities, effective leaders understand that they set the pace for the rest of the company (Odunayo, 2015). To expect high employee performance, earnings, productivity, long work hours, and company loyalty, leaders must lead by good example (Khan, 2013). Leaders should be mindful of the work ethic they promote to their employees because followers often mirror the acts of the leader, which can impact the way they treat their work (Chinthala, 2014). Business leaders should lead by example to improve employee performance.

Leadership is more than sheer force (Chan & Dar, 2014). Leadership is influential and leaders must persuade people to act toward their goals (Khan, 2013). Spector (2013) discussed the 75 primary components of employee satisfaction and identified the most important is communicating in three areas. The three areas are: (a) understanding the business strategy, (b) helping employees understand how they can contribute toward company goals, and (c) sharing information about progress. Trust and confidence in leadership is important to ensure success of the company and employee satisfaction (Abdalla & Ahmed, 2013; Keeys & Huemann, 2017). Business leaders should communicate the organizational strategy to employees for improved performance.

Business leaders should understand the critical need to establish a well-defined and continuous form and channel of communication with employees because workers are the best advocates for the company (Holland & Weather, 2013). Communicating with employees can serve as a morale booster because individuals feel they are valuable to the company (Abdalla & Ahmed, 2013; Silvius, Kampinga, Paniagua, & Mooi, 2017). Existence of communication between the company leaders and employees could engender employee satisfaction and loyalty (Khan, 2013). Employee performance improvement has become a subject of interest to scholars and psychologists, who are studying strategies for encouraging employees to perform and produce maximum output (Abdalla & Ahmed, 2013). Employee engagement and performance are a function of ability, and one task facing a manager is the formulation of strategies to engage employees for optimal performance (Odunayo, 2015). The principal reason why managers engage employees is to entreat employee action to meet organizational goals (Karumuri & Singareddi, 2014). Business leaders should develop a strategy for engaging employees for optimal performance.

Creating a positive communication with labor employees is important because they are the organization's best ambassadors or loudest critics (Silvius, Kampinga, Paniagua, & Mooi, 2017). The ability to achieve positive communication depends on how fast the sender receives relevant information and the context the receiver perceives the info (Wang et al. 2014). Information consistency and coherence influence success of the industry and if leaders fail to communicate information explicitly, the reputation of management and company may fall (Khan, 2013; Martens & Carvalho, 2017). Effective

communication between leaders and employees is important for improving business performance.

Communication primarily uplifts the morale of employees (Sani, 2013).

Communication makes employees feel they are part of the organization and this feeling of belonging could generate employee satisfaction and loyalty to the company (Sani, 2013). Employers are becoming aware that employee loyalty, commitment, and concern for quality depend on effective communication (Spector, 2013). Employee engagement has become a history of psychological strategies business leaders use to encourage workers to produce maximum output (Khan, 2013; Nicholas, 2016). Business leaders should engage employees to improve performance.

Business managers and scholars have studied the importance of psychological conditions in optimizing employee performance (Chinthala, 2014; Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014). The basis of high employee performance and productivity depends on employee behavior and tendencies and business leaders who inspire positive attitude on workers enhance employee performance (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014; Silvius, Kampinga, Paniagua, & Mooi, 2017). Employee performance is frequently described as a joint function of ability and engagement, and one task is to engage employees to perform to the best of their ability (Johnston & Spinks, 2013). Employee engagement serves as the driving force of employee behavior to fulfil needs or achieve goals of the company (Haar & White, 2013). Business leaders who engage their employees promote good work environment for improved performance.



Employee engagement is the reason employees perform to a high standard. Leader engaging an employee could make the person to perform better and more efficiently (Wang et al., 2014). Employee engagement is not a fixed trait but refers to a dynamic internal state resulting from the influence of personal and situational factors (Haar & White, 2013). Employee engagement affects behavior rather than performance. Strategies designed to enhance job performance by increasing employee engagement and motivation may not be successful without strong link between job performance and employee's efforts (Gupta & Charu, 2013). Employee engagement refers to the degree an individual wants and chooses to engage in certain specified behaviors (Abdalla & Ahmed, 2013). Business leaders engage employees for improved performance.

Employee performance depends on a number of factors such as employee engagement, employee satisfaction, compensation, training and development, and job security (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014; Marnewick, 2017). Companies' leaders need to have effective strategies for performance improvement because the primary role of managers in work places is to increase and maintain effective job management among employees in organizations (Taurigana & Afrifa, 2013). Without functioning strategies, employees will not be receptive to the goals and objectives they must achieve (Abdalla & Ahmed, 2013; Kivila, Martinsuo, & Vuorinen, 2017). Employee performance improvement is necessary in all organizations for the company to be successful (Chan & Dar, 2014). Performance improvement measures serve as an encouragement for employees to look for improved practices to do work (Burns & Christie, 2013; Nicholas, 2016). Encouraging and engaging employees for optimum performance is challenging

for employers, and business leaders who embrace performance improvement strategies realize significant rewards (Haar & White, 2013; Oponng, Chan, & Dansoh, 2017).

Business leaders should develop strategies for improving employee performance.

Researchers revealed that job satisfaction dictates the performance of employees. Scholars and professionals have different definitions of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is an emotional response (Chinthala, 2014; Sani, 2013; Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014). Job satisfaction is the feelings an employee has about his or her job or job experiences in relation to experiences, expectations, or available alternatives (Sani, 2013). Burns and Christie (2013) discussed three important reasons to continue research on job satisfaction, which are economic and humanitarian concerns, and contribution to theoretical literature. Explaining the economic concerns, some scholars have indicated explicitly the importance of job satisfaction by suggesting that job dissatisfaction may lead to unnecessarily high costs (Chan & Dar, 2014; Gupta & Charu, 2013, Ukaegbu, 2014). Employees who are satisfied with their jobs tend to improve business performance.

### **Application of Leadership and Management Strategies Toward Employee**

#### **Performance Improvement**

Businesses leaders continued to recognize employees as key players towards the achievement of company goals (Kivila, Martinsuo, & Vuorinen, 2017; Spector, 2013). Employers see employees as the most critical component of any business establishment because without workers companies will not be able to produce the goods and services that define the organization (Awases, Bezuidenhout, & Roos, 2013; Spector, 2013).

Without employees, companies will not be able to grow and provide goods and services for consumers (Dysvik & Mack, 2012). According to Spector (2013), nurturing and maintaining employees is not only essential for any establishment but are also key ingredients for growth and profitability.

In this global economy, most employers have come to realize that relying only on monetary compensation, as a way of motivating, hiring and retaining good workers will not suffice for long (Chan & Dar, 2014; Ukaegbu, 2014). Researchers have demonstrated that monetary compensation is top on the list of strategies for engaging employees, but advised business leaders to avoid utilizing monetary compensation as the sole strategy to continue engaging employees (Agrusa & Lema, 2012; Chinthala, 2014; Weather, 2013). Wang et al. (2014) posited that usage of non-monetary methods of engaging employees such as training and development opportunities could promote happy and committed workforce with resultant increase in productivity and profitability to the business.

Another strategy business leaders use to promote employee performance improvement is opening opportunities to perform meaningful work (Carmeli, Gelgard, & Reiter-Palmon, 2013; Madu, 2014). Some of ways leaders could encourage employees to perform meaningful work include (a) interactions between employees and the management team, (b) creating job training, (c) promotions based on merit, (d) recognition programs, and (e) tuition reimbursements (Madu, 2014). The adages of retaining employees by means of financial incentives are the thing of the past (Chan & Dar, 2014). Adopting fringe benefits and financial incentives could help management to engage and retain hard working employees in this global and mobile workforce (Chan &

Dar, 2014). Business leaders should develop strategies to retain talented employee for improved performance.

Most company executives have a misconception that employees care only about promotion and salary increase, but fail to realize that employees desire recognition, appealing assignments, and increased feedback to stay engaged (Madu, 2014). Not engaging employees' is a key concern to business leaders and this could result to low morale within the workforce, and potentially deter the quality of work and retention of good employees. Many managers who believed in keeping and continuing to retain employees by means of salary increase or financial incentives do not understand that monetary compensation is an insufficient strategy for retaining employees (Kivila, Martinsuo, & Vuorinen, 2017; Sani, 2013). Employees are the lifeblood of their companies because they offer or give products and services that define the businesses (Burns & Christie, 2013). Employees are the most important asset of any business (Chiarini, 2016; Madu, 2014). Management theorist explained why company leaders engage and motivate employees. Many business leaders have learned to rely on monetary benefits as the sole strategy to engage and motivate (Sani, 2013). Monetary benefits alone would not be enough to engage and motivate employees.

Scholars have shown that employee engagement is a challenge for companies (Madu, 2014; Opong, Chan, & Dansoh, 2017; Spector, 2013). Due to changes in the market environment, globalization, and technology; employee performance has become a challenge to business leaders (Chan & Dar, 2014). As a result, business leaders should be able to understand what stimulate employees within the context of the roles they perform.

Regardless of what theories to consider, interesting work and employee compensation are essential and significant links to higher engagement and motivation (Spector, 2013).

Business leaders should emphasis on promotions, job enrichment, monetary, and non-monetary compensation (Khedhaouria, Montani, & Thurik, 2017; Wang et al., 2013).

Wang advised company leaders to consider the following areas: good wages, job security, interesting work environment, good working conditions, tactful discipline, and full appreciation of work done by employees.

Company leaders should pay attention to the employees and consistently explore ways and means of keeping the workforce motivated (Haar & White, 2013). Although companies over the years have incorporated human resource development in their corporate culture, company leaders are still exploring new ideas on the subject (Gupta & Charu, 2013). Research studies have shown that human resource development is necessary to all businesses to survive, maintain growth orientation, and remain competitive (Madu, 2014; Spector, 2013).

Human resource development is the process of increasing the knowledge, skills, and the capacities of the workforce (Madu, 2014). The society benefits from human resource development. Employees typically will stay engaged knowing that training is available for their personal and collective advancements (Guo et al., 2013). Making available necessary tools and skills training is an important instrument toward employee performance in a business entity (Spector, 2013; Van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017). With engaged employees, a company will not only experience a high rate of retention but also realize increased performance with resulting increase in productivity (Woźniak &

Łubieńska, 2013). Spector (2013) opined that engaging employees has a direct relationship with behaviour and job training will not result in increased performance if employees are not happy and engaged at work.

A weak link exists between job satisfaction and job performance. Gupta and Charu (2013) showed that significant relationship exists between job satisfaction and firm performance. Loyal employees improve the financial performance of the company (Haar & White, 2013). Madu (2014) studied internal customer service to show how company leaders treat employees in the company and how they treat each other while at work. Retention increases in a company when company leaders treat their employees well and are less likely to leave the company. Companies with low employee turnover rate experience larger profits (Khedhaouria, Montani, & Thurik, 2017). Employee satisfaction would have a positive impact on company performance and company performance would have an impact on financial performance (Khan, 2014; Marnewick, 2017). Employee productivity is the most important component in measuring a company's efficiency (Sani, 2013). If employee's productivity were high, the company would have low production costs (Sani, 2013; Nicholas, 2016).

### **Factors Affecting Leadership Employee Performance Strategies**

Most employees do not want to work without pay and equally expects a reasonable pay that is measurable to their work (Madu, 2014). Financial numeration, as payment is the most desirable equal to no other incentive method or motivational technique with respect to influencing employees (Chinthala, 2014). To achieve greater productivity in businesses, employers must be ready and willing to pay employees fairly

and in a timely manner (Madu, 2014). Researchers have shown that rewarding employees in a timely manner results in increase satisfaction and influence performance (Spector, 2013). Business leaders should understand that rewarding employees is a tool that when applied appropriately could contribute to the company's effectiveness by influencing individual or group behavior (Tauringana & Afrifa, 2013). Business leaders use reward to improve employee performance.

Researchers have demonstrated that corporations use pay, promotion, bonuses, and other types of rewards to motivate and encourage increase performances of employees (Khedhaouria, Montani, & Thurik, 2017; Sakulkijkarn, 2012; Tauringana & Afrifa, 2013). In using salaries as a motivating tool, business leaders should consider structuring the pay system to include payment relating to performance, personal or special allowances, fringe benefits, and pensions (Spector, 2013). If businesses are to realize desired results, leaders should motivate employees to get the followership from the workforce (Oppong, Chan, & Dansoh, 2017; Tauringana & Afrifa, 2013). Corporate leaders who empower employees provide benefits to their businesses and bring about a sense of belonging on the part of the workers (Holland & Weather, 2013). Employee empowerment brings about the fulfillment of the desired goals that the management seeks to attain (Sakulkijkarn, 2012). Burns and Christie (2013) posited that empowering employees allows the workforce to concentrate on the work at hand, which results in the continued progress and ease of management.

Employees want reasonable compensation for the work they do while business leaders want personnel to feel they are getting their desire (Haar & White, 2013). Money

is the primary engagement instrument for companies (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014). Money is the key strategy business leaders' use for inspiring and engaging employees (Madu, 2014). Money is the most fundamental factor in engaging and motivating employees to attain greater productivity (Gurazada & Rao, 2013). Scholars have shown that rewarding employees cause satisfaction, which has a positive impact on employee performance (Burns & Christie, 2013; Camisón & Villar-López, 2014; Sani, 2013). Company leaders should adopt rewarding employees as a strategy that will contribute to employee performance improvement, company effectiveness, and profitability (Tauringana & Afrifa, 2013; Silvius, Kampinga, Paniagua, & Mooi, 2017). Many businesses use salaries, overtime pay, and promotions to encourage and engage employees to achieve a high level of performance (Sani, 2013). Frenking (2016) identified the primary duty of business leaders is to ensure that employees do work to meet the company expectations.

Holland and Weather (2013) described an engaged employee as one who is willing to do a job right while at the same time being happy to do the job. Once engaged, an individual performs to his or her best (Burns & Christie, 2013; Marnewick, 2017). Company leaders may not recognize performance improvement efforts in which a link does not exist between job performance and effort from employees (Tauringana & Afrifa, 2013). Employee engagement as the degree to which an individual wants and chooses to engage in certain specified behaviours (Adesola, Oyeniya, & Adeyemi, 2013). Some scholars posited that employee engagement is action oriented, directed by both internal and external forces (Adesola et al., 2013; Ratiu & Suci, 2013; Sakulkijkarn, 2012;



Silvius, Kampinga, Paniagua, & Mooi, 2017). Guo et al. (2013) noted that without employee engagement and motivation, the ability of a company to train employees to be knowledgeable about skills necessary to perform company tasks will prove difficult.

Business leaders should establish their company goals about what they want to achieve from the employees and follow up with a thorough planning and implementation (Chinthala, 2014). Business leaders and managers can only realize meaningful results from performance improvement strategies with engaged employees (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014). The reason for this school of thought is that employees are social beings, who need interactions from the management to fulfil those necessary social needs (Haar & White, 2013; Johnston & Spinks, 2013; Karumuri & Singareddi, 2014). Chinthala (2014) rationalized that management must continuously solicit employees' involvement and opinions because workers are not a factor of production to the business.

Engagement makes employees perform better and more efficiently (Gurazada & Rao, 2013). When considering performance improvement strategies, company leaders should first consider the aim of such strategy. Business leaders should be interacting and communicating with employees to keep them engaged (Cassell, 2014). Because employees are the most important asset a business has, their active engagement should be a priority for business leaders. Lack of employee engagement is one of the dangers facing businesses, undermining the efforts of business owners and leaders in areas of increase productivity (Follett, 1918). The development of a business depends on its workforce.

Lack of strategies toward employee performance improvements comes with far reaching disadvantages both to an employee and to the company (Holland & Weather, 2013). Some of the demerits of not establishing strategies for employee performance improvement include frequent absenteeism from work and low productivity (Khedhaouria, Montani, & Thurik, 2017). Productive businesses play a significant part toward national and global development strategies (Burns & Christie, 2013). Business leaders could not sustain growth without sound strategies geared toward employee performance improvements and motivation of the workforce (Burns & Christie, 2013). Holland and Weather (2013) opined that most businesses, large or small, want to invest in strategies and areas that support the availability of trained or trainable workforce with potential to employee performance improvement.

Productivity has some determinants, which are necessary and must be present before an increase in employee performance can take place (Hechanova, & Cementina-Olpoc, 2013; Holland & Weather, 2013). Job satisfaction is necessary for an increase in employee performance and productivity in a company (Marnewick, 2017; Sakulkijkarn, 2012). Engaged employees in a business could result in the increase in employee performance and quality products or services (Holland & Weather, 2013). Business leaders have adopted various strategies to engage employees (Corlett, Morris & Slack, 2015).

To be successful in attaining goals and objectives, company leaders need to pay attention to their employees and constantly be on the lookout for ways and means of keeping the workforce engaged (Ratiu & Suciu, 2013; Khedhaouria, Montani, & Thurik,

2017). Over the years, companies have incorporated employee engagement and development in their corporate strategy but scholars and researchers are studying new ways of employee engagement (Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013). Employee engagement and development is necessary to all businesses to survive and remain relevant and maintain their growth orientation (Marnewick, 2017; Ratiu & Suciu, 2013). Gupta and Charu (2013) opined that employee development is the process of increasing the knowledge, skills, and capacities of the employees.

With engaged employees, company leaders will not only experience high rates of performance and retention but will also realize increased productivity (Corlett, Morris, & Slack, 2015; Sakulkijkarn, 2012). The lack of employee engagement is one of the dangers facing businesses which undermine the efforts of business leaders in areas of increase performance and productivity (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014). Unengaged employees pose several disadvantages to the personnel and company than engaged employees (Chan & Dar, 2014; Silvius, Kampinga, Paniagua, & Mooi, 2017). Non-engagement of employees does not only result in frequent absenteeism from work but also hampers productivity and profitability (Awases, Bezuidenhout, & Roos, 2013; Guha, 2014). High performing employees play a significant part toward the growth of the company (According to Guha, 2014). Cassell (2014) posited that businesses cannot sustain growth without an engaged workforce.

### **Employee Accountability**

Management is interested in employee accountability (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014, Carter, 2013; Spector, 2013; Van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017). The purpose of

accountability in the workplace was to create an environment that allows people to be honest about what they will deliver to overcome obstacles to achieve high performance and accomplishment of work assignments (Oppong, Chan, & Dansoh, 2017; Ratiu & Suciu, 2013; Sakulkijkarn, 2012). Accountability represent a positive, empowering and productive space, encouraging people at all levels to believe in the cause, feel personally compelled to go out of their way to drive results, and behave as if they are the owners of the business (Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013; Spector, 2013; Silviu, Kampinga, Paniagua, & Mooi, 2017). Business leaders should implement some processes to be successful in adopting the strategy of accountability within the firm (Gurazada & Rao, 2013). Some of processes include: (a) management should engage employees early on in setting the goals, (b) promote a culture of courageous communication, (c) instill the language of accountability, (d) deal with failures in an empowering way, and (e) highlight and recognize display of accountability.

Any strategy is only as good as peoples' relationship with it (Spector, 2013). When business leaders create an environment of accountability, it compels people at all levels to establish a powerful relationship with the company (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014). Business leaders who excuse themselves from being accountable will always find it difficult to manage employees. A leader who is not accountable poses performance and financial challenges in the organization through distrust and forced compliance due to consequences. Spector (2013) posited that business leaders who hold themselves accountable will realize employee loyalty, team alignment, and enhanced trust from the employees.

## **Employee Engagement as a Driver of Increased Productivity and Profitability**

Productivity has some determinants, which are necessary and should be present before an increase in productivity can take place (Abdalla & Ahmed, 2013; Rowland & Thomas, 2014). Job satisfaction is an important factor for an increase in productivity because engaged and happy employees in a company result in optimum performance (Bertels, Koen, & Elsum, 2015; Gurazada & Rao, 2013). In recent years, business leaders have debated on what strategies affect employees the most (Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013; Khedhaouria, Montani, & Thurik, 2017; Zehir, Ertosun, Zehir, & Muceldili, 2011). Scholars have revealed the existence of some factors, such as increase salaries, promotions, training and development, and fringe benefits (Ratiu & Suciu, 2013; Rowland & Thomas, 2014; Sakulkijkarn, 2012). Management theorists posited that training enable employees to feel good about what they are doing and give them the sense of value and belonging to the company (Burns & Christie, 2013; Silvius, Kampinga, Paniagua, & Mooi, 2017). Cassell (2014) opined that employees are receptive to high expectations and want to know they are on a team with exceptional people.

A good method for defining and communicating individual expectations is through the performance review process (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014). With thorough periodic feedback, employees can gain a better idea of how they are doing and what training opportunities they should pursue to develop their skills and knowledge (Rowland & Thomas, 2014). Communication is important to modern employees (Cassell, 2014). Employees want to know how their work fits into the big picture of the companies' vision and mission. Employees appreciate monthly meetings that provide

updates on plans and new developments and address their questions and concerns (Oppong, Chan, & Dansoh, 2017; Ratiu & Suciu, 2013). Attracting and retaining employees is a marketing and management issue. Camisón and Villar-López (2014) advised business leaders to develop and promote a positive organization and remind employees that getting involved in positive culture is critical to achieving company goals, which will translate to high employee performance and productivity.

### **Strategies for Improving Employee Engagement**

Many business leaders have realized that use of money alone cannot achieve effective engagement and motivation of employees (Adesola, Oyeniya, & Adeyemi, 2013; Schneider, & Schroder, 2012; Van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017). Business leaders should consider using a variety of strategies to ensure employee performance improvement (Zecheru, 2014). Company leaders who use other strategies along with money enjoy an increase in employee performance (Burns & Christie, 2013; Van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017). Other strategies include job recognitions, paid time offs, job enlargement, and allowing employees to own their job, and take part in decision making are crucial in encouraging and engaging employees to improve performance (Burns & Christie, 2013). Arshadi and Shahbazi (2013) advised business leaders to recognize and offer fringe benefits to employees, and give a high priority to employee training in key performance areas of importance to the overall company performance, productivity, and profit. According to Corlett, Morris, and Slack (2015), business leaders should allow employees to make relevant decisions on their jobs.

Scholars have shown that employees who are happy tend to increase their overall performance (Burns & Christie, 2013; Ratiu & Suciu, 2013). Making sure that employees have a pleasant work environment is a motivating and engaging factor (Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013; Oppong, Chan, & Dansoh, 2017). Training employees in new skills and different job assignments helps to improve the personnel's understanding of the company (Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013). Improving the work conditions and capabilities of employees within the company increases an individual's good decision making (Zecheru, 2014). Many business leaders adopt employee empowerment as an engagement strategy technique to foster increase in employee performance and productivity (Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013; Van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017). Burns and Christie (2013) opined that engaged employees tend to take ownership of their job, which results in attaining business goals.

Business leaders should allow employees to choose incentive method (Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013). Employees perform better when company leaders allow and encourage them to make their own decision on incentive method (Holland & Weather, 2013). Company leaders realize a stimulating and encouraging workforce with increase employee performance when they encourage employees to make their own decision on incentive method (Odunayo, 2015; Rowland & Thomas, 2014; Spector, 2013). Because employees are different, business leaders should allow workers to choose incentive method. Corporate leaders boost the morale booster of the employees by allowing personnel to choose between cash or kind incentive (Al-Shuaibi, Subramanian, & Shamsudin, 2014; Wang et al., 2014). Business leaders who allow employees to set their

own work hours and schedules within company parameters do not only encourage employees but engender ownership of responsibility (Corlett, Morris, & Slack, 2015). Recognizing and enabling employees gives them a sense of belonging and ownership in the company (Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013). Compensating employees through ownership of company stock could translate to better performance because employees perceive themselves as part owners of the firm (Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013). The feeling of ownership serves as a morale booster to the employees.

Because of technological advancement and globalization, employees have become more diverse, hence, business leaders should include in their corporate strategy ways to attract employees with different values and experiences (Arokiasamy, 2013; Silvius, Kampinga, Paniagua, & Mooi, 2017). The benefits of a diverse work force are immediate and cost effective than securing replacements. Chan and Dar (2014) posited that business leaders who enjoy diversity in their companies realize high employee performance, innovation, and better customer satisfaction and business performance.

The performance of employees has a great impact on the business bottom line (Beck, Demirgüc-Kunt, & Singer, 2013; Wang et al., 2014). Scholars have proffered many recommendations on performance improvement strategies (Beck et al., 2013; Rowland & Thomas, 2014; Wang et al., 2014). Some of the strategies fail to address the impact of employees on an organization's performance (Corlett et al., 2015; Ratiu & Suciu, 2013). Researchers and business leaders have common interest in satisfying employees but recommended the need to further studies on job performance and the



factors that influence job performance (Beck et al., 2013; Rowland & Thomas, 2014; Wang et al., 2014). Employee performance is critical to business sustainability.

Employee behaviors on the job could have a great effect on the profitability of the business (United Nations Development Program, 2014). Companies with low employee engagement have a high turnover rate and minimal employee performance while companies with high employee engagement experience high employee performance and higher profits (Thomas & Rowland, 2014). Engaged employees work hard for an organization and perform their jobs well, which result in the company producing more goods or services (Al-sharafi & Rajiani, 2013; Guo, Porschitz & Alves, 2013). Business leaders should engage employees to improve business performance. An employee who has undertaken necessary training performs tasks more effectively and efficiently than an employee who has not (Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013). By attending training, employees may build self-confidence because of improved understanding of the business and the responsibilities of their jobs to achieve organizational goals (Rowland & Thomas, 2014). With enhanced self-confidence, employees could strive to improve performance and think of new ideas that help them excel (Anvari, JianFu, & Chermahini, 2014). Employees who are competent and familiar with changing industry standards help the company hold a position as a leader and strong competitor within the industry (Thomas & Roland, 2014). Some of the benefits to companies with engaged employees include (a) enhanced customer and employee satisfaction, (b) reduced turnover rate, (c) increased revenues, (d) lowered costs, and (e) improved collaboration across the organization

(Thomas & Roland 2014; Wasiuzzaman, 2015). Trained employees develop improved awareness of safety practices and proper procedures for basic tasks.

Employee performance has been a key area for business leaders, and has remained a subject of interest to scholars and researchers for over a century (Arokiasamy, 2013; Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013; Nicholas, 2016). Engaging and motivating employees to perform better and more efficiently is a major challenge for business leaders (Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013). Researchers have identified the causes of low employee performance and productivity but have not determined the solution (Al-Salemi, 2013; Alarape, 2013; Fang & Xiong, 2014). Business leaders cannot ignore the consequences of employee performance and productivity (Alias, Noor, & Hassan, 2014). According to Alarape (2013), a major hindrance to a meaningful performance strategy is the inability of business leaders to realize and address unengaged employees within the company.

Today's high-performing employees have other expectations in addition to compensation packages and benefits (Agyapong & Boamah, 2013). Employees might move to another job for better compensation, but they also seek for career growth and successful companies with friendly environment that support employee participation in decision-making and teamwork (AlBattat & Som, 2013; Alias, Noor, & Hassan, 2014). Provision of rewards such as breakfast foods or fruit in the kitchen or free soft drinks, not just coffee and tea could contribute immensely to employee engagement (Al-Nsour, 2012). Bakotic (2014) posited that company' performance and productivity increase with effective and efficient engagement of employees.

The trend in the United States involving some company leaders who face the challenge of finding people to fill job openings is on the rise (Van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017; Chitra & Badrinath, 2014). An important trend is business leaders experience difficulty in recruiting and retaining skilled workers. In the past, company leaders depend on wages and benefits to gain the job loyalty from employees, but recent findings indicate that employees accept new job offers within weeks in current employment (Al-Salemi, 2013). Business leaders must rethink their strategies to effectively engage and motivate employees to retain committed employees, who the company can trust to perform better (Khedhaouria, Montani, & Thurik, 2017; Thomas & Rowland, 2014). Insurance company leaders and the insurance industry will benefit from adopting strategies for improving employee performance (Alias et al., 2014).

Employee performance is critical to the performance improvement strategy of the company (Kasekende, Byarugaba, & Nakate, 2013; Khan, 2013, 2014). To justify reward performance and engage employees, business leaders should establish a process for measuring employee performance (Baños-Caballero, García-Teruel, & Martínez-Solano, 2014). Business leaders need high performing employees to meet company goals and remain productive. Corporate leaders should hire employees who are trainable and willing to work (Spector, 2013). Business leaders who maintain high performing employees tend to shift focus on supplementing the employees' skills and competencies through additional training (Karyeija, 2012).

Employers should motivate employees to maintain high performance during their employment while at the same time monitor performance to determine personnel who are

meeting company required performance standard (Alarape, 2013; Nicholas, 2016). The most valuable resource available to an employer is the employee (Al-Salemi, 2013; Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012; Anvari et al., 2014). Engaged employees work efficiently, producing better products or services, and constantly meet the company standards while unengaged employees waste time and work less efficiently (Goodall & Pogrebna, 2015). According to Abii, Ogula, and Rose (2013), unengaged employees take a longer time to accomplish their job assignment.

Business leaders who engage and motivate employees will realize business growth, profitability, and efficient performance (Alarape, 2013; Warrick, 2011). Engaged and motivated employees work hard to deliver services or products of superior quality (Rowland & Thomas, 2014). Engaged employees take ownership and pride in their work, which result in good reputation to the business (Guha, 2014). In contrast, unengaged employees put in a minimum effort, which result in poor customer service and low-quality products (Holm & Severinsson, 2013). With improved productivity and high quality of service, businesses could gain increase revenue (Abii et al., 2013; Agrusa & Lema, 2012; Oppong, Chan, & Dansoh, 2017). Business leaders can use the increased revenue to expand the business, increase salaries and wages of employees, contribute to retirement savings for employees, and make more contributions to its social obligations.

Employee engagement lowers employee turnover rate in organizations (Frenking, 2016; Fu, 2014; Goodall & Pogrebna, 2015; Rowland & Thomas, 2014). Because business leaders invest resources to hire new employee, researchers have identified the need for corporate leaders to adopt strategies that will engage, motivate employees, and

reduce turnover (Alarape, 2013; Flynn, Smither, & Walker, 2015; Forber-Pratt, 2015).

Rowland and Thomas (2014) opined that current employees have knowledge of the firm and processes and company expectations.

An effective onboarding can be beneficial to a company and its leaders (Al-Salemi, 2013, Gruman, Saks, & Zweig, 2006; Rowland & Thomas, 2014). Onboarding, also known as organizational socialization, refers to the mechanism through which new employees acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviors to become effective organizational members and insiders (Carter, 2013). The first day can be stressful and even scary for new employees, and the leader's job in the initial employee onboarding is to welcome them to the team and give them all the tools to acclimate to their new job quickly (Al-Salemi, 2013; Van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017). Socialization techniques create positive outcomes for new employees leading to higher job satisfaction, better job performance, greater organizational commitment, and reduction in occupational stress and intent to quit (Forber-Pratt, 2015). These outcomes are particularly important to an organization looking to retain a competitive advantage in an increasingly mobile workforce (Arokiasamy, 2013; Khedhaouria, Montani, & Thurik, 2017). Business leaders will save a lot of money and resources by retaining existing employees (Akpinar, Tas, & Okur, 2013). Engaged and motivated employees tend to be happier than unengaged and unmotivated employees (Rowland & Thomas, 2014). Fu (2014) advised business leaders to make efforts to keep employees engaged and motivated, because morale within a group of people is contagious. Frenking (2016) posited that engaged and motivated workforce will promote a friendlier work environment and higher productivity.

Employees are the company's most important asset (Thomas & Rowland, 2014). Business leaders should engage and motivate employees to enhance productivity (Rowland & Thomas, 2014). The productivity of a business depends on qualified workers. By encouraging employee engagement, corporate leaders increase performance, which ultimately translates to business productivity and profitability (Corlett, Morris, & Slack, 2015). Flynn et al. (2015) advised business leaders to support the professional development of their employees and help them feel part of the company culture. Employees leave their jobs because they are unengaged and unmotivated, which affects retention and productivity (Akpinar, Tas, & Okur, 2013; Van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017). The use of several strategies to engage and motivate staff could translate to high employee performance and business productivity (Gupta & Charu, 2013; Gurazada & Rao, 2013; Sani, 2013). Business leaders should not use only monetary compensation but a combination of strategies to engage employees (Andersen, 2016). Some of the strategies include employee empowerment, recognition programs, and paid time off.

### **Transition**

The objective of this qualitative single-case study was to explore the strategies insurance business leaders in Atlanta, Georgia use to improve employee performance. Section 1 contain background of the problem, problem and purpose statements, nature of the study, research and interview questions, conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations and delimitations, significance of the study, and review of the professional and academic literature.

In Section 2, I discuss role of the researcher, research method and design, participants, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, data organization and analysis, and reliability and validity. In Section 3, I present the study findings, discuss application to professional practice and implications for social change, provide recommendations for action and future research studies, and discuss reflections and conclusion.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 1 of this qualitative single-case study included the background of the problem, problem and purpose statements, nature of the study, research and interview questions, and conceptual framework of the study. Section 1 also included operational definitions; assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; the significance of the study; and a review of professional and academic literature. In Section 2, I discuss my role as the researcher; describe the study participants, research method and design, and population and sampling method; address considerations related to ethical research; present the data collection instrument and technique; describe data organization and analysis; and address reliability and validity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single case study was to explore the strategies that insurance business leaders use to improve employee performance. The target population consisted of nine senior managers in the insurance industry in Atlanta, Georgia, who had been in management positions for at least 5 years. Implications for positive social change arising from the study could include providing area insurance industry leaders with an in-depth understanding of leadership strategies for employee engagement and performance improvement. By using these strategies, insurance business leaders could reduce the employee turnover rate, achieve higher productivity, increase revenue, and create employment opportunities for people in the local community.



### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Goffnett, Lepisto, & Hayes, 2016; Goodrick, 2014; Guercini, 2014; Kyvik, 2013). Researchers actively engage participants to build rapport, promote empathy, and enhance responses to interview questions (Goffnett et al., 2016; Goodrick, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). I engaged the participants during the data collection process to aid rapport and encourage respondents to answer the interview questions.

I am a business owner in the industry and had significant knowledge about the research topic but did not have relationships with the participants. With a university degree in finance, I selected a focus for the study that aligned with my professional and academic interests. I attended a National Institutes of Health (NIH) online training course (see Appendix A). To understand my role as a researcher, I reviewed the Belmont Protocol Report and the NIH web-based training course. The goal of the Belmont Protocol Report is to ensure that researchers comply with ethical principles and guidelines for protecting human research participants (NIH, 2015). The three basic ethical principles of research are (a) respect of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. I adhered to the Belmont Report and the guidelines for conducting ethical research at Walden University.

Data collection involved individual face-to-face interviews using semistructured interview questions. Researchers audio tape and transcribe interviews to ensure accuracy in data collection and to help in data analysis (Yin, 2014). I audio recorded and transcribed the interviews. To ensure adherence to ethical standards and safeguard

participants, researchers may keep reflective journals (Coussement, Lessmann, & Verstraeten, 2017; Starke, 2013). I kept a reflective journal to mitigate researcher bias. Researchers use interviews to obtain information and gain insights from participants (Goffnett et al., 2016; Goodrick, 2014; Zhou & Miguel, 2013). I used semistructured interviews to collect data from participants.

### **Participants**

Researchers use purposive nonprobability sampling to select research participants (Park & Park, 2016; Roulston, 2016; Suen, Huang, & Lee, 2014). For the study, I used the purposive sampling technique to select nine participants. Before collecting data, a researcher selects participants (Jug & Vilar, 2015; Morrison et al., 2016). I selected the participants based on the following criteria: serving in roles such as agency owner, territory manager or director of operations, or vice president or president; and working in Atlanta, Georgia. I selected participants with senior-level insurance industry experience who had appropriate qualifications in relation to the research topic. Prior to commencing the study, I obtained permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and written permission from the research site to gain access to conduct research.

The relationship between researcher and participants is critical to the success of research (Suen et al., 2014). I obtained a list of prospective participants from the human resources department of the participating company. I sent an introductory email (see Appendix B) to the prospective participants. The introductory email included the purpose of the study, criteria for selection, and benefits of the study. I gained access to the participants by phone, email, and face-to face contact. Participants did not receive

compensation for participating in this study. Participants' identities were not disclosed to ensure confidentiality (Jug & Vilar, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I used fictional names for the participating company (i.e., CMP) and the participants (i.e., PT1 to PT09) to maintain confidentiality and privacy. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalties by notifying me by email, by telephone, or in person. All participants signed an informed consent form acknowledging their willingness to participate in the study before commencement of the interviews. Data will remain stored on a password-protected computer and in a fireproof safe for a minimum of 5 years. Data will be deleted thereafter.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

I used a qualitative research method in the study to explore the leadership strategies that business leaders need to improve employee performance. The three types of research methods are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Gile, Johnston, & Salganik, 2015; Seng, 2013; Sorour & Howell, 2013). Researchers use the qualitative research method to answer what or how questions rather than to test hypotheses (Block & Erskine, 2012; Cooper & Schindler, 2012; Forber-Pratt, 2015; Morse, Lowery, & Steurya, 2014; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013; Yin, 2014). Researchers use the qualitative research method to focus on building a holistic understanding of complex processes or reality (Andriopoulous & Slater, 2013; Jarvik et al., 2014). I used the qualitative research method to examine how company leaders can engage employees to improve performance

by probing what strategies participants use to improve employee performance and how they use them.

Qualitative research is exploratory and involves open-ended questions that require extensive data collection and analysis (Coussement et al., 2017; Draper & Swift, 2012; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). Qualitative research is appropriate for collecting data to achieve in-depth knowledge of a topic (Alexander, 2014; Chong et al., 2015; Dahl et al., 2016). Qualitative researchers attempt to build a holistic understanding of complex processes, with no precise measurement or predetermined hypothesis, and they derive cumulative questions during a study (Block & Erskine, 2012; Yin, 2014). Qualitative research methodology was ideal for this study because I explored employee improvement strategies instead of testing hypotheses.

The quantitative research method is formal, objective, and useful in describing, testing, and examining cause-and-effect relationships (Anitha, 2014). With the quantitative research method, researchers use numerical data to prove or disprove hypotheses (Hoare & Hoe, 2013). Quantitative researchers test for the relationships between variables and hypotheses (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Yin, 2014). The quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study because I did not test hypotheses but explored employee improvement strategies.

Mixed-methods research consists of both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Alexander, 2014; Roulston, 2016). Researchers use mixed method when the qualitative or the quantitative method is insufficient by itself to understand the research topic or the research requires one method to inform or clarify another (Alarape, 2013).

Both quantitative and qualitative methods have strengths and limitations, and joining the two paradigms is increasingly common (Elo et al., 2014; Tong, Chapman, Israni, Gordon, & Craig, 2013). By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, a researcher can capitalize on the strengths of each method and offset its weaknesses (Punch, 2013). I did not use mixed methods for the study because the qualitative research method was adequate in achieving the study's objective of exploring employee improvement strategies.

Social constructivist researchers use qualitative methods to seek participants' views on the situation under study (Alarape, 2013; Coussement, Lessmann, & Verstraeten, 2017). The purpose of this study aligned with the social constructivist worldview because I sought to explore, investigate, identify, and interpret collected data to gain an understanding of how insurance industry leaders motivate employees to perform better. Qualitative research consists of written descriptions that provide sufficient details for a reader to discover meaning and understand a phenomenon (Boesch, Scholz, Schwaninger, & Weber, 2013). Qualitative researchers often ask open-ended questions to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Buisman-Pijlman & Willison, 2016). Qualitative research is useful in (a) studying a limited number of cases in depth, (b) describing complex phenomena, (c) providing individual case information, (d) understanding and describing individuals' experiences of phenomena, and (e) identifying contextual and setting factors in a study (Anderson, Bolton, Fleming, & Lord, 2016; Thomas, 2016; Yin, 2014). The qualitative research method was the most appropriate method for this study.

## **Research Design**

A research design is a tool for answering the research question(s) (Zohrabi, 2013). A research design is a plan that allows participants and the researcher interact directly in the data collection phase of the study. Research design is a blueprint for what the researcher does to reach conclusions about the research problem (Yin, 2014). Qualitative research designs include case study, ethnography, and phenomenology (Aluwi Seng, 2013; Akamatsu, Kawasaki, & Kojima, 2016; Amade-Escot & Bennour, 2016; Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). For the study, I used single-case study design, which involves defining the meaning of a phenomenon.

Researchers commonly use case studies to explore a single experience or distinct occurrence (Bodoh, Melewar, Nguyen, & Tan, 2015; Goffnett, Lepisto, & Hayes, 2016; Goodrick, 2014). A case study is an empirical, in-depth inquiry into a phenomenon that occurs in a natural setting (Zohrabi, 2013). Researchers use case study to collect detailed information through a variety of procedures over a period (Sorour & Howell, 2013; Yin, 2014; Zohrabi, 2013). By using case study design, a researcher can identify gaps and discover solutions that may challenge or modify original perceptions (Yin, 2014). The researcher's choice of research design is critical in the research results and determines the direction of the study (Sorour & Howell, 2013). A research design has a relationship with the study results, research conclusions, and recommendations (Chan et al., 2013). The choice of the case study design for the study was appropriate to explore the research question.

An ethnographic design involves intensive fieldwork and direct observation of research participants (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Houghton et al., 2013; Zohrabi, 2013). Observations, interviews, and documents are appropriate sources of information for ethnographic researchers (Anderson et al., 2016; Dietz & Lockey, 2014; Sorour & Howell, 2013). The biggest challenge facing ethnographic researchers is the balance between getting close to subjects and maintaining critical distance (Helin, 2013; Houston & McGill, 2013). Ethnographic design was not appropriate for the study because I did not intend to observe participants but to explore employee improvement strategies.

Researchers use phenomenological design to explore participants' shared meanings of experiences and concerns (Roulston, 2016). Phenomenological design involves human experience, which researchers use to provide subject-centered, inductive, and empirically driven information (Amade-Escot & Bennour, 2016). I did not use phenomenological design for this study because I did not intend to explore participants' lived experiences but business leaders' employee improvement strategies.

Researchers use case study designs to address the significance of participants' experiences (Akamatsu et al., 2016). Case study researchers access participants, assess their lived experience, and triangulate data with documentary evidence from other sources (Coussement, Lessmann, & Verstraeten, 2017; Helin, 2013). Researchers use the case study design to study the complex relationship among phenomena, context, and people (Houston & McGill, 2013; Yin, 2014). A case study design was appropriate for the study because I intended to identify strategies that business leaders use to improve employee performance.

Data saturation occurs when no new additional information is available, the themes are similar, no new coding emerges, and one can replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). The sample size of a study can determine data saturation and invalidate research findings (Gile, Johnston, & Salganik, 2015; Yin, 2014). Qualitative researchers may attain data saturation using between five and 50 participants (Yin, 2014). Researchers justify sample size by interviewing participants to identify new information or until no new theme emerges to reach data saturation (Marshall et al., 2013). I conducted interviews and performed member checking with nine senior insurance leaders, continuing to interview participants until I had reached data saturation.

### **Population and Sampling**

The components of a sampling plan include the target population, parameters of interest, sample frame, sample method, and sample size (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). The target population for the study consisted of senior managers in the insurance sector located in Atlanta, Georgia, who had been in leadership positions for at least 5 years. Most qualitative researchers use the purposeful criterion sampling technique to select participants who have personal experience and qualifications in relation to the research topic (Cleary et al., 2014; Grosseohme, 2014). Liu, Tang, Wang, and Lee (2013) advised researchers to outline criteria for selecting study participants. The criteria for selecting research participants for this study indicated that participants needed to (a) be senior managers in the insurance sector, (b) have 5 years' experience in senior management positions, and (c) work in Atlanta, Georgia.



Qualitative researchers use appropriate sample sizes to reduce bias and enhance in-depth exploration of phenomena (Houghton et al., 2013; Morrison et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). A case-study researcher typically interviews a small number of individuals to obtain a deeper understanding of an issue (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Maxwell, 2016). A small sample enables a researcher to analyze interview responses in detail and identify themes (Block & Erskine, 2012). Qualitative researchers could attain data saturation using between five and 50 participants (Yin, 2014). A sample size of nine participants was adequate for this case study. I interviewed nine insurance managers and conducted member checking to reach data saturation.

I selected participants with extensive knowledge of the insurance industry. I obtained a list of prospective participants from the human resources department of the participating company. I sent an introductory email (see Appendix B) to the prospective participants. The introductory email included the purpose of the study, criteria for selection, and the benefits of the study. I gained access to the participants by phone, email, and face-to face contact.

A sample size should be adequate to address the research questions and allow data saturation (Englander, 2012; Liu et al., 2013). Qualitative researchers can reach data saturation with a sample size of between five and 50 participants (Houghton et al., 2013). Data saturation occurs when no new additional information is available, the themes are similar, no new coding emerges, and it is possible to replicate the findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall et al., 2013). Qualitative researchers use data saturation to obtain accurate and valid data (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). To reach data saturation, I

continued to interview participants until no new additional information was available and themes were similar. I focused this research on participants who were in leadership and management positions in the insurance industry and had enough involvement in workforce management to have a complete grasp of the main research topic.

Prior to commencing the study, I obtained permission from the Walden University IRB and a written permission from the research site to gain access to conduct research. My IRB approval # is 09-28-17-028476 and it expires on September 27, 2018. I obtained a list of prospective participants from the human resources department of the participating company. I sent introductory emails (see Appendix B) to prospective participants. I gained access to the participants by phone, emails, and face-to face contact. Participants did not receive compensation for participating in this study.

### **Ethical Research**

Ethical considerations refer to the principles and guidelines that help researchers conduct studies appropriately and responsibly (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014; Grosseohme, 2014; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Researchers should be conscious of ethical issues such as confidentiality and misrepresentation of facts (Punch, 2013). The prevailing ethical standards in contemporary research require a fair treatment of research participants (Thomas & Rowland, 2014). Researchers should treat participants with appropriate ethical standards, including assurance of respondents' physical and psychological safety (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012; Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013). I adhered to high ethical standards in the conduct of this study and treated participants with respect.

Before beginning to collect data, I sought permission from Walden University's IRB. My IRB approval number is 09-28-17-0284761 and it will expire on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Upon receipt of IRB approval, research participants completed the informed consent form. The statement of consent form contained information about the content, nature, purpose, and significance of the study; participant's rights in the study, the withdrawal process, and any associated risk with the interview process. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants can withdraw before commencement of interview by either verbal or written notice. Participants received a copy of statement of consent form by e-mail to review and complete. By completing the form, participation in the study was voluntary and I provided the participants with an opportunity to make an informed decision.

Participants who completed the informed consent form participated in the study. Solicitation of participants continued until the required participants reach nine in number. I contacted participants through email or telephone call to agree on convenient location, date, and time for the interview. Before the interview with each participant, I reiterated the content of the statement of consent form and requested participants to sign the completed informed consent form. Participants did not receive incentive for participation. Signed consent form will be stored in secured cabinet for five years to protect confidentiality of research participants. Data will be deleted thereafter.

In a research, it is essential to be mindful of the study effect on those involved while simultaneously being ethically sensitive and morally competent (Houghton et al., 2013). Researchers should assure participants of their privacy, pay particular attention to

what happens in the interview process, and protect the privacy of the research participants (Bernard, 2013; Thomas & Rowland, 2014). Ethical confidentiality is a matter of concern to researchers (Thomas, 2016). I assigned a numerical code to protect the confidentiality of participants and organizations. The responses of the participants will remain confidential and anonymous. The final doctoral document included the Walden University IRB approval number.

Qualitative scholars have devoted less attention to the ethical issues such as confidentiality standards in research (Roulston, 2016). Researchers should abide by institution research guidelines regarding the use of human participation in the study, and apply ethics throughout the research process (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012; Thomas, 2016). The research participants did not include minors or children or mentally challenged persons. Non-disclosure statement was not necessary because the study did not involve classified information. I adhered to Walden University research guidelines regarding participation of human in research study.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

I was the primary instrument of data collection for the study. Data collection involved individual, semistructured interviews with nine insurance executives in Atlanta, Georgia. Interview protocol contains the interview questions designed to answer the study's overarching research question (Cooper, Cathain, Hind, Adamson, Lawton, & Baird, 2014; Park & Park, 2016; Morrison, Clement, Nestel, & Brown, 2016). Qualitative researchers use document discovery to supplement interviews (Dietz, & Lockey, 2014; Kolb, 2012; Kriyantono, 2012; Nicolaidis, 2016). I reviewed company

documents such as achievement club promotions which encourage agents and employees to perform better. Amongst the programs is the Toppers Club program which focuses on rewarding employees and agents for raising the bar and improving their growth, productivity, cross-sell, and customer experience and customer retention. I also reviewed lead provision program which the company setup for agents and employees. Also review of company documents revealed that agents are provided with The Agency Marketing Package which is an affordable, turnkey marketing program designed to drive leads for agents. In addition, the company institutes a Direct Mail program for agents which run every month in an effort to drive new prospects. It targets the company's preferred customers and is easy to customize. As an Agency Marketing Package subscriber, agents also receive \$2,400 a year in cost share dollars to spend on additional marketing products and services in the Marketing Store.

I used the interview protocol (see Appendix C) to ensure consistency of interview with each participant. Semistructured questions involve the use of open-ended questions to obtain detail responses from participants (Barry, Chaney, Piazza-Gardner, & Chavarria, 2014; Chinthala, 2014; Parris & Peachey, 2013). The disadvantages of semistructured open-ended interview technique include time consuming, expensive to conduct, and participants' evasiveness to sensitive topics (Bodoh, Melewar, Nguyen, & Tan, 2015). Data collection process involves a series of activities including gaining permission, conducting sampling strategies, recording and storing the data, and resolving ethical issues that may arise (Yin, 2014). During the research no known ethical issues arise. Researchers mostly create a data collection instrument or reuse an already

designed instrument (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The data gathering included interviewing and recording of participants' response during the meeting. I used Samsung Galaxy S7 1286 phone recorder which has a lasting battery advantage and expanded memory to record participants' opinions. For participants who cannot meet with me at the interview site, I planned to use FreeConferenceCall.com to collect data. FreeConferenceCall.com is a free conferencing service that record each interview session in a digital format. However, all participants were able to meet with me and usage of FreeConferenceCall was not needed. At the end of each session, I transcribed the voice recorded interview to a Microsoft word document. Use of Microsoft word was because of its user friendliness and low cost. Participants answered series of open-ended questions and probing issues that support the core question (see Appendix C). I applied a combination of creative data collection technique.

Qualitative researchers create conditions for participants to feel comfortable and meditate on the issues during the interview (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). To ensure the comfort of the participants, I assured participants of their confidentiality and conducted the interview at a quiet place. Strategies researchers use to ensure study reliability and validity include (a) engagement with interview participants, (b) member checking, and (c) quality recording of the interview (Marais, 2012; Morrison, Clement, Nestel, & Brown, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Member checking is the most effective way to establish credibility in qualitative studies (Yin, 2014). I demonstrated member checking by allowing the participants to review and validate their interview transcript at the end of the interview. I also sent each participant a copy of the transcript via email to

validate their responses. Participants confirmed the accurate interpretation of their responses within 48 hours.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Qualitative researchers use participant structured interviews and/or semistructured interviews (Morrison, Clement, Nestel, & Brown, 2016; Yu, Abdullah, & Saat, 2014).

Data collection techniques included audio-recording and semistructured interview.

Qualitative data collection could be time-consuming and expensive but the major benefit is that information is richer and involves deeper insight into the phenomenon under study (Dietz & Lockey, 2014). The primary basis for reporting the qualitative results is to organize the data into patterns (Morrison et al., 2016). I used the interview protocol (see Appendix C) to ensure uniformity in data collection from each participant. Prior to commencing the study, I obtained written permission from the participating company to gain access to the site and to conduct research. I obtained a list of prospective participants from the human resources department of the participating company. I sent an introductory email (see Appendix B) to the prospective participants.

In qualitative research, interviews are the most popular method of collecting data (Klenke, 2016). Researchers use interviews to collect data that are impossible to gather from observation (Cairney & St Denny, 2015; Kihn & Ihantola, 2015; Kolb, 2012; Zivkovic, 2012). The primary means of data collection for the study was semistructured face-to-face interviews. I gained access to the participants by phone, emails, and face-to-face contact. Four of the nine participants were interviewed at the conference room located at the company's corporate office while the remaining five were interviewed at

their individual offices. The interviews with each of the participants lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Nothing extraordinary happened during the interview sessions. Open-ended questions define the topic under investigation and provide an avenue for participants and researchers to discuss topics in detail (Stark, 2013). A benefit of semistructured interviews is the ability of a researcher to prompt or encourage participants to provide more information when the need arises (Jug & Vilar, 2015). I used semistructured face-to-face interview to collect data from participants.

Qualitative researchers demonstrate rigor using coding technique, description of data instrument, and detailed presentation technique (Srivastava & Misra, 2014). Member checking is the most effective way to establish credibility in qualitative studies (Yin, 2014). In a similar study to explore strategies to retain IT professionals, Thomas (2015) used member checking to demonstrate validity by sharing interview interpretations with the participants for validation. In this study, I demonstrated member checking by sharing interview interpretations with the nine participants. Researchers asked open-ended and probing questions to gain a comprehensive perspective on the business (Thomas, 2015). I asked open-ended questions to senior leaders in insurance industry to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem regarding employee performance improvements strategies.

After IRB approval, I did not conduct pilot study because doctoral committee members' expert validation of interview questions was adequate. Data from interviews consist of direct quotations from respondents' experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015). I encouraged participants to honestly and openly



respond to interview questions to have an in-depth understanding of their viewpoints. With participants' permission, I audio-recorded the interview sessions and supplemented with company documents such as achievement club promotions; lead provision program, Agency Marketing Package, Direct Mail program for agents, and Agency Marketing Store. Upon request, I will make available the transcripts of the interview recordings to the participants.

Prior to commencing the study, I obtained written permission from the participating company to gain access to the site and to conduct research. I obtained a list of prospective participants from the human resources department of the participating company. I sent an introductory email (see Appendix B) to the nine prospective participants. The introductory email included the purpose of the study, criteria for selection, and the benefits of the study. I gained access to the participants by phone, emails, and face-to face contact. All the nine participants were first sent an email inviting them to participate followed by a phone call. Out of the nine participants, four were interviewed at the company corporate conference room and the remaining five participants were each interviewed at their individual offices. All interviews were conducted face-to-face at different locations selected by participants. Participants did not receive compensation for participating in this study. I gave each participant 10 minutes to review the informed consent form before starting the interviews. All nine participants reviewed and signed the informed consent form acknowledging their willingness to participate in the study prior to the commencement of the interviews. Interview protocol

(see Appendix C) includes the interview questions designed to answer the study's overarching research question.

I determined with each participant a convenient place, date, and time for the interview. All interviews were conducted face-to-face at different locations selected by participants. The duration for interview with each of the nine participants was between 30 to forty five minutes. Guercini (2014) advised qualitative researchers to allow enough time for participants to answer questions and not feel rushed. I gave each participant enough time to respond to the interview questions. I used a single method to collect data. I conducted interviews using face-to-face interviews and collected data from all the nine participants and recorded the interviews with Samsung Galaxy S7 1286 phone recorder which has a lasting battery advantage and expanded memory. All interviews were conducted face-to-face at different locations selected by participants. I transcribed the voice recorded interviews into a Microsoft word document. I used Microsoft word because of its user friendliness and low cost and will recommend it to future researchers especially those facing limited time and funds. I interviewed nine business leaders in the insurance industry in Atlanta, Georgia to reach data saturation. Data saturation occurs when there is no new information collected and the themes are similar (Yin, 2014). The relationship between the researcher and the participants is instrumental in any research study (Thomas, 2015). I maintained a professional relationship with the participants throughout the duration of the study, given that the success of the research was dependent on the relationship between the researcher and the participants.

Within 48 hours, participants received the interview transcripts for member checking to validate their responses and enhance reliability. Participants had one week to review the transcripts and return with any questions or concerns. All the nine participants were able to return the transcripts with no request to change.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Analyzing qualitative data in raw form is challenging and critical to the security and validity of a study's results (Guercini, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Sorour & Howell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Tessier, 2012). File organization is very important because it determines the methods of access, efficiency, flexibility and storage devices to use (Yin, 2014). Based on the work of Richardson (2014), I used Microsoft and Microsoft Word 2010 and NVivo 10 to organize transcribed data. During the interview phase of data collection, I took detailed notes and document a wide range of information: (a) verbatim quotations, (b) paraphrases of participant responses, (c) follow-up questions, and (d) final questions and conclusions.

Field notes provide contextual information that could enhance the understanding of interview transcripts (Dietz & Lockey, 2014). I typed handwritten notes such as verbatim quotations, (b) paraphrases of participant responses, (c) follow-up questions, and (d) final questions and conclusions. Tessier (2012) advised researchers to adopt a labeling convention for computer files that complies with standard convention specified in transcription protocol using archival numbering to indicate the site name, method of data collection, participant category, and sequential number. Usage of Microsoft Word and NVivo 10 helped me organize responses and identify themes. I used research logs to

track and categorize data. I scanned and saved each signed consent form in an electronic folder. I adopted the standard convention method to label the interview transcripts for computer files.

For ease of information identification, researchers create packets of necessary forms for each interview event (Abaci & Pershing, 2016). Creating packets of relevant forms by researchers is a valuable strategy which facilitates appropriate labeling of data collection materials (Goodrick, 2014). I used large heavy duty envelopes to create packets of relevant forms for each interview event to make information easy to identify. Each envelope contained the interview guide, note-taking forms, informed consent forms, and debriefing form. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity of research participants, researchers should store research materials in secure place (Goffnett et al., 2016). Hard-copy data, including notes, back-up recordings, and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at a secure location for a minimum of 5 years before destroying them.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a process of making sense of data and discovering what they have to say (Gill et al., 2016). The aim of analyzing data is to understand the constituent parts and identify any patterns that may exist (Dahl et al., 2016; Lamb, 2013; Walsh, 2013). I obtained a list of prospective participants from the human resources department of the participating company. I sent an introductory email (see Appendix B) to the prospective participants. The introductory email included the purpose of the study, criteria for selection, and the benefits of the study. I gained access to the participants by phone, emails, and face-to face contact. During the data analysis process, I used a coding system

to maintain confidentiality of the participants and company, and to identify key themes emerged from the interview process. I used fictional name for the participating company such as CMP and PT1 to PT09 for the nine participants to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

To achieve a deep understanding of the responses provided by participants, researchers read the transcripts several times until they reach an understanding of every response (Chong et al., 2015; Tessier, 2012; Yin, 2014). I read the transcripts to achieve a deep understanding of participants' responses. Data analysis is an ongoing and iterative process in qualitative research (Carrol & Huxtable, 2014). Walsh (2013) advised qualitative researchers to sustain the good practice of continuous analysis of data. To strengthen the validity and reliability of data analysis, qualitative researchers use a coding system to preserve confidentiality of participants and to identify key themes emerging from the interview process (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013; O'Keeffe, Buytaert, Mijic, Brozovic, & Sinha, 2015). I used fictional name for the participating company such as CMP and PT1 to PT09 for the nine participants to maintain confidentiality and privacy. Coding involved reading the transcribed data line by line and dividing data into meaningful segments for referencing and identification purposes. Ideal data analysis technique for thematic analysis of semistructured interview transcripts should relate between and within themes (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). The data analysis technique involved a coding system that compares between and within themes. The first step involved giving each theme a name while reading the transcribed data until I have coded all the data. I used fictional name for the participating company such as CMP and PT1 to

PT09 for the nine participants to maintain confidentiality and privacy. I synthesized data in an attempt to find out what recommendations are necessary for business leaders to increase employee engagement and performance.

I compared and contrasted the findings with existing literature. I also transcribed the digital recording to a Microsoft Word document. I used Microsoft Word because of its user friendliness and low cost and would recommend it to future researchers especially those facing limited time and funds. Lastly, I correlated the key themes emerged from the interviews with the literature (including new studies published since writing the proposal) and the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework of this study was Taylor's (1911) CMT and Burn's (1978) TLT theories. Data analysis helped correlate the engagement factors posited by Taylor (1911) and include: (a) rewards and recognition, (b) opportunities and advancement, and (c) meaningful work.

### **Reliability and Validity**

In qualitative studies, the trustworthiness of content analysis is a function of creditability, dependability, conformability, transferability, and confirmability (Bernard, 2013; Buisman-Pijlman & Willison, 2016; Yin, 2013). Qualitative researchers use multiple strategies to demonstrate rigor in study findings (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013; Singh, 2014; Srivastava & Misra, 2014).

#### **Reliability**

Reliability is a measure of freedom of the research data from random errors and the overall dependability of instruments researchers use to collect data (Yin, 2014). I ensured reliability in this study by documenting the sequences of data process and

analysis, member checking, and triangulation. Reliability is the result of a process that produces a dependable, consistent, and replicable outcome (Singh, 2014). A research instrument is reliable to the degree that it supplies consistent results as measured by stability, equivalence, and internal consistency (Barusch, Gringeri, & George, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Some of the strategies researchers use to improve reliability in a study include data collection procedures, coding techniques, and data analysis (Barusch et al., 2013; Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Recording the interviews allowed me to listen attentively during the interview process. I transcribed all recordings as soon as practicable using participants background information such as the current position, years of experience in management, and years of experience in the current organization. Qualitative researchers also demonstrate reliability in research by: (a) documenting the process of data collection analysis and interpretation, (b) explaining the strategy used for the study, (c) explaining the selection of participants, and (d) articulating the roles of the researcher (Thomas, 2015). I ensured reliability in this study by documenting the sequences of data process and analysis, member checking, and triangulation. Qualitative researchers' use of dependability establishes reliability of study findings (Houghton et al., 2013).

**Dependability.** To establish reliability, qualitative researchers use dependability to focus on measurement within a construct (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015; Houghton et al., 2013). Lishner (2015) advised qualitative researchers to resolve dependability concerns to avoid getting false research findings. Dependability is the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, analysis, and theory generation

(Yin, 2014). The strategies qualitative researchers use to establish dependability are member checking, triangulation, transcript review, audit trail, and reflexivity (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Houghton et al., 2013; Merwe, 2014). I ensured the dependability of this study by conducting member checking and transcript review.

### **Validity**

Validity in qualitative research refers to whether a study's findings are true and certain and whether the evidence supports the research findings (Akamatsu et al., 2016; Amade-Escot & Bennour, 2016; Lamb, 2013). Validity is the extent to which data are reasonably believable and trustworthy and the researcher can successfully defend the study findings (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Yin, 2014). Establishing validity in qualitative research takes time (Anderson, Bolton, Fleming, & Lord, 2016; Tong, Chapman, Israni, Gordon, & Craig, 2013). Qualitative researchers understand the importance of stating the validity techniques used in the study.

Boesch, Scholz, Schwaninger, and Weber (2013) identified three types of validity in qualitative research: (a) descriptive validity, (b) interpretive validity, and (c) theoretical validity. Descriptive validity denotes the researcher's accuracy in reporting events. Interpretive validity refers to the accuracy of the researcher's understanding and interpretation of participants' responses, perspectives, experiences, emotions, and ideas (Yin, 2014). Theoretical validity relates to the degree to which the data gathered agree with the theoretical explanation of the researcher. The criteria for establishing validity in a qualitative study are creditability, confirmability, authenticity, and transferability (Carter et al., 2014; Elo et al., 2014; Houghton et al., 2013).



**Creditability.** A critical element in qualitative study is creditability. Developing trustworthiness and credibility is a key component to validity (Robinson, 2014). Roulston (2016) posited that a qualitative research based on more than one method of data collection can enhance the study's validity and credibility (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014; Zohrabi, 2013). To ensure the validity and credibility of the study, I collected data using a single case study and interviews. Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Neville (2014) verified the validity of their study by using consistent questions and comparative case study design. To ensure validity of the study, I used consistent questions and comparative case study design. I recorded the interviews in their entirety and then transcribed all interviews verbatim. Ensuring the information is correct by reviewing recorded tapes and respondent validation for clarity will reduce mistakes and avoid errors (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Royset, 2013). I conducted a careful analysis of data collected to achieve an accurate and valid estimate of qualitative results.

Bias is an issue that researchers face. Bias is unknown or unacknowledged errors created during the design, measurement, sampling, procedure, or choice of the problem studied (Yin, 2014). Whether real or perceived, bias can compromise the process by which scientific research informs policies and programs (Thomas, 2015). Researchers could avoid bias by remaining transparent throughout the study (Elo et al., 2014; Singh, 2014). I remained transparent by embedding carefully chosen extracts from participants' words in the final document which uniquely gives participants a voice in the outcome while contributing to the credibility and transparency of my research. Accepting personal

bias will help the researcher better understand the viewpoint of others (Spector, 2013). I mitigated bias and view data from a personal lens by audiotaping interviews with permission, and developing a verbatim transcript. To ensure credibility, I was transparent with the participants throughout the study by giving full disclosure of the research design and analytical procedures in the final document. In addition, to remain transparent, I quoted in verbatim from the participants which are a typical and necessary component to any qualitative research report.

To ensure credibility, I was transparent with the participants throughout the study by quoting in verbatim from the participants which are a typical and necessary component to any qualitative research report. Other strategies qualitative researchers use to establish credibility of their study findings include (a) prolonged engagement, (b) triangulation, (c) raw data, (d) reflexivity, (e) interview protocol, and (f) member checking (Aluchna & Mikolajczyk, 2013; Houghton et al., 2013). Triangulation involves comparing interviews, observations and employee performance reports. To ensure credibility of the study, I used triangulation to examine the company documents such as achievement club promotions; Toppers Club program; lead provision program, and Direct Mail program and transcripts from the interviews. Member checking involves the participants' review of interview transcripts for completeness and accuracy (Houghton et al., 2013). I ensured member checking by allowing the participants to review and validate the data. The interview protocol used for each semistructured interview contains set of questions, supplemented by additional questions posed for clarification or

elaboration. I ensured creditability of this study by conducting member checking, triangulation, and reflexivity.

**Transferability.** Qualitative researchers should provide a detailed description of research process to enable the reader and future researchers to evaluate the transferability of the study findings (Aluchna & Mikolajczyk, 2013). Transferability is the extent to which researchers can apply conclusions beyond the study's parameters (Aluchna & Mikolajczyk, 2013; Bodoh, Melewar, Nguyen, & Tan, 2015). To address transferability, qualitative researchers state the criteria for choosing research participants to enable other researchers to assess the applications and interpretations of the research findings to other settings or groups (Cope, 2014; Elo, S., Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs, 2014). Qualitative researchers use thick verbatim description of the research process to determine transferability of study findings (Houghton et al., 2013). I ensured the transferability of the study by using a thick verbatim description of participants' attitudes and experiences in the use of employee performance improvement strategies in the insurance industry.

A key strategy qualitative researchers use to address confirmability of their study is to provide a detailed presentation of research findings with relevant academic citations (Houghton et al., 2013). Transferability involves generalization of the study findings to persons not included in the initial study population (Grossoehme, 2014). By providing a detailed description of criteria for selecting research participants, data collection and analysis, and interpretation of the findings, qualitative researchers inspire future researchers to replicate the study findings, regardless of the geographical location (Singh,

2014). With a detailed description of data collection and analysis process, future researchers would identify associations and interpretations in the study (Barusch et al., 2013). I ensured transferability of this study by providing a detailed description of the criteria for selecting research participants, data collection and analysis, and interpretation of the findings.

**Confirmability.** One area of concern among qualitative researchers is the confirmation and completeness of their study findings. Triangulation as a research strategy researcher use to ensure confirmation and completeness (Chinthala, 2014). To ensure confirmation, I reviewed company documents such as achievement club promotions; lead provision program, Agency Marketing Package, Direct Mail program for agents, and Agency Marketing Store to supplement interview transcripts. Confirmability is the extent to which researchers can authenticate the findings of their study (Aluchna & Mikolajczyk, 2013). I ensured the confirmability of the study by preparing a detailed description of phenomena in the insurance industry, narrating how and why events occurred in particular contexts, and describing participants' attitudes and experiences.

The strategies qualitative researchers use to establish confirmability of their study findings include triangulation, audit trail, raw data, reflexivity, and member checking (Aluchna & Mikolajczyk, 2013; Houghton et al., 2013). The audit trail approach involves the detailed description of the researcher's decisions throughout the research process to enable the reader understand the justifications for investigation methodological

and interpretative judgments of the researcher (Houghton et al., 2013). The strategies I used to ensure confirmability of this study were audit trail and reflexivity.

**Data saturation.** Reaching saturation ensures the elements are observable in the study findings (Boesch et al., 2013; Cope, 2014). Researchers mostly ensure data saturation by continuously interviewing participants until the themes are exhausted and no new themes emerge (Boesch et al., 2013; Merwe, 2014; Punch, 2013). The general principles for achieving data saturation are (a) no new information, (b) no new coding, (c) no new themes, and (d) ability to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The sample size of the participants could determine data saturation (Yin, 2014). Researchers reach data saturation using between five and 50 participants in qualitative studies (Buisman-Pijlman & Willison, 2016). The interview of nine senior insurance leaders was adequate to ensure data saturation. I continued to interview research participants until no new themes or information emerges to ensure data saturation.

The key strategies qualitative researchers use to achieve data saturation are methodological triangulation of multiple sources of data and member checking of the interview data for accuracy verification (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). Qualitative researchers use member checking to reach data saturation (Merwe, 2014). To ensure data saturation, I used triangulation and member checking.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 2 of this study contained an overview of the steps for conducting the research study. The focus areas include (a) purpose statement, (b) role of the researcher,

(c) participants, (d) research method and design, (e) population and sampling, (f) ethical research, (g) data collection, (h) data organization, data analysis, and (j) reliability and validity. My role as a researcher include sampling and data collection, organization, and analysis.

Furthermore, Section 2 contain justification relating to decisions to use qualitative exploratory single case study design, purposive criterion sampling technique, sample size of nine insurance industry leaders, interview protocol, and open-ended questions during interviews. Another focus area in Section 2 is the description of how to enhance reliability and validity of the research instruments and findings. In Section 3, I explained the presentation of findings, application to professional practice, implications to social change, recommendations for action and further study, and reflections and a concluding statement.

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

#### **Introduction**

The objective of this qualitative, exploratory single case study was to explore the strategies that insurance business leaders in Atlanta, Georgia use to improve employee performance. Nine senior managers in the insurance industry who had been in management positions for at least 5 years participated in this study and provided me with data to answer the research question. From the participant's answers, I identified four themes: (a) goal setting and performance review; (b) effective communication; (c) training, coaching, and counseling; and (d) good working environment and teamwork. The study findings indicated that insurance business leaders use a combination of strategies to improve employee performance. Section 3 includes a presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and further study, reflections, and a conclusion.

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

The overarching research question for this study was as follows: What leadership strategies do insurance business leaders use to improve employee performance? The primary role of managers in workplaces is to increase and maintain effective job performance among employees in the organization (Tauringana & Afrifa, 2013). Employee performance improvement is necessary in all organizations for companies to be successful (Chan & Dar, 2014). Business leaders who emphasize strategies for improving employee performance are more likely to succeed than their colleagues without leadership strategies (Bahn & Weatherill, 2013). Many business executives are

developing performance-improvement strategies to improve employee performance, increase efficiency, and ensure business sustainability (Balcioglu & Nihinlola, 2014). By maximizing performance improvement strategies, business leaders can achieve high employee performance and productivity (Parris & Peachey, 2013; Wile, 2014). Insurance industry leaders should have sound employee performance improvement strategies to attract and retain high-performing employees (Carter, 2013). Business leaders should use various strategies to improve employee performance.

Researchers have studied the various strategies that business leaders use to improve employee performance (Ayres, 2015; Berbary, 2014; Khan, 2013; Kramer, Maas, & van Rinsum, 2016; Wang et al., 2013; Xu, Zhong, & Wang, 2013). Zecheru (2014) advised business leaders to consider using a variety of strategies to ensure employee performance improvement. Alias, Noor, and Hassan, (2014) posited that insurance business leaders benefit from adopting strategies for improving employee performance. In this study, I identified four themes: (a) goal setting and performance review; (b) effective communication; (c) training, coaching, and counseling; and (d) good working environment and teamwork. In the following subsections, I present the four themes that emerged from my thematic analysis of participants' responses to the interview questions.

### **Theme 1: Goal Setting and Performance Review**

A good method for defining and communicating individual expectations is to use the performance review process (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014). Performance review is a tool that business leaders use to implement organizational goals and improve employee



performance (Ayres, 2015). The major strategy that managers use to improve employee performance is employee evaluation (Balcioglu & Nihinlola, 2014). As Swanepoel, Botha, and Mangonyane (2014) stated, business leaders use performance review to improve employee productivity, efficiency, and performance. All of the research participants echoed Swanepoel et al.'s opinion, attesting to the use of performance review to improve employee performance.

A review of company documents such as those relating to the Toppers Club program, lead provision program, agency marketing package, and direct mail program revealed that management had set up various achievement programs in an effort to encourage employees to perform better. The company's Toppers Club program focused on rewarding employees and agents for raising the bar and improving their growth, productivity, cross-selling, customer experience, and customer retention. The team goal setting and performance review emerged from Interview Questions 1-6. All of the research participants confirmed the use of goal setting and performance review as a strategy to improve their employee performance. In response to Interview Question 1, Participant 2 (P2) stated, "I have a strong belief that setting goals for employees is one of the best strategies to improve employee performance in any organization." Responding to the same question, P7 said, "The number one strategy I always use is to make sure that my employees know that I am here to help them succeed in meeting their goals set."

In response to Interview Question 2, participants also offered information relevant to goal setting and performance review. P1 said, "In the insurance industry like many industries, we set goals for the company and employees as well ... We track the

production level of each employee.” P2 referred to “going through their numbers and cross check[ing] it with their set goals and production requirements.” P3 reflected, “As a leader, I always look at the required performance standards and compare these requirements to the actual performance of the team member.” P4 explained, “ We sit with each employee to go over their production to determine whether he or she is meeting the numbers which helps us to know which employee needs help and in which area.” P5 noted, “ I utilize the performance action plan to give struggling employees the opportunity to succeed.” P6 stated, “Every one of my employees including myself has quotas to meet daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly all the way to annually. When I see that any of my employees is not meeting his or her quotas for an extended period, I make sure that I sit with the individual and review his or her performance.” P7 observed that “one way to remove barriers to employee productivity is to specify performance expectations for all employees.” P8 identified that “one thing we do on monthly basis is performance review with each of our employees.” P9 noted, “We do a performance review with each employee to determine where they are doing good and where they need extra support, so we can work on that area where improvement is needed.”

Responses to Interview Questions 3 through 6 were also relevant to this theme. In response to Interview Question 3, P9 said, “Employee performance gaps can arise when our employees do not have the full authority they need in order to meet their performance objectives or standards.” In response to Interview Question 4, P2 stated, “A performance action plan is a great way to give struggling employees the opportunity to succeed while still holding them accountable for past performance,” while P8 acknowledged

establishing an action plan for improving performance, explaining, “This action plan should include specific and measurable objectives that are accurate, relevant, and time-bound.” Responses to Interview Question 5 included the following: “managers to make sure that the goals they set for employees are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely” (P2); “it is important to have an ongoing performance feedback into the performance management process to ensure accountability” (P5); and “managers to utilize a performance improvement plan, also known as a performance action plan” (P6). In response to Interview Question 6, P5 stated, “ Managers should embrace helping employees to reach their set goals.”

The participants’ responses to Interview Questions 1-6 demonstrated that goal setting and performance review constitute a major strategy for improving employee performance. All of the insurance business leaders confirmed using goal setting and performance review as the best strategy to improve employee performance. As applied in this study, the participants’ responses aligned with the assertions of Balcioglu and Nihinlola (2014), Camisón and Villar-López (2014), and Swanepoel et al. (2014) that managers use goal setting and performance review to improve the performance of employees.

## **Theme 2: Effective Communication**

Communication is important to employees (Cassell, 2014). Sandhya and Kumar (2014) posited that business leaders use effective communication to improve employee performance. Business leaders should understand the critical need to establish a well-defined and continuous form and channel of communication with employees because

workers are the best advocates for the company (Holland & Weather, 2013). Leaders should understand the importance of demonstrating honesty and integrity in communicating with any member of the team, especially to promote leadership role-model traits among employees, friends, neighbors, and community members (Chan & Dar, 2014). Leaders must be open and honest with their team members on all occasions (Sani, 2013). Communication between company leaders and employees can engender employee satisfaction and loyalty (Khan, 2013). Communication with employees can serve as a morale boost because it can make individuals feel that they are valuable to the company (Abdalla & Ahmed, 2013). Employers are becoming aware that employee loyalty, commitment, and concern for quality depend on effective communication (Keeyes & Huemann, 2017; Spector, 2013). Michael (2014) demonstrated that business leaders use effective communication to improve employee performance. Six of the research participants echoed Michael's and Sandhya and Kumar's opinion, attesting that they used effective communication to improve the performance of their employees.

Review of company documents such as those related to the Toppers Club program, lead provision program, agency marketing package, and direct mail program revealed that insurance business leaders recognized that lack of communication demotivates employees. The issue is that although the majority of employees are motivated when they start a new job, demotivation can quickly set in after a few months. One of the reasons for demotivation is lack of communication from management. A "need to know" policy for communication between managers and employees will only leave employees feeling frustrated, which will have a negative impact on productivity. In

company documents, I observed that insurance senior managers had resolved issues related to lack of communication by establishing proper communication, a clear organizational purpose, and continual reinforcement on flow of information between agents and employees.

The theme of effective communication emerged from responses to Interview Questions 1-4. Specifically, the responses of P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, and P9 indicated that insurance business leaders use effective communication as a strategy to improve employee performance. In response to Interview Question 1, P4 said, "Having an open communication channels between employees and managers in an organization is in my view, one of the best strategy any leader can take to improve employee performance." Responding to the same question, P5 stated, "Effective communication can help to foster a good working relationship between a manager and employees which can in turn improve morale and efficiency thereby improving performance." In response to Interview Question 2, P7 said, "Effective communication leaves no doubt about how your staff's productivity will be evaluated and eliminates unintentional inconsistent treatment." Responding to Interview Question 3, P3 noted, "Only when we have open and honest conversations with our employees about the need to improve their performance can we begin to really understand why the gap has arisen and how we can help our employees close that gap." Responses to Interview Question 4 included the following: "it is critical to allow for an open dialog and feedback from the employee to help determine whether the employee has been provided all the tools and resources necessary for him or her to be successful" (P2); "having an open and honest conversation with my employees about the

need to improve their performance is a great way to motivate employees into performing better” (P3); “by engaging our employees to make sure that they know what to do, and when they want to do it” (P4); “how we overcome these obstacles is varied but the most important strategy we employ is by engaging our employees at all levels” (P5); and “I make sure that we have an open channel of communication between management and our staff” (P5).

The responses of 67% of the participants to Interview Questions 1-4 indicated that effective communication is a good strategy for improving employee performance. Six of the nine senior insurance managers who participated in this study confirmed using effective communication as a strategy to improve their employee performance. As applied in this study, the statements of P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, and P9 were consistent with the findings of Sandhya and Kumar (2014), Michael (2014), and Sani (2013), who reported that business leaders use effective communication as strategy to improve employee performance.

### **Theme 3: Training, Coaching, and Counseling**

One of the factors influencing employee performance is training and development (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014). Employee development is the process of increasing the knowledge, skills, and capacities of employees (Gupta & Charu, 2013). Employees typically will stay engaged if they know that training is available for their personal and collective advancement (Guo, Porschitz, & Alves, 2013). Business leaders should make available necessary tools and skills training to enhance employee performance (Spector, 2013). Holland and Weather (2013) opined that most businesses tend to invest in

strategies that support the availability of a trained or trainable workforce with the potential to improve employee performance. Some management theorists have posited that training will enable employees to feel good about what they are doing and give them a sense of value and belonging to the company (Burns & Christie, 2013). Researchers have demonstrated that business leaders can use training and coaching to improve the performance of employees (Durgin, Mahoney, Cox, Weetjens, & Poling, 2014; Rekalde, Landeta, & Albizu, 2015). Five of the research participants echoed the contentions of Durgin et al. (2014) and Rekalde et al. (2015), confirming that they used training, coaching, and counseling to improve employee performance.

A review of company documents such as those related to the Toppers Club program, lead provision program, agency marketing package, and direct mail program revealed that business leaders set up training programs to improve employee performance. The training programs supported new agent onboarding programs regarding retail, acquisition/seed, and traditional to improve employee performance. The management also provided employees with different training tasks to enhance their growth and flexibility, further their field of adequacy, and contribute to the organization's benefits. The insurance senior managers recognized that because employees understand that learning is the best way to remain employable, ignoring employees' learning needs would only stall their employees and their business. In the company training records, I observed that employees attended job-enhancing courses to learn new skills and improve their performance.

The theme of training, coaching, and counseling emerged from Interview Questions 1, 3, and 4. P2, P3, P4, P6, and P7 indicated that they used training, coaching, and counseling as a strategy to improve the performance of their employees. In response to Interview Question 1, P3 said, “The primary strategy we employ here is training of employees,” and P6 stated, “The first step in any effort to improve employee performance is counseling or coaching.” Responding to Interview Question 4, P6 stated, “Again this question brings me back to coaching because coaching is an effective tool for managers to deploy in their efforts to help employees succeed.” Responses to Interview Question 3 included the following: “In my view, lack of training and experience of new employees that we hire poses more challenge than the rest” (P2); “As a manager, I have come across many obstacles but the one that stand out most of the time is the lack of training” (P4); and “The rate of production is low when employees don't know enough to perform their jobs confidently” (P4).

The participants’ responses to Interview Questions 1, 3, and 4 demonstrated that training, coaching, and counseling constitute a strategy that business leaders use to improve employee performance. Five of the senior insurance managers noted the use of training, coaching, and counseling as one of the strategies for improving the performance of their employees. As applied in this study, the responses of 56% of the participants aligned with Durgin et al.’s (2014) and Rekalde et al.’s (2015) statements that business leaders could use training, coaching, and counseling to improve the performance of their employees.



#### **Theme 4: Good Working Environment and Teamwork**

Researcher have demonstrated that psychological conditions could optimize employee performance (Chinthala, 2014; Wang et al., 2013). Business leaders who inspire positive attitude on workers enhance employee performance (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014). Employees seek for friendly environment that support worker participation in decision-making and team work (AlBattat & Som, 2013; Alias et al., 2014). Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015) demonstrated that good working environment is a factor influencing employee performance. Bakotic and Babic (2013) posited that good working environment is important for improved employee performance. AbuAlRub, El-Jardali, Jamal, and Al-Rub (2016) advised business leaders to focus on redesigning the structure of the work environment to improve employee performance. Five of the research participants corroborated AbuAlRub et al.'s and Bakotic and Babic's statements that they ensured good work environment and teamwork to improve the performance of their employees.

The theme good working environment and teamwork emerged from Interview Questions 1, 4, and 5. Participants P1, P4-5, and P7-8 indicated that they used assurance of good working environment and team as a strategy to improve the performance of their employees. In response to Interview Question 1, participant P1 said, "To me, seeing my employees as a team member rather than just employees is the most effective strategy." and P8 stated, "One strategy we use is teamwork." Interview Question 4 inquired how participants overcome obstacles encountered in implementing employee performance improvement initiatives. Responding to Interview Question 4, participant P1 stated, "By

making sure that we have a work friendly environment for our employees.” and P5 said, “So fostering teamwork in the company helps the engagement of our employee.” In response to Interview Question 5, some participants said, “Treating employees fairly and letting them know that they are part of a team and their contribution is vital to the team as a whole.” (P1) “Creating an environment where employees are inspired, encourages them to succeed, and complements the overall business success.” (P4) “Fostering a positive, supportive, encouraging working environment in which employee morale is high is important to employee motivation and performance in general.” (P7) “ Like I said earlier, when you treat employees as a member of the team.” (P8) The participants’ responses to Interview Questions 1, 4, and 5 demonstrated that ensuring a good working environment and teamwork is a strategy that business leaders use to improve employee performance. Five of the insurance business leaders confirmed that ensuring a good working environment and teamwork is a good strategy for improving employee performance. As applied in this study, the responses of 56% of participants’ aligned with the statements of AbuAlRub et al. (2016), Bakotic and Babic (2013), and Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015) who stated that business leaders could improve employee performance by ensuring a good working environment and teamwork.

### **Findings Related to Conceptual Frameworks**

The CMT developed by Taylor in 1911 and the transformational leadership theory proposed by Burns in 1978 were the conceptual frameworks for this study. Researchers have used CMT and transformational leadership theory as lenses to understand the importance of leadership in employee performance (Bakotic, 2014; Wooderson et al.,

2016). The research findings indicated that insurance business leaders used various strategies to improve employee performance. Business leaders could improve employee performance by involve employees in decision making; goal setting and performance review; effective communication; training, coaching, and counselling; and ensuring good working environment and teamwork. As applied in this study, insurance business leaders used to goal setting and performance review; effective communication; training, coaching, and counselling; and ensuring good working environment and teamwork to improve employee performance. All participants confirmed the CMT and transformational leadership theory relating to using various strategies to improve employee performance

The main tenet of CMT is that workers need necessary tools to maximize their performance ((Asaduzzama, Hossain, & Rahman, 2014; Ashar, Ghafoor, Munir, & Hafeez, 2013; Bajwa, Yousaf, & Rizwan, 2014)). Business leaders should have basic knowledge of management theories to improve employee performance (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013). Camisón and Villar-López (2014) opined that training and development influence employee performance. As applied in this study, insurance business leaders should provide workers with necessary tools to maximize their performance. Five of the research participants attested to providing employees with necessary tools through training, coaching, and counselling to improve their performance.

Khan (2013) and Sani (2013) posited that researchers develop CMT to enable business leaders to predict and control employee behaviors in organizations. Business leaders should set expectations to improve employee performance (Kim, 2014; Wang et

al., 2013). Chinthala (2014) posited that business leaders who set objectives and constantly provide feedback help employees to improve their performance. As applied in this study, insurance business leaders should predict and control worker behaviors to improve employee performance. All the participants confirmed Khan's and Sani's statements regarding CMT by using the strategy of setting goals and performance review to predict and control employee behavior for improved performance.

The main tenets of the transformational theory is enhancing the motivation, morale, and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms (Thomas, 2016). Transformational leaders stimulate and inspire followers to achieve outcomes, help followers to grow and develop into leaders, and recognize and render rewards where necessary (Grigoroudis et al., 2013). As applied in this study, insurance business leaders should stimulate, motivate, and inspire followers to improve employee performance. All the participants confirmed transformational leadership theory by attesting to using a combination of strategies to improve employee performance.

Burns (1978) posited that enhancement of followers' motivation, morale, and performance involves (a) connecting followers' sense of identity and self to the mission and the collective identity of the organization, (b) being an inspirational role model for followers, (c) challenging followers to take greater ownership for their work, and (d) understanding followers' strengths and weaknesses. Kim (2014) advised business leaders to develop good leadership strategies to navigate the changes arising from advancement in technology within corporations. As applied in this study, insurance business leaders should adopt good leadership strategies to improve employee performance. All the

participants confirmed transformational leadership theory by echoing Kim's statement regarding the use of good leadership strategies to improve employee performance.

Bass (1990) identified three ways in which leaders transform followers: (a) increasing their awareness of task importance and value, (b) getting followers to focus first on team or organizational goals rather than their own interests, and (c) activating followers' higher-order needs. Employees seek for successful companies with friendly working environment that support teamwork (AlBattat & Som, 2013; Alias et al., 2014). The study findings indicated that insurance business leaders could improve the performance of employees through creation of good working environment that support teamwork. As applied in this study, 56% of the participants confirmed transformational leadership theory by attesting to the use of teamwork and assurance of good working environment as strategy to improve employee performance.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The identification of strategies insurance business leaders use to improve employee performance is crucial to the success and sustainability of insurance firms. Balcioglu and Nihinlola (2014) posited that lack of performance-improvement strategies in any organization contributes to poor employee performance, reduced efficiency, and potential failure of the business. Scholars and practitioners have demonstrated that business leaders use various strategies to improve employee performance (Campbell, 2014; Chan & Dar, 2014; Hooi & Ngui, 2014; Nguyen, Dang, & Nguyen, 2015; Rehman & Ali, 2013; Ukaegbu, 2014; Wang et al., 2013). The findings from this study could

encourage insurance business leaders to collaborate, network, and share information regarding strategies to improve employee performance.

Employers have recognized that employees are the most important asset and are critical to the success of any business (Madu, 2014; Spector, 2013). Woźniak and Łubieńska (2013) opined that business leaders who engage workers improve the employee performance and experience increase in productivity. Based on the results of this study, the most significant contribution to professional practice may be the identification of potential strategies that insurance business leaders use to improve their employee performance. Individual who are new in leadership position in the insurance business may use the findings of the study to improve the performance of their employees.

Insurance business leaders should consider employee management as a strategic approach to achieve the organizational goals (Bajwa et al., 2014). Carter (2013) posited that insurance industry leaders who lack strategies to improve employee performance may find it difficult to attract and retain high-performing employees. To achieve high employee performance and productivity, business leaders should adopt strategies for improving worker performance (Parris & Peachey, 2013; Wile, 2014). Insurance business leaders may use the findings of this study to identify the various approaches for improving employee performance. The study findings may assist insurance business leaders and managers to bridge the knowledge gap on strategies for improving employee performance to sustain their business.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Organizational leaders should implement strategies for improving employee performance to ensure the sustainability of their businesses (Bahn & Weatherill, 2013). By developing performance improvement strategies, business leaders could achieve high employee performance and productivity for firm success and remain in competition (Parris & Peachey, 2013; Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015; Wile, 2014). Bajwa et al. (2014) posited that business leaders, especially in the insurance industry, should consider employee management as a strategic approach to achieve organizational goals. Ayers (2015) opined that business leaders use various strategies to improve employee performance. As demonstrated in my study findings, the improvement of employees' performance might assist insurance business leaders to sustain their business and support the local community through its corporate social responsibility.

Business leaders could contribute to positive social change through their corporate social responsibilities to the local population (Alarape, 2013). The study findings may contribute to positive social change by improving the lives in the local community through corporate social responsibility initiatives. With improved employee performance, the organization will achieve its goals, which will enable business leaders to use the extra revenue to support community leaders in building libraries, schools, and hospitals for the local citizens. The business leaders could use the extra revenue to grant scholarships, give health insurance to employees and their families, and contribute to entities such as Red Cross. Corporate leaders could use the extra revenue and contribute

to noble courses such as promoting the research and treatment of AIDS and cancer related diseases.

Ratiu and Suciu (2013) posited that 50% of businesses fail because of unengaged and unmotivated workforce. Insurance industry leaders who lack good employee performance improvement strategies may find it difficult to attract and retain high-performing employees (Carter, 2013). The study findings might contribute to positive social change by helping insurance business leaders to understand the strategies for improving employee performance to sustain their company. By sustaining their businesses, insurance business leaders will continue to provide job opportunities to the local population and boost the socio-economic activities in the community. The insurance business leaders could partner with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private sectors to provide health insurance to the local citizens.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Improving employee performance is crucial to business success. Because human resource is a critical asset to an organization, employee performance is essential to the productivity and sustainability of a business (Ayers, 2015; Grigoroudis, Tsitsirisi, & Zopounidis, 2013; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Wile, 2014). Researchers have identified goal setting and performance review as the most common approach that business leaders use to improve employee performance (Ayers, 2015; Balcioglu & Nihinlola, 2014; Camisón & Villar-López, 2014; Swanepoel et al., 2014). Ayers (2015) advised corporate leaders to use performance appraisals as a tool to implement goals and increase employee performance. Flynn et al. (2015) opined that business leaders should have the skills for



evaluating employee performance. I recommend that business leaders should develop an effective goal setting and performance review process to improve employee performance.

Organizational leaders should have the required competency for improving employee performance. To achieve organizational goals, business leaders should possess leadership strategies for improving employee performance (Bajwa et al., 2014). Carter (2013) opined that insurance industry leaders should acquire leadership skill sets required to improve employee performance to attract and retain high-performing employees. Some organizational leaders may lack the leadership strategies to improve employee performance (Nikpeyma, Abed-Saeedi, Azargashb, & Alavi-Majd, 2014). Organizational leaders who lack leadership strategies for improving employee performance could contribute to the potential failure of the business (Balcioglu & Nihinlola, 2014). I recommend that insurance business leaders should develop leadership strategies for improving employee performance.

Employee engagement is important to the success of a business. Ratiu and Suciu (2013) attributed 50% of business failures to unengaged and unmotivated workforce. Because of the importance of communication to workers, business leaders should communicate effectively to improve employee performance (Abdalla Alfaki et al., 2013; Cassell, 2014; Sandhya & Kumar, 2014). The performance of employee depend on the effectiveness of communication with business leaders (Spector, 2013). Michael (2014) posited that effective communication is a useful strategy that business leaders use to improve employee performance. I recommend that business leaders should understand their staff and use appropriate communication approach to improve employee

performance. I will disseminate the results of this research study to various stakeholders through knowledge sharing within my network community, publications in academic and business journals, and presentations at trainings, seminars, and conferences on employee management.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies insurance business leaders use to improve employee performance. Scholars have studied the leadership strategies practitioners use to improve employee performance for business sustainability (Ayres, 2015; Balcioglu & Nihinlola, 2014; Carter, 2013; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Wile, 2014). This study was limited to the cross-sectional, qualitative, single case study involving senior managers in the insurance industry in Atlanta, Georgia. I recommend further study should involve longitudinal, qualitative phenomenological, qualitative multiple case study, quantitative or mixed methods, other categories of workers, participants from other industrial sectors, and different geographical locations.

The study was limited to the sample size of nine senior managers in the insurance industry. Researchers who use larger or smaller sample size might generate different themes (Robinson, 2014; Royset, 2013). Further studies should involve larger sample size. Another limitation is my limited knowledge of doctoral study. Novice researchers have significant challenge organizing participants' responses into themes to gain an in-depth understanding of the research question (Morsea et al., 2014). Further studies should involve research experts with diverse contextual skills in conducting research and knowledge in employee management for business sustainability.

## Reflections

I utilized the qualitative single case study to explore the strategies insurance business leaders use to improve employee performance. Reflecting on the doctoral study process, I could recognize significant improvement in my networking, communication, analytical, and interpersonal skills. By taking the doctoral study, I increased my scholarly and professional knowledge on strategies business leaders use to improve employee performance for business sustainability. I learned from the challenges encountered during the doctoral study process which positively changed my personal biases, ideas, and perceptions regarding strategies business leaders use to improve employee performance. Reflecting on the doctoral research process, I found that I have developed a better understanding and perception of the rigor required for doctoral study and academic research work.

By using the qualitative single case study, I studied the participants in their work environment and gained an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the research question. I used the purposive sampling techniques to select nine senior managers in insurance industry who had adequate knowledge and experience about strategies for improving employee performance. By using the semistructured interview technique, I interacted with the research participants who spoke freely and expressed themselves in a manner that enabled me to understand the strategies they use to improve employee performance.

Reflecting on the interview process, I realized the participants use similar strategies to improve employee performance. The participants shared different

perceptions of the interview questions, which enabled me to understand the strategies insurance business leaders use to improve employee performance. The study changed my personal bias and preconceived ideas and values on strategies for improving employee performance because I gained understanding and knowledge from nine participants. I was overwhelmed by the data that emerged from the participants' responses. The study findings indicated that insurance business leaders use various strategies to improve the performance of their employees. My doctoral study findings aligned with modern literature on employee management and increased my understanding of the research problem.

### **Conclusion**

By emphasizing on leadership strategies for improving employee performance, business leaders could sustain their organizations (Abdalla Alfaki & Ahmed, 2013; Bahn & Weatherill, 2013). Because employees are critical resource for a business, the poor performance of workers could have a negative effect on the organization's goal (Bajwa et al., 2014; Grigoroudis et al., 2013). Some insurance business leaders lack the leadership strategies to improve employee performance. The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory single case study was to use the CMT and transformational leadership theory as lenses for exploring the strategies insurance business leaders in Atlanta, Georgia use to improve employee performance. I utilized the semistructured interview technique and asked open-ended questions to nine senior managers in the insurance industry to collect data to answer the research question. Four themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the data indicating the strategies insurance business leaders use to improve employee

performance. The themes are (a) goal setting and performance review, (b) effective communication, (c) training, coaching, and counselling, and (d) good working environment and teamwork.

Insurance business leaders use a variety of strategies to improve employee performance. The participants confirmed that goal setting and performance review is an effective strategy for improving employee performance. The use of CMT and transformational leadership theory as lenses for this qualitative exploratory single case study may fill a gap in literature. The findings from this study confirmed that business leaders use various strategies for improving employee performance and validate the conclusions of previous scholars regarding the use of leadership strategies to improve employee performance.

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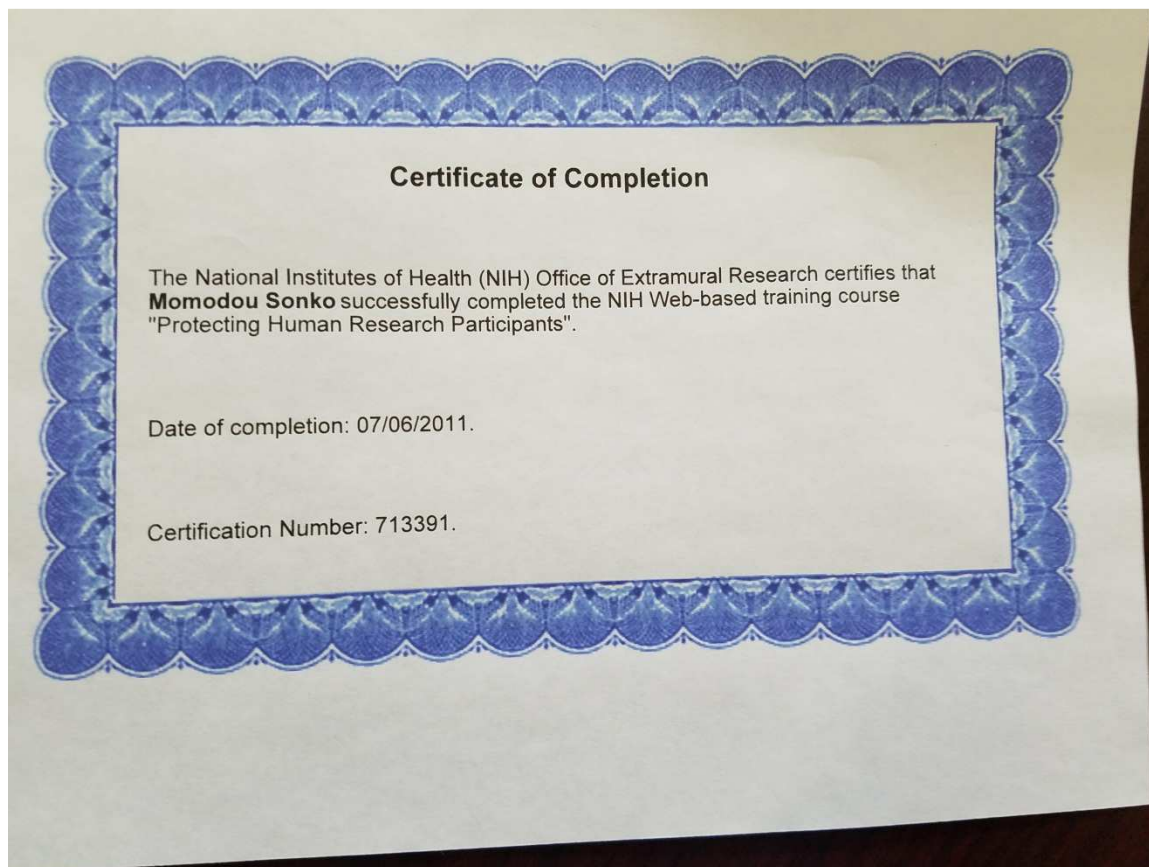
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## Appendix A: Certificate of Completion of National Institutes of Health Course



## Appendix B: Letter of Corporation

Company Name:

Website:

Phone Number:

Date

Dear Momodou,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Leadership Strategies to Improve Employee Performance in Insurance Industry* within our organization. As part of this study, I authorize you to contact members of the organization to participate in the study, data collection, member checking, observation and collect company documents from participants, and results dissemination activities. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: informing our employees to participate in the study. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

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

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

Sincerely,

Name of Authorizing Personnel (Position)

Email Address and Phone number

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

### The Researcher:

- a. Introduces self and thank participants for deciding to participate in the study.
- b. Reiterates the content of the informed consent form and request the participant to evidence consent to participate by signing the form.
- c. Re-confirm participant's willingness to audiotape and take notes during the interview process.
- d. Turn on the audio recorders and commence the interview process.

### Demographic Questions:

1. What is your job title? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How long have you been in senior management position? \_\_\_\_\_years
3. What is your gender? Female: \_\_\_\_; Male: \_\_\_\_; No Response: \_\_\_\_
4. What is your age? 18-25 years: \_\_\_\_; 26-35 years: \_\_\_\_; 35-45 year: \_\_\_\_; 46-55 years: \_\_\_\_; 56-65years: \_\_\_\_; Above 65 years: \_\_\_\_; No Response: \_\_\_\_

### Interview questions:

What leadership strategies do insurance business leaders use to improve employee performance?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies do you use to improve performance of your employees?
2. How do you assess the effectiveness of the improvement strategies?



3. What obstacles have you encountered in the process of implementing employee performance improvement and motivation strategies for your company?
4. How did you overcome these obstacles?
5. What recommendations would you give regarding methods to improve performance of employees?
6. What other related information could you share?